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## **Discipleship – The Church’s Greatest Need**

I still remember the first time I heard the word “disciple” used in any real spiritual sense. It was July 11, 1990, and I was sitting at my first Wednesday evening church supper. I was 18 years old and I had just entrusted my life to the Savior on the previous Sunday afternoon. The glee and glow of a fresh faith in Christ was still upon me as I shared a meal with my new Christian family.

Near the end of the meal, a man named Sidney Benz approached me; he had evidently seen me respond to the invitation at the end of the Sunday evening service. Sheldon introduced himself as one of the deacons of the church and then said, “I’ve been praying for you and I believe God wants me to disciple you.” I had never seen him before and had no idea what he meant, but it wounded great to me, so I agreed. Just a few days later, I found out what it was to be “discipled”.

Sheldon and I began meeting together for a few hours every week. During these meetings, he helped me understand my salvation, he taught me how to practice spiritual disciplines, he instructed me in matters of doctrines, and he kept me accountable for spiritual growth and purity. His teachings, coupled with the strong biblical leadership of a loving church family, set me firmly upon the path to Christian maturity. Sheldon and I met weekly for almost two years, and looking back now from the position of pastor, I see what an extraordinary gift God gave me in this mentoring relationship.

Sadly, such experiences are quite rare among Christians in American churches. Discipleship has become the urban legend of the modern church; it is often discussed, but seldom observed, at least in any biblical sense. One-on-One mentoring is virtually nonexistent. Authoritative, scriptural teaching has been replaced by topical discussions on lifestyle enrichment, and most worship services are little more than religiously enlightened group therapy. Knowledge of self is favored above the knowledge of God; ordained leaders are viewed more as spiritual guidance counselors; and the pursuit of individual and corporate purity is forsaken in favor of the sporadic practice of culturally-sensitive ethics.

The result is an impotent church, or even worse, a church that has become content and comfortable in its impotence. The vast majority of Christians no longer live with a real sense of expectancy, holy awe, or spiritual urgency. The lack of knowledge about God and His Word has given rise to a reinvented deity that is more congenial to the demands of our modern lives. He is our long lost grandfather in the sky, bequeathing our inheritance from the convalescent home of eternity. He is longsuffering when ignored, patient when wronged, understanding when doubted, and eager to bless when he finally gets the attention he desires. Religious ideas like sin, judgment, wrath, righteousness, sovereignty, and sacrifice no longer fit the character of this god. Those aspects of his identity belonged to an outdated, unenlightened generation. Our god and our faith are now what we make them, and we are happy to make them as comfortable and as undemanding as possible.

What the church needs is a return to true discipleship, and that is what I want us to strive toward here at Morningview. This is the heart of our Benchmark, which I discussed in last week’s article. We need to be a people who are wholly consumed with God and His Word, wholly devoted to seeking His glory and sharing His gospel. Those kind of Christians don’t just happen, they must be intentionally grown by a church that is fully submitted and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Tune in next week for my next topic: “Discipleship – What is it, really?”