

## PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on Being a Disciple, Part 5.

Four months ago I mentioned the Biblical background of this model of a disciple:

### **AN ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ:**

- 1. Is involved in regular Christian service to others;**
- 2. Is a student in a regular Bible School, Sunday School, or other learning environment with a teacher or mentor;**
- 3. Is a regular in corporate worship and private prayer;**
- 4. Is looking for and working with pre-Christians and new Christians to be a mentor for them.**

Now is the article I wanted to write four months ago! I was thinking then about the importance of being a teacher or mentor for others – the fourth item on the list. Since it was the fourth item, I figured I needed to say something about first three. But to me, this one needs much more attention.

Many of you might even cringe a bit just thinking about sharing your faith with someone. A source in 2009 reported some statistics about people becoming Christians. While other sources differ some of the exact numbers, these tend to be close:

- *95% of all Christians have never led a person to make a decision for Christ.*
- *80% of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ.*
- *2% are involved in a ministry of evangelism.*
- *63% of pastoral leaders have not led a stranger to a decision for Christ in the last two years.*
- *49% of pastoral leaders spend zero time in an average week ministering outside of the church.*
- *89% of pastoral leaders have zero time reserved on their list of weekly priorities for going out to reach new people.*
- *Yet, 99% of pastoral leaders believe that every Christian, including leadership, has been commanded to preach the gospel to a lost world.*

Now we could argue that these statistics paint a overly bleak picture. My guess is that most of you who are parents are a major reason for your children's faith, even if they did not make a decision in front of you. And for that matter, any other person's decision for Christ is out of our control. Most persons decide to become Christian after an accumulation of witnesses, so even if you never saw a person's declaration of faith, your conversations and your friendship likely were part of it.

Several years ago, in a meeting of pastors, we were asked to name a person or persons who mentored or coached us in our Christian faith. It turned out that for almost every pastor there, there was at least one person who took time with them, either one-on-one or with a small group. For some it was as simple as reading parts of the Bible over lunch, or playing chess or tennis or something else together and having occasional spiritual conversations.

Maple Street started as a congregation in what was then the Evangelical Association. Jacob Albright, who lived around 1800, was a Lutheran who became licensed as a Methodist preacher, but chose to independently preach and move among his German-speaking neighbors. Over the course of 3+ years (1796-1800) his “group” grew to 20 people in 3 small groups. While that hardly sounds significant, this was not just a casual group of 20. These were people with whom Albright spent a great deal of personal, one-on-one time; their meetings would have been more like training sessions for pastors, and they would include very personal confession (probably similar to many AA and NA meetings). By 1807, this Association of small groups and churches had 220 members, and organized as an Association. By 1892 (just before Maple Street was founded), the Evangelical Association had 148,506 adult members, with 1,864 ministers and 2,043 churches.

The point I am trying to get here is that not only is personal teaching and mentoring a *part* of church, but that it is the *essence* of what church is meant to be. Jesus preached to crowds and did compassionate ministry among many people, but as far as we can tell, the bulk of His time on earth was spent investing time in a small number of people who later became His vessels for reaching the world. And we have every reason to believe this was His model for us. Consider these words we commonly call the Great Commission: Jesus’ last words to His disciples:

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them** to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Matthew 28:18-20

So what is “making disciple”? Isn’t it bringing people into the Christian family (baptizing) and teaching them?

Occasionally I hear of persons who are quietly mentoring one or two people. For those of you who are investing time with others one-on-one, I have a couple of suggestions: 1- Don’t underestimate the importance of what you are doing. 2- Don’t forget that you have a church. I don’t mean focus on bringing your person to church services – not yet, for some that will come later. But invite a trusted friend from the church into your circle – then you open up their lives to a new relationship and you lessen the burden on yourself. It might not work with the first friend you introduce; so introduce another. And maybe your little circle grows slowly into a small group and a part of the church.

And for those of you who are not investing time at least one-on-one with someone outside the church family, you can start with prayer and reserving time (unlike 89% of our leaders) to make this possible. We have far more capacity to change lives than we realize.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'R' and 'A' in a stylized, cursive script.