

## **Small-Group Christianity: How to Develop Discipled, Discipling Disciples**

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I like the idea. Disciples who are discipled and are discipling. Really, is there any other kind? I have been working through the book of 1 John, finishing up my Bible Study Guide on the General Letters. John makes clear the progression—truth, obedience, example, practice.

The modern church tends to emphasize the Sunday assembly more than any other activity on the weekly calendar. Other activities may come and go—but in most churches what really matters, week after week, if one is a faithful Christian, is attendance at the Sunday morning assembly. Even if this is a bit overstated and the focus is unintentional, it is easy for the modern church and contemporary Christians to drift toward this definition of Christianity.

The problem with any emphasis is when it causes one to neglect things that are equally important. What is the problem with the assembly-only focus? After all, the weekend services and programs let members hear teaching and preaching, and there is a strong emphasis on what one believes and the need for obedience. Here is the problem: the weekend assembly provides very little by way of examples and virtually no opportunities to practice with feedback from a more experienced person. Merely hearing is not sufficient for making strong disciples.

The church that is intent on making disciples must focus on relationships. In Phil. 4:9, the apostle Paul writes, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Notice the progression: hear—receive—learn—see—practice.

Where will the church find a dynamic that promotes the intentional, healthy development of the Christian life? While there are several possible answers based on deepening relationships, mentoring, and other programs, the one things that most churches could mostly easily do to help develop discipled, discipling disciples would be to initiate and put an intentional focus on small group Christianity.

Defining the expectation of church members to include small groups will do at least the following—

- Give members a meaningful fellowship experience with more intimate relationships that are capable of focusing on spiritual matters (maturing disciples)
- Give members more opportunities to share their personal faith and to develop gifts (equipping disciples)
- Increase involvement of the members in other activities (involved disciples)
- Give members more opportunities to share the gospel with friends and family (developing disciples who disciple others)
- Help members learn to develop spiritual practices in the context of a spiritual family unit (growing disciples)
- Help the church assimilate new members effectively so that new disciples are discipled