

Discipleship

Discipleship has been described as *“One beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.”*

It's NOT trying to persuade or convince anyone to do anything. It's NOT self-righteous or condescending.

Discipleship is a way to honor God and love others.

Perhaps, each of us in this room would practice the discipleship of the benefit of these Saturday morning meetings with a relative or friend, if we understood that it's just sharing our experience, not selling something. A good example of those statements is how & why I came to my first North Shore Men's Bible Study meeting:

One day in the building where I had my office, I told a fellow tenant about the progressive nerve damage in my legs. He said that maybe I would like to attend a Saturday morning men's bible study group. It had helped him. I said, *“Yea. Yea. But if I'm not there, start without me.”*

A few months later, I was at a friend's engagement party for his son. Randy Frank was also a friend of my friend, and was at the same party. I mentioned the problem about my legs. Randy said that I might benefit from attending a Saturday morning men's bible study group. I said, *“Yea. Yea. But if I'm not there, start without me.”*

A few months later, I was sitting in Panera, when Mike Casey came in and joined me. In addition to my leg problem, I told Mike that I had just completed a 2 year successful emission reduction project approved by the U. S. EPA & State of WI, conducted by Envirotest on several municipal fleets, which also saved them 10 cents @ gallon, because my fuel additive worked in regular gasoline, not the expensive reformulated gasoline.

As a result, a nationwide distributor of additives agreed to a multi-million dollar annual compensation arrangement with me. But within a month, I lost everything. The International Distributor, arranged to go bankrupt to void my distributorship agreement. He started a new company to try to take advantage of my arrangements. The County Sheriff knocked on my door and handed me an injunction to stop selling the additive. As a result, I lost everything. I had no income. No cash. No assets. I was broke.

Mike said that I might benefit from attending a Saturday morning men's bible study group. I agreed to go just once. At my first meeting, the group was just starting the “Book of Job”. I went every Saturday for the next 15 years.

Those 3 men all practiced the same principles of discipleship:

Faith. All 3 men had extreme confidence in the benefit of the Saturday morning bible study. (The word confidence come from 2 Latin words – “Cum Fide” – with faith. Their ONE rock-solid, common denominator was that the Saturday Bible study reminded them of the value of their relationship with God.

Sincerity. There was no slick presentation, no manipulation, just the transparent sincerity of the bible study's benefit in their lives. There was no pressure, just the calm confidence of the bible study's value. After all, it's not about us. It's about the message, not the messenger. It's about the purity of heart, not the turn of a phrase.

Perseverance. I sensed that all 3 men shared their beneficial experience of the bible study with others. Too often, people are dissuaded by rejection or objections. (An objection is just a request for more information.) Rejection is not personal. Some will. Some won't. So what. It's akin to the parable of seed sown on good soil, rocky soil, and among thorns & thistles.

Effort. WE are only accountable for our effort, not outcomes. Only the Holy Spirit can open minds and soften hearts. However, all members of the Mystical Body of Christ must make the effort to help other members. Our effort, not outcomes, is all that is important. All members of the Mystical Body are different from each other, but all are valued the same by God.

Grace. Grace is not meant to be hoarded. If hoarded it withers & dies, like the manna in the desert. Grace is meant to be shared, from through one broken vessel to another. If shared, more flows through us to others, and on & on, like the flow of countless tributaries. That's the Cosmic Mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ.

I recall Sandy once saying, *“When I walk into this room, I can feel the presence of God here.”* That is an extension of Mike Casey’s observation, *“Each of us experiences the awesome awareness of the presence of God within us.”* Gentlemen, by the grace of God, we all need to make the effort to share that personal and collective experience with confidence, sincerity, and perseverance of effort, with a relative or friend, EVERY WEEK.

I have direct knowledge that the above principles effectively increased membership for other organizations:

The M/T School District was about to lose a favorable contract to add seats to both the soccer & football stadia. They had less than 3 months to raise the necessary \$90,000. Panic & despair gripped the Board. Then, the Board agreed to implement the 4 principles. We simply expanded our contacts to ALL non-Booster Club H. S. parents, and contacted the parents of the 2 Middle School & 3 Grade Schools, with the theme of *“Standing on the shoulders of those who came before.”* **The Booster Club increased membership by 35%, along with raising \$95,000.**

As a member of the Board of Governors for Tripoli Country Club, I attended a meeting to discuss the elimination of the Social, Pool & Tennis membership. There were only 29 members. Instead, we embarked on a simple campaign. The Governors asked the 225 golf members to contact an associate or friend with a 4-color, 2-sided brochure extolling the club’s benefits – basically, why they were members. **In less than 3 months, the club’s “Social, Pool, and Tennis memberships rose from 29 to 90 & a waiting list, without discounting dues or fees.**

The Sales & Marketing Executives of Milwaukee’s membership had been bobbing around 400 members for several years. The Board then asked all members to convey the value of the organization, with confidence, sincerity, and perseverance of effort, to other business associates & vendors – basically, why they were members. **The club increased the net membership from 400 to 500 members in one year.**

Those 3 examples of the effective membership development were achieved without the most important element: Grace. Those were merely trivial secular achievements involving membership & money. We can embark on a membership effort that results in an “Eternal ROI” – the companionship of God. We can make another life breathe easier because we shared our experience at Faith Walkers, every week with someone.

Sharing our personal experience of the awesome awareness of the presence of God within us, and collectively in this room, is a function of the Mystical Body of Christ. We will do it, not because we have to, but because we want to – loving others as Christ has loved us. A year from now, this room will have twice as many men enjoying the companionship of God, because God is sovereign over all things.

A Pertinent Post Script - My personal testimony describes Faith Walkers’ role in Discipleship:

My wife’s best friend is also her 1st cousin, (actually – more like the sister she never had.) That best friend’s daughter died the past December. She was 44, with 2 young children, and a loving husband. The 44 year old daughter battled breast cancer, then liver cancer, then spinal cancer, but lost the war against brain cancer. During her two years of painful struggles, she demonstrated great courage & resolve.

She wrote insightful “blogs” that thousands followed. The New York Times printed her inspiring letter-to-the-Editor. The replies and eventual sympathy cards & eulogies at her memorial service all paid tribute to her as a bright, caring, inspiring, beautiful woman, wonderful mother, loving wife, with a successful career, and on & on. But, remained silent about her relationship with God.

It was all about her self-reliance, and her ability, and her will that resulted in all her financial, social, and medical achievements. The notable absence of God prompted me to write her a letter, about the value of the relationship with God, during her final months.

Her father sat next to me at our son’s wedding in August. I gently probed him about his daughter’s spiritual beliefs. (After all, he sent me the “Book of Joy” – an interview of the Dahlia Lama & Archbishop Tutu. – about the real basis for joy, and its impediments.) But, the father mentioned only vague references to some nebulous mystic musings that his daughter may have entertained.

So I wrote a letter about the wonderful eternal benefits of the relationship with God. The unconditional love of the Redeemer, couched in the delicate expression that *"Our soul is like a ship sailing from view over the horizon, only to see the welcoming embrace of the outstretched arms, of the Redemptive Cross, along with family & friends of previous passing, on the other shore."*

I removed any trace of self-righteous condescension. I removed any hint of blame for his daughter's spiritual indifference. **But, I never sent the letter.** I didn't want to jeopardize my wife's prized relationship with her best friend. Nor seem judgmental of their daughter. Nor seem obtuse to all the wonderful accolades from others.

So my soul suffered the thousand cuts of compromise & rationalization not to send my letter. **Then she died.** I failed as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ to share my experience about the value of a relationship with God. I failed to tell another beggar where I found bread. I failed to trust the Holy Spirit.

I realize now, that had I come to these Saturday morning sessions, that maybe a presentation, or the counsel from the men of the center-front table, may have provided me with the wisdom & courage to send the letter. I can't change the past. But I can make the effort now, to come to these Faith Walker Saturday morning bible sessions. And every week, tell a relative or friend about my experience of the presence of God, in this room – tell someone that Faith Walkers is a gyroscope for my soul.

The Truth is: By accepting the grace of God, each man here can tell another man, with sincere confidence and perseverance of effort, about his experience of the presence of God in this room. And by the grace of God, the recipient of that message may open his mind & soften his heart, and accept that message. Then, twice as many men will be in this room next year. That happens one man at a time.

Like a man walking along the beach and watching a child throwing a washed-up starfish into the sea, and telling the child, *"There are hundreds of starfish on this beach. What difference does it make throwing one washed-up starfish into the sea?"* The child replied, *"It made a difference to that one."*

I will close with a "Blessing":

*"May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm on your face, and the rain fall soft on your fields.
And while you are telling one beggar where you found bread,
May God Hold you in the palm of His hand." Amen*

Thank you.

Presentation made by Paul Maliszewski, to the Saturday morning Faith Walkers' Bible Study, on 1/20/2018.