

September 06, 2006

DISCIPLESHIP – Where Does It Happen?

I continue this week with the 3rd installment of my series on Discipleship. Now that we have a basic idea of what it is, we have to get down to the nuts and bolts of where it happens. When speaking of Discipleship in the church context, it basically takes place at 4 levels.

Discipleship **Level 4** (DL4) is the congregational level. On Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, we gather for times of congregational worship and instruction and admonishment from the Word. In a general sense, what David and I communicate as we lead you during these times sets a tone for our whole congregation. Through worship and expositional preaching and teaching, we set forth a vision and create an atmosphere of discipleship for the whole church. In a specific sense, the content of what we set forth serves to practically instruct believers on the character and glory of God, the wonderful message of the Gospel, and true purpose of the Church, and various other biblical doctrines and spiritual practices. All who attend and worship and hear the Word are thus participating in discipleship at this corporate level.

Discipleship **Level 3** (DL3) is the group level. Discipleship groups are Sunday School classes, Discipleship Training classes, home gatherings, and other group studies that typically involve 40 or less people. Each group has a leader that bears the chief responsibility for biblical teaching and for encouraging participation. Discipleship takes place at this level as the Bible is taught in an atmosphere of greater openness, accountability, and fellowship. At this level, disciples can ask questions, build meaningful Christian relationships, and grow to maturity in the faith as they gather together to digest Bible doctrine and practically apply it to life. These group meetings are smaller extensions of our corporate gatherings that allow for a less-formal environment that fosters more active discussion, application, and involvement.

Discipleship **Level 2** (DL2) is the mentoring/accountability group Level, which is also the most neglected level in the modern church. This is a group of only 2 to 5 persons who meet regularly for instruction and to keep one another formally accountable for living the faith. Mentoring is the biblical concept of passing on the faith from one generation to the next. This is the heart of true discipleship. In true mentoring, a mature believer takes on the responsibility for one or very few younger Christians of the same gender and personally invests their time and experience into those persons by teaching them, helping them to apply the Word, and keeping them accountable for growth and involvement in the church. An accountability group is a group where persons of the same gender gather to discuss their spiritual growth and to ask one another intimate questions for the sake of personal purity and accountability. One small group can serve both purposes of mentoring and accountability, or it can be two separate groups.

The final level is Discipleship **Level 1** (DL1) and it is the self-feeder level. Discipleship takes place at the individual level as individual believers study the Bible, invest themselves in prayer, engage God in personal worship, memorize the Word, and actively mediate upon and apply God's truth. More mature believers will even be able to read and grow from supplemental Christian literature and theological works that deepen their understanding of the Scriptures. This is the most basic level of discipleship, and it should be what drives us and prepares us for participation in each of the other 3 levels.

So, that is where Discipleship happens. Where are you at in each of the 4 levels? Absence of activity and participation at any of the 4 levels will lead to an incomplete experience in your Christian life and in your church life. God means for us to personally *know* Him and to be involved in a community of faith. Both of those dynamics are represented at each level in varying degrees. Where do you see your next opportunity for growth as a Disciple?