

RELATIONSHIPS

Topic: Discipleship
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Biography:

Drew Melton is the Associate Minister at St Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge. He has been in this post for 2 months, but previously served as Youth and Student Worker at St Andrew’s Street for over 3 years. Drew and his wife, Brittany, and son, Owen, live in Cambridge, but they are originally from Oklahoma, USA. They love living in the UK and serving in the UK church context. Drew has a passion for teaching the Bible to all ages, and hopes that through his preaching and teaching ministry people see what it might look like to be a disciple of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is all about Relationships. And relationships are hard. For some people, they come more easily i.e. if you’re outgoing, like being around people, and are genuinely friendly, starting a relationship can come naturally. But even for these extroverts, relationships often get difficult at some point.

This is true too when we think about building relationships with young people. Our goal in building these relationships is Discipleship - we want to see our young people become fully devoted followers of Jesus. The problem is that most young people would rather be followers of just about anyone (or anything) other than Jesus. That is why I think the foundational element of discipleship must be showing young people Jesus’s greatest quality: Love.

THEOLOGY

In the time of the New Testament, a ‘Disciple’ was one who learned under the instruction of a ‘Teacher’. Every disciple had a teacher, and every teacher’s goal was to make disciples. We see lots of examples of Jesus being called ‘Teacher’ by his disciples (John 3.2), and this seems to be an essential part of what Jesus came to do during his time on earth (Mark 4.2). This idea of teaching and continuing the goal of making disciples is encompassed in Jesus’ final command to his disciples following his resurrection: Go, therefore, and MAKE DISCIPLES of every nation, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and TEACHING them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28.19). At this point in Jesus’s life, he has made disciples (they’re standing right in front of him!), and now he tells those disciples to become teachers and start making their own disciples.

How are they to make disciples? John 13.35 tells us it is by loving one another. This is why discipleship is about relationships. First, the whole idea of a disciple is that he/she would sit under the instruction of a teacher long enough and with such enthusiasm that the disciple would start to look, think, and act more and more like his/her teacher. Then, as the disciple began to become like

the teacher, there would be a time when the teacher would say to the disciple something akin to 'You have learned all you can learn from me. Now you must go teach.' There is *relationship* in this idea of disciple becoming like teacher.

Second, John 13.35 makes clear that it is most important WHO our teacher is: Jesus. And we mark ourselves as disciples of Jesus by showing love to one another. Love is a relational concept. It is also a teachable concept, because love is not a feeling - it is a way of acting towards others. So, we as disciples of Jesus are meant to love others as Jesus loved others, and then to teach others how to love like this.

PRACTICALITIES

What is commanded in Matthew 28.19 is a kind of 'reproduction model' that looks much like a family tree. Jesus had 12 disciples, and then those disciples were meant to become teachers and make their own disciples, who were then meant to become teachers and start the process all over again! Each one of us can probably think of someone in our life who has been something of a teacher to us. It might be a parent, or a mentor, or someone from your church growing up, or someone who is still very much a part of your life now. That person is your discipleship 'parent'. But we cannot remain discipleship 'children'; instead, we must become 'parents' ourselves.

To continue with the parenting model a bit more, I have often heard about raising children that the most important thing one can do is simply to be constantly there for them. Discipleship is very much the same. When we are striving to serve young people and build these kinds of relationships with them, the most important thing is simply to be there for them. Turn up and try as best you possibly can to show them the love of Jesus. It will be infectious, trust me, and it will start to spread! Before you know it, the young people you disciple will begin teaching their own disciples.

REFLECTION & LEARNING

In my experience, intentionality is an important part of this process of discipleship. As youth leaders, we must be intentional in the way we interact and build relationships with young people. We must have the expressed goal of showing young people the love of Jesus and in teaching them how to love like Jesus. This also means that every time we are with young people—whether a youth event, weekend away, watching a football match etc. we must be intentionally teaching them. I don't mean that we must always be pulling out our bibles and pointing out some verse that shows why some TV show character ought not to have done what they did. I mean that when we are with young people, they are always looking to us as their teachers, their role models, and so we should act accordingly.

This does not mean that we have to be perfect, even if we strive to be. I have had numerous times in my ministry when I've gone home from a youth event completely upset with myself for the way I acted towards a young person. It is extremely challenging work to build relationships with young people. But God has called us to this work, and given us a command to make disciples, so we continue to strive to love them just as Jesus loves them.

It is also important that we continue to learn as we are trying to teach. As I've already mentioned, none of us are perfect, and so there is always more to learn. There are always ways we can

become more like Jesus, in the ways we think and act.

- Continue to read the bible and learn what it says.
- Continue to pray and communicate with God on a daily basis.
- Continue to talk to your own teachers and mentors in your church.

These are all things that will greatly benefit your relationships with young people. As an example, I have found that the more Scripture I read and know, the better I am able to answer a young person's difficult questions about their life.

DEVELOPING PRACTICE

Perhaps the first step to developing a practice of disciple-making is to recognise that you are called to do it and there is nothing in your life that disqualifies you from this calling. You might think, 'Oh, but I can't be a teacher to young people because I was a horrible young person' or 'I'm still struggling with X in my life, so I can't be a role model to young people'. These are simply false thoughts. The Apostle Paul was used by God to take the good news about Jesus throughout the world, and he had been the greatest enemy of Jesus's followers (1 Timothy 1.15).

The second step is to begin intentionally building these kind of discipleship relationships with one or two young people. Perhaps there is a young person you have already connected with, over shared interests or similar personality traits. Begin to look for ways to teach them about the love of Jesus and how they can demonstrate this love to their friends and family. Begin steering conversations toward the things of God and asking them thought-provoking questions about how they're thinking about their life. All the while, continue modelling for them the love of Jesus. I promise they will take notice when you do.