

Building a Plan for Discipleship

(Written by Andy Harrison for Leading Student Ministry Magazine, LifeWay, Winter 2004)

Many veteran youth ministers, that is, ministers that possess numerous years of experience, often struggle with this very issue. They will see success in many areas of their ministry over the years, but will often lament, "I wish I had done a better job of discipling students. I never really developed an effective plan." Their hearts wanted as much, but, either because they were never themselves discipled and so had a vague image of expectation or because they felt it was a personal commitment the student needed to take responsibility for, or a myriad of other reasons, they just didn't get it done.

Do you know what you want your students to be like after they graduate? Do you want them to drift in college or to connect immediately on campus with the BCM and become an active member of a local church? Do you want them to be able to minister to others their freshman year or be fighting through their own crisis of faith? Do you want them to fondly recall their days in the youth group or to passionately love Jesus? Well, the real question is, how will you get them to the mature places?

Consider the following:

3 Steps to Successful Discipleship

Seek God's divine direction for *your* group.

Now, this doesn't mean that Jesus will decide that Luke 9:23 doesn't apply to your group, and so you might as well forget those weekends of service and book those concert tickets today. No. What this does mean is that every church situation is unique. The church's location, size, setting, theological and ministerial emphases, among other factors, should contribute to your plan for discipleship. Consider Acts 17:26-27, "From one man He has made every nation of men to live all over the earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live, so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." (HCSB) These verses indicate that God is so into the details of our lives that He has determined where we will live and the time in history that we will exist, so that we might come to find Him. If that is true (and it is), then the students in your community are living there because He has determined that they would live there, and they are teenagers at this time in history because He has coordinated it to be so. If His divine plan has coordinated all these factors, then it is easy to conclude that He has a divine purpose for your church, that will uniquely capture and mature the hearts of those who are affected by its' ministry.

For instance, is your church an inner city church? Perhaps your discipleship will emphasize ministry and meeting physical, financial, and social needs. Is your church a mission minded church? Perhaps your discipleship plan will place an emphasis on mission opportunities near and abroad. Is your church bible-study driven? Perhaps your plan for discipleship will emphasize understanding, memorizing, and obeying God's word. Of course, any balanced plan for discipleship will teach all of the afore mentioned scriptural commands, but God's disciples do not all share the same personalities and gifts and will tend to lean toward certain calls of ministry. Successful youth ministries do not

all look the same, but they are each effective. Have you sought God's divine direction for *your* group?

Know your spiritual gifts and build a team of leaders who possess various other spiritual gifts.

Let's say you have the gift of evangelism. I wouldn't say it will be easier, but it will be more natural to disciple students in sharing their faith. It is a gift of God and a strength in your life that He will use for His glory. But what about the training that comes after the salvation experience? Who will help you with students in this regard?

I was always strong in taking church-ed students and helping them become rooted in their faith. I knew that they needed to shake loose the bonds of self-righteousness and stop living off of mom and dad's faith and possess their own. I knew how to help them break free of complacency and ritualism and form an intimate relationship with Jesus. I, however, struggled significantly with other types of students. I loved youth who were tattooed, body-pierced, and had no church experience, but I was handicapped, it seems, at relating to them on certain levels. It was always important to me to have leaders in my youth ministry who were gifted where I was not.

If it is important to you that **every** student be discipled, then you will build a team that is gifted in reaching and maturing as many types of students as possible.

Instill the basics

Prayer. Bible Study. Scripture Memory. Witnessing.
Ministry. Worship. Fellowship.

A plan for discipling believers in these areas would include:

1. *Scripture studies of what the Bible says about each of these basics.* When we understand that the scripture commands us to walk in the manner of these things, we allow the Holy Spirit to use His words to transform our hearts.
2. *Dedicated times of involving students in the basics.* Students must be engaged in these disciplines if they are ever to become active disciples of Christ. Study alone will not accomplish this.
3. *A mentor or discipler to encourage, exhort, and model these basics.* Discipleship is incomplete without relationship. Jesus' teachings became life to the disciples because the disciples were in close observation of Christ's heart. His mere presence encouraged and strengthened them.