

## What Are We Really Trying to Accomplish?

Most of us are familiar with our Lord's command to "make disciples". Yet, we struggle with understanding what our Lord desires to accomplish with our lives.

I would doubt that any of us believe that the church is simply in the behavior-modification business. Our role is not to admonish people by telling them what they should and should not do and attempt to encourage them towards more appropriate behavior.

As we look at Scripture we can clearly see that our job is to encourage people towards Christ likeness. Of course, this is not something that we are able to achieve by our own efforts or strategies.

It is only the Holy Spirit Who can transform a person from an enemy of God to a fully-devoted follower of Jesus. In essence, it is our responsibility to foster an environment where this type of life-change can take place.

Obviously, this is not an issue that can be dealt with exhaustively in a few paragraphs. However, we can begin to lay out some basic guidelines that will help us to develop a strategy to help our churches become vessels for "equipping the saints ...to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12, NAS).

The first step however, is that we must begin to see discipleship as a process and not a program. It is not about how many classes we have attended. Rather, it is about how we are different people because of what Jesus has done in and through our lives.

I want to suggest a list of some basic elements of discipleship in the life of every believer. Hopefully, this will allow us to develop some common ground of what we are seeking to accomplish as followers of Jesus.

The first element of discipleship is salvation. It is impossible for a person to become a committed follower of Jesus Christ until one has submitted himself to His Lordship and trusted in the finished work of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

This element is followed by a public profession of our faith through baptism. It is through this act of obedience that one identifies Jesus as the leader of his or her life. While our relationship with Jesus is a personal matter, it is not meant to be something that we keep secret.

Another element of the discipling process is the practice of the spiritual disciplines. These disciplines include but are not limited to prayer, Bible study, evangelism, stewardship, worship, serving, journaling, fasting, learning, silence and solitude.

As we put these disciplines into practice in our lives they can be a major impetus in bringing about a change in our character.

This is best accomplished through an accountable mentoring relationship. We all know that God uses relationships to transform us.

Unfortunately, many of us think that we can skip this aspect of our spiritual development. For example, some may not want to submit themselves to the authority of another in something as personal as one's spiritual growth.

We must realize that without this type of relationship we will never become the man or woman of God that the Father desires.

As we begin to discipline ourselves the Holy Spirit is able to gain a firmer foothold in our spirit. The more that He has free reign in our lives the more we begin to take on the character of our Savior.

Through our submission to the lordship of Christ we become a different person. Paul's admonition to the church in Corinth becomes a reality in our lives.

"...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NAS).

While we are sealed by the Holy Spirit at the moment we call upon our Savior, the process of becoming who God wants us to be takes time. It also will require some effort and discipline on our part.

I don't know about you, but discipline is not something that I am quick to apply to my own life. God knows that this is true in many of our lives. Thus, we need the support, encouragement, and accountability of others to help us on this journey.

Perhaps that is why the Lord expresses His desire that we live out our faith in community. In Proverbs, we are told, "...as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another..." (Proverbs 27:17). We were never meant to embark on this endeavor alone.

Of course, this journey is never complete in this life. However, we can know that we are on the right road as we begin to see the lives of others that the Lord has transformed along the way.

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