

How Discipleship Becomes More Than a Class: Influence

Does your church only see discipleship as a class to be taken or a study to attend?

The story of discipleship in the beginning days of the church was lived out as those early Christians went about their lives – telling family, friends, masters, slaves, soldiers about their new lives in Christ.

In other words, they lived out their faith every day in the relationships they already had with others.

Fast forward to today: Every weekend, untold numbers of Christians leave a church building seeing no connection between their faith and their everyday lives. The next six days between Sundays seem like a spiritual vacuum, with little to no spiritual meaning.

For first-century believers, daily life was intertwined with discipleship. What happened?

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Workplace Grace](#), by Bill Peel and Walt Larimore

You can take your faith to work in appropriate, engaging ways. *Workplace Grace* offers a simple, non-threatening approach to evangelism. Whether your work takes you to a construction site, a cramped cubical or the corner office, every Christian plays a significant role in the Great Commission. Between Sundays, you can be a pipeline for God's grace in the most strategic mission field in the world: your workplace.

Workplace Grace is for Christians who are not gifted evangelists, yet they want to make a spiritual difference at work and see their coworkers and friends come to faith in Jesus Christ. After adopting *Workplace Grace* strategies, Christians who once felt awkward sharing their faith now say, "A load of guilt has been taken off my shoulders." "I never knew sharing my faith could be so simple." "I can do this!"

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Mention the word "discipleship" to most Christians and the likely response will have something to do with a class they attended at church or something similar. It may even progress to something deeper, like learning how to "witness" to others.

While that's not wrong, it's not all the story.

Our job is not so much to bring people to Jesus, as it is to bring Jesus to people.

Spiritual influence is about more than zeal to spread the gospel. People need to see and be attracted to Jesus in us before we try to persuade them to trust Him.

In Acts 1:8 the word "witnesses" is a noun. The emphasis is on being a witness, not on

witnessing. In fact, we are never commanded to go witnessing (verb), but to be witnesses (noun). Focusing on doing before being disconnects who we are from what we say.

When we “go witnessing (verb),” we usually know little to nothing about the status of the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of the people we meet. And they know little, to nothing about us that gives them a reason to trust what we say. In the context, we challenge people to take a quantum leap of faith, rather than a small step toward Jesus. This can add more rocks on the hard soil of someone’s heart.

Whether growing acres of wheat or planting a backyard vegetable garden, cultivation is key to a successful harvest. Breaking up the soil, removing rocks, and pulling weeds always comes before planting.

God often uses those whose own heart soil is softened and fruitful to cultivate the hearts of others. People who reflect Christ’s character and demonstrate His love, compassion, integrity, graciousness, and patience.

Cultivation is all about earning the right to be a spiritual influence in someone’s life. The goal of this phase is to break down emotional barriers by earning trust and creating curiosity about our faith.

Trust is not automatic. It is a response to character and actions.

Bill Peel and Walt Larimore, [Workplace Grace](#)

A NEXT STEP

As we live out our lives and spend time with other people, being alert to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, we are beginning to understand how God can use us to disciple others, and in the process, grow as disciples ourselves.

Developing relationships with others – especially those with whom we have regular and close contact – can be very difficult. But God didn’t give us a pass on this – the Great Commission is pretty specific that we are to “make disciples” as we are going about our daily lives.

Developing relationships with others in our daily lives requires us to earn the right to be heard, and often that requires understanding and practicing new rules of engagement with others.

Gather your staff or key leaders and brainstorm personal and intentional ways in which each person can earn influence through obedience of these commands of Jesus:

1. *Turn the other cheek.* “I tell you, don’t resist and evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matthew 5:39). The “slaps” of Jesus day today take the form of rolling our eyes at someone, acting too busy to listen,

or anything that communicates a condescending attitude toward others. Letting an insult bounce off us without any visible effect may quietly be the first step toward developing a conversation rather than a confrontation.

2. *Give what's asked for* – and more. “As for one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well” (Matthew 5:40). The coat referred to here is like an overcoat today. Jesus’ words demonstrated an extraordinary thing to do – seeing if going beyond the initial request would settle the matter. People are more important than the point. We can plant many seeds for developing relationships by treating other people as more valuable than our own appeals for fairness and justice.
3. *Walk a little further*. “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41). Roman law of the first century required Jewish cooperation in helping soldiers and officials in daily life – a practice that continually reminded the Jewish people of their second-class status. Jesus’ command turned a legalistic requirement into an act of grace, by allowing the needs of others to take precedence over our own.
4. *Show generosity*. “Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:42). Sharing the generous, open lifestyle of the kingdom with others is as much about the state of your heart as is the size of your wallet. We’re all needy people – we may not have the same needs, but we have many needs. Looking for ways to do more and want less is clearly not seen in much of society, and may help develop a relationship with others.

Actions like the above – when we start deliberately letting God do remarkable, countercultural things through us – are some of the best ways to help others see a difference in you, and lay the groundwork for developing a relationship as the beginning point of sharing Christ with them.

Adapted from *Subversive Kingdom*, by Ed Stetzer

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix 61-1, published March 2017

*This is part of a weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** Book Summaries for church leaders.*

SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; each solution is taken from a different book. As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS provides 26 issues per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).

>> [Subscribe to SUMS Remix](#)