

Discipleship

Published by SAM Journal Magazine, Cook Publishing, (Sept 2006)

By Kris Swiatocho

As a leader in single adult ministry, I have traveled and spoken all over the United States. Consistently I find that discipleship is the one area that seems to be a struggle for every single adult leader. How do we find leaders who are called, then find the time to disciple them? And what do we mean by disciple? As pastors and directors, are we responsible for coming along side them at every step of their lives—helping to mold them and shape them into being like Christ? How are we supposed to accomplish this? Where do we start?

As I have traveled I have asked the question, "*What does discipleship means to you?*" I am amazed at the different answers. Sure we all agree it's helping someone else grow in their relationship to Christ. But how and when is this done? Here are just a few of the answers I have gotten from various single adult pastors, directors and leaders.

Discipleship means...

Influencers: These are individuals who have made a difference in our lives by their walk, something they have said or something they have done for us. Most everyone can agree that they have had several people in their lives influence them. This could be anyone from a school teacher, to a favorite aunt, to a best friend or pastor.

Mentors: These individuals will sometimes seek you out. Mentoring can be a short or long term arrangement in which you agree on specific goals to obtain change. You usually meet on a regular basis—have a Bible study, read a book together, etc.—all with specific goals in mind.

Leaders: These individuals are those who have led you in some way, whether through your job, school or church. They may or may not have intentionally tried to disciple you. They were simply working out the role they were given.

Advisors: These are individuals who have either been put in place to give you advice in your walk with Christ or you have sought them out on your own. They sometimes specialize in the field you are asking advice in, such as single adult ministry.

Counselors: These individuals specifically have an agenda to help guide you short or long term depending on the need. I believe most people should have at least one period of their life when they should seek counseling.

Family/Friends: These are individuals that out of love and care for you are helping to guide you on your way. However, because they are close to you they can make a huge difference in how you look at yourself, how you make choices and how you handle your life.

Where does discipleship happen?

Discipleship could be short term while serving on a ministry team or council to long term while attending a home or small group. It can happen with a comment or advice. It can happen by watching a television program or listening to Christian concert. It can happen anywhere and anytime.

Q: Who can disciple? All of us who have Christ in us not only have the ability but are expected to disciple another person. It's making yourself available to God and to others to start the process.

Q: How do we disciple? Depending on what area you may be calling discipleship will affect the way you disciple. You can disciple by calling a person, listening to them, sending cards or notes, spending time with them, praying with them, setting goals, learning scripture, etc., with the intentions of sharing your life, your experience and your direction. Ultimately we want to help everyone grow more towards Christ. It starts with one.

Then Jesus came to them and said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Discipleship happens when our lives change for the better—when we look and live more like Christ.

About two years ago I was speaking to one of my advisors. He asked me the question, "Kris, who has discipled or mentored you?" I replied that, well, there was this person and that person. He stopped me and said, "No, who has discipled you with specific goals in mind, and come along side you?" Then it hit me: no one. Sure, there have been a ton of people in my life who had influenced me but no one has actually come up to me and said "I would like to disciple you, Kris, for a specific time!" It made me realize that it would have been nice if someone had. Then, perhaps, a lot of my mistakes could have been prevented—from arguments with friends, to wasteful spending, romantic relationships and prideful decisions in ministry. Sure, it would have been nice to have someone else charting my success and failure, helping along the way to improve, etc.

So OK, perhaps we haven't had the discipleship we wanted. This doesn't mean we don't need to be teaching it to others. We can still make a difference in someone else's life.

So where do we start?

Start with yourself. Allow God to pour into you. Make a commitment to not only be in a daily quiet time with Christ but also to be living out the example to others. How can you expect your leaders to have a daily quiet time if they don't see you having one? Take time for yourself, rest when you need to, practice boundaries, keep yourself educated and informed, be available and teachable, pray and ask God for someone to disciple you as well, get a counselor, etc.

Then pour into others. As you grow in Christ and are filled each day, the result will be to pour into others by:

- Spending time with them. (For some this is an occasional email, a postcard, a phone call, coffee at Starbucks...whatever it takes to pour into them and have it stick.)
- Love and care for them. (If you show them attention and care, they will not only listen but also want to be led.)
- Pray for them. (Ask them for specific areas you can be praying for them, check back to see what God has done.)
- Encourage and edify them. (Find ways that motivate them towards excellence.)
- Discipline. (Discipline with love. As you grow closer to your leaders you may have to

make some changes, ask people to step down, etc...)

- Give them goals. (Good discipleship gives them a task to do with specific goals in mind—goals that can be checked later, goals that lead to bearing fruit.)
- Constantly communicate. (You can't expect people to read your mind. You must stay in constant communication with them to re-evaluate what your expectations are.)
- Set the standard high enough. (Good discipleship always challenges a person. Not to stretch them till they break but enough to teach them flexibility. If you give your leaders so much to do that they crash and are unable to disciple those below them, then what good is the task? However, if you do all the work and never delegate or challenge your leaders then the task will bring no value to either side.)
- Follow-through. (See through the goals, the suggestions, the changes till the end. If you have challenged your leaders with something specific, try and follow through to you see change.)
- Keep the vision in front. (Every journey that leads towards Christ has a purpose. However, sometimes we get tired, distracted and discouraged. As you disciple, keep the vision out in front of what you are trying to achieve. Always remember to tell them where the power and direction comes from first, as God passes it down.)

I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)

Bottom line

We want our ministries to grow. We want to find healthy, Christ-focused leaders. So what do you expect from your leaders? Then be what you expect. If you want them to lead the ministry, love and pour into others then, you must do the same. They can only do what is modeled before them. Are there going to be some leaders that don't need you to be there at every step? Sure! But don't allow that to be your crutch. God has called us all to disciple—from the basics of getting to know people, to leading them to Christ, to leading them to be leaders. And remember, its starts with one.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)