

Discipleship Is A Great Word

(Written by Andy Harrison for *Leading Student Ministry Magazine*, LifeWay, Fall 2003)

Discipleship is a great word. It rolls off the tongue with the greatest of ease, sounding all at once humble, yet powerful. It looks good on a church bulletin right above the words: Evening Service. It appears pleasant and inviting on the cover of a multiplicity of curriculum choices. Its mere mention on a resume can change a hardcore evangelist into a well-rounded, balanced ministry professional. The fact is: discipleship is a great word. It is however, a difficult task.

Paul speaks of his commitment to discipling believers in this manner: it's labor! "*We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me.*" (HCSB)

Don't you remember your father asking you to join him in a great day of leaf raking? Or your mom asking you to scrub the bathrooms on a nice day of spring cleaning? You leapt up out of bed and said, "All right! I get to spend the day toiling and laboring with my mom and dad!" Hardly. I remember as a teenager being on a mission trip to Kansas City, MO, when our youth minister announced that half of our group was going to Crown Center to go shopping for the day and the other half was going to canvas the neighborhood with a religious survey. Got any guesses as to which bus filled up first? Few are those who would choose labor over ease, and toil over convenience.

Christ has called us to disciple believers. Paul saw the value in Christ's command and was willing to "labor" until the task was complete. This goal of spiritual maturity was his desire for every believer. "*...that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*" If we truly want to accomplish the task of discipleship with every student God gives us, we must consider the following:

- 1. We must commit to the task.**

There is no "just add water" method of making disciples. Discipleship is not a program; it is a process. It's not a sleek, red sports car that burns rubber and gets you and one suitcase there in a hurry, but rather, it is a locomotive that slowly leaves the station containing the strength to transport an unfathomable amount of cargo. Being committed to the task means that we cannot get impatient and bail when things aren't moving at the pace we desire. People require trust. Trust requires time. Time is required to present each of your students as, "mature in Christ." Determine, with Paul, to do this.

- 2. We must exercise personal spiritual disciplines.**

How can we possibly pass on what we do not possess? My father spent a lot of time talking to his children about money. He wanted financial wealth so he could have something to pass on to us. He always spoke about providing each of his children with a healthy inheritance. When he died several years ago, my brother, sister and I received no money. There was none. My father spoke often of wealth, but never possessed any. In order to pass on a love for

Christ and the tools for building a relationship with Him, we must first possess them ourselves.

3. We must have a plan based on relationship.

Every student is different. They require individual care and development. Just because a group completes Experiencing God does not mean that they have been discipled that semester. Bible study is only one aspect of discipleship. Day to day, life on life experience and instruction helps transform that bible study into life skills. As you seek God's guidance in the "what," (Bible Study Curriculum) also seek Him in the "who" (The person or persons who will walk with the student through this time of life).

4. We must not waver.

"This bible study seems like school work and it doesn't meet my needs." "My teacher is boring." "Why don't you take these kids on more trips?"

There are dozens of reasons to seek another method of growing students; methods that are more pleasing to parents and more enjoyable for students. Jesus must have thought the same things as many turned and walked away from His call to radical discipleship, but He stayed the course. If a student will test your love for them, they will also test your commitment to the task. When they see your love, and understand your resolve, they will come along for the ride. And there is plenty of room on the train.