

Writing assignment 1



Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary Writing Assignment 1 A paper submitted to Dr. Rick Garner In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course Discipleship Ministries DSMN 500 By Hershel L. Kreis, Jr. November 4, 2012 Toano, Virginia INTRODUCTION While there are those who may be uncomfortable with the idea that worship is a goal in making disciples, the goal of Christian education according to Mitchell is to make a disciple who worships Jesus.

Mitchell points out that worship is more than just showing up at church on Sunday morning for an hour of corporate worship. He points out that worship according to John 4: 19 -24 goes much deeper than just that time of corporate worship that we often think of as worship. He points out that worship involves the whole person, mind, body and soul. Anderson states that corporate worship is “ an action of discipling and discipleship” and a “ school for the Lord’s service. Discipleship is just one part of the equation needed to assist Christians in spiritual formation to maturity. Christian education also has a role to play. The goal of both discipleship and Christian education is to produce spiritually mature disciples of Christ. Education, as the term is used by Csinos and many others, is used to refer to learning that takes place within churches or schools. Formal Christian education and discipleship can be seen as points along a continuum that is designed to increase the spiritual maturity of believers.

Mitchell’s definition of Christian education, when broken down gives a number of clues as to the role it plays in regards to assisting Christians to become more mature in their walk with Christ. When Mitchell speaks of Christian education as “ engaging learners in acquiring the mind and skill

sets," he clearly shows that there has to be a transfer of knowledge in some fashion. Faithful expository preaching allows the Christian to understand how the Bible is not just a collection of 66 individualized books, but instead an interlocking mosaic that explains God's love for man and the relationship between them.

Topical preaching is good for learning about particular aspects of faith and what the Bible has to say about the issues that Christians confront in today's society, but expository preaching is faithful to not only the text, but the context of the passage in light of the entire Bible. But, faithful preaching of God's Word is not the only way that Christian education is being accomplished. There are still many churches that conduct Sunday schools. These Sunday schools have varied curricula and, as a result, their success as a tool in spiritual formation can vary.

For those who use Sunday school curricula provided by a denominational source, they can provide a great deal of information to the Christian as to what the denomination believes and why they believe it. Other formats include topical studies or studies that examine books of the Bible in a manner similar to expository preaching. While Sunday school materials vary, the importance to the individual Christian will also vary. If a class was using a topical study, there may be particular lessons or units that may not apply to all that are in the class.

While Sunday schools and corporate worship provide Christian education to believers, they are less intimate than small groups. Small groups are, in many ways, a hybrid of formal Christian education and discipleship, depending on the way in which they are run and the content in which they

cover. Some small groups tend to be smaller formal education by doing Bible studies. Other small groups tend to lean more towards discipleship in that they are based on encouragement, accountability and support for the members.

These small groups are often termed accountability groups for just that reason. These small groups not only help the Christian learn about the fundamentals of the faith, but also allow others to hold them accountable to follow Christ in the details of life. Both formal Christian education and small groups help the Christian with “ understanding of the Creator, the created order, and themselves as created in the image of God, while also discovering their contribution and place in God’s Kingdom, as well as their community. ”

Spiritual formation is always occurring in the Christians life through Christian education as it is the changes in our spiritual maturity as we continue to follow Jesus. This spiritual formation grows at an individual rate depending on the amount of overall Christian education received, either through formal or informal means. The informal Christian education is often thought of as being discipleship in the truest sense of the word. When many think of discipleship, they think of the situation where a mature Christian pours themselves into the life of a less mature Christian in a mentoring role in an informal fashion.

The term discipleship has a broad range of meanings in the church today according to Collinson including encouraging a Christian lifestyle, referring to the relationship between a believer and Christ, and helping new believers grow in the spiritual disciplines. A simpler definition may be that “ discipleship means following after Jesus and doing what He says to do. ” But

discipleship is also seen as a calling, not a program or profession, and a daily living with Jesus. But, the Bible refers to a disciple in three different ways.

In the first use of the word, it is nothing more than a person being educated by a teacher, such as in Matthew 10: 24 and 13: 52. This way of defining a disciple is a life transformation of becoming more like a person's master, such as seen in Matthew 16: 24 or Mark 8: 34. A second way is when someone starts the process of becoming a disciple or being a disciple, such as in Matthew 27: 57 or Luke 14: 26-27. Lastly, there are those who are referred to as disciples that only occasionally followed Jesus, such as those in Matthew 8: 21.

Samra summarizes discipleship succinctly by saying that it is the " process of becoming like Christ. " A one on one discipling relationship allows for the greatest accountability and requires the greatest amount of trust on the part of both individuals. This type of discipleship often is the strongest and most effective to achieve true spiritual growth. While it is quite easy to evade issues that may be struggles in your life while listening to expository preaching or in a Sunday school setting, it is almost impossible when in a one-on-one relationship with another Christian.

As a result of the trust that has been developed in the course of the relationship and the permission given by both parties to ask the tough questions of each other, there is no escaping the immense amount of learning that can produce a great deal of spiritual maturity in a new Christian. While the goal of Christian education and discipleship is spiritual formation of the new believer into a true disciple who makes other true disciples, this concept has been watered down in the American church today

by emphasis on programs instead of progressive spiritual growth in every member's life.

There are many churches that do not encourage spiritual growth with anything beyond worship services on Sunday morning and evening, Sunday school and possibly a prayer service on Wednesday night. Many churches emphasize education over discipleship as it is easier to do and less labor intensive on the part of church members. Many churches now seem to emphasize numbers of people in the pews at the cost of sacrificing the spiritual growth of its members because there is less vulnerability in a large gathering along with a higher participation rate than in a small group or one-on-one discipleship setting.

Churches today are flooded with programs while showing little regards to the process of disciple making. While the church wants spiritual growth to occur, the most effective way to achieve this is through discipleship. While spiritual growth can take place as a result of conferences, special events or classes, when looking at the biblical precedence for spiritual formation, it was done through discipleship, as shown by the examples of Paul and Jesus.

It is important for every church or ministry to evaluate what it is doing from time to time to see if the programs they are participating in are making true disciples, large numbers of spiritual infants or just people who attend church for what they can get out of it instead of what they bring as an offering of their time and talents. Mature Christians hold the key to producing other Christians who will then follow the Great Commission to make disciples, not just followers or church attenders.

American churches today are full of attenders and that is why we see the current trend of declining membership throughout the country today. The church should focus on making disciples which over time will turn into true worshipers who worship God in every part of their lives every minute of their lives, not just during the course of a program, event or training offered by the church. Jesus made disciples who changed the world without programs. These disciples demonstrated true worship in their lives and passed it to succeeding generations.

Unfortunately, the message has become twisted over time from the simple message of a disciple being one who worships God in spirit and in truth. We must recapture the essence of true discipleship before it is lost forever in the next program or fad proposed by a popular Christian leader, instead of following Jesus' formula for lasting discipleship. BIBLIOGRAPHY Anderson, E. Byron. "Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus." *Theology Today* 66, no. 1 (April 2009): 21-32. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed October 29, 2012).

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