

The Right Ingredients of Discipleship

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What makes for quality discipleship? What are the things within a discipleship relationship that produce real growth and make for an enjoyable, satisfying discipleship experience?

The four Gospels offer fascinating answers when you consider two things: What did Jesus impart to His disciples, and how did He do it? He imparted to them His compassion for the lost and the necessity of servanthood. He demonstrated the importance of His relationship with the Father, and even how to pray.

Now consider how He did that – how He imparted these things while teaching in a large group setting; how He told stories to illustrate the kingdom of God; and how He modeled ministry at the very feet of His disciples.

Mark 3:13-14 describes Jesus' method of discipleship: *"...He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach."*

Jesus selected these 12 to spend the next two and a half years with Him, to go wherever He went, and to eventually be sent out into the ministry. Jesus' example is the very nature of discipleship we hope to model.

Here are three components of quality discipleship.

1st Ingredient: Relationship Building

The number one thing that Jesus did was get involved in people's lives. When you disciple someone, you're not taking on a project, you're investing in a person.

Look at 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, a classic passage where Paul talks vividly about his heart for the people in whom he invested in the city of Thessalonica.

"Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" (v. 8).

These believers at Thessalonica weren't just a crowd of people; they weren't just objects or a project. These were people who Paul deeply loved. No matter how spiritually gifted you may be or how much theology you may know, "People won't care what you know, until they know that you care."

Here are just five ways to build discipleship relationships:

1) Learn to ask questions

When you're diving into someone's life, move beyond the superficial questions and more deeply into "soul" questions, like, "What's going on in your soul today?" "How are you doing in your walk with God?" "What are you learning from the Lord?"

Ask questions about his or her family. "What was it like at home?" "What were your parents like?" If you have someone who grew up in a home where her father verbally abused her, then that'll probably tell you something about what she may need in her life. If you're discipling someone who was sexually abused, that's something in her life that you're probably going to want to work on with her. Ask questions about the whole person, not just her ministry, but questions about her whole life.

2) Learn to listen –

It's just as important that we learn to listen as it is to ask questions. One of the things that can make you a notoriously bad discipler is if you sit down with someone and go over your agenda of 10 things you want to tell them. You may want to come in with a couple of specific things in mind that you want to communicate. But, first and foremost, you've got to listen to what's going on in their soul. If you're meeting with your disciple, and he's just had a horrible conversation with

his parents, but you've planned to dive into some other topic, you'll probably miss something that needs to be processed. Sometimes we have to shut up and simply listen to where the other person is.

Spend relational time together – Discipleship should include more than just weekly appointments and Bible studies. Have him over for dinner, play sports together, and do things that they would enjoy. This way they see your life outside a discipleship setting. Extra time studying together, going to church together, hanging out after Cru, and eating together are all ways that you build a relationship.

3) Learn to be an encourager

Did you ever notice how much people like to be encouraged? Did you ever notice how much you enjoy being around a person who encourages you? That's an art, a skill. Learn to praise someone for the qualities that God is building into their life. Learn how to identify the good things in a person's life and how to praise and affirm them in a healthy way.

4) Demonstrate vulnerability

If you're vulnerable and open about what's going on in your life, if you share your struggles and temptations, it's going to be easier for the person you're discipling to be open. If you come across as a perfect disciple who doesn't have any issues or problems, then they're going to feel that what it means to be a disciple is that they have it all together just like their discipler. No one's got it all together. So be real and honest about what's going on in your life.

While ministering at University of Miami – Ohio, Roger Hershey worked with a guy named Eric, an African-American man who had grown up in inner city Cleveland dealing drugs and hating white men. Roger was twenty-five years older than Eric, Caucasian, and grew up on a farm in rural Pennsylvania. Eric had met the Lord, and the Lord changed his whole life. Roger began discipling Eric his junior year, and Eric became like a son to him. Roger recalls the day as he sat in the dining hall where Eric was an RA, and him saying, "Hersh, I want you to know something. Our weekly time together, our discipleship appointment is my favorite time of the week." "Really?" Roger said. "Why is that?"

"Because when we get together every week, I realize this is the safest place I have to be on campus all week long because I know you love me, you believe in me, you'll encourage me, and you'll listen to all my junk, and you'll walk me through my failures and sins, and I know you care." Race, age, background - it doesn't make a difference. When you move into someone's life, when you love them and they know it, they will respond.

2nd Ingredient: The Word of God

Quality discipleship involves getting the Word of God into someone's life. We know what Romans 12:2 says – "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Don't be conformed to this world - be changed, be transformed. But how? By getting the Word of God in your life, by the renewing your mind with the Word of God. Here are three reasons why the Word of God is key to discipleship:

1) God's Word produces life transformation

People don't change unless the Word of God changes their thinking and changes their perspective on life. Life transformation comes from the Word.

2) God's Word builds convictions for a lifetime

We don't want students who have been discipled to do it just because they're involved with Cru while they're in college. We want them to see that these things come from the Scriptures and to have the Word of God build a deep, internalized conviction to live out biblical discipleship for the rest of their lives.

3) God's Word is the truth

Every one of us has lies in our belief system, and those lies can only be replaced with the Truth of God's Word. How do we get the word of God in their life? There are a lot of ways – during your one-on-one appointments with them and during Bible study.

But here's the good news: you impart God's perspective on life more often than you think. You impart God's perspective when you're hanging out late at night over pizza after Cru. You're sitting around just talking about life, and

biblical truth just starts to come out. You start talking about God's perspective on dating relationships, God's perspective on money, and what makes you happy. As you involve your disciples in the larger body, they'll get the Word of God in their lives when they sit in Cru meetings and hear a good talk. On the fall retreat, they'll get the Word of God taught to them all weekend long. The responsibility isn't just yours. As you involve them in the larger body, the Word of God comes into their lives.

3rd Ingredient: Doing Ministry Together

Training your disciple in how to have a ministry involves more than simply talking about how great it would be to reach out to people who don't know Christ. Doing ministry together means planning outreaches together and actively sharing your faith with others. Look what Jesus did. He took His disciples and went throughout Galilee and Israel, ministering to people. He spoke to the masses; He healed; He cast out demons; He taught. For two and a half years, Jesus went about ministering, and He took the disciples with Him.

When Paul challenged Timothy in Acts 16, he did not say, "Timothy, let's hide away for three years. I'll teach you everything I know from the Old Testament, give you a crash course in theology, and then you'll be ready for ministry." Instead, Paul said, "Timothy, just go with me," and Timothy joined Paul on his missionary journeys. Timothy learned how to have a ministry by hanging out with Paul. For you and your disciple, ministry may be talking with guys at the basketball court where you're playing hoops. Perhaps, it means showing your disciple how to talk about Jesus over a cup of coffee with her classmate. Maybe it's modeling to your disciple how to initiate with a person, build a rapport with them, and transition into the Gospel. Modeling ministry in these ways allows the disciple to see your heart for the lost.

Four things happen when you are in ministry together:

1) Our view of God develops

When you and your disciple are sharing your faith and following up with a survey contact, your disciple's view of God will grow because the Lord may just show up and that other person may come to Christ. You may have a great spiritual conversation, and your disciple walks away saying, "Wow, that is cool! Look what God did!" God shows up and works in someone's life when you're in ministry. Not when you sit around and talk about it, but when you get out and do it.

2) Compassion develops for the lost

Compassion for lost people really develops when we're eyeball to eyeball with someone, hearing the hurt and pain in their life. Even when we meet someone whose life is all together, who is as happy as can be thinking science has all the answers and dismissing God as totally irrelevant, our compassion grows as we realize how lost he really is.

3) Our confidence that God will use us grows

When you go out and share your faith over spring break, or on a summer mission, and you see God use you to bring someone to Christ. Or you simply have a great conversation during which the Holy Spirit gives you things to say. He leads you; He recalls Scripture to your mind, and recalls the answers to things you learned in the past. You walk away saying, "Wow, God used even me!" Confidence in God usually grows as you're involved in ministry.

4) Ministry builds vision and passion

When disciples are out sharing their faith, it's all they can talk about. There's a passion, a zeal, an excitement. Because when you're discipling and getting involved in a ministry, the disciple is getting in on what God is doing, and that naturally brings excitement. As a discipler, you must love your disciple enough to model ministry in a way that prepares them, increases their confidence that God can use them, and helps them to develop true compassion for the lost. Healthy discipleship involves all three components – building relationships, studying the Word of God, and doing ministry together. The challenge is to balance all three and periodically evaluate which component needs improvement.

There is no perfect discipler. You learn to disciple by doing it. Building relationships and studying God's Word may be easy for you. Ministry is usually the most difficult because it means stepping out in faith and bringing another person along with you. But if we do not embrace all three, we rob people of the privilege of growing, of seeing God show up, of watching God work.