
WHAT HINDERS DISCIPLESHIP IN CHURCH?

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From the beginning, God's pattern for begetting life has been for each living thing to bring forth seed, sprout, or young, *after its kind*. Though He began the worlds with a sovereign, unilateral making something out of nothing, God's ensuing, intentional activity has primarily been to relegate creation to procreation and to leave to each life the responsibility of reproducing itself.

Thus, God's first commandment to mankind prefigures the primary mandate to believers: "*Be fruitful and multiply yourselves in like kind; what I have made you, you make others.*" (Reference Genesis 1:28.) That is why the main motif for blessing and success in the Scriptures is the concept of fruitfulness. God promises a land of provision to Israel not so they will have nothing to do except sit around all day, but so they will be able to devote themselves to His purposes for them—to witness before all nations. Answered needs for believers are supposed to release them to carefree pursuit of disciple making. Success is not in what we have, but in how we use what God has given us to do the job God has given us.

And yet, as we look around at the church models, ministry approaches, individual congregations, and spiritual leaders most touted as successful in the body of Christ, rarely do we see them engaged in purposeful discipleship. My point is not to criticize contemporary ministry but to question the church's mindset that has unintentionally removed disciple shaping from the center of its activities.

The issue is by no means limited to the lack of disciple making by individual believers. Para-church ministries rarely beget *other* ministries; few churches regularly give birth to daughter congregations; denominational leaders get replaced not by developing understudies or protégés, but by other single generational leaders; pastors of big and small churches alike usually run their churches with no *Joshuas* at their side; and the choir directors, married ministries coordinators, or cell group leaders within those churches, tend to be solo players rather than coaches of prospective coaches.

A LEARNED BEHAVIOR

Most church leaders want to disciple; in fact, many imagine that they are, to a degree, making disciples (sort of). Because the church has accepted an academic model for its structure and approach to instruction and nurture, pastors feel they are discipling simply by virtue of their sermons or their Tuesday night Bible studies. This academic model—borrowed from the world's educational values because of being intimidated by them—puts a premium on information rather than transformation. It measures progress by classroom evaluation and grades, rather than by personal development and change. It thrills at the quality of the lesson, not necessarily on the lasting effect the lesson had on the listeners.

Thus, a pastor's preparation for ministry (through Bible college or seminary) suggests itself as the most effective mode to further his and others' ministries: the lectures given by instructors and the personal study done by the pastor in college get translated to a pastoral ministry style that says to people, "I will give sermons, and you will study your Bible on your own, just like I did."

Students, who themselves, have not experienced a nonacademic approach to mentoring, rarely become disciplers of others. Most of us teach what we have been taught; we model what was modeled for us. One generation sets the pattern for the next. Consequently, church leaders today seek to mature the believers in their churches primarily through teaching, counseling, and encouraging personal devotions (study and prayer). These are wonderful tools, but they are incomplete without the personal nurture of discipleship.

In His final commission to His disciples, Jesus outlines a simple approach to discipleship based on personal involvement with people. Our calling is to lead people to repentance (baptism) and obedience that will lead them away from their own way of thinking and lead them toward God's way. We are to help them forsake their own works, so that they can partner with the Lord in the works He has prepared for them to walk in.

How we do that is much less complicated than we have imagined. Rather than setting up an elaborate scheme of "*essential truths*" for a discipleship class, all we need do is teach others what we have been taught by Jesus. The academic model insists on a curriculum. It proposes a systematically structured body of information with various courses, specializations, and disciplines. The academic model encourages us to teach what we have studied—not what we have learned and have written in our hearts.

What we have studied is not always the same as what Jesus has been teaching us; hence, we end up artificially separating what we think *people* ought to learn from what Jesus thinks *we* ought to learn. If His pattern for instruction is to teach others by first teaching us, then if we do not teach what He is teaching us, we deprive others of the very truths Jesus wants them to learn.

I am not against study, or teachings that arise out of that study. Doctrine is doctrine no matter when or how it is learned. People need good doctrine. But the best doctrine should be written on our hearts so that others may read it there and see it in our lives. Once a leader accepts the notion that good doctrine can be taught by lecture alone, he or she will unintentionally drift away from a mentoring mode.

TEACHING OBEDIENCE

A mentor does more than teach what that mentor is learning; he or she also teaches others to obey in the same way the mentor is obeying. Doctrine and obedience is not the same thing. Teaching someone a truth is not the same as teaching the person to obey that truth. The academic model presumes that learning and obeying are synonymous. The discipleship model understands that it is easy for people to know more than they obey. So, a good discipler teaches obedience as much as, if not more than, doctrine.

The best way to teach obedience is by example—opening our lives to others—enable them to observe what God is doing in our lives, and to see how we are responding to His workings. This means becoming vulnerable and honest about the true issues of our lives. Usually, opening our lives entails sharing historical sketches and past convictions of the Holy Spirit, as well as the current events and present dealings of the Lord with us.

While we would all acknowledge that keeping the Lord's commandments means more than simply memorizing them, we sometimes fail to grasp that without any

true sense of being held accountable by someone for how the person lives out those commandments, the people we teach are vulnerable to an experiential separation between what they know and what they live. When we disciple people by discussing with them the nitty gritty pressures of our daily life, we provide them with another kind of course outline than those offered in a classroom.

I'm not implying that true discipleship consists only of personal anecdotes with a smattering of scripture to legitimize it. What I mean is that disciples need the assurance of knowing that their mentor has, himself or herself, found ways to translate doctrine into a manner of living. Teaching people how to "*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord*" (Colossians 1:10) requires us to show them how we have stepped across the many types of terrain and ground hazards in our own lives.

People learn from us, and we become role models, not just lecturers. The teacher merely teaches truth; the discipler must obey it, or his lesson will be lost to his disciples. Simply put, a discipler is someone who sets about to teach others to obey what he or she has been taught and has obeyed.

SUBTLE HINDRANCES TO DISCIPLESHIP

The question then becomes *why* more of us are not doing the very work in the kingdom we want to do. If we want to make disciples instead of just converts—or instead of just running church programs—what hinders us?

Certainly, the adversary of the church has his hand in the mix. But can we identify any of his schemes, or the unconscious mindsets in the church that make disciple making such a rare occurrence? I think we can, at least, begin to see some of the issues involved.

FAULTY LEADERSHIP MODEL

We have already seen how an academic model for discipleship limits our instructional options and makes discipling little more than lecturing and course offering. But there is another model that likewise affects our ability to make disciples effectively. This is a faulty model of leadership. Most church leaders have probably never even heard of *transactional* leadership, but because they unintentionally adopt that model of leadership—as opposed to *transformational* leadership—most of their efforts to truly disciple are doomed.

A model of leadership explains the nature of the relationship between the leader and the followers. For what purpose and on what basis do people allow themselves to be led? Following and leading are a mutual agreement between those who lead and those who follow. If the leader or the follower changes the basis of the agreement—its terms or its purpose—the entire relationship must be renegotiated.

Transactional Leadership

Let me describe the nature of *transactional* leadership to demonstrate how inadequate it is as a leadership model for meaningful discipleship in churches. *Transactional* leadership approaches people on the basis of exchange: bargaining, selling ideas or projects to individuals or groups by appealing to their wants or needs. The leader and followers trade for mutual profit, advantage, and gratification. As long as the leader is giving a *good deal*, the followers continue to do business with him; thus, the followers' opinion of what the leader does for them becomes more important than what the leader may ultimately accomplish.

Transactional leadership is based on “deal making” and tradeoffs that mutually benefit both the followers and the leaders. It fosters co-dependence between pastors and parishioners, and it can lead to unhealthy ego building for both. Because the followers gratify the leader, that leader becomes increasingly unwilling to do or say anything that might jeopardize the pleasing relationship. Not wanting to upset the followers, the leader is subtly influenced to avoid confronting the followers. Since discipling involves a good measure of challenging, exhorting, and correcting the disciple, a *transactional* style of leadership is wholly incompatible with discipling.

More specifically, *transactional* leaders will draw back from discipling and releasing followers into significant ministry because those leaders remember personal betrayals and hurts suffered at the hands of previously trusted people. The memories of past disappointments become loud reminders not to invest meaningfully in present followers.

Also, *transactional* leadership—fears losing its position, platform, or prestige. The insecurity of not being needed by everyone for everything keeps the *transactional* leader perpetually in the role of counselor, never in the role of meaningful mentor. In other words, that leader wants everyone to come to him for their needs to be met. He does not want to teach others how to meet their own needs, and certainly not how to truly meet others' needs. *Transactional* leaders monopolize ministry rather than mobilize it.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, is based on change: making a difference rather than a deal, altering people instead of merely appealing to them. Followers look to the leader for solutions, not sales; for betterment, not bargains. Followers are willing to set aside personal gratification for the sake of being part of a larger purpose. Recognizing the need for change in the world at large, *and* in themselves, followers of *transformational* leaders evaluate their leaders more in terms of what has been accomplished (changed), than in terms of what personal profit they have gained.

Transformational leadership requires courage and conviction—a determination to speak loving truth in the sight of God, rather than an inclination to speak pleasing words in the hearing of followers we are afraid to lose. What gives us that courage is a passion to serve people for their good, not our own.

Only when a leader is freed from his desire to use people to meet his own emotional/psychological/spiritual needs, can that leader become *transformational* in his style.

FAULTY COUNSELING MODEL

We have seen ways in which the unspoken assumptions of our instructional and leadership models hinder the process of discipleship. These are not intentional or belligerent choices church leaders make to resist discipling. But unless we actively break out of our underlying mind-sets, we are doomed to perpetuating the status quo in the church of the future. This is the very nature of repentance—coming to different conclusions than we have had before. Repenting is essentially reconsidering things from God's vantage point rather than from our own.

I turn now to what I consider the most insidious and threatening mentality in the church today. Its tentacles reach into virtually every aspect of the church, but perhaps it can best be seen in the way it affects our attempts to disciple people. It is so dangerous because it so closely mimics our mandate, and it is profoundly engaging—drawing our time, energy, and attention away from where they might otherwise be directed.

I am referring to the many ways in which psychoanalytical counseling/therapy has invaded the church of Jesus Christ. The subject itself is almost too vast to treat effectively in an article on another subject like discipleship, but we must examine at least a few particulars of clinical counseling that directly impinge on the church's efforts to disciple.

Let us first remember that there is a huge difference between *caring for* and *nurturing* people; counseling someone is not the same as discipling them, though counseling may be a part of discipling. The process of discipling and developing someone is intended to enable the person to do the same to others. By the word of the disciple's testimony of miraculous transformation, others are drawn into the same process of being loved, mended, trained and sent themselves. It is not a perpetual, self-fulfilling activity. It has no value if it does not ultimately release the person being discipled.

Not so with counseling therapy. Although many Christians may not realize it, the goal of psychoanalytical therapy is not to see patients cured and trained to cure others. Its goal is to have patients cope—with the necessary, on-going help of continued therapy—and, by their testimony of miraculous coping, draw other people into the same web of dependency.

Psychoanalysis—whether it is secular or ostensibly *Christian*—has frightening origins in the tortured life of Sigmund Freud during the 1890's, and it is coming under increased assault for its ineffectiveness. It has no definable track record of having cured anyone, yet uninformed churches and Christians across the country are buying into its basic premises—all of which run counter to essential elements of discipleship.

HERE ARE SOME OF THOSE ISSUES:

1. It is me-centered rather than other-focused. Its entire realm of discovery and insight is limited to the patient's unconsciousness and behavior. It is a fundamental violation of our call to serve others, not ourselves.
2. It puts explanations for our behavior and thoughts in completely natural terms. Since one of its goals is to help patients understand why they do/think as they do, it cannot attribute matters to sin or demonic bondage. It must find rational explanations.
3. It removes the power of the Cross from people's lives because the Cross works only against sin and bondage. If people's problems are not caused by sin or bondage, the Cross of Jesus Christ cannot really address them.
4. It focuses people's thinking on things of this earth and on their past (abuse and dysfunction). Discipleship urges people to think on the things above and on the future they can access through forgiveness, deliverance, and obedience.

5. It teaches people a false kind of self-responsibility. Rather than urge people to repent of their own sin, psychoanalysis seeks to empower patients with (a) the knowledge of how they have been mistreated by others, and (b) the “*inner anger*” (self-respect) to blame those people.
6. It fosters a victim mentality—encouraging testimonies that draw attention to how bad a life the patients have experienced. Recovering victims are very unwilling to offer themselves anew as living sacrifices to suffer more for the sake of others.

One last issue ought to be mentioned about the effects of psychoanalytical counseling. It has to do with what people now expect from church. No one can really blame them. Since the church has not been aggressively pursuing all the Bible has to say about the causes and cures for so many psycho-spiritual distortions of the human soul, people in the church have, for the most part, had only two choices for personal recovery: make do with a few spiritual platitudes and formulas like “*read more and pray more*” or “*reckon yourself dead to sin*”; or, go to trained counselors who (for a fee) would at least listen to and not summarily dismiss the person seeking counsel.

Now that *counseling* is available so readily within the church, and now that it has been labeled as *Christian*, the people in our churches would rather be counseled than disciplined. They have been convinced that the secret to their cure is in ongoing, psychoanalytical counseling. Many of them even come to their leaders with their own diagnoses and recovery regimens.

Because of the psychoanalytical model of counseling (which has become so common place in our society) counselees are used to doing most of the talking. They pick counselors according to their own preference, and since they “*hire*” the counselors, the counselees are accustomed to being the boss.

Disciplers aren’t paid. They listen more to the Lord than to the ones whom they are discipling. Disciplers choose their disciples, not the other way around. And discipleship believes in the absolute sufficiency of the word of God to direct every person into paths of righteousness that will ultimately make things well with their soul. Discipleship is profoundly moral in its orientation—speaking in terms of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, obedience and disobedience. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, categorically rejects any moral applications in people’s lives, and argues, instead, on pseudo-medical terms: counselors and therapists speak of syndromes, compulsions, disorders, and complexes as though they were diseases—no one’s fault, just things to respond to medically.

CONCLUSION

Much more could be said about our models for instruction, leadership, and counseling. Since these elements of the church's paradigm are mostly unconscious, they will not be affected that much by arguments, reasoning, papers, or discussions. What will bring the most change to entrenched mentalities are new models being modeled. Those of us who feel passionately about the desperate need for the church to make disciples—if it is going to advance in the next century—have a great responsibility to *do* far more than we *say*.