

From "Building A Discipling Culture" by Mike Breen

Chapter 3 excerpt:

*The hard reality is that immersion works only when people are actually fluent in something.*

For instance, a toddler is never going to learn English if she's hanging out only with people who don't know English themselves or if she hangs out only with other toddlers. In other words, because most churches have so few actual disciples running around, there simply aren't enough disciples at churches to create a quality immersion experience.

The way most churches have structured the discipleship process, it is as if we are saying, "If I can just get the right information into their heads, if they can just think about it the right way, then they will become more like Jesus."

Right information/teaching=right behavior=disciple.

So let's think about it practically: How successful has that been for us?

Or think about it like this: Would you trust a doctor to perform open heart surgery on you who has had only classroom experience and no residency? Yet that is how we have structured our discipleship processes!

Most church leaders we know, after hearing this, usually say the following: "Well, we can't be responsible for feeding them. They need to learn to be self-feeders. They have to be responsible for being disciples. I can't will it for them." There's a little truth in that, but we think it fails to acknowledge the complexity of the problem.

Getting people to a place where they can nourish themselves with the Bible, through prayer, community and

other spiritual disciplines doesn't happen just because we tell people that's how they can nourish themselves spiritually. That's like telling third graders that in order to function in school they need to learn to write in cursive but offer no in-depth way of teaching them to do this. And to be clear, kids don't learn to write in cursive because the teacher gives a 30-minute lecture on how to do it. One of the problems that occur when people become Christians is that we either explicitly or implicitly give them a list of things to do that we think will help them become "self feeders" (admittedly, we believe "self-feeders" is a terribly unhelpful term):

- 1) Read your Bible
- 2) Pray
- 3) Tithe
- 4) Go to church services each week
- 5) Find a small group (or whatever your church does)
- 6) Tell your friends about Jesus

Think about it. Aren't we making some pretty gross assumptions here?

Why do we assume that by telling people to read the Bible that if they do it, people know how to read Scripture well? Why do we think they know what in the world to do with this gigantic book that somehow brings us to the "Living Word"?

We tell people to pray. We teach sermon series on prayer. Maybe we teach classes on prayer. But we forget that Jesus' own disciples had no clue how to pray like Jesus and they grew up in a culture that practiced prayer.

Something about the way Jesus prayed was so profound, was so connective, visceral and life-giving that they said, "Please, please teach us to pray like you!" People really need help with this, and more than just a sermon, class or book.

Why are we assuming that simply by giving people information (pray, read the Bible, read doctrinal statements, be a part of a small group) they actually know how to do it or can figure it out by themselves? I can read a book on how to perform open heart surgery. If you go into cardiac arrest, do you want me to operate on you?

Our culture encourages us to believe knowing about something and knowing something are the same thing. What we have managed to do is teach people about God. Teach them about prayer. Teach them about mission. The point isn't that they would just know about it but to know it.

We don't want to just know about God; we want to know God. In the same way that we don't want to collect random facts and nuances about our spouses, we want to know them through and through. That's why Paul seems to give this guttural cry: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of sharing in his sufferings."

Discipleship isn't a random assortment of facts and propositions and behaviors, discipleship is something that is you to the core and is completely incarnated in you. If it is information, it is information that has worked its way into you and is now part of you, in the same way that John talks about the logos being wrapped up in the person of Jesus: "The Word became flesh." It goes from being information to being knowledge.

Yet almost all churches have built a whole discipleship process on that first style: classroom teaching. Hear the sermon. Join the small group. Go to the membership class.

Read your Bible (hopefully you figure out how to do it). Go to class 201 or 301, and "yes, we have classes for that."

Of course our churches aren't seeing the life, vibrancy and power we read in the Gospels or in Acts. No one has a clue how to do the things that Jesus taught his disciples to do! Most people know they should be doing these things. Most people know these things are important. We would even guess that most want to know how. But knowing I have a broken carburetor and need a new one isn't the same as knowing how to put a new one in! In the same way, there's a big difference between knowing forgiveness is central to Jesus' message and actually going out and forgiving your dad for what he did to you when you were a kid. Knowing something in your head alone is never what Jesus was after. The truth of Scripture is meant to be worked out in us, not something that we hold as an abstract reality.

We don't want people to understand forgiveness or prayer or mission or justice only intellectually. We want people who can forgive, who can hear and respond to God, who actually know Him. We want people who have hearts that break for our world and the people in it and do something about it. We want the kind of people in our communities who resemble the people we see in Scripture.

Jesus called twelve guys to follow him and be his his disciples ... to be learners of him. People who would learn to do all of the things he does and somehow learn to carry his very essence through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

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