



The Discipleship Model

Jesus had 12 disciples. Christ's Gospel Commission to his disciples begins with the direction for them to go and make disciples of all nations. Disciples follow their leader, learning what the leader stands for and lives, and applying this to their own understanding and lives. The Discipleship Model could be described as a life-long journey of discovering and applying the principles and practices of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Basis

The Gospel Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) begins with a world-wide mandate to go and make disciples of all nations. This includes baptism and instruction in all the commands Christ gave his own disciples. The influential Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers that they should follow Paul's example just as Paul followed Christ's example (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Jesus chose young people to be with him as disciples (Mark 3:13). He later sent out larger numbers while mentioning a great harvest and the need for more workers to go into the fields (Luke 10:1-2). Paul teamed up with Barnabas and later with Silas (Acts 13:4-5; 15:40). After the debacle concerning the young John Mark's desertion (Acts 15:36-40), Paul mentored multiple young people such as Timothy, Titus, and others (Acts 16:1-16). Moses mentored Joshua (Exodus 24:12-14; Deuteronomy :) and Elijah mentored Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). We are called to do the same type of thing today,

especially when it comes to youth and young adult ministry!

Discipleship often can be described as "three steps forward, two steps back" experiences as a disciple learns, makes mistakes, and learns more (Matthew 16:16-19 and 23). Through the process, it becomes obvious that Christ's disciples had been with Jesus because they were doing the same things Jesus had done (Acts 4:13; John 15:26-27; John 16:12-15). The Discipleship Model expects for that to continue through the Holy Spirit's power (John 17:20-21).

What It Looks Like

Instead of a moment or an event, discipleship is a journey. It involves coming alongside others, teaching, listening, verbalizing, questioning, testifying, growing, and learning. Models demonstrate what is right and good and Godly, although they aren't perfect. Admitting weakness, apologizing, asking for forgiveness, saying "I was wrong" are part of modeling just as much as demonstrating strength, making a

stand for the right, doing good, choosing wisely, and resisting temptation.

After celebrating when the lost is found (model #1), discipleship kicks into gear. It can function from the cradle to the grave with spiritual growth throughout the life cycle. Spoon-feeding is appropriate for babies. Experiential learning is valuable for all. Measured results might be difficult to quantify, but trends and change can be noticed over time.

Discipleship finds its root in discipline. This includes developing spiritual habits as well as choosing and planning for growth. Time, action, reflection, and repetition comprise the mix. Mentors and mentees are the human agents in the process. Matching these sometimes requires divine intervention or direction. Such relationships might occur spontaneously or formally. Their duration and intensity vary. Occasionally words make the greatest impact; usually actions play the greater role. Combining words and actions is ideal, matching “walk” and “talk.”

In a congregational setting, you can expect to see more teamwork than solo direction or activity. Multiple generations integrate rather than segregate. Learning takes place from old to young, and vice versa. Expectations include current competence as well as improvement and increased understanding. The action-reflection combination occurs spontaneously as well as a scheduled experience. Discipling individuals and events usually don't make the headlines, but they fit into the larger picture of maturing in Christ.

Keys To Make It Work

The three keys to make the Discipleship Model work are the disciple, the mentor, and time/experiences. A disciple can grow without an official mentor. Teachable people constantly learn from others, both what to do

and what not to do. With current technology, many learn from others without even coming into direct contact with them. The primary key for discipleship is a ready disciple.

A mentor with intentionality increases the benefits for a disciple by being available, focused, and even directive. Mentors can disciple others in arenas in which they lack personal experience, but there's nothing quite like having been over the path previously. We expect mentors to have experience, wisdom from that experience, and the ability to transfer that in a way that connects with the disciple. Some demonstrate greater acumen than others in such an enterprise. Astute mentors recognize individuality and potential in disciples, including personal motivations, backgrounds, and environments. No two people are the same; no two situations are identical.

The third key, time/experiences, relates to commodities that might be in short supply. Depending on the relationship and one's current flow in life, even being at the same place at the same time proves to be difficult for some, even those with good intentions. Being in school together or working together might increase the amount of time and experiences together, but that can change from one semester to another or from one task to another. Based on one's current time and experiences, mentor-disciple relationships probably are available. That takes us back to the first two keys.

Obstacles

Each of the three keys already mentioned—disciple, mentor, and time/experiences—could also be obstacles. Attitude, communication skills and ego have the potential to be door-openers or door-closers. With flexible and difficult-to-measure elements over time, evaluation often becomes hazy and cause-effect relationships may also lack clarity. Some prefer the sensationalism of

a big event or a charismatic star more than “long obedience.”

Opportunities

If you are alive, you probably have opportunities to be a disciple and also a mentor. You only have the time and experiences that come your way or that you create. Within those can be found the relational contacts for discipleship. If you believe that the Gospel Commission has been divinely ordained, then you can expect supernatural forces to be available for discipleship. You may need to initiate relationships, both to be a disciple and to be a mentor. Look around you—the fields are white for the harvest!

