

DISCIPLESHIP REVIVAL

THE NEED FOR A RENEWED FOCUS ON
DISCIPLESHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Dedication

In memory of Pastor Bobby Edwards. You were my greatest discipleship mentor. I look forward to seeing you in glory!

To my wonderful wife and children, thank you for your support and faithfulness to the ministry.

To all of my professors and mentors who have influenced my life and instilled in me a passion for the ministry.

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Introduction

It is a great privilege to serve as a pastor. It is a very humbling experience. I am always amazed at how God can use a sinner like me in the work of the ministry. Throughout the years that I have served as a pastor or church staff member, I have noticed one common thread in most all churches. There is a missing element in most every church. Very few churches really understand what it means to make disciples of Jesus.

Winning people to Christ is crucial. Most all believers have a desire to see people birthed into the kingdom of God. Most of the ministries of the local church are centered on seeing people saved. This is a good thing. We should desire to win people to Christ. We should have various evangelism programs and efforts through the ministry of the local church. However, I am afraid that we have developed a 'dunk them and drop them' mentality. We work hard to see people saved and baptized. Once they are baptized, we make them church members and then try to put them to work in the church. Yet, so many lose heart. So many get discouraged and drop out of the church altogether. There is a constant revolving door in most local churches. People leave as quick as they come in. The reason for such a dilemma is the lack of true discipleship. Local churches across our nation are failing to help people to grow in their faith and to be equipped for the work of the ministry. We fail to help people discover true authentic life-changing faith.

The solution to this problem is found in the pages of

scripture. We are command to go into all the world and make disciples. We are not to simply make converts, but we are to develop true authentic and mature followers of Jesus.

I believe that the church should be a school of Biblical learning and training for true believers. Yes, lost people may come to church and hear the Gospel and be saved. However, the church is not designed for the lost. The local church is a place where believers in Jesus Christ gather together on a regular basis for the purpose of spiritual transformation and development. It is a place where we are to be trained and equipped to engage our society with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sadly, most churches fail miserably in this area.

It is my desire as a pastor to make sure that the church where I serve is providing an array of opportunities for believers to grow in their faith. It is my heart's desire to develop the ministries of the church to be driven by discipleship. Everything we do should be centered on becoming more and more like Christ.

The purpose of this book is to give a wake-up call to churches across America. We need a discipleship revival. We need to return to what the church is all about. Being relevant in today's culture is all fine and good, however, if our attempt to be relevant causes us to neglect true discipleship, then relevance is not what we need. We need strong churches that consist of mature believers who will be equipped to change the world. It is my prayer that this book will challenge you to consider the great need for discipleship in the local church and to make the necessary adjustments in your church to become a true disciple making church.

CHAPTER **One:**

What Is Discipleship?

OFTEN TIME DISCIPLESHIP is defined as the teaching program of the local church. This can be true in some aspects; however, the attitude portrayed by such a view is that discipleship is just another program. It is thought of as just one part of church life. Such a view lends to a lack of emphasis on discipleship. Our purpose here is to not view discipleship as a program, but as a way of life. Discipleship is much more than the teaching program of the local church. It involves both in-reach and outreach. It is not one of the many Sunday ministries; it is a lifestyle, a daily part of life. It is our goal to examine what true discipleship really is and to come to a greater understanding of the need for discipleship in the local church. We will also consider various methods through which discipleship can happen in the local church.

To begin our quest for discipleship in the local church, we must first come to a clear definition of discipleship. There are many definitions that can be used. Webster's Dictionary defines discipleship as, "The state of being a disciple or follower in doctrines and precepts."¹ This is a fairly well simplified definition of the word discipleship. Being a disciple is

being a follower. However, when it comes to discipleship in the local church, the question raised would be who or what do we follow? The Dictionary of Christianity in America states, "In Christian usage a disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, an adherent to the Christian tradition. *Discipleship* identifies the lifestyle or process whereby individuals or groups live out their understanding of what it means to be a disciple. The concept undergirding these terms is an ancient one and can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. At the end of his life, Jesus instructed his followers to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20)."² The Concise Oxford English Dictionary says a disciple is, "a follower or pupil of a teacher, leader, or philosophy."³ The one that we are to follow, of course, is Jesus Christ. We are called to be disciples of Jesus. "In the New Testament, disciples do not seek out Jesus; rather, they answer when He calls them."⁴ Continuing with this thought, the Lexham Bible Dictionary states, "Jesus' disciples were not to choose another master, or become masters themselves. Instead, Jesus' disciples were told to go and make disciples of the nations—to teach them what Jesus had taught them."

There is a greater emphasis seen today on small groups in the local church. I believe that this is a good thing, if those small groups have the right focus. In the Big Book on Small Groups, discipleship is viewed this way: "the word *discipleship* means different things to different people. My emphasis is on the deep, intense relationship that Jesus had with his disciples. A discipleship group tends to be small (2–4 members) and focused on personal and spiritual growth. It is ministry-oriented only in the sense that those who have been "discipled" are free to go forth and minister because they have been empowered in their relationship to God and others. The

group time is spent in self- and God-reflection with others who want to grow in their faith.”⁵ Small group discipleship is certainly a vital part of the local church and is much needed; however, discipleship is much more than a program. *Fresh Start Devotionals* puts it well:

“Unfortunately, to many people discipleship is more of a program than a lifestyle. They fill their notebooks, making sure every blank is filled, with ferocious devotion, they memorize selected passages and meet with their accountability partners to see that they’ve crossed every “t” and dotted every “i” in their program. While none of these activities are bad, they aren’t necessarily discipleship. While discipleship involves actions, it has more to do with attitudes than actions. Unless the attitude is right, all of these activities can become an end in themselves. Following Christ, in my opinion, can never be boiled down to filling in a blank or attending a meeting it is far too organic for that. It may involve those things, but it is not those things. Condoleezza Rice, (former) President Bush’s top adviser on National Security, is a regular church goer whose faith affects the way she lives her life. In an interview with Biography Magazine, she said her religious faith is “... very deeply who I am. I actually think it gives you a kind of optimism, a sense that you’re not the most important being on earth or in heaven. I think it leaves you feeling supported and not alone. It’s not as if when you’re facing some decision you say all right, how would a Christian deal with this ... It’s just a kind of organic sense of who you are.” (Biography, Sept 2001, p. 63) Discipleship

isn't what you do. Being a disciple is who you are-it changes everything. Too many people are "trying to act Christian" instead of just being who they are, a new creation in Christ."⁶

Reiterating the thought 'being a disciple is who you are' is important here in developing a good definition of discipleship. As most churches see 'discipleship' as a program of the church, we must adjust our focus to view discipleship as a life-style. Being a disciple of Jesus is who we are. When one accepts Christ as their Savior, he or she enters a new a life. This life is a journey, a journey that we would call *sanctification*. "Sanctification refers to the act or process by which humans become holy. The term is derived from the Latin *sanctus* (holy) and *facere* (to make) and is used to translate biblical terms related to holiness (Walters, 1962). Its most primitive meaning is to be set apart for or consecrated to God's service (Berkhof, 1939)."⁷ The goal of every disciple of Jesus should be to become more like Christ. Thankfully, we are already declared righteous through the avenue of justification. However, as we continue our lives on this earth, waiting for the day in which we are glorified and enter into that perfect sinless state with Christ, there is a process through which we strive to become more like Christ is this life. This process is what we refer to as the sanctification process or progressive sanctification. The Baker encyclopedia of psychology and counseling states:

"All sanctification should be seen as fundamentally God's work through the Holy Spirit (Hodge, 1872/ 1995; Packer, 1992; cf. Phil. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). However, progressive sanctification requires human participation grounded in God's grace

and power (Phil. 2:12; Rom. 8:13; Heb. 12:14). All of salvation is through faith (Eph. 2:8; Heb. 10:38); so also sanctification. Spiritual growth cannot be self-generated; it occurs only through faithful abiding in the divine source of that growth (John 15:4–5). God’s Spirit gives life; his law, apart from the Spirit, brings death (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 7:10; Gal. 3:2–14). Nevertheless, the standard for human sanctification remains God’s law as revealed through Scriptures (Ps. 19:7–10; 2 Tim. 3:16; Packer, 1992), a standard that includes behavior (1 Cor. 6:9–11) as well as motives and desires (Matt. 5:28). The end of sanctification is character conformity to God (1 Peter 1:16), best summarized as love (Matt. 5:43–48; 22:37–38); a theme especially emphasized by theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, and Bernard (Muller, 1988).⁸

Faithfully abiding in the Divine source of our growth is what sanctification is all about. It is abiding in Christ. As we abide in Christ, we become more holy. When it comes to discipleship, we cannot arrive at a proper definition without including in that definition the doctrine of sanctification.

The underlining theme that we see in these various definitions of discipleship is the idea of discipleship as a lifestyle. Included in our definition (for the purpose of our study on discipleship in the local church) should be that being a disciple is who you are and that the source of our growth is found in Christ. With these thoughts in mind, we should now turn to the scriptures in order that our definition may have a concrete scriptural basis. One of the key verses on discipleship is when Jesus gave the call to follow Him in Mark 8:34, *“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples,*

he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”⁹ There are three things we see here in this verse. One is that *discipleship must include a desire to be discipled*. Jesus said that ‘if anyone would come’ or ‘if anyone *desires* to come’. It is not in the character and nature of God to force His will on anyone. It is His will that all would come to faith in Him. He died for everyone and has offered His gift of grace to everyone. However, God does not make people come to faith in Him. Faith in Christ is an act of the human will. No doubt, the ability to act in faith is given to every human being by God; it is still ultimately left to the choice of man. We must decide to believe in Jesus. We must decide to follow Him. Therefore, when it comes to discipleship, God is not going to force us to follow Him. We must have the desire to follow Him. The question to consider would be, ‘do we really want to become more like Christ?’ This is a soul-searching question. It is a deep question that ultimately questions the genuineness of our faith. If someone is truly born again, his or her desire is no longer for the things of the world but for the things of God. Therefore, if there is no desire to follow Christ and to become more like Him, then the individual’s salvation would be in question. The second thing we see in this verse is that *discipleship requires sacrifice*. Jesus said that if you do have that desire to follow Him, then you must ‘deny yourself and take up your cross.’ “The phrase deny himself implies that, like Jesus, we must seek God’s will and submit our will to his. Take up his cross must have been a puzzling, offensive statement to the listeners. They knew what the cross represented. Barbieri notes that when criminals carried their crosses, it showed those who were watching the identity of the one who had authority

over the criminal (Barbieri, *Mark*, p. 190). By denying oneself, taking up one's cross and following Jesus, a disciple acknowledges that he is submitting to Jesus' authority."¹⁰ This is the sacrifice that we must make. We must completely and totally submit ourselves to the authority of and will of God. To become more like Christ, we must live a life of surrender. The further we go on our discipleship journey, the more our lives are transformed by God's Word and the more we are conformed to God's will. Once we have the desire to come after Jesus and we give our lives as a daily sacrifice to God, then we can say that we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Pulling all of our resources together and taking a close look at what Jesus said concerning discipleship, brings us to a definition of discipleship by which we can work. *Discipleship is the sanctification process of the believer who is abiding in Christ through the means of submission to the authority of Christ and the daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God.* It is with this definition in mind that we approach the subject of discipleship in the local church. Essentially, discipleship in the local church takes place when *believers in Christ unite together for the purpose of helping one another in the sanctification process and the encouragement of another to abide in Christ through individual and corporate submission to the authority of Christ and the daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God.* This process of discipleship in the local church is achieved through various means and methods including, but not limited to: Sunday School, Small Groups, Mentorship Programs, Preaching, Teaching, Counseling, etc. Toward the end of our study, we will look at some of these various means and methods and consider ways in which the local church can use already existing ministries to ensure that disciples are being made through the ministry of the

church. However, before we can consider such methods and means of discipleship we must first examine the need for discipleship in the local church today as well as a closer look on discipleship in the mind and heart of Jesus and how discipleship took place in the early church.

CHAPTER **Two:**

The Need For Discipleship

THE DEFINITION FOR discipleship that we have established is as follows: *Discipleship is the sanctification process of the believer who is abiding in Christ through the means of submission to the authority of Christ and the daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God.* As we look at this definition we must ask ourselves if real discipleship is taking place in the average local church today. To consider such a question we will break down our definition of discipleship and compare that to what takes place in the average local church.

First of all, we note that discipleship is *the sanctification process of the believer.* We touched on what sanctification is in the last chapter. However, for the sake of emphasis, let us reiterate what the Baker Encyclopedia of psychology and counseling says in regards to sanctification: “All sanctification should be seen as fundamentally God’s work through the Holy Spirit (Hodge, 1872/ 1995; Packer, 1992; cf. Phil. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). However, progressive sanctification requires human participation grounded in God’s grace and power (Phil. 2:12; Rom. 8:13; Heb. 12:14). All of salvation is through faith (Eph. 2:8; Heb. 10:38); so also sanctification.

Spiritual growth cannot be self-generated; it occurs only through faithful abiding in the divine source of that growth (John 15:4–5). God’s Spirit gives life; his law, apart from the Spirit, brings death (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 7:10; Gal. 3:2–14). Nevertheless, the standard for human sanctification remains God’s law as revealed through Scriptures (Ps. 19:7–10; 2 Tim. 3:16; Packer, 1992), a standard that includes behavior (1 Cor. 6:9–11) as well as motives and desires (Matt. 5:28). The end of sanctification is character conformity to God (1 Peter 1:16), best summarized as love (Matt. 5:43–48; 22:37–38); a theme especially emphasized by theologians like Augustine, Aquinas, and Bernard (Muller, 1988).¹¹ It should be noted that sanctification is conditioned upon the yielding of one’s life to the Spirit of God. In other words, once someone has come to faith in Christ, he or she begins a process of growth. However, that process of growth is dependent upon the submission to the will of God and to the filling of the Spirit. You cannot grow unless you are willing. You cannot become more like Christ while at the same time holding on to the things of the world. This is what sanctification is all about. It is growing. It is conforming to the image of Christ. The question to consider then would be, ‘is the average local church filled with such believers that are growing in Christ?’ Though we would hope that the majority of churches are filled with believers that are growing in Christ, the sad truth is that those who are truly growing in Christ are in the minority. How do we know this? We know this by examining the way Christians are living. The result of a life growing in Christ is a life that is conforming to the image of Christ. It is a life that is lived righteously. According to *The Second Coming of the Church* by George Barna, most Christians today do not think or behave any differently than non-Christians. For example, 23%

of non-Christians have been divorced. Sadly, 27% of born-again Christians have been divorced.¹² Obviously, there is not much difference between a believer and an unbeliever when it comes to the sacredness of marriage. I have seen this first hand as a pastor. In all of the churches where I have served, the majority, if not all, of the families in the church have been touched by divorce one way or another. When I look at the children in most all churches, the vast majority of those children come from broken homes. If the local church is filled with Christians who are growing in their walk with God, then why are our homes so broken? Another statistic is very surprising. According to Barna, more unbelievers help the homeless and poor than do believers. 34% of non-Christians helped the homeless or poor compared to only 24% of believers.¹³ If churches are filled with believers who are growing in Christ, then why are we not more like Christ? When you study the earthly ministry of Jesus, we find that He constantly was concerned about the poor and destitute. At the time of the research, only 16% of non-Christians watched an X-rated movie in the past three months, compared to 9% of Christians.¹⁴ Obviously, very few people would actually admit that they've watched an X-rated movie. This tells us that nearly 10% of those who claim to be believers in Christ views X-rated material. The Bible teaches us that we are to be salt and light to the world. We are to make a difference. How can we make a difference if we are not involved? According to Barna, 37% of Christians, at the time of this research, attended a community meeting on a local issue in the past year. However, 42% of non-Christians attended such meetings.¹⁵ Does this tell us that non-Christians are more concerned about the world than Christians are? If the local church is filled with believers who are growing in Christ, you would think that the halls of our

schools and government institutions would also be filled with Christians who are growing in Christ. These statistics are just the tip of the iceberg. The sad reality is that Christians are not much different than non-Christians in the way they live and think. If this is the case, unfortunately, we must conclude that the majority of believers sitting in pews across America are not really growing in Christ. They are not submissive to the sanctification process that Jesus calls us to. Therefore, the need for discipleship is great.

The second part of our definition of discipleship states that a disciple is one who is *abiding in Christ*. What does it mean to abide in Christ? To answer this question, we must turn to the scriptures. The classic passage on this subject is John 15. Notice what verses 1-8 says,

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."*¹⁶

Notice He says that God is glorified by our abiding in Christ which then produces fruit in our lives and this abiding in Christ and producing fruit is what it means to be a disciple. In other words, a true disciple of Jesus will abide in Christ. When one is abiding in Christ it is evidenced by the producing of fruit which glorifies God. One of the key phrases in these verses that are often missed is, 'If you abide in Me and My words abide in you...'. Abiding in Christ is the living out of the Word of God that is within us. "Jesus said, 'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you ...' (John 15:7). The Word of God abides in believers and we are to let what we hear abide in us (1 John 2:14, 24). 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (Col. 3:16)."¹⁷ As we hear the Word of God and heed the Word of God, its truths will transform our lives causing us to grow, thus, abiding in Christ. Peter Crosby writes, "It is very important to know that the truth abides in us in this life, because that is the only way to be sure that the truth will also be with us forever in the life to come. The two are linked; it is either now or never."¹⁸ It is believed that if someone is truly saved, they will have the truth in them. In other words, you are not really born-again unless you are abiding in Christ. If someone is truly saved there will be evidence of a changed life. This evidence is seen greater as one is growing in their walk with God. As they grow, fruit is being produced, which gives evidence to true salvation. The sad truth today is that many who sit in church pews across America have little to no evidence

of true salvation. Many in churches today are not really abiding in Christ. This is why discipleship in the local church is so important. We need to be teaching people what true salvation is all about. Too many people in churches today are depending on their church membership or their baptism or on their good works in order to get them to heaven. The church has failed in many ways to teach people what it means to accept Christ through faith. If people are truly regenerated, it will be evidenced by the way they live. As we saw early, there is not much difference in the way many Christians live and the way non-Christians live. Therefore, the fact of the matter is that many of our church pews are not filled with Christians at all, rather, with those who think they are saved but are really not. However, a true Christian can, at times, not completely abide in Christ. In other words, there are times in our lives when our sin nature creeps in and we are not what we ought to be in our relationship with Christ. Oswald Chambers writes, "Think of the things that take you out of abiding in Christ—'Yes, Lord, just a minute, I have got this to do; Yes, I will abide when once this is finished; when this week is over, it will be all right, I will abide then.' *Get a move on; begin to abide now.* In the initial stages it is a continual effort until it becomes so much the law of life that you abide in Him unconsciously. Determine to abide in Jesus wherever you are placed."¹⁹ There is an abiding in Christ which is secure. In other words, Christ is in you. When you accept His wonderful gift of grace, the Spirit of God indwells you and Jesus is abiding in you. However, we do not always live as

we should. Therefore, the believer must continue to abide in Christ. He or she must strive to become more like Christ and to grow closer to Him each and every day. This is where discipleship comes in. A believer who is not being discipled is abiding in Christ in the sense that Christ is in them. However, without discipleship, the relationship with Christ becomes stagnate and there is very little growth. The truth is that many churches are filled with people that are either lost or there is little to no growth in their lives. This account's for the fact that there is very little difference in the way many Christians live and the way non-Christians live. If discipleship in the local church is occurring, we would be producing strong mature Christians who are abiding in Christ and producing fruit. It does not take much research to find out that the church today is failing in the area of discipleship.

The third part of our definition of discipleship states, *"through the means of submission to the authority of Christ."* How do we engage in the sanctification process and abide in Christ? It is by submission. Typically, we do not like to submit. We like to do things our own way. We want to be in control of our lives. Submission is a key word that we find throughout the pages of scripture. The *New Living Translation* provides an excellent outline for the term 'submission' found in the Bible: "Christ is our example of submission to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39,42). Following Christ requires submission to him (Luke 14:27). God created lines of authority for harmonious relationships (1 Corinthians 11:2–16). Marriage calls for mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21–33). Submit to God (James 4:7–10)"²⁰

Notice how that Christ is our example of submission to the Father's will. Matthew 26:39-42 says, "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ²¹ Here we see Jesus as a man. He knew that He was about to face the cross, He knew the pain that He would endure; for a moment the thought was entertained that maybe there could be another way. Yet, realizing His purpose and His love for mankind, Jesus knew that there was only one way to pay for the sins of men; He must suffer and die. Jesus knew that this was the Father's will. This was the plan even before the world was created. Jesus willingly submits to this plan and to the will of God the Father. "Jesus was clear that He submitted Himself to His Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; cf. 1 Cor. 3:23; 15:24–28). Christ has never been—before, during, or after His incarnation—inferior in essence to the Father. But in His incarnation He willingly subordinated Himself to the Father in His role as Savior, humbling Himself in loving obedience so He could fulfill God's redemptive plan."²² The *Compendium of Christian Theology* states, "Viewed in relation to His work the humbled estate of Christ began with His baptism and ended with His descent through death into Hades. It may be regarded as His personal submission to be the Representative of a sinful race; and as His obedience to the Father's redeeming will. These converge to His Passion and Death, in which the Redeemer's

humiliation was perfected."²³ Jesus submitted to the Father's will no matter the cost. This should be the attitude of a true disciple of Jesus. Someone who is a true disciple will have a great desire to be obedient to God's will. A true disciple is willing to do whatever it is that God would have him to do. One of the best ways to see if the local church is producing real disciples is to consider the way in which people serve. In other words, a church that is practicing real discipleship will be producing mature Christian workers. A disciple making church will produce strong and mature laity, missionaries, pastors, evangelists, etc. Think about the church you attend. When was the last time that someone from your church surrendered to full-time ministry? How many pastors has your church produced? How many missionaries has your church produced? Too often, we focus on how we can keep people in the church. However, our focus should be on how many we can send out of the church to go and serve in ministry. Sadly, for the most part, this is not happening today. In my experience, I have found that many churches will go years without producing one missionary or one pastor. Seminaries across the nation are reporting a shortage of men who are answering the call to be a pastor. It seems that many who are called do not submit to the call due to financial issues, which, in my mind, shows a lack of faith. We have become too materialistic today and as a result we hold on to what we have rather than submitting and surrendering to Christ. Whose fault is this? Why are we not producing Christian workers? The number one reason is the lack of discipleship in the local church. If we are really equipping the saints then the saints will grow and the saints will develop a desire for ministry and will submit to God and His will. How many of us would honestly say that we are willing to do whatever God wants us to do and go

wherever God wants us to go, even if that includes a cross? We should follow the example of our Savior and say, 'not my will, but yours be done.'

Another thing we should learn about submission is that following Christ requires submission to Him. Notice what Luke 14:27 says, "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*"²⁴ Jesus clearly says that if you do not follow Him, then you cannot be His disciple. I wonder how many people in churches across America are truly following Jesus. Sadly, most studies show that not only are there few people following Jesus, but there is also many who are turning away from Him.

Consider the evidence given in light of church attendance. Thom Rainer wrote, "The U.S. church is in a general state of decline, with fewer than 20% regularly attending church. This suggests that 7.9 million people may be leaving church annually-that's 150,000 each week!"²⁵ Mr. Rainer goes on to say, "More than 80% of the formerly churched do not have a strong belief in God, explaining why work and family are a higher priority than church."²⁶ Think about that. Of all of the people leaving the church on a yearly basis, 80% of them do not have a strong belief in God. The fact is, they are not following Jesus. Their reasons for attending church to begin with were not out of a love for Christ. The fact that so few are following Jesus and so many are turning away from Him, suggest that the church has failed in teaching people the truth. Essentially, the church is failing when it comes to discipleship. According to Lifeway Research, "Fewer than 1 in 5 formerly churched adults confess to being a devout Christian with a strong belief in God."²⁷ Basically, people are leaving the church because they are not learning more about God. The church has become a place where people are being entertained rather

than being challenged through the Word of God. As a result, people choose not to follow Christ. If there is no substance, then what is the point? The local church must take heed to these trends and examine their discipleship programs. What are the people actually learning? How are they growing? If the local church is engaged in effective discipleship; then more people would be following Christ on a daily basis, rather than turning away from Him. Jesus said that we are to 'take up our cross and follow Him.' What does this actually mean? What does it mean to follow Jesus? Look at what J.R. Bisagno said, "Jesus gave Matthew a simple command. It was not "Follow me *plus*," "Follow me *but*," or "Follow me *if*." It was "Follow me." And Matthew left almost everything for Jesus, right? Wrong. "And he left *all*." What a simple transaction! What a clear and concise picture of conversion! Jesus said, "Follow me," and Matthew followed Him. The person who will follow Jesus must go the same direction that Jesus is going, and that is not the direction anyone walks before knowing the way of the Master. "He left everything behind." Not tomorrow, not after he'd thought about it, not with qualifications. Right then, without delay—everything and immediately. True discipleship allows for no less."²⁸ If discipleship is occurring in the local church, then the church would be producing followers of Jesus. Yet, how many people in our churches would give up everything to follow Jesus? Is the overall attitude of the church an attitude of willingness to follow Jesus wherever He leads? I am afraid that in most churches in America today, this is not the case. Notice what John 1:35-37 says, "*The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,* ³⁶ *and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"* ³⁷ *The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.*"²⁹ "The expression *followed Jesus* pictures

discipleship, which means that to learn from Jesus is to follow him as the guiding priority of one's life."³⁰ As we learn from Jesus, we follow Him. We do not have Jesus with us today in flesh and blood, so we cannot sit at His feet and learn from Him in a literal sense. However, He has given us His Word and He has given us pastors and teachers to teach us more about Him and to equip us for ministry. If following Jesus is not the guiding priority of most people who attend the local church, then the local church is failing in the area of teaching and equipping. If the church is not producing followers of Jesus, then the church will eventually be forced to close its doors. In order to follow Jesus, we must submit to His Word. We must learn and grow through the teaching of the Word. Submission to Christ requires that we follow Him. If we are not following Him, then we are not submitting to Him.

In James 4:7-10 we are commanded to submit to God. Notice what the text says, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*⁹ *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*"³¹ In order to be a true disciple, there must be a submission to God. This submission to God is a submitting to the process of sanctification. It is to allow God to work in us to make us what He would have us to be. Lange writes, "Their submission to the rule of the living God was moreover to exhibit itself in their humbly getting reconciled to the new order of things, the change of Judaism into Christianity, the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christianity and the existing rule of pagan Rome."³² When one comes to faith in Christ there is a new order. There is a new way of life.

In order for this new way of life to become actuated in the life of the believer, there must be a submission to God as the ruler of our hearts. This is a process that occurs as a believer grows in Christ; a process that depends on discipleship. The local church is inhabited by people who have come to faith in Christ but are still holding on to their old ways. The Jews who came to Christ also had the temptation to hold on to their old religion and their old way of life. They had a hard time letting go. For the sinner who comes to Christ, it often takes time to let go and submit to God and His plan completely. This is where discipleship in the church is needed; we need to help people to let go of their past life and submit totally and completely to God. As a believer learns to submit, he or she is then enabled to resist the temptation of Satan to return to their old life. This learning to submit and to surrender is much encouraged in a disciple making church. A church's ongoing discipleship ministry should have as its goal the development of lives that are totally submitted to God and His plan.

The final part of our definition of discipleship suggests that discipleship includes *daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God*. The passage of scripture that best describes such a daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God is Romans 12:1-2. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*³³ Paul is begging the believers in Rome to be a living sacrifice. This is a daily sacrifice of the believer's life. Being a living sacrifice is "in contrast with the Levitical sacrifices of slain animals. Cf. 6:8, 11, 13. Not a propitiatory sacrifice, but one of praise."³⁴ Discipleship

involves the daily sacrifice of praise of one's life to God. It is understanding the fact that all that we do is to be done as unto the Lord. It is giving God all the glory through the way in which we live. The Christian life is a daily commitment. Such a commitment must be renewed every day. Our daily commitment to Christ is pleasing to God. The reason such a sacrifice is acceptable and well-pleasing to God is because of the fact that it is a sacrifice of praise.

"Then to distinguish it from the Jewish, he calls it 'holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service.' For theirs was a material one, and not very acceptable either. Since He saith, 'Who hath required this at your hands?' (Isa. 1:12.) And in sundry other passages He clearly throws them aside. For it was not this, but this with the other, that He looked to have presented. Wherefore he saith, 'The sacrifice of praise shall glorify Me.' And again, 'I will praise the name of my God with a song, and this shall please him better than a bullock that putteth forth horns and hoofs.' (Ps. 50:23; 69:30, 31.) And so in another place He rejects it, and says, 'Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink goat's blood?' (ib. 50:13) and proceeds with, 'Offer unto God a sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.' (ib. 14.) So Paul also here bids us 'present our bodies a living sacrifice.'³⁵

The ultimate goal of discipleship is the glory of God. It is for His glory that we grow close to Him. Therefore, it makes sense that Paul would say that a living sacrifice of praise is one that is truly acceptable to God. Sadly, most people in churches today do not understand what it means to live a life of worship to God. We think praising God is singing songs out of a hymn book on Sunday mornings. Worship is so much more than that. Worship is living. Everything that we do as believers is to be an act of worship to God. If this is truly taught and

emphasized in most local churches, then perhaps Christian would be living such transformed lives that the world cannot help but notice the difference. Paul goes on to say that the daily sacrifice of the believer is not only acceptable to God but it is also our 'reasonable service.' R.C. Sproul writes, "To do so is described by Paul as your spiritual act of worship. The New American Standard renders the last clause as 'your spiritual service of worship'. Other translations say 'your reasonable service'. Both ideas are included in this activity for it is logical worship. It is logical in this sense: it is what God deserves. It is reasonable for us to give ourselves away to God. God is not saying that spiritual sacrifice and spiritual worship are above and beyond the call of duty. It is the duty of every Christian to present himself as a living sacrifice to God."³⁶ Why should we present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God? Why should we not? After all, think of all that Christ has done for us. None of us deserve His grace, mercy, and love. None of us deserve to be given the gift of salvation. Though no debt is required for salvation, we owe Him our lives. He deserves our praise. He deserves our devotion. How can we not be devoted to the one that snatched our souls from the flames of Hell and gave us a new life? How can we not be devoted to the one who suffered and died for us? It is reasonable. It makes sense. We must be devoted to Him. Such devotion is developed as one is disciplined. If discipleship is not taking place in the church, then we will not produce lives that are totally and completely devoted to Christ. In verse 2 of Romans 12, we are told that in order to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, we must first of all, 'not be conformed to the world.' "The term *world* has several significations, but here it means the sentiments and the morals of men; to which, not without cause, he forbids us to conform. For since the whole world lies in wickedness, it

behooves us to put off whatever we have of the old man, if we would really put on Christ: and to remove all doubt, he explains what he means, by stating what is of a contrary nature; for he bids us to be transformed into a newness of mind."³⁷ As we have seen, statistics show that believers do not live much different than non-believers. For the most part, people in local churches across America have yet to let go of the ways of the world. We have allowed ourselves to adopt the ways of the world. If real discipleship was taking place, the results would be much different. In order to not be conformed to the world we must 'be transformed by the renewing of our minds.' Our lives are transformed as our minds are renewed by the Word of God. This puts great responsibility on the church to make sure its members are taught the Word of God. For it is in the teaching of the Word of God that our lives are transformed. J.P. Moreland says, "A mature Christian mind has two aspects to it. First, it is a mind that has formed the habit of being focused on God constantly throughout the day. It is a mind preoccupied with God and directed regularly toward Him in prayer and meditation (Ps 16:8; Is 26:3; Lk 18:1; Rm 12:12; 1 Th 5:16–18)."³⁸ Moreland goes on to say, "The second aspect of a mature Christian mind is one that sees all of life in light of a Christian worldview and is growing in intellectual excellence. A worldview is the sum total of the entire things one believes, especially in regard to reality, truth, knowledge, and value. A Christian worldview is a biblically grounded set of beliefs about all of life, from work, recreation, and finances to God, life after death, and morality. One tries to think of all of life in light of the teachings of Holy Scripture and, more specifically, of the Lord Jesus. There is no secular/sacred separation in such a mind."³⁹ This is why discipleship is so vitally important in the local church. "All of life is an occasion for

discipleship and worship for a mature Christian mind."⁴⁰ Are we developing such minds amongst the members of our local churches? A disciple making church is one that understands its need to teach God's Word in such a way that lives are transformed. Such transformed lives are acceptable to God and is in His will. "This is the will of God in general, even our sanctification, that will which we pray may be done by us as it is done by the angels; especially his will as it is revealed in the New Testament, where he hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son."⁴¹

The need for discipleship in the local church is great. As we examine the church of today, we find very little in the way of true discipleship. This is evidenced by the lack of changed lives. Instead of being a church that is on fire for Jesus and filled with people that are consumed by Him; we have become a church that is lukewarm which makes God sick. We must repent of our failure. We must strive to regain what we have lost. We must build churches that are producing real disciples. Only then can we change the world!

CHAPTER **Three:**

Jesus And Discipleship

WE HAVE DEVELOPED a definition of discipleship and we have examined the need for discipleship in light of the definition established; now we will turn our attention to the life of Christ as we discover how Jesus viewed discipleship. Being a disciple of Jesus is to follow Jesus. We looked at this in our last chapter. A disciple is one who is abiding in Christ and submitting and conforming his or her self to the will of God. Notice what the book of Ephesians tell us, *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.”*⁴² To imitate Christ is to be like Him. Churches should have as its goal to produce people who are Christ-like. We should produce followers of Christ. In a sermon entitled ‘Imitators of God’, Martyn Lloyd-Jones helpfully pointed out that we cannot imitate God in those attributes which are true only of him, such as his glory, eternity, majesty, omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. But we can seek to imitate him in his moral attributes such as his holiness, righteousness, justice, goodness, love, mercy, compassion, tenderness, longsuffering, lovingkindness, faithfulness and forgiveness.⁴³ This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We are to imitate Him. We are to live the way He

would live. The question then would be, 'how did Jesus live?'

First of all, Jesus lived as a *servant*. He came to serve and not to be served. "Paul's instruction, 'Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1), was made in the context of Christian service. His aim was not to please himself, but to serve others by leading them to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 10:33). He wanted the Corinthians to adopt this Christ-like attitude. In this context we also find the sole recorded occurrence of the word 'example' on the lips of the Savior. At the Lord's Supper Jesus adopted the position of a servant and washed his disciples' feet, before giving them the following explanation: 'If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master' (John 13:14–16)."⁴⁴ The act of foot washing is not necessarily meant to be taken literally; however, the principle of servitude applies. Henry Alford, in *The New Testament for English Readers*, rightly pointed out that "the Lord did not command his apostles to do 'that which' he had just done to them, but 'as, in like manner as' he had done."⁴⁵ "His action was a striking and unforgettable visual aid to exemplify humility and servanthood. But his greatest act of service was accomplished in his death."⁴⁶ Jesus humbled Himself as a servant and showed us by example how we are to serve others. A servant of Christ is one who is submitted to the will of God. "The only thing all the servants have in common is that Yahweh chose to use them in a specific way for a specific purpose. Being Yahweh's servant involves following His divine will and chosen path. For the servant in Isa 52:13–53:12, the divine will Yahweh placed in front of him was to suffer and die for Yahweh's people (or at least their guilt)—those who were originally intended to

be His servant. The servant in Isa 52:13–53:12 is Yahweh’s servant *par excellence*; he fulfills Yahweh’s will all the way to his death. The servant in Isa 52:13–53:12 was blessed for his actions with resurrected life.”⁴⁷ Jesus’ example of being a servant led Him all the way to the cross. As servants of Christ, we must be willing to give Him our all. We must take up our cross and follow Him. We must surrender all to Him. Sadly, this giving of oneself completely to Christ as His servant is rare in the local church today. We have become so self-centered that the idea of serving Christ and others is foreign to us. Many churchgoers just sit on the pew each Sunday without in real involvement in the ministry. They often come to be served rather than to serve. One of the greatest needs in the local church is to teach people how to serve and to assimilate them into the church body so that they can have the opportunity to serve. Emphasis should be made in the discipleship ministries of the local church on developing servant leaders. We should regularly teach on the subject of spiritual gifts and help people to discover what their gifts are and how they can use those gifts to serve.

Not only did Jesus live as a servant, but He is also lived and *suffered*. Imitating Christ, following Jesus, discipleship; requires an element of suffering. Notice what 1 Peter 2:20-23 says, *“or what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.* ²¹ *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:* ²² *“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”*⁴⁸ Notice how that suffering is commendable before God. There is something special about suffering for Christ. Suffering identifies us with Christ. “If Christians find they are

ill-treated for doing good, then they must realize that this happened to Jesus too."⁴⁹ Satan is against all that is good. When an individual is discipled and comes to Christian maturity, it will produce good works coming out from them. Because of this, those who are practicing good works, which comes out of a life that has been transformed by the power of God, are attacked by Satan. He will do everything he can to discourage and to bring down those who are doing good. Since Jesus suffered, then we should expect that those who follow Him (His disciples) will also suffer. "Believers ought to expect to suffer as an inevitable part of their calling. To believe is not to evade suffering; it is to face it with new confidence and hope. Rightly approached, suffering develops the character of believers, equips them for more effective service, draws believers closer to Jesus Christ and prepares them for eternal life."⁵⁰ "Our discipleship will be costly. It may call for leaving families, giving up hoarded resources, even giving up life itself."⁵¹ When we are faced with suffering, we may take comfort in the fact that we are not alone. Many disciples of Jesus have suffered a great deal because of their faith. As a matter of fact, all of the Apostles suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. Consider what the Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations adds to this thought,

"All of the apostles were insulted by the enemies of their Master. They were called to seal their doctrines with their blood and nobly did they bear the trial. Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia. Mark expired at Alexandria, after being cruelly dragged through the streets of that city. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in the classic land of Greece. John was put in a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterward banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome with

his head downward. James, the Greater, was beheaded at Jerusalem, James, the Less, was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller's club. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned and then beheaded. Barnabas of the Gentiles was stoned to death at Salonica. Paul, after various tortures and persecutions, was at length beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero. Such was the fate of the apostles, according to traditional statements." ⁵²

When you think about it, none of us has really suffered the way the Apostles did. There are also many people around the world who are suffering in this present hour in very painful and heartbreaking ways all because they claim the name of Jesus. The good news for the believer who is suffering is that God is well aware of your suffering and you will be rewarded for it. "God, who observes that the righteous are suffering, will ultimately reward their endurance and punish those who are afflicting them."⁵³ The bottom line is that a disciple of Jesus Christ must be willing to suffer for Him. It would be interesting to see how many people in local churches across America are truly willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. How far would we go in our suffering? We have become comfortable with our lives and we often complain about the smallest of inconveniences. If we are producing true disciples of Jesus Christ we would be producing people that will follow Him no matter how hard it

may be and no matter what the cost. Jesus wants us to follow Him. Following Him includes suffering. Are we willing to suffer? Will we follow Him no matter the cost?

Jesus gave us the best example of what being a disciple is all about. He served and He suffered. Another way in which we may describe suffering is sacrifice. Jesus gave of Himself. He sacrificed Himself so that we may have life. When it comes to our discipleship, we learn that in order to really worship God, we must serve Him, and in order to really serve Him, we must be willing to make sacrifices. This is what Jesus did. He glorified His Father through His acts of service that came with great sacrifice. With this thought, I am reminded again of what the scripture says in Romans 12:1-2. We are to follow the example of Jesus and present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. This is the 'reasonable service' of a disciple of Jesus Christ. This type of service is demanded of those who are disciples of Jesus. "Jesus Christ demands total devotion from those who will be His disciples."⁵⁴

When it comes to discipleship in the local church, the key is to point people to the example of Jesus. Teach people the life of Christ and show them how He served and how He suffered. The more we see Jesus, the more we will love Him and serve Him. This is why a disciple making church is one that will make much of Jesus. A disciple making church does not graduate from the Gospel, rather, they go deeper into the Gospel. In order to produce strong disciples of Jesus Christ, the church must lead people to follow the example of Jesus.

CHAPTER **Four:**

Discipleship In The Early Church

WE HAVE SEEN the example that Jesus lays before us concerning what it mean to be a real disciple. To really follow Him and be His disciple, we must serve sacrificially. As we continue to look at this issue concerning discipleship in the local church, we will now turn our attention to the example of the early church found in the book of Acts.

The classic example of the way the early church operated is found in Acts 2:40-47.

“And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions

and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”⁵⁵

In this passage, we find the perfect Biblical example of discipleship in the local church. It would be profitable to every local church to pattern their ministry after that of the early church in Acts chapter two. As we examine the early church, there are several components of discipleship that is revealed.

First of all, *they devoted themselves to the apostle’s doctrine.* The focus of the early church was centered on the teaching of the Word. J. Vernon McGee writes, “The mark of a church is not the height of the steeple nor the sound of the bell. It is not whether the pulpit is stationed in the middle or the chancel is divided. The important issue is whether or not they hold to the apostle’s doctrine. Correct doctrine was one of the fingerprints of the visible church.”⁵⁶ Sadly, there are many churches today who have substituted doctrine with other things. Many have bought into modern marketing methods in order to attract large crowds at the expense of the teaching of true doctrine. Someone told me once that the church should not focus so much on doctrine. They said that doctrine divides. Doctrine does not divide, rather, it unites. The teaching of true doctrine holds a church together. I have personally been criticized by those who say that I should stop preaching so much doctrine and focus more on ‘Christian living.’ The thing they fail to understand is that Christian living is Bible doctrine. In other words, in order to know how to live right

as a Christian, you must be taught the Bible. It is the Word of God that transforms our lives; therefore, it is the Word of God that must be taught and preached. A church that does not have a strong emphasis on the teaching of true doctrine will fail to produce disciples of Jesus. The key to discipleship in the local church is a strong ministry of teaching and preaching true Biblical doctrine. Personally, I believe, this is best accomplished through expository preaching. We should simply teach and preach the Bible. We should teach through books of the Bible and really examine and search the scriptures. It is through such teaching that we grow in our faith and our lives are transformed into greater disciples of Jesus. As we focus on teaching and preaching the Bible, we allow the scriptures to speak for themselves. It is not giving our opinion or promoting a certain theological stance. It is letting the Word of God speak for itself. This is what the early church did. They continued in doctrine. They studied the Word and they allowed the Word to transform their lives.

Secondly, they devoted themselves to *fellowship*. Usually, we do not equate fellowship with discipleship. However, this is a big mistake. Fellowship is a part of our discipleship. The discipleship ministry of the local church is not some program that is separate from all the other ministries of the church. Discipleship in the local church includes fellowship. Not only must there be strong Biblical teaching, but there also must be genuine fellowship amongst the church body in order for true discipleship to take place. "The people who are the church have voluntarily banded together to form a fellowship of believers in Christ (1 John 1:7). Early Christians valued this fellowship highly (Acts 2:42). Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day

until now' (Phil. 1:3, 5)".⁵⁷ What exactly is fellowship? What does it mean? The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary states that fellowship is "communal association for the mutual benefit of those involved. In the NRSV, the word "fellowship" (Gk. *koinonia*) is used only in the NT, as a mark of the early church (Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9; 1 John 1:7) and as a description of the intimate relationship that believers have with God through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:6)."⁵⁸ Fellowship is the relationship that believers have with one another which is based on their common relationship with Jesus Christ. This fellowship is beneficial to the entire church body. "The scriptures are very clear that fellowship with other believers is a must for spiritual growth. Fellowship (Greek, *koinonia*) is partnership with Jesus and partnership with other believers in Jesus. The best preventive against false doctrine is true fellowship."⁵⁹ I personally believe that such true fellowship can only occur as believers physically come together in one place for worship and sharing in the Word. There is a trend that we see taking place today of Christians who will opt out of going to church and stay at home and participate in 'online' church. No doubt, those who participate in such a practice may very well be growing in the knowledge of God's Word and may even have some interaction with other believers, however, this can never replace the need for personal face to face fellowship with other believers. Discipleship in the local church does not take place in front of a computer screen. In order for true discipleship to take place, one must participate in fellowship with other local believers of like faith in a very real and intimate fashion. There is something special about God's people gathering together in one place. This is something that cannot be replaced. A disciple making church is one that will emphasize and encourage the regular gathering together of

believers in order to provide encouragement and to challenge one another in their walk with God. Such fellowship brings great joy to the heart of the believer. True Biblical fellowship is genuine. It is not putting on a face. It is truly enjoying the company of other believers as you share together in worship.

A third component of discipleship as seen in the early church is that of *breaking bread*. This is more than just the ritual of the Lord's Supper; rather, it is being brought into a fellowship and relationship with Jesus Christ. The breaking of bread is of special importance because it was established by Christ Himself. "The uniform practice of the N. T. churches, and the celebration of such a rite in subsequent ages by almost all churches professing to be Christian, is best explained upon the supposition that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance established by Christ himself."⁶⁰ The early church participated in such communion on a regular basis. "The Lord's Supper to which the Gospels bear witness involved the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup in remembrance of the blood of Christ "poured out for many." We may assume too that the tradition that the apostle Paul received, followed, and passed on to others went back to his earliest years as a Christian, and so involved the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup "in remembrance" of Christ, and thus proclaiming the Lord's death until his return."⁶¹ It is also mentioned that they broke bread from house to house. This could refer to some type of fellowship meal; however, in keeping with the tradition of the term 'breaking bread', it is more likely referring to a regular act of communion and worship. In other words, not only did the early church meet in the temple to worship, but they also would meet together throughout the week in various meeting places for the purpose of fellowship and communion with Christ. The lesson we learn here is that discipleship takes

place on a daily basis. A disciple making church is one that will have such ministries in place that encourages the gathering together of believers for the purpose of worship and fellowship throughout the week in addition to its regular Sunday meetings. The principle here is that we need each other daily. True discipleship requires ongoing interaction with other believers with the focus on our communion with Christ.

A fourth component of discipleship that we see demonstrated in the early church is that of *prayers*. I am afraid that united cooperate prayer is one the areas of the church that is most lacking. This is seen in most churches by the attendance for prayer meetings compared to that of Sunday worship and fellowship activities. Very few believers really understand the importance of prayer and the importance of praying together. The greatest weakness of the church is the greatest asset of the church: prayer. The Dictionary of Bible says that pray is “fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, expressed in adoration, thanksgiving and intercession, through which believers draw near to God and learn more of his will for their lives.”⁶² In order to draw near to God, we must pray. In order to learn more of His will, we must pray. Therefore, discipleship in the local church is impossible apart from fervent and vigorous prayer. Unfortunately, much of our praying has followed in the tradition of the religious Jews who took prayer as a ritual rather than passionately calling upon God. As MacArthur writes, “The wording and forms of prayer were set, and they were then simply read or repeated from memory. Prayers easily became a routine, semiconscious religious exercise, able to be recited without any mental or passionate involvement by the individual.”⁶³ How often do our prayers become routine? Even in our regular gatherings as a local church, we have a tendency to pray just to pray without

any real heart-felt passion for God. We say a bunch of words without any thought as to what we are saying. To be a disciple making church, our prayers should be real and genuine and that of faith without doubting. "Prayer is not an exercise, it is the life. Beware of anything that stops ejaculatory prayer. "Pray without ceasing," keep the childlike habit of ejaculatory prayer in your heart to God all the time."⁶⁴ Often times our attitude toward prayer is filled with unbelief. As Frank Retief writes, "Prayer is so important, yet we find it such a difficult spiritual exercise. Perhaps the heart of the struggle is unbelief. We seldom recognize this and many sincere Christians would be affronted if we suggested that the reason for their apathy about prayer is unbelief. Let me clarify this. When we approach God in prayer, we are immediately confronted by two questions: Does God hear me? Will He answer my prayer?⁶⁵ Prayer is verbal communication with God. "Prayer is not *desire*. Prayer must be made in intelligible statements. Jesus taught his disciples to pray after a certain manner, and then gave them the form of words (Matt. 6:9–13). Hannah spoke in her heart, yet her lips moved in prayer (1 Sam. 1:12–17). All the prayers of Jesus, on divine record, were stated in words. We must do more than *desire*—we must *ask* for what we would receive (1 Sam. 1:27; John 14:13; 1 John 3:22). Prayer is not vain repetition (Matt. 6:7). It is a simple, fervent, open-hearted talk with God."⁶⁶ Discipleship in the local church will never take place unless believers gather together and verbally make their request known unto God through believing prayer. A church that is struggling in producing true disciples, yet, is confused because they do have great fellowship and worship and teaching of the Word; they should carefully examine the prayer life of the church. Prayer is the power of the church. It is the fuel that drives the engine of true discipleship. Without

it, the church will never produce genuine disciples of Jesus. Prayer is a key component for discipleship in the local church.

A final component that we see for discipleship in the local church as seen in the early church is the fact of their *unity*. The early church was united. They had all things common. They were together and they shared everything with each other. The church was a family. They stuck together and they helped each other with their needs. "One of the strongest emphases of the "body" metaphor is that of the UNITY of the many members of the Church. The Church (body) of Christ is not merely a collection of individuals who subscribe to its philosophy; the Church is an organism, of which the members are interrelated parts."⁶⁷ The early church was interrelated to one another. They pulled together their resources in order to help each other. Many churches today struggle to maintain unity; which hinder the work of discipleship. A church that is divided cannot produce disciples. There must be unity. Where is this unity found? How is it achieved? Unity is found in connection with God's Word. Notice the order here in Acts 2. The church was devoted to doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers. Once all these things were in place, it then mentions how they had all things common. Unity is found when the church focuses on what the church is suppose to be and do. A church that is weak in doctrine will be divided. A church that is weak in fellowship will be divided. A church that is weak in worship will be divided. A church that is weak in prayer will be divided. A church that is divided will not produce disciples.

Discipleship in the local church is dependent upon exercising the key components of discipleship as seen in the early church. Weakness in one area will hinder the work of discipleship. Local churches today must return to their roots.

We must examine our church and see if we are following the pattern given to us by the early church. If we are serious about discipleship, then we will be serious about being what the church is supposed to be.

Notice in the later part of Acts two, we see the church experiencing great growth. You see, a discipleship church is one that is multiplying. As we make disciples, the church will multiply, it will grow. We should not put too much emphasis on numbers; however, numbers is a good indication for whether or not real discipleship is taking place. As a church follows the pattern of the early church and is strong in every component of discipleship, the church will experience growth. As disciples are made, those disciples will reach more people with the Gospel and disciple them and then those new converts will reach others and disciple them and the pattern will continue and continue and the church will multiply. Often times a church will ask the questions as to why are we not growing? We will look at many various factors and will try to place the blame on various people. However, to examine such a question, the church must evaluate where they are in relation to the basic components of discipleship. Is the church strong in doctrine? Is the church strong in regular and continual fellowship? Is the church strong in worship and communion with Christ? Is the church strong in prayer? Is the church strong in unity? Most all local churches today have some area of weakness that prevents them from multiplying and being the church that God would have them to be. It is vitally important for local churches to evaluate themselves in relation to the components of discipleship on a regular basis and constantly seek to improve in order for real discipleship to take place. Even the greatest disciple making church has room to improve.

The early church gives us a clear example of what it means to be a disciple making church. Seek to follow the pattern of the early church. Work to implement all of the components for discipleship as seen in Acts 2. As you put these things to practice in your church, you will see true discipleship in the local church. We look at these five components of discipleship in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER **Five:**

The 5 Components Of Discipleship

THE ENTIRE MINISTRY of the local church is to be centered on Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and driven by discipleship. In Acts 2:42-47, we see how the early church practiced discipleship. In this passage, we find five key components that drove the ministry of the early church. These components, rightly practiced and put in place, are the driving forces behind a disciple making church. In this chapter we will look at each of these components in detail.

The first key component of discipleship as seen in Acts chapter two; is **doctrine** or teaching. Acts 2:42 says, *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*⁶⁸ In the KJV and other English versions we find the term ‘doctrine’ is used. The word ‘doctrine’ literally means ‘teaching’. The New Bible Dictionary shares the following information concerning the Biblical word of ‘doctrine’:

“In the OT the word occurs chiefly as a translation of *leqa*□, meaning ‘what is received’ (Dt. 32:2; Jb. 11:4; Pr. 4:2; Is. 29:24). The idea of a body of revealed

teaching is chiefly expressed by *tôrâ*, which occurs 216 times and is rendered as 'law'. In the NT two words are used. *didaskalia* means both the act and the content of teaching. It is used of the Pharisees' teaching (Mt. 15:9; Mk. 7:7). Apart from one instance in Colossians and one in Ephesians, it is otherwise confined to the Pastoral Epistles (and seems to refer often to some 'body' of teaching used as a standard of orthodoxy). *didachē* is used in more parts of the NT. It too can mean either the act or the content of teaching. It occurs of the teaching of Jesus (Mt. 7:28, *etc.*) which he claimed to be divine (Jn. 7:16–17). After Pentecost Christian doctrine began to be formulated (Acts 2:42) as the instruction given to those who had responded to the *kērygma* (Rom. 6:17). There were some in the church whose official function was to teach this to new converts (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:28–29)."⁶⁹

So, we see here that a primary purpose of the church is to teach the contents of true Christian doctrine. In other words, the church has the responsibility of teaching the scriptures.

There are three things that we should consider when it comes to the doctrine or teaching of the church. Those three things are: the role of teaching, the content of teaching, and the response to the teaching. Notice first of all, *the role of teaching*. The converts in the early church was said to have 'devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.' In the early church, the apostles carried the majority of the load when it came to the teaching that took place in the church. Therefore, we see that the role of teaching in the church begins with the pastor. It was the apostles teaching that they devoted themselves to. This is emphasized in a

greater way in Acts 6:1-7. In this passage, we see the appointing of the first deacons of the church. These men were appointed to care for the physical needs in the church in order that the apostles may focus on prayer and teaching. Notice what the text says in Acts 6:2-4, *“And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*⁷⁰ Though we do not have actual ‘apostles’ today, this primary role of teaching in the church has been transferred to the ‘pastor’ or ‘pastors’ of the church.

The apostle Paul instructed a young pastor, Timothy, concerning his primary responsibility as a pastor. Notice what 2 Timothy 4:12-16 says, *“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*⁷¹ Notice the emphasis that is placed on the reading of scriptures, exhortation, and teaching. Paul tells Timothy to ‘immerse’ himself in these things. He tells Timothy to ‘keep a close watch on himself and on the teaching.’ In other words, Paul tells Timothy to focus on his personal purity and on his teaching. When people see how the preacher

lives and what he says, they will grow in their faith. As the pastor grows in his faith, so does the church. As a pastor, it is my responsibility before God to instruct and teach the people that God has placed into my care, the complete counsel of God's Word. I must preach and teach the scriptures and nothing else. Long hours must be given in the study and in the prayer closet in order to provide the spiritual food that the church so desperately needs.

The teaching which primarily comes from the pastor enables believers to serve others and do the work of the ministry. Notice what Ephesians 4:11-16 says,

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” ⁷²

God has given to us pastors and teachers in order that we may be taught the truth and not be deceived by false doctrine. The pastors and teachers instruct or equip us in doing the work of the ministry. The purpose for their teaching is so

that we will become mature followers of Jesus Christ. It is through such teaching and our response to such teaching that the church has a united purpose and is built up in love.

Not only should we understand the role of teaching in the church, but we should also consider the *content of the teaching*. What exactly is the pastor or teacher supposed to teach? The content of the teaching may be summarized in Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. *"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*⁷³ Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word. The 'word' includes the entire counsel of God's Word. In other words, the pastor/teacher is to teach the Bible. He is to teach the whole Bible. This is why I often will preach through various books of the Bible. As a pastor, I have the responsibility to preach and teach all of God's Word. I should not just pick and choose topics or pet doctrines that I hold dear. I should preach all of God's Word, even the difficult parts. As the Word of God is preached there are several things that take place.

First of all, there is reproving or convincing. In other words, as the Word of God is preached, people will be convinced of its truth. The preacher or teacher has the responsibility to reveal or correct that which is false and to point people to the truth. This is why the preacher or teacher should

be well studied. Ample time should be spent in the study of God's Word in order to assure that nothing but the truth is declared.

Secondly, there is rebuke. This is a part of preaching and teaching that is not fun. People do not like to be rebuked. When they are rebuked, they often become defensive and they will attack the one who is doing the rebuking. However, we need to understand that we cannot preach and teach all of God's Word without being rebuked. Notice what Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*⁷⁴ This passage describes the Word of God as a sharp two-edged sword. Last I checked, if you are cut by a sword, it's going to hurt. It's not going to feel good. You may not like it. You are not necessarily going to enjoy it. God's Word has convicting power. It convicts us of sin and reveals to us who we really are. It cuts through the layers of our lives and reveals our sin and our need for change. If the Word of God is being faithfully preached in the church, there will be conviction. There will be rebuking of sin. As a result, there will always be those who will attack and criticize the preacher who is faithful to declaring the Word. It is not an easy task, but, when the Word of God is preached, there will be rebuke.

A third thing that takes place when the Word of God is preached is exhortation. To exhort someone is to encourage them in doing what is right. It includes the 'equipping' ministry of the pastor/teacher. Through the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the church is exhorted or encouraged to live out their faith in a very real and practical way.

Therefore, the content of the teaching is the Word of God,

which, when faithfully preached, brings about reproof, rebuke, and exhortation. The preacher or teacher must also be patient as he pulls people along in the truth. He is not to 'shove' them, but rather, he is to pull them along, teaching them the truth one step at a time.

Now that we have looked at the role of teaching and the content of teaching, let us now turn our attention to our *response to the teaching*. What is our responsibility in response to the teaching ministry of the church? The answer is found in James 1:22. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*⁷⁵ The principle here is that we are to respond in obedience. When we hear the Word of God taught and preached, our responsibility is to listen and obey. In other words, when we are rebuked, we should repent. When we are exhorted, we should answer the call to action. We are to obey what we are taught. Notice what Hebrews 13:7 says, *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."*⁷⁶ In other words, we are to follow the example of our teachers. Hebrews 13:17 says, *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."*⁷⁷ These are some strong words. We are to obey the leaders of the church. Particularly, we are to obey those who teach us. When we are convinced that what we are being taught is the truth; when we grow to trust and believe what are teachers are teaching us, we have no other choice but to obey. How do we know what we are taught is the truth? We examine the scriptures. If what is being declared to us is found in scripture, then we cannot refuse it, we must obey it.

As the truth of God's Word is taught and as we respond

to that truth in obedience, disciples are made and the church will grow. In order to be a disciple making church, the teaching and preaching of God's Word must be central to everything that we do.

A second component of discipleship as seen in Acts 2 is, **fellowship**. Often times we mistaken fellowship with having fun with one another or sharing a meal together. These activities may include fellowship, but they are not fellowship in and of themselves. In order to be a disciple making church, there must be true Biblical fellowship. The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible describes fellowship as "the essence of the Christian life—fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers in Christ."⁷⁸ The word 'fellowship' comes from the Greek word 'koinineo' which means, 'partnership' or, more literally, 'participation.' When one comes to faith in Christ, he or she enters into a 'partnership' with Jesus. When applying to the church, we to 'partner' with one another or 'participate' with one another. Notice what Acts 2:42 says, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*"⁷⁹ The early church was devoted to 'fellowship.' They were 'partners' and they 'participated' with one another. What exactly then are we supposed to 'partner' in? How does fellowship take place in the local church?

First of all, there is the fellowship of the Gospel. Notice what Philippians 1:3-7 says. "*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as*

both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace."⁸⁰ The apostle Paul was thankful for the 'fellowship in the Gospel.' He had a 'partnership' with the church both in the acceptance and study of the Gospel and in the proclamation of the Gospel. In verse seven, he mentions that they are 'partakers' with him. As believers in Christ, we *share in what the Gospel has done for us*. We share in the grace of God. Therefore, we are to partner with one another in learning and growing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As believers, we never graduate from the Gospel; instead, we go deeper into the Gospel. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are also *partner with other believers in the proclamation of the Gospel*. We are to be devoted to the cause of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. As a local church, we are to work together for the cause of Christ. We are to participate together in the sharing of the Gospel with our local community and around the world. You cannot be a disciple making church unless the Gospel is sounding forth from the church. We should also partner with other local churches, missionaries, and ministries for the sake of bringing the Gospel to the world. We should constantly be looking at ways in which we can partner with other believers in the work of spreading the message of the Gospel.

Secondly, we have the fellowship of sanctification. Once we have accepted the gift of salvation by faith, we then enter into a time of sanctification. This is the process of our salvation. Each and every day we are to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our goal is to be more like Him every day. This fellowship of sanctification is described in Philippians 2:1-13.

"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ,

if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."⁸¹

As disciples of Jesus, we are to be of 'one mind'. We are to be united. We are to follow the example of Jesus and humble ourselves and consider the needs of others. We are to help one another in having the mind of Christ. It is because of the unity that we have in knowing Christ, that we are to work

together to ‘work out our salvation.’ This does not mean that we work for our salvation, rather, that we ‘work it out’ or exercise our faith. In other words, we are to partner with one another in the ‘working out’ or in the ‘development’ of our faith. We are to help each other to grow in our relationship with Christ. How can we make this happen in the life of the local church? We organize and structure the church in such a way that believers can help each other to grow in their walk with God. There are many avenues through which this fellowship of sanctification can take place. One avenue is through the *Sunday School ministry*. The Sunday School classes should be designed in such a way that it encourages and promotes spiritual growth. They should be designed in such a way that it encourages one another in their walk with God. Another avenue is through *various small groups* such as home Bible studies, youth ministries, children ministries, men’s groups, and women’s groups, etc. True authentic spiritual growth does not occur on our own. We cannot grow to be more like Christ by ourselves. We need each other. We need to partner with one another in our spiritual growth. Being a part of a small group can help you connect with other believers as you share in this journey of becoming more like Christ. There are many other ways in which we can help each other grow in the faith. The bottom line is that we cannot grow on our own. We must partner together for our spiritual growth.

A third way in which we partner together is in the fellowship of suffering. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to share in each other’s sufferings. The Dictionary of Bible Themes says this about fellowship: “Believers have fellowship with one another on the basis of their common fellowship with God, their participation in the blessings of the gospel and their common task of mission. True fellowship is demonstrated in concern

for, and practical commitment to, one another.”⁸² Are we truly committed to one another? Do we really care for each other? Notice what 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, “*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*”⁸³ Using the analogy of the human body, when one part of the body is hurting, it affects the entire body. For example, when you have a headache, it affects how the rest of your body functions. The entire body shares in the suffering. The same is true for the body of Christ. When one member of the body is suffering, we all suffer. We share in each other’s suffering. As a local church, we should hurt when others hurt. As a parent, it pains me to see my children hurting. When I see them struggling, whether it be physically or emotionally, it pains me. I feel for them. As a result, I do everything I can to help them and to encourage them. As a local body of believers, we should feel each other’s pain. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens.” We are to hold each other up. When a brother and sister in Christ are suffering, we are to come along side of them and bear the burden with them. The church should be organized and structured in such a way that we are able to support and encourage one another as we suffer through this life.

Also, notice the fellowship of joy. When I was just a young child, my dad was the pastor of a church that had as its slogan, ‘the fellowship of joy.’ The scripture tells us that not only are we to share in each other’s sufferings, but we are also to share in each other’s joy. Partnering together as disciples of Jesus Christ should be a joyous thing. As believers we share in the common joy that we have in a relationship with Jesus. The local church should also be a genuine joyous place. When we gather together, we should enjoy each other’s company. It should bring great joy to our hearts to be able to partner with

other believers.

Finally, there is the fellowship of love. It does not matter what we do as a church, if we do not love one another, everything we do is in vain. Loving one another is proof of genuine faith. Notice what 1 John 3:14 says, *“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.”*⁸⁴ The greatest evidence of authentic faith is love for brothers and sisters in Christ. This love for one another is developed out of our common love for Jesus Christ. The more we love Jesus, the more we will love each other. Ask yourself, ‘do I really love my brothers and sisters in Christ?’ Do I really love the people that I go to church with?

As we examine the early church in the book of Acts, we find that they had a strong fellowship because they were together. Hebrews 10:25 says, *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*⁸⁵ Church, how can we have fellowship if we are not together? The closer we are to the return of Christ, the more we should gather together. The early church went to the temple to worship everyday in addition to meeting at each other’s house. When you and I came to faith in Christ, we were adopted into the family of God. We then partnered with a local church where we attend to worship and grow. That local church is now our immediate family. There was a day when all of the family’s activities were centered on the church. Gathering together at church was a top priority. I long to see that day again. You may say, well, I need to spend time with my earthly family. What better place to spend time with your earthly family than at the house of God? If we are going to have true Biblical fellowship, we must be together.

Acts 2:42 says, *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*"⁸⁶ The third component of discipleship is that of **Breaking Bread**. This phrase is used several times throughout the Bible. 'Breaking Bread' basically refers to food or eating together. However, it has a much deeper meaning embedded in the partaking of the Lord's Supper, or what we may call, 'communion.' Part of the worship of the early church was the gathering together to 'break bread' or to partake of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. In addition to this, they also gathered together in various places and shared meals together. I would suggest that the term 'breaking bread' in scripture is a symbolic gesture of our communion with God and our communion with each other. The Anglicans viewed communion as "a body of Christians having a common faith and discipline."⁸⁷ Communion is a deep intimate fellowship or partnership. Communion is participating with someone or a group of people. In order for the local church to be a disciple making church, its members must have both daily communion with God and with each other. The early church participated in 'breaking bread' on a daily basis. In other words, their relationship with God and with each other was not just a Sunday thing. It was a daily thing. I am afraid that the 'breaking of bread' is the weakest and most lacking component in the church today. We all have such busy schedules that we seldom have the time to spend with God and with each other. The church of today has allowed itself to be caught up in the pleasures and trappings of the world that we have neglected our communion with God and with each other. As a result, the church has become worldly and useless. So, what do we need to do? What does it really mean to 'break bread'?

First of all, we must have communion with God. One

of the greatest tragedies of God's people today is the limited amount of time that we spend alone with God. There are three basic things that we should do on a daily basis in order to have communion with God.

First, we must *study the Bible daily*. Reading and studying the Bible on a daily basis is not just something that is good for us to do, it is something that we must do. Our spiritual lives depend on spiritual food, and our spiritual food is the Bible. In our world today, there are

many resources that help us in our study of the scripture. There are many devotional books available, however, to really have communion with God, we need more than devotional books, we need to simply read and study the Bible. Five minute devotion simply does not cut it. To really grow, we must take our time and read the scriptures. As we read the scriptures we should ask ourselves the following questions: How is God speaking to me? Is there a direct command that I must obey? Are there any principles for me to live by? How can I apply the passage to my life today? Taking time to really read the Bible and allowing God to speak to us, is essential to our walk with God.

A second thing that we must do in order to have communion with God is *to pray daily and continually*. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to "pray without ceasing." In other words, we are to be in a constant attitude of prayer. Sadly, most believers do not take the time to really pray. We are so busy that we rush through our day without any quality time on our knees in prayer. Even Jesus spent quality time in prayer. "Jesus' earthly ministry was remarkably brief, barely three years long. Yet in those three years, as must have been true in His earlier life, He spent a great amount of time in prayer. The Gospels report that Jesus habitually rose early

in the morning, often before daybreak, to commune with His Father. In the evening He would frequently go to the Mount of Olives or some other quiet spot to pray, usually alone. Prayer was the spiritual air that Jesus breathed every day of His life. He practiced an unending communion between Himself and the Father.”⁸⁸ I believe that every believer should have what I like to call a daily ‘Sabbath hour’. We should have at least one hour every day that we set aside to get alone with God for the reading of His Word and for prayer. Such a daily commitment will enhance our relationship with God to such a degree that we live a life of continual prayer and communion with God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon described praying without ceasing this way:

“Like the old knights, always in warfare, not always on their steeds dashing forward with their lances in rest to unhorse an adversary, but always wearing their weapons where they could readily reach them, and always ready to encounter wounds or death for the sake of the cause which they championed. Those grim warriors often slept in their armour; so even when we sleep, we are still to be in the spirit of prayer, so that if perchance we wake in the night we may still be with God. Our soul, having received the divine centripetal influence which makes it seek its heavenly centre, should be evermore naturally rising towards God himself. Our heart is to be like those beacons and watchtowers which were prepared along the coast of England when the invasion of the Armada was hourly expected, not always blazing, but with the wood always dry, and the match always there, the whole pile being ready to

blaze up at the appointed moment. Our souls should be in such a condition that ejaculatory prayer should be very frequent with us. No need to pause in business and leave the counter, and fall down upon the knees; the spirit should send up its silent, short, swift petitions to the throne of grace ...A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying."⁸⁹

Such a life of prayer is made possible as we communion with God on a daily basis. Such a closeness with God where we can call upon Him at any moment is achieved only when first spend time on our knees. What about you? How often do you pray? Do you have a 'Sabbath hour'? Do you live with an attitude of prayer?

Not only must we study the Bible daily and pray daily in order to have communion with God, but we must also *meditate daily*. With the busyness of our modern society, I am afraid that meditation has become a lost art. According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, to meditate is to "focus one's mind for a period of time for spiritual purposes or as a method of relaxation."⁹⁰ Meditation is also healthy, by the way. "In a study of the physiological changes during meditation it was found that heart rate slows, respiration is

reduced, less oxygen is consumed, and the meditator's brain waves show a marked increase in alpha frequencies (West, 1987). These bodily changes are the opposite of what occurs in the body when a person is subjected to stress."⁹¹ Though it is interesting to point out the health benefits of meditation, the purpose of our meditation should be to have communion with God. That 'Sabbath hour' where we study the scriptures and pray, should also include a period of time where we get quite and close our eyes and simply listen to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. This is best done at the beginning and the end of your 'Sabbath hour.' Begin that special time with God by getting quite and calming your heart and mind and then continue with prayer and then the study of God's Word. At the end of this time, the heart and mind should once again be made calm as you sit and listen. Such mediation is very Biblical. The Psalmist was one who practiced meditation. Psalm 119:15 says, *I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.*"⁹² Psalm 4:4 says, *"Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still."*⁹³ Psalm 1:2 speaks of the blessed man as one who "meditates day and night."

In addition to having a daily 'Sabbath hour', I would recommend that you also have a yearly 'Sabbath retreat.' Take a trip by yourself to a cabin in the woods or just in a tent and spend a day or two with just you and God. Go some place where there are no distractions. No television, no internet, no radio; just you, God, and your Bible. Spend that time in quiet meditation as you reflect on God's Word and His plan for your life. Imagine, what would happen if every believer in the local church had a daily 'Sabbath hour' and a yearly personal 'Sabbath retreat'! I believe; that if we did, revival is sure to come. The bottom line is that in order to be a disciple making

church, we must have personal communion with God.

Not only must we have communion with God, but we must also have communion with each other. The early church participated in 'breaking bread' together. They were in the habit of doing this on a daily basis. A disciple making church is one that engages in true authentic community. Chip Ingram, in his book *"True Spirituality"*, says that authentic community occurs when "the real you meets real needs for the right reason in the right way."⁹⁴ The local church should gather together at least once day a week for worship, prayer, and the study of God's Word. That gathering together should then spill over into the daily lives of the believers as they participate with one another on a daily basis. This may include having dinner together or exercising together or meeting together for Bible study. Whatever it may be, the bottom line is that God's people need and should spend time together. I believe that this time that we spend together is both spiritual and practical. In other words, as we spend time in communion with God, our conversation and time spent with other believers will reflect the time we have spent with God. In addition to this, there is a place for believers to simply have fun together. I believe that God wants us to have balance in our lives and in our relationship with other believers. Sometimes it is good to get together simply for fun. Maybe it's a game of golf or tennis or perhaps gathering in homes and playing cards. The local church should be a 'Christian Community' where we engage in both our spiritual walk with God and in the sharing of the simple joys and pleasures of this life that God has blessed us with. When such communion with each other takes place, our masks are taken off and we become real with one another. We begin to really love one another. As our love grows, we then meet each other's needs, both spiritual and physical. The

early church had this Christian community thing down pat. They were together and they shared together and they met each other's needs on a daily basis. In order to be a disciples making church, there must be real and genuine communion with one another.

There is a final point that must be made on this subject of 'breaking bread' or communion. There is a warning that must be given. The first part of that warning has to do with our communion with God. If all we do is have communion with God without communion with other believers, we will develop a sense of spiritual pride. In other words, if all you do is spend time alone with God, you will develop an attitude that says that you do not need the church. You will begin to think of yourself as more spiritual than everyone else and you have no desire to associate with other believers. You will begin to think that you have arrived at some spiritual level that other believers have not arrived at and cannot attain. Such spiritual pride is sin and will ultimately lead to your downfall. On the other hand, if all we do is have communion with each other and we never spend time alone with God, then we will become spiritually immature and worldly. This, I am afraid, is the greatest sin of the church today. We are good at getting together and having fun and enjoying one another, but our personal walk with God is lacking. As a result, worldliness has set into our lives and into the life of the church. 'Breaking Bread' is essential to the life of a disciples making church. May we all have a greater commitment to our communion with God and our communion with each other.

The fourth component of discipleship is that of **prayer**. The early church continued in the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and in prayer. One of the least used resources of the local church today is the resource of prayer. The

church lacks power because there is very little time spent on our knees. Souls go unreached and remain lost because there is very little praying for the lost. Our prayer meetings often consist of gossip sessions where we talk about all the woes and aches and pains of life. Prayer requests become ways to communicate information rather than sharing genuine heart-felt concern for one another. Even our prayers are sometimes used to communicate subtle messages to each other rather than pouring our hearts out to God. We entertain ourselves with our praying. We pray almost to the point of competition to see who can pray the best and the longest. Prayer is the life-blood of the church, yet, it is seldom used. Even when we do pray, it often lacks power and passion and fervency. However, prayer is essential to the disciple making church. The church is powerless apart from prayer. When it comes to our praying in the context of the local church, there are several things to consider. Those things are as follows: private prayer, cooperate prayer, and continual prayer.

First of all, let's examine private prayer. Matthew 6:6 says, *"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*⁹⁵ This verse is in the context of the example given of the hypocrites who likes to pray on the street corners in order to be heard by other men. Jesus is not condemning the cooperate prayer of the church; however, He is emphasizing the need for personal private prayer. When we discussed the component of 'breaking bread', we mentioned that every believer should have a 'Sabbath hour.' There should be at least one hour that is set aside everyday for the purpose of prayer, Bible study, and meditation. This time of private prayer is essential to the spiritual growth of every believer. Our private prayer time also affects the life of the church.

Our personal time with God will spill over into the life of the church as we grow closer to God and have a greater desire to serve Him and bring Him glory. There is something special about being alone with God in prayer. There are several things that private prayer will do for the believer. First, *private prayer gives us a higher view of God*. Having a high view of God is extremely important. God is our friend, but He is more than that. God is our helper, but He is more than that. We need to understand that God is God. He is above all things. He created all things, yet, is separate from His creation. In other words, He is not a created being. He always has existed and He always will exist. His various attributes such as: omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscience, and immutable; have always been a part of who He is. Yet, in all His power and glory, He has allowed us to have access into His throne through the blood of Jesus. All believers in Christ can openly and boldly come before Him in prayer and give Him our cares and concerns and seek His power and His plan. As we go before God in private prayer, we will begin to develop a real sense of who God is and the privilege that we have to come before Him. It is a humbling thing to realize that we can go to God in prayer. As we pray privately, we will develop a high view of God. Secondly, *private prayer enhances our relationship with God*. As we spend time with God in prayer, we will grow to love Him more. We will desire Him more. The times we spend with God will be precious to us. When something hinders us from that special time, we feel as if something is missing. Our entire day is out of sync when we miss time with God in private prayer. Our relationship with God becomes much more personal and special to us as we pray privately. A third thing that private prayer will do for the believer is that it will *increase our faith*. The more we spend time with

God in prayer, the bolder our prayers become. As we see God work in our lives and answer our prayers, we will develop a greater faith and confidence that God will answer when we call. We will learn to trust Him more as we pray. He may not give us the answers that we personally desire, however, the more we pray, the more we understand God's desires, and His desires then becomes our own. This will develop a greater confidence both in God and in our praying. Finally, the private prayer of believers will *enhance our relationships with others*. As mentioned earlier, the time we spend alone with God should spill over in our relationships with other believers. This actually makes a lot of practical sense. As one spends time with God in private prayer, attitudes begin to change. As your love for God increases, so will your love for others. Forgiving those who have wronged you also becomes much more possible and even easier when time is spent alone with God. Private prayer can reduce stress levels and cause you to react to others in more loving and encouraging ways. You can tell when someone has been with Jesus. A person who has a strong and intimate walk with God is easy to spot. When you spend time in private prayer, there will be a glow about you. People will see a difference in you and it will enhance your relationships with others.

Secondly, let's consider cooperate prayer. Cooperate prayer is the coming together of believers to pray. The Bible clearly teaches us that we should pray together. The early church continued together in prayer. Matthew 18:19-20 says, *"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*⁹⁶When God's people gather together in unity and in agreeing prayer, things begin to happen. God

'inhabits the praise of His people.' When we gather together as a church body, and we begin to worship and pray, God is in our midst. Every great revival in history began when God's people joined together in prayer. When God's people pray together, demons will flee. The greatest weapon in the arsenal of the church is prayer. Every local church should provide as many opportunities as possible for God's people to gather together for the purpose of prayer. Cooperate praying is not a show. It is not simply part of the order of Sunday worship. Cooperate prayer should be genuine. It should be real. Real hearts that hunger for God, real burdens that we share, real desires and dreams that we agree on; cooperate prayer should be a time of great unity and coming together in agreement over the petitions that we are bringing before the throne of God. There is nothing more beautiful, more special than God's people coming together to pray.

A final aspect of prayer in the context of the local church is that of continual prayer. The Bible tells us to 'pray without ceasing.' In other words, we are to have such a personal and intimate relationship with Christ that we have a continual attitude of prayer. We should be in a state of constant prayer. This does not mean that we must be on our knees 24/7. However, we should continue in prayer. I look at it as having an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day. In this age of technology, this 24 hour connection is easy to understand. I personally have three devices: a laptop in my office, a tablet in my brief case, and a smart phone in my pocket. Each of those devices is synced together. I have instant access to my day planner, calendar, and to people. With instant messaging and facebook, I can have an ongoing connection with my wife no matter where I am. Apply that 24 hour connection that we have with each other through

amazing technology to the connection we have with God. As believers, we have an ongoing 24/7 connection with Jesus and we don't need a smart phone to make it happen. Through the blood of Jesus, we have constant and instant access into the very throne of God. We talk to God about anything and everything in any place and everywhere that we are. You and I can talk to God continual as we go about our daily task. Do you have such a relationship with God? Do you talk to Him throughout your day no matter where you are? Are you connected 24/7 with Jesus?

Prayer is a powerful thing. Through prayer, anything can happen. Through prayer, anything is possible. In order for a church to be a disciple making church, it must also be a praying church. It must be a church where its people gather together for cooperate prayer, but also, where its people spend quality time alone with God everyday and also continues in prayer throughout their day. The prayers of a disciple making church never cease

The final component of discipleship in the local church is **unity**. The believers in the early church had all things common and were together. Notice what the text says in Acts chapter two, *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people."* ⁹⁷The focus here is on verse 44-46 where it mentions how they came together

as one family and shared in meeting each other's needs. This was a church that was 'together', they were united. In order for a local church to be a disciples making church, there must be unity. There are several things about unity that we see throughout the pages of scripture that we should consider.

The first thing to consider when it comes to unity is that unity pleases God. Psalm 133:1 says, "*Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!*"⁹⁸ God is pleased when His children are united. He desires that we would be one. Jesus even prayed that we would be one just as He and the Father are one. There is a perfect unity in the Godhead. It is at the heart of God for His people to share in such unity. When the church is divided, God is not pleased. I do not believe that there is ever a case when a local church is divided to the point of a church split where God is pleased. Very little good can come from a church that is divided.

Secondly, unity happens when believers share in each other's burdens and joys. Paul gave us some very good advice on how we are to live in relation to one another in Romans chapter twelve. Notice what he says in verse 9-16:

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in

your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".⁹⁹

Notice the emphasis that is given on love. We are to love one another with a genuine love. This genuine love is revealed as we care for one another and seek the best for one another. As we grow in love, we will then 'rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.' We will share in each other's joys and in each other's sufferings. As our love for one another grows we become more and more forgiving and gracious. When someone wrongs us, we leave vengeance up to God and we do not repay evil with more evil. In other words, when believers are together in unity, the love of God is expressed in amazing ways. As we are united, we are then able to really live out the Christian life. No longer will we just be Christian in name only, but we will 'be' Christian in our actions and love toward one another. As the church is united, people will do life together. There will be real authentic community as God's people are united.

As believers, we should also seek unity in all essentials. Paul appeals to the Corinthian church concerning this very thing.

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our

Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." ¹⁰⁰

There were those in the church of Corinth that argued over who they followed. We see this same thing taking place in churches across America today. We have our theological labels such as dispensationalist, Armenian, or reformed. We divide ourselves into various groups such as evangelical, fundamental, conservative, liberal, moderate, etc. Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to not follow after some man-made theology, but to simply follow Christ. Personally, I am dispensational in my view of scripture, but I do not consider myself as a dispensationalist. I believe in the fundamentals of God's Word, but I do not consider myself as a fundamentalist. I practice church governance in a Baptist way, but I do not consider myself as a Baptist. We should not look at scripture through man-made theological lenses. We should view the

scriptures simply for what it says. I am a follower of Jesus, a born-again believer, and a Bible believer. When it comes to unity in the local church, we should major on the majors and minor on the minors. In other words, there are some areas that are non-negotiable, however, there are those grey areas where we can agree to disagree and continue to work together. Those non-negotiables are those areas in which we draw the line in the sand. It is those core truths of scripture that we must agree on. If we cannot agree on those core truths, then separation is necessary. So, what are those essentials? What are those core truths that we must agree on? What are the essentials? Time will not permit us to look at each essential in detail (that can be a whole other study). However, those core essentials that we must agree on in order to have unity in the local church is listed as follows: a literal six-day creation week and a young earth, sin came from Adam and death by sin, Israel is God's chosen nation through which He used to bring redemption to the world, the attributes of God, the trinity, the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the death of Christ on the cross, the resurrection of Christ, justification by faith alone, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration, the church as God's called-out ones to be used to bring the Gospel to the world, the second coming of Christ, and the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. These, I believe, are the things that we must agree on in order to be able to work together in unity. As believers, we should seek after such unity. We should focus on the things that matter most rather than argue over differences of opinions. In order to be a disciple making church there must be unity in the essentials.

Another truth concerning unity in the local church that we should consider is that there can be unity even in great diversity. One of the unique and special things about the church

is that we are all different. God has given each of us different personalities and gifts that can contribute to the church in unique and special ways. Notice what Paul says in Ephesians chapter three.

“Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”¹⁰¹ He goes on to say, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”¹⁰²

Every joint or part of the body has something to contribute in order that the church may be strengthened in love. The universal body of Christ is very diverse. We all come from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds that influence our way of thinking and way of doing things. Such diversity is also

seen local churches. A local church has both rich and poor, educated and uneducated, male and female, young and old, etc. The fact is, we are all different because God made us that way. A disciple making church is one that will embrace the diversity of the church. It is one that understands that everyone has something that they can contribute to the body, no matter who they are.

A final thought concerning unity in the local church is found in Philippians 2:1-2. Unity is a distinctive mark of true believers. *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”*¹⁰³ We are to be of one mind. Again, such unity focuses on the essentials of our faith. We can be of one mind because we believe in those core essentials. Those who do not believe in those core essentials are either unbelievers or are believers who are deceived and need to be brought to the light. However, if someone separates his or herself from other believers over differences of opinion on non-essentials then they may not be true believers. True believers will be of the same mind. True believers will focus on what matters most. In other words, a true believer will not break fellowship with someone who uses a different version of the Bible than they use, or uses a different style of music than they do, or wears different clothes, etc. They may not attend the same church. Each one may gravitate toward a local church that is more aligned with their particular opinions; however, true believers will not ignore or break true Christian fellowship with someone over things that are not essential. True believers will be of the same mind. We may not agree on every little detail, but we do agree on the essentials. It is because of such unity that

we are able to work together for the cause of Christ despite our differences of opinion.

Christian unity is often hard to come by. However, it is a must in the disciple making church. A local church that is making a difference for the cause of Christ and making disciples is one that is united around the core fundamentals of the faith. It is one that focuses on scripture and on what matters most and does not divide itself over things that are not essential.

These five components of discipleship are essential to the disciple making church. Each component should be emphasized and developed in order to ensure that disciples are being made.

Romans 12 Discipleship

ROMANS CHAPTER TWELVE is the premier chapter in the Bible on what it really means to be a disciple. A careful study of Romans twelve will reveal what a true disciple of Jesus looks like. There is a need in the local church today to produce Romans 12 Christians. Every local church should do a careful study of Romans 12, perhaps as often as once every year. Local churches should organize and structure themselves in such a way that enables Romans 12 discipleship to take place.

As we examine Romans 12 we will follow the following outline: Totally Committed (v. 1-2), Teamwork (v. 3-8), Together in Authentic Community (v. 9-21). First of all, we see in verses 1-2 that as believers in Christ, we are to be *totally committed*. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*¹⁰⁴ Paul is appealing to his readers that they make a total commitment to

God. In other words, we should have an 'all-in' mentality. He mentions that it is our 'reasonable service' to give of ourselves in our relationship with God. Giving of ourselves completely to God is the reasonable thing to do in light of what Jesus has done for us. He gave of Himself for us on the cross and did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He has atoned for our sin and has given us an eternal home in heaven. He has been merciful to us and has not given to us what we deserve. By His grace He has given to us what we do not deserve and that is a relationship with God. It makes perfect sense for the believer to live a life of total commitment to Christ. After all that Jesus has done for us, why would we not be totally committed to Him? In verse 2, he explains how we are able to live a life of total commitment. Such a life is made possible as we allow ourselves to be transformed by God's Word and we resist conformity to the world. We cannot change ourselves. We cannot become like Christ on our own merit. It is only through the transforming power of the Word of God that we can resist buying into the world system and be totally committed in our relationship with God. Therefore, we should structure our daily lives in such a way that we spend quality time in God's Word and in prayer so that we are transformed by the power of God. What does such total commitment look like? A totally committed Christian is one that is constantly changing. He or she understands that they never get to a point where they stop growing. There is always room for improving in our walk with God. There is always sinful habits to repent of, idols to tear down, scripture to obey, principles to live by, etc. A totally committed Christian is not perfect, however, they are constantly progressing in their walk with God.

A Romans 12 disciple is one who is practicing Totally Committed *Teamwork*. In verse 3-8, reference is given to the

practice of spiritual gifts in the life of the church.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”¹⁰⁵

Here, emphasis is placed on the fact that we are a part of the body of Christ and as members of that body we have been give responsibility. A disciple making church is one that will constantly help each other in discovering the spiritual gifts and encouraging one another in using those gifts. A Romans 12 disciple understands that he or she has a role to play in the life of the local church. They have something that God has given to them to contribute. I find it interesting that in every church that I have served in, God has placed in those churches people with various spiritual gifts. I have never been in a church where a certain spiritual gift was lacking. Now, I have seen those who have certain gifts that are not using their gifts, but I’ve never seen a church that is lacking in spiritual gifts. God places people in local churches with various spiritual gifts, talents, and personalities to be used for the edifying

of the church and for the ultimate glory of God. The question is whether or not you are a team player? Are you using your gifts for the building up of the church or are you just sitting on the side lines? It is God's desire that every believer get into the game. He wants us to be involved. He wants to participate with other believers. A disciple making church will actively pursue and produce Romans 12 disciples who are totally committed team players.

A Romans 12 disciple is also one who practices *Totally Committed Teamwork Together in Authentic Community*. Notice what Paul says in verse 9-21,

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³ distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap

coals of fire on his head. ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”¹⁰⁶

In this section we are given instruction on what it means to really live like a Christian. In his book, *True Spirituality*, Chip Ingram outlines verses 9-13 in the following way: “Authentic community occurs when the real you (v.9) meets real needs (v. 10) for the right reason (v. 11) in the right way (v. 12-13).”¹⁰⁷ Paul tells us in verse nine that our love is to be without hypocrisy. In other word, we are to be real. The local church should be structured in such a way that encourages people to be themselves. In order to be able to meet each other’s needs, we must be real with one another. We must take off our masks and allow our lives to be open to our church family. We should not hide anything. The local church should foster such an atmosphere where people feel comfortable and unafraid of letting people see the real you. As we are real with one another we are then able to meet real needs. Verse ten encourages us to put the needs of others ahead of our own. We are to genuinely care for one another. In a disciple making church, needs are met as everyone considers the needs of each other ahead of their own. In a disciple making church, real people will meet real needs for the right reason. Verse eleven has to do with our motive. As we meet the needs of others, we are doing so ‘as unto the Lord.’ In other words, our goal and purpose is to bring glory to Christ through meeting the needs of others. This is something that we should not be lazy in. We should actively pursue serving God through caring for the needs of others in the local church. A disciple making church is where real people meet real needs for the right reason and in the right way. Verses 12-13 speak to meeting needs in the right way. Notice how we are to meet needs by

rejoicing, in patience, in prayer, and through distributing to the needs of others. In others words, not only is our motives to be pure and directed toward bringing glory to God, but also, our attitudes should be that which is exemplary. Often times it is not a matter of whether or not you do serve, but how you serve. A disciple making church will be one in which real love is cultivated in such a way that real people meet real needs for the right reason and in the right way.

In verses 14-21, Paul shows how that part of being a Romans 12 disciple is also seen in our relationship with those who harm us. There are times when people will hurt us. People will do evil things toward us. The key is how we respond to those who hurt us. Paul mentions that we should not try to pay back evil with evil. Just because someone does us wrong does not mean that we should do wrong to them in return. As true disciples of Jesus, we should let God deal with vengeance and we should focus on doing good to everyone. There are times when the disciple making church will be attacked by the enemy. Satan may use people within the church or in the community to try and hinder the work of the church. A church that is truly developing Romans 12 disciples will be one that will respond to such attacks in love rather than in vengeance.

There is a desperate need in church pews across America for Romans 12 discipleship. Every local church should be committed to producing disciples of Jesus that follow the teaching of Romans 12.

CHAPTER **Seven:**

Lack Of Discipleship In The Local Church

EARLIER, WE EXAMINED the need for discipleship in the local church. We saw how that many Christians are struggling to live differently than the rest of the world. We noticed some of the statistics that show how there is not much difference between believers and non-believers in the way that they live. There is a great need for discipleship in the local church simply because true discipleship is severely lacking in the church today. There are four areas in the church today that contributes to the lack of discipleship and those areas are listed as follows: spiritual apathy, spiritual laziness, lack of knowledge, and lack of spiritual leadership. Each of these areas will be carefully examined in this chapter.

Notice first of all, *spiritual apathy*. The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Thesaurus defines apathy as: “lack of emotional responsiveness or lack of interest or concern.”¹⁰⁸ Sadly, this is all too common in many local churches today. We have become unresponsive to the things of God and as a result we have very little interest or concern for doing anything for the

cause of Christ. This is something that pastors battle with on a regular basis no matter where they may serve. Sometimes, churches will go through seasons of apathy for various reasons. Perhaps it is caused by being burned out or a lack of passion from the pulpit. For whatever reason, we must understand that apathy is a sin and should be addressed as such. In a blog post I wrote the following:

“I am greatly concerned over the fact that so few people have any desire to serve in the church. Those that do serve are getting burned out and are slowly fading away. There is very little excitement. There is very little passion. And there is no vision. I see parents who are setting poor examples to their children by putting other things ahead of church attendance and just simply being lazy when it comes to the things of God and the church. I have also witnessed Satan’s most destructive and subtle attacks by using so-called Christians to spread lies and deceitful doctrines. However, the cause of such attacks and spiritual decline is the fact that we have let our guard down. We have gotten to the point where we just don’t care anymore. We are tired. We are weary. We are not willing to fight. Spiritual apathy has set in.”¹⁰⁹

Cross Leadership identified several reasons or causes for apathy in the church which include: material prosperity, trials, and coasting.¹¹⁰ We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Even our poorest is considered wealthy compared to the plight of others around the world. I have been to other places in the world where I witnessed extreme poverty. We, living in America today, have it made. Most all of us have

houses to live in and a bed to sleep in. Many of us have multiple cars to drive and nice clothes to wear. We have plenty of food to eat. God has truly blessed our nation. Because we have so much, it is easy for apathy to settle into our lives. We really don't know what it is like to trust God to provide because we already have so much. We have many luxuries in our homes. I know in my house we have a nice television and game systems. We have too much furniture and comfortable beds. It would be very easy to get comfortable in my recliner and become lazy as I enjoy the luxuries that I have. There is nothing wrong with having such luxuries; however, when we allow those luxuries to overtake us and cause us to become lazy, then it's a real problem. Many Christians, if not most Christians, will spend more time watching television than they will in study of God's Word. As a result of this we find spiritual apathy running rampant in the church. No one cares. No one wants to go the extra mile. No one wants to serve because they are 'too busy' taking care and indulging in all their stuff.

Another reason that there is so much apathy in the church today is due to the many *trials* that we face. The article from Cross Leadership elaborates on this:

"On the contrasting side, apathy can set in when we face hard times. For example, perhaps you are facing a difficult situation with coworkers. Every day, you hear taunts from your officemates, ridiculing your God-believing, faith-holding, Bible-reading lifestyle. You are mocked because you refuse to sleep around, get drunk, cuss like a comedian, or view porn. You are scoffed. After a while, your spiritual resolve goes slack. You think to yourself, "is it really worth it?" After

a while, your spiritual walk becomes a slow, tired swagger. Eventually, you slide right into the stultifying slog of apathy. It happens with other types of trials — perhaps an extended illness of a family member, or a disease that ends in death. Things like this try our faith, they drain our hope, and they sink our spirits. We become apathetic.”¹¹¹

I have experienced such things in my own life as well. As a pastor, there are times when I am deeply burdened and concerned for the church. There are times when I will spend many sleepless nights with never-ending thoughts and concerns. There are times when I will feel that it’s no use, because of the lack of response and change in the lives of those in my church. These burdens will sometimes lead to a depressed state of mind and spirit which leads to apathy. There are seasons in our lives when our burdens weigh so heavy upon us that we just don’t care anymore. The church is filled with people that have many troubles and trials. Often times, those troubles will overwhelm them in such a way that they have grown cold and indifferent to the things of God and the work of the church. It is of little concern to them anymore.

Another reason or cause of spiritual apathy is *coasting* through life and ministry. The day to day grind can often rob us of our spiritual vigor and fire. The church will often find itself in a state of being lukewarm due to just ‘going through the motions’ of ministry. We are creatures of habit. We do not like to change. We are comfortable with our routine and the way we have always done things. This ‘going through the motions’ and ‘coasting’ through life will sometimes created in us a sort of boredom to life. There is no excitement, there is nothing new. It is the same thing week in and week out. We grow so

accustom to our routine that we slowly fade away and wither to the point of not caring about anything anymore. Certainly, coasting through life can contribute to apathy.

Now that we understand the causes of such apathy in the church, which is why discipleship is lacking, we will now turn our attention to how we can overcome such apathy in our lives and in the church. The first step to overcome apathy is to call it out for what it is. Apathy is sin. Therefore, we should seek forgiveness and repent of our apathetic ways. When apathy sets in the church for whatever reason, the church as a whole should repent. Another step in overcoming apathy is to understand who we are in Christ. Scripture warns Christians to make sure that they are indeed in the faith. Apathy may be a sign of no faith at all. If you are a believer, then you must live as one. Growing as a Christian is a process, a progressive journey. Generally speaking, Christians don't start their Christian life with a great deal of spiritual maturity. Maturity grows over time. There are ups and downs along the way, but the general trajectory is *more* like Christ, not less like Christ. Fighting against sin is also a way to overcome apathy. Usually, it is our sinful habits that lead to the sin of spiritual apathy. Therefore, we must be determined to fight against the temptations and the sins that so easily distract us from being who we should be in our walk with God. It is certainly a fight and we must put on the armor of God and gear up for the fight.

Spiritual apathy is a huge contributor to the lack of discipleship in the local church. When spiritual apathy sets into a church, the desire to make disciples falls by the wayside. Ministries that were once filled with spiritual vigor and power are now powerless and fruitless due to the apathy of the believers. There is another contributor to the lack of discipleship in the local church and that is *spiritual laziness*. The sin of

apathy will lead to spiritual laziness. Since we have lost our fire and our will to serve, we become lazy in the things that we do. Such spiritual laziness will prevent any church from being a disciple making church. The same things that contribute to apathy may also contribute to laziness.

Such laziness in the church can stem from burnout. In most churches there is a small percentage of the people that is doing all of the work. This causes those who do serve to get discouraged and tired to the point of no longer putting one hundred percent into the work. Eventually, there are many things that go undone simply because we are too lazy to do them.

The reason for such laziness in the church can also be attributed to the lack of teaching and training. People are often placed into areas of service in the church without being properly trained and equipped. Eddie Rasnake, in his study on spiritual gifts said, "As it takes more than a uniform and rifle to make a soldier, so does it take more than just an altar call or invitation to minister effectively-it takes training, or to put it Biblically, equipping."¹¹² Churches are prone to put people into places of leadership and service without properly equipping them to serve. In other words, we fail to disciple people to serve. When discipleship is lacking in the church, it fosters an environment of spiritual laziness as people serve in areas where they are not gifted, have no desire, and are not equipped.

With the lack of discipleship in the local church, there also comes a personal spiritual laziness. When people are not properly disciplined through the ministry of the local church, they will become lazy in their personal walk with God. If the church is not encouraging them to grow in their walk with God, they will become slack in their personal prayer and

Bible study time. They will grow bored and cold toward God and His Word. Such spiritual laziness will lead to temptation and sin, but in the long run, if properly addressed, could cause one to enter into greater heights in their walk with God. "Faith doesn't always come to bear until we are faced with our own fallibility. When we "enter into temptation," it often means we haven't been vigilant—that we've stopped pursuing the God who has pursued us. In the aftermath of temptation, we recognize our spiritual laziness. We become wise—but remorsefully."¹³ The fear is that many will continue in their spiritual laziness, unless proper discipleship is applied through the church.

The lack of discipleship in the church will cause laziness when it comes to the area of serving in the church. Chambers writes,

"Supposing you are asked to speak in the open air—"Oh, I can't!"; to take a Sunday School class—"Oh, I can't!"; to write an essay—"Oh, I can't!"; to expound a particular passage—"Oh, I can't!" What is the matter? We have not been educated on the right line. Some of us do not know what to do in certain circumstances spiritually because we have never stored our memory with the counsels of God, never watched the way God's servants conduct themselves. If we have been storing our minds with the word of God, we are never taken unawares in new circumstances because the Holy Spirit brings back these things to our remembrance and we know what we should do; but the Holy Spirit cannot bring back to our minds what we have never troubled to put there. "My people doth not consider," God says; they live on "spooned

meat” spiritually, go to church on Sunday and expect to live in the strength of it all the week without doing anything. We should be so in the habit of obeying the Holy Spirit as He interprets the word of God to us that wherever we are placed, we extricate ourselves in a holy and just and unblameable manner.”¹¹⁴

The point is that if we are properly disciplined and taught the Word of God, we will be much more apt to involve ourselves in the kingdom work. As a pastor, when I see a lack of willingness to work and serve amongst my congregation, the first thing I do is evaluate the discipleship ministry of the church. If we are properly discipling, the people will have a desire to be obedient to God and to use their spiritual gifts in the work of the ministry. Before we blame the people themselves for their lack of contribution, we should first examine how we are doing when it comes to making disciples. Spiritual laziness is found in any church that lacks true and effective discipleship.

Not only is apathy and spiritual laziness stem from the lack of discipleship in the local church, but we also see that the *lack of spiritual knowledge* also stems from the lack of discipleship. There is an increasing Biblical illiteracy in the local church today. Unfortunately, most people that come to church have very little knowledge of the Bible. There is a great deal that we can learn from the Bible. Knowing the Bible is possible for all those who have access to the Bible. The reason we do not know the Bible is because of our lack of desire or will. “A serious Bible study should be approached first with the knowledge that the Bible invites our inquiry and that it is possible to learn deeply from it if we take the opportunity to do so. As in any other serious endeavor, it will take time and

patience to build a good, working knowledge of the Bible. And like any other important and complex subject of study we undertake, we must be prepared to invest ourselves in the work, giving it both concentrated time and energy."¹¹⁵ Our attitude towards the Bible will play a huge role in how much we know of the Bible. "Like any other subject we have decided to learn, how well we do will depend on the kinds of attitudes with which we begin. For example, if our minds are already made up on what the Bible says or means and we are basically closed to new understanding, there is no real reason to study the Bible further. Openness in learning, as opposed to being closed minded, is the first key to studying the Scriptures. This is an attitude that says, "I am teachable because I do not know everything but want to learn more."¹¹⁶ A disciple making church will be one that will create an attitude amongst its people that is hungry for the scriptures. A disciple making church will have those present who have a teachable spirit. We must be willing to learn. The nature of most of our churches does not foster an atmosphere for Biblical learning. Most churches are so dogmatic in their beliefs and in their man-made theological system to the point that there is no room for the individual believer to expand his or her knowledge of the scriptures. We have our theological biases and hold so strongly to them that we create closed-minded people that are not willing to learn. No one really gets into the habit of studying the scriptures for themselves because the church tells them everything that they are suppose to believe. A disciple making church will not just tell people what they have to believe, but it will whet the appetite of believers for more of God and His Word. The answer to such a lack of spiritual knowledge is found in the pulpit. Pastors must understand that their role is to teach and equip the saints. Many pulpits across America

are filled with those who tell stories rather than preach the truth of God's Word. Many pastors shy away from teaching Bible doctrine in order to please the ears of those in the pews. As goes the pulpit so goes the church. Everything begins and ends with what is taught in the pulpit. If there is no spiritual vigor and fire in the pulpit, there will be no fire in the church. If there is no passion for the things of God displayed in the pulpit, there will be no passion in the church. If there is no deep searching of the scriptures in the pulpit, there will be no desire for personal Bible study in the church. If there is no carefully prepared and planned teaching from the pulpit, there will be a Biblical illiteracy in the church. As the truth is preached in the pulpit it is then carried over in other church ministries such as Sunday School, small groups, mentorships, and other discipleship ministries of the church.

This leads us to the final factor that will cause a lack of discipleship in the local church and that is a lack of good *spiritual leadership*. As mentioned earlier, everything begins and ends with the pulpit. The pastor of the church sets the tone of the church. If the pastor is not engaging in personal discipleship, then it is very unlikely that the church will be engaged. If the pastor does not practice spiritual mentorship, then neither will the church. If the pastor is not actively engaged in the discipleship ministries of the church such as Sunday School, mentorships, small groups, student ministries, etc. then the church will not see the need for such ministries and will not involve themselves in them. Over time, churches will take on the personality of its pastor. If the pastor is not growing spiritually and excited about the things of God and the ministry of the church, then the church will follow suit. If the pastor is lazy, so will be the church. If the pastor is lukewarm, so will be the church. If the pastor is not involved in people's lives,

neither will the church. Many leaders in churches today do not understand what it means to be a shepherd of the flock of God. MacArthur writes,

“Many contemporary church leaders fancy themselves businessmen, executives, entertainers, psychologists, philosophers, presidents, or lawyers. Yet those roles contrast sharply with the symbolism Scripture employs to depict pastors and spiritual leaders in the church. In 2 Timothy 2, for example, Paul uses seven different metaphors to describe a spiritual leader. He pictures the minister as a teacher (v. 2), a soldier (v. 3), an athlete (v. 5), a farmer (v. 6), a workman (v. 15), a vessel (vv. 20–21), and a slave (v. 24). Each of those images evokes ideas of sacrifice, labor, service, and hardship. They speak eloquently about the complex and varied responsibilities of spiritual leadership. Not one of them makes out leadership to be glamorous. That’s because it’s not supposed to be glamorous. Leadership in the church is not a mantle of status to be conferred on the church’s aristocracy. It isn’t earned by seniority, purchased with money, or inherited through family ties. It doesn’t necessarily fall to those who are successful in business or finance. It isn’t doled out on the basis of intelligence, education, or talent. Its requirements are faultless character, spiritual maturity, skill in teaching, and a willingness to serve humbly. God has ordained that leadership is to be a role of humble, loving service. Church leadership is ministry, not management. God calls leaders not to be governing monarchs but humble slaves, not slick celebrities but laboring

servants, not charismatic personalities but faithful shepherds. The man who leads God's people must above all exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness."¹¹⁷

Sadly, such spiritual leadership in the church is found wanting. Very few churches are blessed with such Godly leadership that understands their role as God's servant. "With the trends in the church headed where they are, nothing is more sorely needed today than a return to biblical leadership principles. Solid men willing to take on the true realities of leadership are appallingly rare."¹¹⁸

Spiritual leadership as described by MacArthur requires a certain boldness and willingness to take risk. Strong, Godly leadership in the church is usually met with resentment. As the days grow closer to the return of Christ, people want to have their ears tickled. They desire to hear what pleases them rather than to be challenged to live Godly lives. A discipleship making church requires men who are willing to provide brave and strong spiritual leadership. Such leadership is not exercised by the weak, but by the strong and the bold. President Theodore Roosevelt said,

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of the deed could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion

and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checked by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows little victory nor defeat.”¹¹⁹

I have often said that I would rather go to the grave a complete failure than go to the grave as one who did nothing.

To be such a leader, it does not necessarily take authority, rather, it takes influence. A good leader is not one who is respected because he is an authority, but because his life has such an impact on others that it naturally demands respect. I have known few people in my life that had such an influence on those around them. One such man was Pastor Bobby Edwards. I had the privilege of serving as his associate years ago. Though he lost a battle with leukemia and is with the Lord, His life still impacts many people today. He was not a man of prestige or great education. Rather, he was a man that exemplified the love of Christ. He was one that noticeably spent many hours with Jesus. When he walked into a room, the atmosphere would change. People would sit up and take notice and listen very carefully to what he had to say. Such godly men and women, sadly, are lacking in churches today.

In the book *Transformational Discipleship*, the authors mention that “love is the mark of discipleship. But here’s the problem: you can’t teach love.”¹²⁰ To lead well, you must love naturally. This is how Pastor Bobby Edwards led. He had a natural and genuine love for those he served. This is how Jesus served as well. “That’s actually why love is the defining characteristic of discipleship-because love-true love-can

only comes from a true, vibrant, and constant experience of the gospel. The gospel is what love is—that's the true measure of love. Those who truly love demonstrate they have been loved and are growing in their understanding of the great love of God in Christ."¹²¹ Essentially, a strong spiritual leader will be one who is constantly growing. A good leader will never graduate from the gospel, but will go deeper into the gospel. "Leaders must decide to press love to the forefront rather than information."¹²²

Good spiritual leaders in the church will produce good spiritual leaders. The goal of ministry is not how many followers we can accumulate, but how many leaders we can create. Success in ministry should not be measured by how many we can gather around us, but rather, how many we can send out from us. This, I believe, is my role as a pastor. I must disciple men and women in such a way that I am producing spiritual leaders who will go out and do the work of the ministry wherever God may call them to.

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of Christian workers today. Fewer and fewer are answering the call to ministry. Why is this? It is because we are not making disciples. There is an unprecedented lack of discipleship in the local church today due to spiritual apathy, spiritual laziness, lack of knowledge, and a lack of spiritual leadership. To turn the tide, church leaders must first repent of their own sins and make a fresh commitment to building the church God's way. This can only be done through the conviction and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Such a discipleship revival should be the greatest subject of our prayers.

CHAPTER **Eight:**

How Can The Local Church Make Disciples

NOW THAT WE have dealt with discipleship in the local church in a general sense, we will now look at discipleship in the local church in a more practical way. It must be understood here, however, that programs is not the answer to developing a disciple making church. However, such programs (as will be discussed) are means through which discipleship takes place, if they are done through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I believe that everything we do as a church should be carefully organized. The ministry ideas that we will examine are vitally important to the church and if organized properly, can in fact, go a long way in making disciples. There are four areas in church life that we will examine: Sunday School, small groups, discipleship mentors, and pastoral leadership. Each of these ministries is vitally important to the disciple making church. We will look at each of these areas and learn how such ministries can help a church effectively make disciples.

The first ministry to consider is the *Sunday School*. There are many today who feel that Sunday School is old fashioned

and is dying out. The problem is that most churches do not do Sunday School right. I like to tell people that I am a Sunday School pastor. I believe in the Sunday School. I believe in developing a strong Sunday School ministry in order to make disciples. Sunday School is more than just a class to teach children Bible stories. Sunday School is church growth and discipleship tool. Ken Hemphill states, "The Sunday School is the finest integrated church growth tool on the market today."¹²³ There are four tools of Sunday School to consider: Biblical learning tool, accountability tool, ministry training tool, and a multiplication tool.

Notice first, *the Biblical learning tool*. Sunday School is a place where the Bible should be taught. One of the problems that many churches face is finding Sunday School material that provides strong in-depth Biblical teaching. Most of the material available today is water-downed and very light doctrinally. However, there are some good resources out there. If the church has the staff and capability, they may decide to create their own Sunday School material. The bottom line is that the Sunday School class must be designed in such a way that the Bible is taught in a very real, practical, and life changing way.

Another tool for Sunday School is *the accountability tool*. As believers join together in a Sunday School class, they are able to hold each other accountable in their walk with God and in their personal holiness. One way that this can be done in a Sunday School class is to have the class organized into 'care groups.' The ideal size for a Sunday School class is about 15 to 20 students. Those students are then organized into 3 or 4 'care groups.' The purpose of 'care groups' is to bring people together in true Biblical fellowship in order that they may grow in their walk with God and in their relationships

with each other. Care groups can accomplish several things. Care groups *promote fellowship*. As believers within a Sunday School care group partner with one another and participate with one another in their walk with God and in their ministry, real authentic Biblical fellowship will take place. Care groups also *strengthen accountability*. A greater sense of openness develops as people really connect with one another. As they open up, accountability becomes possible as they pray for one another and covenant together to help each other live lives that bring glory to God. Care groups *build relationships*. Your best friends should be the people you go to church with, and more specifically, the people that are in your Sunday School class. As people connect with one another in a Sunday School care group, they will build relationships that will last a lifetime. Care groups also *help to provide in time of need*. As believers come together and really do life together, needs are revealed and needs are met. As needs are met, it brings an overwhelming joy to those in the group as they share in their care for one another. Care groups *make disciples*. To make disciples is to come alongside each other and help each other grow to become more like Christ. Care groups make such spiritual growth possible. Care groups also *multiplies disciples*. As believers care for one another, others will see their love and have a desire to join them. This will then produce more disciples who are also producing more disciples. Having care groups within a Sunday School class is a wonderful way to use the accountability tool.

Sunday School is also a *ministry training tool*. As believers learn God's Word together, they are also equipped for the work of the ministry. Sunday School can help people discover their spiritual gifts and train them in how they can use their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the local church.

Not only is Sunday School a Biblical learning tool, an accountability tool, and a ministry training tool, but it is also a multiplying tool. Through the Sunday School ministry of the church, the local church will multiply. Once an individual connects with a Sunday School class, the more likely they are to being committed to the work of the church and involved in the ministry. As one person is reached and discipled, that person will then reach others and so forth. Sunday School provides the opportunity for disciples to multiple in the church.

Another ministry to consider that will enhance the discipleship in the local church is *small group ministry*. Small group ministry is similar to that of Sunday School because Sunday School is essentially a small group ministry. A small group ministry in the church may include but is not limited to the following: Sunday School, home Bible studies, mission fellowships, men's groups, ladies groups, youth ministry, children's ministry, senior adult ministry, etc. When you break things down on a smaller scale, real discipleship can take place. It is very difficult for one to grow in his or her faith when they are not connected with a small group. Every church of every size should have several small groups that people can be a part of in order to really connect with other believers and thus be able to grow in their walk with God.

A very important ministry that will enhance discipleship in the local church is one that very few churches do and that is *discipleship mentorship*. Every believer should have a mentor while at the same time they should be mentoring someone else. We all need someone who is a little more 'spiritually advanced' than we are, to take us by the hand and walk with us through the ups and downs of the Christian life. One way that this can happen in the life of the local church is to provide discipleship mentors for new believers. Every time someone

comes to faith in Christ, they should be plugged in with another believer who will guide them through their new walk with Christ. As they grow, they can then get to a point where they can mentor others.

A final area to examine is that of *pastoral leadership*. In order for a church to be a disciple making church, the pastor or pastors of the church must be discipleship driven. There must be a vision for discipleship amongst the pastoral staff. If a pastor does not understand or know how to lead the church in making disciples, then disciples will not be made. Just like everything in the life of the church, it begins with the pastor. If the church is going to have a strong Sunday School, then the pastor must be a part of and engage in Sunday School. I have seen some pastors who would not even attend Sunday School, they will sit in their office during Sunday School while they wait for the worship time to begin. This ought not be! Pastors of any size church, no matter who they are, should be a part of the Sunday School ministry. If the church is going to have discipleship mentors, then the pastor must have a mentor and also should be mentoring others. If the pastor does not have a mentor, then why would the congregation see the need to have one for themselves? If a church is going to have a small group ministry, then the pastor should be involved in a small group himself. You see, everything rises and falls on leadership. If the pastor does not see the need to actively pursue and enhance the discipleship ministry of the church, then neither will the congregation. Good pastoral leadership is the key to becoming a disciple making church.

CHAPTER **Nine:**

A Call For A Discipleship Revival

THERE ARE A lot of sermons that have been preached on the need for revival. Many books have been written on the subject. Prayer meetings in local churches across America often focus on praying for revival. We pray that God will revive the church and that God would revive America. However, often times, I am afraid, that our prayers have no feet. We cry out to God for revival expecting God to do some supernatural and miraculous act that would cause lives to be transformed. We talk about revival, we pray for revival, and then we just wait. We never do anything. I believe that what the church needs now more than ever is not another great awakening that is filled with emotional responses. What we need is not some supernatural miraculous intervention by God (which rarely does God work that way). What we need is for the church to return to what the church is supposed to be. Stop playing church and be the church. What we really need is a discipleship revival.

There are several things that must be done in order for such a revival to take place. The first is to *repent*. As the church of Ephesus, we have left our first love. Local churches

today are caught up in church growth trends, theological labels, doctrinal trends, and the temptation to be like the world in order to reach the world. We are so caught up in *doing* that we have neglected the *being*. We must confess our sins and our hypocrisy. Often we call on America to repent, yet, we are the ones in need of repentance. We blame the politicians for the corruptness and wickedness of our society, yet, we have done little to raise up a generation that will bring real life transformation. We go through the motions of doing church, while neglecting the very souls that the church is called on to minister to. The reason for this is because we are selfish. We care only about ourselves. We love our selves more than we love Jesus. If we really loved Jesus we would live differently. If we really loved Jesus we would not be constantly condemning everyone, instead we would helping everyone. If we really loved Jesus we would be real people who meet real needs in a real way. A discipleship revival will only come if we as the church will humble ourselves and confess our sins and repent.

A second step to a discipleship revival is a *return to the basics*. People in local churches across America today are hungry. They want more. They need more. The church does not need some self-help instruction, the church needs the Word of God. The church needs nothing but the Word of God. So often we are hung up on defending our pet doctrines and opinions that we neglect the simple teaching of the truth. Many churches feel that it is their job to change people. However, it is not the job of the church to change people; it is the Holy Spirit's job. The responsibility of the church is to teach people the truth. To teach God's Word and nothing but God's Word. Pulpits across America are filled with man-made philosophies and opinions. We need to return to the basics of

scripture. Pastors, just preach the text. Let the Bible speak for itself. Do not add to it, do not take away from it, just preach it!

A third and final step to a discipleship revival is a *renewed commitment to making disciples*. The church is not a place to be entertained. It is a place to be nurtured in the faith. The definition of discipleship that we developed earlier is as follows: *Discipleship is the sanctification process of the believer who is abiding in Christ through the means of submission to the authority of Christ and the daily sacrifice and conformity to the will of God*. The local church must have a renewed commitment to such discipleship. The ministry of the local church should be organized and structured in a way that encourages and promotes real discipleship. To have a discipleship revival, work must be done. Yes, we need to pray. However, prayer without feet will get us nowhere. Churches across America need to wake up to the fact that there are very few people in the pews that are really growing to become more like Christ. If we really want to bring change to America then we need to be committed to making disciples. It is only true disciples of Jesus that God will use to have a lasting impact on our nation. Churches need to get out of the entertainment industry and get into the discipleship industry. It is my prayer and earnest desire that local churches across America, both large and small, will begin to take seriously the need for greater discipleship.

May we examine every detail of the church and make sure that all we do is designed for the purpose of making disciples. Discipleship is the church's greatest need of the hour. May God help us and teach us to practice true Biblical discipleship.

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