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MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH:

Discipleship

Importance of discipleship:

As a result of a church's efforts in evangelism, unbelievers become believers. In that split second process of a person's conversion, the unbeliever is regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) and becomes a child of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:10). This is how disciples are made (cf. Acts 6:7; 14:21). As a result of a person's conversion, the new believer is to be baptized and then the process of discipleship is to begin (Mat. 28:19-20; cf. Acts 2:40-42; 2 Tim. 2:2). This is in accordance with Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus stated that after new believers are baptized they are to be taught to observe all that Christ commanded.



The discipleship process is lengthy and ongoing, and may take many forms. Some possibilities might include: classes which teach the doctrine of the church and its practices, evangelism and discipleship, the spiritual disciplines (see the article titled, "Spiritual Disciplines"), books of the Bible or related topics (e.g., family issues, holy living, how to preach and/or teach, how to determine God's will, etc.). Teaching on such topics, along with practical training by people who are involved in ministry, will help strengthen a church and its members in the things of the Lord. This kind of training can also be used to prepare church members for ministries inside and outside of the church. Without this kind of discipleship, the average person will not likely become grounded in the faith and may be weak and unproductive. These are the types of believers who will more than likely be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, possibly even leaving the church after being enticed by the world (cf. Mat. 13:22; 1 Tim. 6:17; Jam. 4:4) or by a false religious group (cf. Gal. 4:9; Col. 2:8). If they do stay within the church, they will probably become dull of hearing, still needing to be taught the elementary principles of the faith, not maturing in righteousness, and therefore not knowing the difference between good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14). They will be like children whose parents never trained them how to live and function in the world because they had not been built up in their faith (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

Building up believers in their faith is the main job of the pastor-teacher and evangelist (see the article titled, "Pastor's Equipping Ministry"). This is important for them to walk in Christ and to one day be presented before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach, firmly rooted, and continually built up in Christ, established and steadfast in their faith (Col. 1:21-23; 2:6-7). So that believers are not carried

away by error and discontinue being steadfast in the faith, they need to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:17-18). Therefore as a result of the discipleship process, believers will be "...built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Biblical examples of disciplers:

In the Scriptures there are examples of men who disciplined others. An early example is Moses who disciplined Joshua from the time that he was a young boy (cf. Exo. 24:13; Num. 11:28). In this discipleship process, Joshua was almost always at Moses' side. Joshua was even on Mt. Sinai for the forty days and forty nights that Moses was there in the presence of God (Exo. 24:13-18; 32:15-18). As Moses disciplined Joshua, he entrusted him with important responsibilities (cf. Exo. 17:9-14; 33:11; Num. 13:16) through which Joshua learned and also proved himself. Moses could do this because Joshua became a trusted disciple. Moses also did this because Joshua was being prepared to be Israel's future leader (cf. Josh. 1:1; 3:7). As a result of Moses' investment in him, Joshua was commissioned (Num. 27:18-23; Deut. 31:14), charged (Deut. 31:7), and then assumed the place of Moses as the next leader of Israel (Josh. 1:1-11; 3:7).

Another Person who made disciples by investing His life in theirs was Jesus. Jesus, after prayer (Luke 6:12-13), chose twelve men whom He would prepare to be His Apostles (Luke 6:13-16). To do this, Jesus had these men travel and live with Him (Luke 8:1), eat and sleep with Him (cf. Mat. 9:10; 26:20-21; Mark 6:31). Therefore they were able to observe Him in many and varied situations. In this way, He prepared them for their future work by teaching them (John 4:27-38; Mat. 5:1-2; Luke 8:1-3; 22:56; 9:12-17; Mark 4:1-25), entrusting them with responsibilities (Mat. 10:1-5; 11:1; Mark 3:14; Luke 9:1-10), giving them special insight into His teachings (Mark 10:32-34; Luke 8:10), and allowing them to witness His miracles (Mark 4:39; 6:1-2). From these twelve, Jesus chose three of them in whom He invested even more of His time and energy -- Peter, James, and John. Not only did these three have special privileges (Luke 8:49-56; Mat. 17:1-13), they were also the ones chosen to be near Him when He was praying in the garden the night He was arrested (Mark 14:33-42). Though Judas betrayed Him (Luke 22:48), church history records that the other eleven disciples remained faithful until death, and that all but possibly John died a martyr's death for the sake of Christ.

Another disciple maker was the Apostle Paul. One of Paul's disciples was Timothy. Timothy accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys during which time Paul trained him as they spent considerable time together (Acts 16:1-5; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 2 Cor. 1:1,19; Php. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; Phil. 1; 1 & 2 Timothy). The epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy are two of Paul's training manuals for his young disciple (1 Tim. 4:12). Paul also assigned Timothy special responsibilities to carry out (Acts 17:13-15; 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; Php. 2:19); and even though Timothy was a young man, Paul's training prepared him for when he would be the pastor of the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).

Characteristics of the discipleship process:

Collectively, the characteristics of the discipleship process which can be observed from the lives of Moses, Jesus and Paul are:

1. The disciples were chosen as a result of prayer and/or God's direction
2. The disciples spent much time with their mentor
3. The disciples were taught (through the Word of God and experience)
4. The disciples ministered with and under the guidance of their mentor
5. The disciples were entrusted with responsibilities
6. The disciples were prepared for future ministry
7. The disciples were sent out on their own (when the discipleship process was completed)

As with these three disciple makers, it is the leader's responsibility to invest himself in the lives of his disciples. The leader's training is to not only be in the classroom, but also outside in the realm of real life. The one being disciplined needs to see his mentor living out and being an example of how to do those things which he is being taught. The mentor becomes a living, breathing example his disciples can hear, see, observe, and touch (cf. 1 John 1:1), and not simply a conveyer of knowledge. A discipleship process which lacks this element may turn out unprepared, ill-equipped disciples. Therefore time is crucial to this process as one person invests his time and life in that of another. As "iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Pro. 27:17).

Discipling others is an important aspect of a leader's responsibilities. As Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The leader is to take the things which he has learned and teach them to faithful men who are under his charge. These disciples are to be men who in turn are capable of taking what they have learned and teaching other faithful men. This is to be an ongoing process.

Results of the discipleship process:

The results of the discipleship process are beneficial to the disciple, his church, others outside of his church, and his mentor. This is true because a believer who is or has been disciplined generally is a growing Christian who will manifest his faith wherever he goes. His life will be a blessing to those with whom he has contact. He will also be a good example to others. His presence in his church should have a stabilizing effect. He, and others like him, will help keep things in the church running smoothly and progressing as they serve. Since this disciple should not be a person who is tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, he will help keep the church on track doctrinally and during difficult times. In contrast to this, if discipleship does not take place, over time the church will most likely begin to die. Also as church leaders change, so will the church and possibly its doctrine, as well as other aspects of its ministry since no solid leadership has been raised up to maintain the church's stability. Therefore, any church which does not have a discipleship program is being irresponsible and will over time experience the negative effects of its negligence.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. Besides the teaching which a person receives in your weekly services, what specific training does your church provide to disciple new believers?

2. What specific discipleship training does your church provide to disciple more mature believers?

3. Does your church have a portrait of what it desires a new believer to look and act like when he or she becomes a mature believer? Below write a word picture of what that person would be like? Also, how long should it take for this process to be completed?

4. Does your church have a plan in place which it follows to take a new believer from his or her spiritual infancy to maturity?

5. If your church does not have such a plan in place, please write out a basic plan with a timeline of training that you feel should take place in such a process. Please include biblical as well as practical objectives that you would like to see occur.
 - First year:

 - Second year:

 - Third year:

- Fourth year:

- Fifth year:

6. What are some ministry opportunities which your pastor or elders can involve people in for the purpose of giving them practical ministry experience?

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7. List below those people you would like to see involved in these ministry training opportunities.

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NOTE: There are very good discipleship programs available which can be purchased. Your church should consider materials such as Navigators 2:7 (Colossians 2:7) or other Navigator material.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. Do you know what material you will use to disciple new believers? Will you purchase it or will you develop it yourself? If you are going to purchase it, have you decided on what to purchase or have you already purchased it? If you will develop your own materials, have you written them or are you in the process of doing so?

2. List the topics below which you believe you will need to teach a new believer to develop him into a mature, well-rounded disciple of Christ?

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3. Though it is natural for people you disciple to learn from your example and even imitate aspects of your character and practices, what will you do to ensure that you produce disciples of Jesus and not disciples of yourself? What indicators would you look for to determine whether the person is more of a disciple of Jesus than yourself?

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