



"EQUIPPING BELIEVERS TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD"

The Importance of Discipleship and Growth



"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6

Growing in Christ is the key to growing a church. This is all about being a good and effective witness of who Christ is and what He has called your church to be and do. Following up, teaching, and mentoring new as well as seasoned Christians are the keys to spiritual growth and the replication of the witness. When a church forsakes discipleship, its people will not

grow and thus will not reach out. Many will give up on Christianity while others become confused, calloused, or complacent. Alternatively, they will be swept away by false doctrines and cults because they do not know the difference. When we forsake discipleship, we end up just living for and unto ourselves. We miss out on opportunities, learning experiences, growth, and will exchange an eternity of rewards for a limited time of fun. This will turn into anger and bitterness later on in our lives.

Why should we grow in Christ? Because, He lived and died on our behalf, willingly giving up His life by paying the penalty for our sin. He allows us not only to escape the fires of hell, but also gives us eternal life. Growth will be our response to who Christ is and what He did for us. This is what will either be repulsive or attractive to others as we "fish" for Him.

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:21-24

Being a true disciple means having a willingness to trust Him completely in all aspects of life, from the highest highs to the lowest lows. It means we are not only willing to trust Him to provide for our salvation, but we trust Him for the future. We are to trust Him even when we do not know, like, or understand when or where He is leading, or when it is unpopular. As we grow in Christ, we have to keep our eyes on Him. In doing so, we will be of better use to Him and become increasingly unsatisfied with anything less than His call and character.

366I Sunset Avenue, Suite II3 • Rocky Mount, North Carolina 27804

Office: (252) 969-0417 • Fax: (252) 822-0200 • Email: randrews@clergycenter.org • www.clergycenter.org

Strategic Development & Organizational Planning • Individual Financial Stewardship • Grant/Proposal Writing • Capacity Building & Fundraising • Board Training & Staff Development • Corporate Planning & Effective Resource Building • Creating Effective Community-based Partnerships • Empowerment Workshops & Seminars • Church & Nonprofit Administration • Bible-based Leadership Training & Development

God does not ask us to seek converts. He simply asks us to disciple. Discipleship is modeling and teaching Christians the precepts of the Bible, mainly prayer, doctrine, and Christian living, which means having an attitude and heart that worships Christ. Yes, we are still to evangelize, but that is not our main mission and call. When we evangelize, we must realize that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring people into an intimate relationship with God. This is an act of divine intervention and grace. He uses us as the tools, but He is the means. We are the display case of His life and work! We are to care, and share with others His love and character. We are to obey and reach out, but we cannot lead people anywhere. He is the One who leads! Our goal is to worship and model our worship to others-not just our service in the church, but the lifestyle of a heart surrendered and poured out to His. However, with that said, when we are real and authentic in our Christian living, then we are actually doing effective evangelizing and bringing others to Christ even more powerfully and frequently.

How does our focus on Him and not evangelism help us be evangelistic? Because, when the focus is on evangelism, it tends to be on gathering numbers for numbers sake, and this mindset is pretentious and ineffective. Out of a real, worship-centered heart will come a church that is also poured out in the community, a lighthouse of God's love and care to the world. It will model Christ-like character to the community, encouraging others to surrender themselves to Jesus Christ. However, this is only the beginning. When we are worshipping Christ with our hearts and minds, we are focused on Him and motivated to be His witnesses. Christ's work in us is what is contagious to others who are seeking Him.

How To Grow in Faith

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

We are to call upon Him! Second Chronicles tells us, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways... Do you see the condition? The "if" needs to become a "do;" we are to carry out what He has accepted in us, so the rest of the passage becomes fulfilled in us. ...*then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14)*. To grow means we are to turn from sin, seek Him, be praying, act with humility, seek His righteousness, and practice maturity. We are not to wander from Him or allow our desires to be selfish and sinful. We are to focus on His precepts and allow ourselves to be filled up with Christ. When we call upon our Lord, that call will echo over all those around us.

We grow as we look to and trust in Him, and as we pursue our lives in Christ. That means careful pursuit and continual growth, not a simple look-over, but an in-depth and committed life. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Growing is surrendering our will to His. Surrender is the process through which we grow toward Him and His will, and away from our will. Surrender is making Christ the Lord of all of our lives so that worship, discipleship,

and growth can happen. For this to truly happen, we must rid ourselves of false presumptions, perceptions, reckless ideas, faulty thinking, and other such things that are barriers to our growth, so we can make room for Him.

This can start by our realizing that Jesus "authors" our faith and teaches us how to run the race according to God's will for His glory, His worship, and His purpose. Thus, we gain a deeper intimacy with our Lord as our Commander and Friend, as our God and our King, as the provider of Grace, as our Love, and as our reason for being. In His purposes, we find real contentment, joy, and fulfillment. This can be summed up in the adage, "we cannot be doing the work of God unless we are the people of God." We have to be growing before we can be effective.

I have been in ministry for nearly thirty years. I can tell you absolutely that the one thing that keeps most people from accepting Christ as their Savior and being born again is that they do not want to admit their need; they do not want to be convicted. They do not want to admit that there is something basically wrong with them. They still cling to the idea that there is some good thing about them that God should accept, and if they do more good than bad, He will have to let them into heaven. I do not think anything has been more destructive in the whole realm of theology and what is preached in so many churches than the idea that we are O.K. as we are. No repentance is necessary. Come one, come all! But, the Bible says we cannot come to Him; He comes to us. Christ will save us if only we will acknowledge our need and accept Him as our Lord and Savior; yet, so few will. It is the same with Christians who lack the motivation to witness; they do not want to admit that others have a need. It is not an official Christian policy by any imagination; rather, it is a rationalization we make because of our fears, complacency, or indecision. Despite our best efforts, we are not fulfilling God's law. We are not able to do so. People desperately need a Savior! So, carefully consider any barriers in your thinking that blocks you from this core truth and reality of life: ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16.)*** What is the barrier that holds you back from giving this proclamation of love to others? We all need to find and remove it.

"But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:23

In Matthew 13:23, we see two key words that strike at the foundation of our complacency, Hears... and does. He calls us to wake up and do something with our faith, not to just sit in a pew and complain, or lay on a couch as life drifts by. A call is pronounced. An action must take place to secure that His precepts will cause an impact. We cannot just hear; we have to obey. Obedience is not in words, but in deeds that demonstrate our words through practice and action. This is not about our salvation; it is about our worth and our impact. Our salvation by faith alone may secure us, but what is the impact if we do nothing with it? As His elect, whenever we read and/or hear the Word of God, we will have the desire to heed the call and put it into action.

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Philippians 2:12-13

Yes, there will be times we do not feel like it. Life is tough; it is full of setbacks and hurts that seem to cripple us. So, we go on permanent disability, unable to hurdle barriers that are really simple to climb^{3/4}simple, when we are carried by Christ Himself. Did you know all it takes to tie down a horse is a simple leather strap? Did you know a horse could easily break it, like we could break a kite string? A horse does not try to do that because he does not think he is able to do so. You are able to cross any barrier to grow in deeper worship and faith in Christ, because He is there with His healing power. When we ignore Him, we just end up stagnate in life, continuing to hurt. Yes, we will struggle and hurt and we will need times to recover. However, we must make the determination to recover, not to remain disabled, preventing our abiding in Him. Obedience will override our feelings so that we will remain steadfast and secure.

We are all called to put our faith into practice. We can now take the relationships, mentoring, and learning, and carry them out in daily life. This is often expressed in service projects and missions, but that is only a small, although necessary aspect of service. Service is how we daily live our lives, modeling His character to those around us. When we are in ministry, we need to realize, it is not what we do, but whom we can equip. As we practice by reciprocating what we have learned to others, we will also be built up. We are called to build a network of relationships so we can build one another up in the faith through friendship and mentoring.

The Word must touch who we are and transform the very core of our being. We cannot lead others to Him when we do not know the way, and, in order to know the way, we must have knowledge. Knowledge comes from experience, and experience comes from discipleship. The will of God is that we study His Word which will change our behavior. A Christian, especially a leader in the church, must have the knowledge and experience to put into practice the work that needs to be done. The disciple will be studious so that the Word nourishes him. He must study and apply the Scriptures, not just read them occasionally, like a novel. The Word must touch who we are and transform the very core of our being. This is the knowledge that leads and transforms.

From the character of Christ comes the conduct of Christ-if we choose to follow Him. Then, the values of our daily walk, those which drive our behaviors, will, in turn, influence others. You cannot lead where you have not been, or when you do not know the direction to go. This is why discipleship is so essential to the aspect of being a Christian, especially a witness. We are called, not to just visualize faith and discipleship, but to do it, not to just read about it, but to do it, and not to just talk about it, but to do it. One cannot just think about dinner and satisfy hunger; the meal has to be gathered, prepared, and then eaten. The effective church will take Scripture and the call of our Lord seriously, gather, prepare, and then put it all into practice so we partake of His feast.

A worship-centered heart will help create a church that grows because it is also poured out to Christ and effective in the community, a lighthouse of God's love and care through prayer and action to the world.

Questions to Ponder

1. Why does growing in your faith encompass more than just asking Christ into your life and heart?
2. What have you done about pursuing your life in Christ?
3. What do you consider to be the key to finding and developing faith?
4. What would it take for you to go from visualizing faith and discipleship to doing it- not just talking about it, but actually doing it? What are you going to do about this?

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” Psalm 37:5-7

Some passages to consider: Psalm 119:89-90; John 3:30; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21