

March 15, 2009 - Core Seminar Manuscript

Discipling: Class 3, Overcoming Barriers (and Excuses) to Discipling

Basic idea:

We've thought about what discipling generally looks like, and have seen that Jesus calls all of us to disciple others. And we have looked at why disciple at all, concluding that it is immensely important for our joy and for God's glory. In this class, we'll look at some barriers or excuses that we might set up in our minds in response to the past two week's teaching on discipling. Then we'll spend some time thinking about these concerns and how Biblical thinking will help us to overcome them.

Now at this point it might be helpful to address those of you who don't think you have any barriers or excuses. You are fully on-board with the idea that getting into intentionally encouraging relationships with other Christians is a good thing to do. Well, as much as we may intellectually ascent to the importance of discipling, I would speculate that for many of us there are reasons why that belief is difficult for us to put into practice.

I hope that our class today will help you to realize if there are some barriers, even previously unconscious ones, that are inhibiting your fruitfulness in intentional spiritually-encouraging relationships. Or, at least this may help you in your work as a discipler who trains your friends to disciple others. Even if you are not hindered by these issues we will discuss, I bet that someone you spend time with is. Thinking very clearly about barriers and excuses to not engage in discipling may help you be an even better trainer for those you influence.

Outline:

- I. Thoughts and Apprehensions that draw us away from discipling others. (How might you convince yourself *not* to disciple others?)

It's easy for us to pass off the task of discipling with several excuses. Again, these may not be entirely conscious but may still be very significant for our behavior none-the-less. Let's look at some common excuses that people might have for not discipling others, and then let's think about whether or not they are appropriate.

--- It would probably be helpful to actually go over the first 4 points first. Mention the “excuse”, and ask the class how we might respond to that excuse. It would probably be helpful to have a whiteboard to write down some of their thoughts, and also have the handouts for them to fill out. After they put up some ideas, you can flesh them out with the points listed, and tie together all the points. After the 4 points, you can open up for more discussion on other “excuses” that people may have. Are there any valid excuses?? ---

- a. I don't want to be in a position of “authority”.
 - i. Sometimes, people don't want to be placed in an “authoritative” position. As it is, our culture breeds independence, so the notion of having an authority or being seen as an authority figure is not so appealing. Even less so, then, the desire to teach and instruct others!
 - ii. Consider, though, Jesus' teaching “authority”. It's one of servanthood. Throughout the Scriptures we see that the proper posture of one in “authority” is as a loving servant.

1. John 13:14 – washing his disciples' feet

14Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

2. Matt. 20:25-28 – Not to be served, but to serve

25Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

3. John 15:15 – There's an underlying friendship

15I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

- iii. Our attitude is to be one of service. We are not “lording it over others” when we disciple biblically; we are serving them, even if they don’t entirely perceive it as such.

We should be very, very careful to have an appropriate view of our authority in these relationships (easily carried away). We should constantly remind ourselves that we are but God’s conduits; he is the one who will change behavior by the work of his Spirit, not by our coercion or abuse of assumed authority.

Don’t get a big head because of your service in this way. But do rejoice in God’s goodness to use you and keep on working to be even more fruitful and useful in the lives of others.

- b. Intentional discipling relationships turn friends into projects.
 - i. Some people may object that if I engage in a relationship with another Christian that is at its heart deliberately focused on encouraging them spiritually, and not merely on enjoying their company or friendship as the primary goal in and of itself, then I have reduced the reality of my true friendship for them and have made them merely into a discipling project.

To help us to understand and deal with this second potential objection, it would help to think back to last week’s lesson and ask ourselves this simple questions...”What is real biblical love and friendship anyway?” -- *take one or two responses from the class* --

- 1. In John 15, Jesus says that real love is when we love others as he has loved us and because he has loved us. If we recognize the example of Jesus love for his disciples (and for those he died for throughout history) as any sort of model, then we

cannot conclude that real love is merely affirming affection and camaraderie.

- a. Jesus loved by setting out fundamentally to do eternal good for others as a supreme mark of his love for them.

We just read in John 15:15 that Jesus was a friend to his disciples. While it's clear he did love them in many ways, at this point he seems to be pointing especially to the fact that he is opening up truth to them. There's a lot going on in this passage, but it seems clear that Jesus regarded his ministry to open up spiritual truth to his disciples as a grand mark of his friendship with them. His aim to do them spiritual good by deliberately teaching them from the Father's self-revelation was a great part of his friendship.

- b. Note Ephesians 5:1 – 2

¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Again here we see Christ's desire to set out to do good for all his children as a grand mark of his love for them, and a pattern for us to follow. We are to live a life of love for others just as Christ lived a life of love for others. Real love sets out purposefully to do spiritual, eternal good for the beloved!!!!

Now it's true that like anything in a fallen world, we can twist even this and go about it badly. It is possible to treat a friend like a project. But we do that by twisting, not by applying, the principal of loving intentionality. We may do it by demanding rigid adherence to some set "program" or by being unconcerned with the actual feelings and hurts of our friend.

Discussion: Ask the class about ways they think we might fall into the temptation to reduce a discipling friendship to a project?

Discussion: Ask the class about ways we can avoid this pitfall?

At the end of the day, we need to be faithful to God and to Scripture in this. There will be times when we have relationships with people who simply will not “feel” loved by an intentional relationship focused on their spiritual good. Often this will happen when someone really doesn’t believe that caring for their own soul is the most important thing in their life. For many a relationship focused mainly on spiritual encouragement may be emotionally unsatisfying. But I encourage you to maintain a good balance of gentleness, kindness and clarity on this point. We want to be kind and gentle, to help a person understand and perceive the love we have for them in Christ. At the same time, especially with less mature Christians, you don’t want to see your way of relating to them being driven by their “felt needs” you want it to be shaped by the Word of God. So be a friend, hang out if you can, but keep in mind that pointing them to the father, to greater joy in repentance and obedience, that’s the best way to love them.

c. I just don’t feel like it, and don’t have time for it.

We live in a busy town, in a busy country, in a busy age of the world. Most of the lives around us, and many of our own, are full to overflowing with relatively good things.

- i. Considering all that we have received from God and His church, what does it say about our understanding of grace and love if we hoard those blessings to ourselves?
- ii. Remember that life is not full without Christ. If our friends are not living life the way that God intended them to live, then they aren’t living life to the fullest. To choose not to encourage them in this way is un-loving.
- iii. Think about individuals who have encouraged you through your faith, and who have challenged you to fight off sin. The great commission was meant to have a spreading effect—not to end with you.
- iv. You can use the ministry of preaching at CHBC as a great basis for teaching in discipling relationships when you don’t have much time to plan or prepare.
 1. Attend a Core seminar class with someone and then meet up for lunch to discuss the content.
 2. Meet together to discuss the Sunday morning sermon.

- 3. Just meeting with someone to stimulate a discussion about content that other people have prepared and delivered is still good and helpful leadership in discipling.
- 4. If you and your friend both attend this church and sit under its teaching ministry, then you DO have something on which base a discipling relationship and it will take a limited amount of time.
- v. It is almost certain, that if you look through your schedule you will find that there are things of lesser value that you could dump to make time to be an encouragement to others in this church. I suspect it comes down to a matter of desire and priorities.

d. I don't have anything that I can "teach"

- i. Every Christian has one important thing to pass on to others. The Gospel of Jesus Christ. At the very least, you can seek out someone with whom to share the Gospel. As we discussed last week, the lines of evangelism and discipling aren't always clearly drawn!
- ii. Throughout the book of Titus, Paul argues that one of the best things we can do is to remind other believers about the basic truths of the Gospel.

Read Titus 3:1-8

¹Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ²to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted

in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

- iii. We must constantly remind ourselves and others of the basic truth of the Gospel. You can form a good discipling relationship with someone just by spending time going over each of these truths in depth. They are “excellent and profitable for everyone.”
- iv. Again, you can use the teaching ministry of CHBC as the content of your discipling relationships, and your time with the other person as the venue for one-on-one discussion and application of the content taught.

Ask the class for other suggestions of how you could meet with someone and encourage them spiritually even if you don't have a great deal to teach.

- e. Others are simply more gifted than I am. Let them disciple others.
 - i. We need to recognize that we all have different gifts that we can pass on to younger Christians. It's not simply a matter of theology or expertise in Biblical exposition. You can disciple someone by teaching them how to pray diligently and effectively, by simply listening to their struggles, etc.
 - ii. As we mentioned last week, discipling is not something you do on your own. You want to get your friend involved in your church so that he/she can be disciplined by other people in your congregation, who have gifts that you don't have. Remember—it takes a church!
- f. --- ***Discussion here for other general “excuses” if time permits---***

II. Overcoming fears of discipling

Even if we get past the “excuses” for not discipling, we'll still have certain fears about discipling. In fact, it's probably a good thing to

have some measure of a healthy, holy fear about the task before you!

- a. First, recognize the commitment. Discipling is not to be taken lightly, and a little bit of fear is a good thing.
 - i. Matt. 18:6 – You don't want to be causing God's children to stumble
 - ii. 2 Peter 2:1 – The Bible often warns against false teachers who lead people astray. You don't want to be one of those—not even in the subtlest sense.
 - iii. By committing to intentionally spending a decent amount of one-on-one time with an individual, we must recognize that we will have a large influence on their Christian walk—especially if they see us as someone with some authority, and they see us as someone to use as their model. We do not want to teach or exemplify falsehood. So, we should approach discipling with some holy fear, that we would not lead God's children in the wrong direction!

- b. Dealing with fears of failure, or general fear for your discipling ministry
 - i. What are some fears that we might have as we approach a discipling relationship? --- ***Discussion here, and have the class list some fears that they or others may have, but only if time permits*** ---
 1. Your friend will ask questions that you can't answer
 2. You'll say something wrong
 3. You won't live out a perfect Christian life in front of your friend.
 4. etc...
 - ii. In all these things, we need to remember that God helps us overcome fear. Not only that, but he finds ways to work through us despite our shortcomings.
 1. Paul did not condemn Timothy for his fear. (1 Corinthians 16:10-11). Nor does God condemn us.***

2. 1 Corinth. 1:25-27: God works through the weak. We need to remember that it's God at work through us—praise God that it's not up to our abilities!
 3. God gives us the strength where we need it. He gave us a spirit of power, love, and discipline. (2 Tim. 1:7)
 4. (1 Tim. 4:12) Remember what God has given you. Don't let a low view of your abilities discourage you from attempting to be encouraging to other believers, but rather, hold fast to the righteousness to which God has called you.
- iii. Also, remember that we are not perfect. When we stumble, we need to face our mistakes. We need to show those who we disciple how we deal with sin and failures. Model confession, repentance, and prayer of thanks for forgiveness. If you sin against your friend, ask him/her for forgiveness. If you say something wrong, correct it next time. The world does not like to admit sin and weakness. We can model the Christian life by dealing with it straight in the face.

III. Concluding thoughts

- a. Despite the fears involved, discipling is a very rewarding process—not only for the disciple, but also for the discipler. It's also a crucial part of the expansion of God's kingdom, our love for him and for his glory, and out of His own grace and love, he chose **us** to do this work! Sometimes we just need to plunge in.
- b. God gives us strength to do the work He called us to do. We ought to thank God for all that He has given us, and look forward to the work that He's called us to—to pass all that we have been given on to other Christians in His kingdom. Ultimately, the power of discipling is in the power of the Word of God and it's application to other lives by his Spirit, not in our relative giftedness.