

7 MARKS OF TRANSFORMATION Be Intentional In Personal Disciple-Making Col 1:28-29; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Matt 28:18-20

We have all heard it at some point in our Christian life: "Christianity is about relationship, not religion." Certainly, most will agree with the truth contained in this neat sentence. The unfortunate thing is that the relationship here is viewed primarily or even exclusively in terms of one's relationship with God, and not with our fellow Christian brothers and sisters.

Relationships and Disciple-Making

One manifestation of this neglect of relationships in the body of Christ is in discipleship. For even after countless sermons and conferences, it remains a formidable challenge to move church members to commit to relationships necessary for serious disciple-making. Greg Ogden, a seasoned writer on matters of discipleship, identifies eight root causes of a church's "discipleship malaise" in his book ***Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time***. Out of these eight, the fundamental root cause is the lack of personal discipling. Ogden writes:

By discipling I mean 'a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.'... The motivation and discipline [for such rigorous discipleship] will not ultimately occur through listening to sermons, sitting in a class, participating in a fellowship group, attending a study group in the workplace or being a member of a small group, but rather in the context of highly accountable, relationally transparent, truth-centred, small (three or four people) discipleship units. In my experience, this is the optimum context for transformation. If every believer had this opportunity, we would go a long way toward addressing the causes of the discipleship malaise I have sketched throughout this chapter.

Looking at Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:1-2, as well as how Jesus personally disciplined His twelve followers, it is easy to understand why Ogden pleads with church members to make disciples through "life investment":

Disciple-making is not a six-week, ten-week or even a thirty-week programme. Adding components that make a programme more rigorous or time-consuming to call forth the truly committed does not produce disciples. Programmes tend to be information- or knowledge-based, focus on preparing for the many, require regimentation or synchronization and foster an atmosphere of low personal accountability.

Relationships vs. Programmes

The differences between relationships and programmes are worth noting, as pointed out by Ogden:

First, discipling relationships are marked by intimacy, whereas programmes tend to be focused on information... [Programmes are] safer, more controllable, and reproducible – less risky, less messy, less intrusive. It seemed easier to give someone an outline than an

hour [of our time together], a well-worn book than a window into our humanity. How easy it is to substitute informing people for investing in people, to confuse organizing people with actually discipling people. Life is not the offspring of programme or paper. Life is the offspring of life. Jesus prioritized shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring because His prize was much larger than information; it was integration.

Second, discipling relationships involve full, mutual responsibility of the participants, whereas programmes have one of a few who do on behalf of the many. In a discipling relationship, the partners equally share responsibility for preparation, self-disclosure and an agenda of change. This is not about one person being the insightful teacher, and the others being the learners who take in the insights of one whose wisdom far exceeds their own. Maturity levels in Christ will vary, but the basic assumption is that in the give and take relationships, the one who is the teacher and the one who is taught can vary moment to moment.

Third, discipling relationships are customized to the unique growth process of the individuals, whereas programmes emphasize synchronization and regimentation. A programme usually has a defined length. You commit to ten weeks, and then you are done. Often churches follow the academic calendar, beginning a programme in September when school starts and completing it in June in time for [vacation]. A discipling relationship cannot be confined by such artificial constraints. Discipling relationships necessarily vary in length of time, because no two people grow at the same speed. It is not a matter of lock-step march through the curriculum but an individualized approach that takes into account the unique growth issues of those involved...

Fourth, discipling relationships focus accountability around life change, whereas programmes focus accountability around content. Growth into Christlikeness is the ultimate goal. The measure of accountability in programmes tends to be observable behaviours such as memorizing scriptures, completing the required weekly reading and practicing spiritual disciplines. In a discipling relationship the accountability focuses on learning to observe or "obey everything that [Jesus has] commanded (Matt 28:19). For example, there is a huge difference between knowing that Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies and loving our enemies. Discipling relationships are centred on incorporating the life of Jesus in all we are in the context of all that we do."

No Better Investment

The body of Christ must rise up to commit themselves to serious, intentional personal discipling relationships, even as we receive solid, sound biblical teaching and theology. Let us return to Jesus' and Paul's discipleship model. We leave the final exhortation to Ogden:

It is not that Jesus' [and Paul's] way has been tried and found wanting; it has been largely talked about but not implemented. Return to small, reproducible, long term relationships as the means of transmission of the gospel from one generation to the next. Legacies are not about leaving large sums of money to our children or being immortalized by getting our names etched on a building. When we get to shore's edge and know that there is a boat there waiting to take us to the other side to be with Jesus, all that will truly matter is the names of family, friends and others who are self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Jesus because we made it the priority of our lives to walk with them toward maturity in Christ. There is no better investment or legacy to leave behind.

Source:

Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Questions for Cell Discussion

Question 1

Reflect on the apostle Paul's message in Col 1:28-29 and 2 Tim 2:1-2, as well as the sermon by Ps Stanley and Greg Ogden's points in the LSA.

How would you define disciple-making or discipling? What key components would you include in your definition? Discuss how disciple-making relationships can lead to growth in your Christian life and transformation in Christlikeness.

Question 2

Have you been in a disciple-making or discipling relationship? Are you in one presently?

If not, what is preventing you from committing to one? If you are, how can you encourage those who are not to get into one?

Sermon Notes