

Relationships: The Glue of Discipleship

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to give you an overview on the role of relationships in the discipleship process and three essential ingredients to effective discipleship.

Objectives: This session will help you to:

1. Explain why relationships are essential.
2. Enumerate basic relationship principles
3. Describe the impact of relationships on discipleship
4. Commit yourself to deepening your relationships with your disciples.

Key Verse: 1 Thessalonians 2:8

I. Introduction.

Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe and spiritual laws that govern the spiritual universe, so are there social laws that govern our relationships with one another. Much of the ill that we see today is the result of violating these social laws.

Relationships are essential for things to work well. Why is that?

II. Relationships: The Nature of Reality

- A. God is Eternally Relational - The Trinity
- B. Man, made in God's image, is Relational - It is not good that the man is alone
- C. The Church, modeled after marriage, is Relational - Christ, is the husband; The Church is His wife.
- D. The Body is Relational - All parts need one another to function optimally.

Relationships are the glue that holds things together. If relationships are going to work well we need to understand two basic principles of building relationships: eternal, which apply in all places at all times and temporal, which are true in time and space.

III. Relationship Principles

- A. Eternal Principles: These principles are true of the Godhead and are also true of us.
 1. Equal in Person, different in Responsibility. Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11:3
These verses show that each person is equally valuable without reference to their position or abilities.

2. Relationship represents both unity and diversity. Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-13
Each part of the body is different, yet they must interrelate and work together for the body to function well. We are not cloning ourselves. We are releasing the unique contribution that person has to offer.
- B. Temporal Principles: These do not apply within the Godhead, but they do apply to us who live in space and time and are fallen.
1. Relationships are built on trust
It's very difficult to communicate with someone on a deeper level without an element of trust. Trust grows as a result of knowing someone and seeing that they are trustworthy. This trust develops as a result of time, effort and a proper mindset toward the person (realizing they are a gift from God and that God will use them in our lives as well).
- John 2:24-25** Jesus didn't entrust himself to others.
John 15:13-15 Jesus entrusted himself to the disciples at the end of His ministry.
Acts 15:36-38 Paul dumped John Mark because he couldn't trust him.
2. Relationships take time and work to develop (2 Timothy 3:10-11,14)
It takes time and work to build good relationships, but the wait and effort are well worth it. Are we giving a good example for others to follow?
3. Significant relationships are developed through trials.
There is a paradox with relationships - they comprise our greatest joys (1 Thessalonians 2:19); and our greatest pain (1 Thessalonians 3:1,2; 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 [Paul gave up a ministry opportunity because of a concern for Titus!]).



IV. The Importance of Relationships in the Discipleship Process.

The word "disciple" = learner. In this sense, discipleship is roughly equivalent to education. We most often think of education in terms of mastering a sequence of information, or information transfer. The biblical idea of education, however, is transformation through modeling. Modeling is learning by watching and imitating others and it focuses on character, conviction and competency. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Modeling is very relational. Jesus didn't hold prayer seminars or evangelism seminars. Rather, He did these in front of them and taught them in the process. He didn't say, "sit in my classroom from 2-3, two times a week and I will instruct you on how to be a good disciple."

Here are a few examples from the Gospels: Teaching them to pray (Luke 11:1), Sending of the 12 and 70 (Matthew 10 and Luke 10), epileptic boy not cured, but they tried doing what they saw Jesus doing (Matthew 17:14-16, 19-21).

Modeling takes place through relationships. Jesus disciplined the 12 in the context of ongoing relationships with them. His disciples lived with Him and heard His teaching in the context of the truths lived out in His life. Because of the intimacy of the teacher - student relationship, Jesus said that a student, when he is finished, would be like his teacher. Paul, likewise, exhorted the people and churches to mimic him. (Luke 6:40; 2 Timothy 3:10-15; Philippians 3:17)

A. We model Christian character to our disciples.

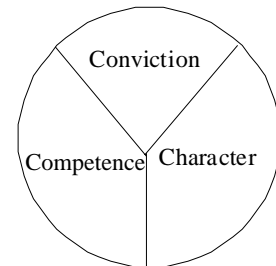
The apostle Paul said, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are to walk with the Lord and model that walk to our disciples. We want them to become dependent on the Lord, not on us. So our lives must be a consistent model for our disciples. But we must also realize that we won't be perfect until we are in the presence of the Lord. We are all in a maturing process. That is a healthy model to give our disciples. This is spiritual living made practical.

B. We model Christian spiritual life (convictions) to our disciples.

We can pass on spiritual truth verbally to our disciples (taught). But through our relationship with them, our disciples will see how to live these truths by watching our lives (caught).

C. We model personal ministry (competence) to our disciples.

Because we want to develop multiplying disciples, it is crucial that we model our personal ministry to our disciples. This is what makes training effective. Instruction with a model is a very strong combination. This assumes that you as a discipler know how to have a personal ministry and have something already existing to show your disciple.



V. Summary

Relationships are the glue of discipleship. Discipleship is not simply about the conveyance of information or skill, it is the transformation of a person into Christ-likeness, with His convictions and character. Discipleship is not about making clones, but about releasing the gifts and abilities that God has built into a person, which are currently bound up by sin. We gave an overview today. In a couple of weeks we will talk about some ways we can build relationships with a special emphasis on communication skills.

VI. Assignment

Evaluate your relationship with the people you are discipling per the attached sheet (page 5). Then, meet with your mentor to discuss the results.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why are relationships essential to discipleship?
2. What are the basic relationship principles?
3. How would you describe the impact of relationships on discipleship?
4. How will you deepen your relationships with your disciples as a result of this talk?

Relationship Evaluation Sheet

1. Do I see this person as an equal?
2. Do I value the differing responsibilities that God has given to him?
3. Am I seeking my own place without reference to everyone else? What am I doing to bring about unity of mind, love, spirit, and purpose (Philippians 2:2)?
4. Am I allowing others to blossom according to themselves, or am I trying to make them all like me? Am I looking for the uniqueness in them and trying to develop it, or am I only looking at how they can forward my ends?
5. Is there much trust between us? Does s/he trust me? Do I trust him?
6. Am I giving ample time and effort to making the relationship work?
7. Am I sticking through the relational tough times, or not?
8. What convictions am I trying to model and teach? How am I doing this?
9. What character am I trying to model and teach? How am I doing this?
10. What competencies am I modeling and teaching them? How am I going about this?