

RELATIONSHIPS

Making disciples requires relationships. Jesus, the ultimate disciple maker, was the greatest preacher that ever lived. But His method for reaching the world was not preaching, it was loving relationships with a few men. Jesus was constantly building and cultivating relationships. He knew that movements happen through people not programs. If we want to do what Jesus did in reaching the world with the gospel, we must get good at being relational. We will need to see others as God sees them and think of their needs over our own. This takes a lot of time and commitment but it is the only way to make disciples as Jesus did.

Read John 15:12-15

Jesus calls His disciples His friends, they were more than projects for ministry.

Read John 17:6-19

Jesus' prayer for His disciples gives insight to how much He cared for them and had godly dreams for them.

Relationship as the strategy

Read Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-14

Jesus begins His ministry with an invitation into a relationship, "Follow Me." As His ministry goes on, most scholars estimate that Jesus spent 9/10 of His time in close proximity with these men. This increased as His time approaching the cross drew closer, and after His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples far more than anyone else. (John 21:14)

Discuss: Describe the relationships that have most impacted your walk with Jesus.

5 elements in building relationships for discipleship

Intentional Pursuit

When Jesus built relationships with the disciples, He actively pursued them. He engaged them with the first question and invitation, He also followed up with a direct call. (John 2:35-39, Mark 1:16-20) Many times in the gospels it is says, "Jesus called His disciples to Him and said..." This shows that He was the one initiating most of their interactions. So to build good relationships, we must be the ones to pursue others. We must swallow our pride, make ourselves vulnerable, and put in the effort of connecting with others. To build good relationships initially you must assume that if I don't take the first step it won't get taken. Be first to introduce yourself and start a conversation, be thoughtful on how to continue the conversation, be purposeful to set up a follow up meetings, ask good questions to find out more about them, and go the extra mile to seek them out and meet them where they are.

Time/Presence

Relationships require a significant amount of time and presence. Jesus Himself incarnated Himself into human life in order to reach humans through relationship. (John 1:14) Relationships require development and cultivation. To build good relationships, we must be present enough and patient enough to allow communication and trust to deepen. We must prepare ourselves for ongoing investment over a long period of time. We must be willing to go deep with people and meet

them where they are. We must be willing to enter into their world, on their turf to really understand their complexities and how we can best serve them. Be consistent, be around, and be available.

Loving Service

Jesus had tangible ways of showing His disciples that He loved and cared about them. (John 13:1;3-5) Serving others and putting their needs before your own builds trust. It communicates love with action. To build good relationships, we must be willing to serve others. We must be willing to find ways to meet their needs. We must do things that even sometimes inconvenience us, to show them that they matter to us. In fact, this is what Jesus says will be a distinguishing mark of our faith. (John 13:34-35) Be willing to pay for meals, provide a listening ear, assist in physical labor, honor them on special occasions, rejoice with them, and mourn with them.

Grace

Jesus is the living embodiment of grace. Not only did He die upon the cross to bring the free gift of eternal life to His followers, but he also in His relationships with His disciples, He graciously pardoned their mistakes and wrong thinking. (John 21:15-17) To build strong relationships, we must extend grace and be quick to forgive when wronged. We must remember that we have been forgiven in Christ and work hard to reconcile when there are differences. Own your mistakes, don't hold grudges, be kind and long suffering, and seek to understand experiences and perspectives of others.

Challenge

Jesus was always teaching and training His disciples to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. He was constantly challenging them with truth from God's word on how they should see things and respond to things. Authentic loving relationships hold one another accountable to the truth. (Mark 10:41-45) To build strong relationships, we must have the courage to challenge people to change. When we see things in their lives that are inconsistent with the way God would have us live, we must call them to repentance and trust in the gospel. Confront issues face to face, speak clear and kind about the truth, and resist the urge to overlook things just to keep the peace.

Discuss: Describe what stands out to you about Jesus' relationships.

Can you describe how your closest friendships are built on these principles?

In which of these areas could you grow in becoming a better friend?

How does Jesus motivate these principles in your friendships?

Pray

Ask God to help you see the value of good friendships, pray for any friends you have that you desire to take deeper for the gospel, and pray for any hindrances to good friendships in your life.