

Reformed University Fellowship

Training Disciples Conference

How People Think and Feel and Learn

I. Apprenticeship – People learn most by being with you. They learn most by seeing what it means to follow Christ through you and then doing it. I have a two year old daughter and it is remarkable to me how much she simply imitates me. If I'm writing with a pen, she wants to write; a pencil won't do, she has to have a pen. Yet it is amazing and at times frightening how much she has learned this way.

A. Being – This is why being is crucial. People *do* learn by imitating whether we like it or not. So I would suggest the maxim, like leader, like follower. Our follower will become like us. Let me illustrate. On one of our campuses the leaders noticed a woeful lack of evangelism and came to the conclusion something had to be done about it. What do you think they did? What do we usually do about it? That's right. We have another meeting and give another talk about evangelism and exhort the saints to get out there and preach it. What happened? Did they disciple the Christians on that campus? Yes!! They disciplined them to be just like them – to get up and talk about evangelism without doing it. You see, we cannot take people where we have not been. We cannot lead further than we are. We cannot pass on grace we have not received. I'm afraid what we so often do when we talk without doing is that we drive people and whip them rather than leading them.

To ask someone to do what we have not is contradictory to leading. Rather we should be trailblazers, out in front of the pack responding to more and more of God's demands, taking hold of more and more of his grace.

Therefore, the most crucial question is, what do I need to be? Where do I need to respond to the King's demands and grace? And the most important plan for discipling is to respond more totally to Christ's word. I would suggest discipling is 95% character and only a little skill. If you are godly and full of love for Christ and His cause, your followers will become likewise.

B. Imitating the Master-craftsman – Following the master-craftsman involves doing what he does and thus learning the trade. People learn most by doing. In fact, we cannot truly know Christ's demands and grace until we respond to them by doing. Doing what the master-craftsman does is the other side of the coin. The master-craftsman *is* master of his craft and the apprentice *imitates* him. The learning pyramid illustrates how crucial doing is. Studies have shown how much we remember through various types of input. We can illustrate this with a learning pyramid.

We remember very little of what we hear, a little more of what we see and hear, and a good bit more of things we see dramatized. But we begin to learn much more as we become more involved by role playing and most of all by actually doing and experiencing something directly. This shows how crucial it is that people act on God's truth. Therefore, it is imperative that people be in situations that demand action and call for response to truth. When placed in a stretching situation, they can learn God's provision. How will this happen? By our doing God's word and calling people to join us and imitate us in doing it. We must be trailblazers pursuing God and His kingdom so that anyone who joins us has to begin to *do* it to stay with us.

Some may object that such imitation does not allow room for individuality. Shouldn't we just teach principles and not impose *our* methodology? But very few learn just from principles. Most of us need much more. This should be clear from the learning pyramid. People need to see principles fleshed out so that they can vicariously do them and then do those same things themselves. I would suggest that we must be willing to do the foreign method that doesn't seem to fit our personality until we understand the principles and then we can begin to adapt those principles to our own unique individuality if we need to.

C. Being with Us – Kinds of time – All the above means that people learn just by being with us as we seek to follow God. I would suggest that they need to be with us when possible in all different kinds of time. Only this way can they learn how to integrate seeking Christ's kingdom with all of life like eating, sleeping, studying and working as well as Bible study, prayer, and reaching out to others. The disciples were with Christ when he did all these things. I would suggest the following categories:

1. structured time – time for planned Bible study, prayer, evangelism, etc.

2. with me time – unstructured time for person and me to be together in the midst of life – having person over for couple days, etc.
3. casual time – time for recreation, play and fun together.
4. work time – time to actually work on some job together – fixing a roof, organizing a picnic, etc.
5. crisis time – this is emergency time when we are tested by some unexpected situation. We cannot plan this kind of time.

II. Scripture – People learn as we bring God’s word to them. We spent a good bit of time on this this morning because it is at the heart of all we are and do as Christians in making disciples. The Gospel includes all of Biblical truth. It is all God’s demands and all his miraculous grace to meet those demands. Thus we saw how it is essential to do two things: 1) come with a word from God – “Thus saith the Lord...” and 2) train people to study Scripture effectively and regularly for themselves. Let me explain further the positive difference these two things will make.

First, coming with a word from Scripture. Have you ever tried over and over again to tell a person to do evangelism and they just don’t budge or even resist you? Perhaps they say we should only live the life so people will ask us. That’s what evangelism means. If you try to argue, it’s just your word against theirs. But if you go to Scripture and show how Christ evangelized, the person can see Jesus saying it instead of you and can respond with less resistance. On the other hand, some people get into an IV group and get turned on for the Lord and do lots of things for him because everyone else is doing it. But when they leave the fellowship for a secular job and local church, they don’t go right on plugging in some of the very principles that made the IV fellowship so exciting – like small groups and discipleship partnerships, etc. Their Christian life and service go stale instead of helping their local church to move into greater truth. Why? Because the person never saw principles in Scripture so that he felt compelled to do them because “thus saith the Lord...” But when we help people to see that it is Jesus who calls them to do these things, then they will be able to continue and pass on more to others so that there’s progress in the church.

You see, we are always to have mediated relationships with people, not unmediated relationships. What do I mean? I mean that we are never to call people to respond to us, to obey us, to trust us, etc. Rather we are always to hold Christ out to them by speaking his word to them so that they respond to Christ’s demands and not mine, so that they rest in Christ’s miraculous grace and Word not mine. I do not have authority to demand allegiance only to show the way. I don’t have the grace to enable another person to meet Christ’s impossible demands, only Christ does. I must bring the person to Christ through giving him Christ’s word so that he can have his needs met.

Second, training others in quiet time. As we said before, when we’ve gotten a person to come regularly to Scripture to dig out God’s truth and respond, we’ve gotten the whole person. He has a lifestyle of responding to Christ as Lord by responding to what Christ says. All other areas of discipleship will flow from this. All we can do then is speed up the process. But this is important: we can speed up each other’s growth because we can help others “see” Biblical truth where we’ve begun to see it and they haven’t. We “see” it because we’ve responded and experienced it, but they haven’t seen it because they’ve never experienced it. Thus we can help them in that area because I understand a little more of God’s demands and grace. Now what difference will it make for the person I’m discipling to have a lifestyle of effective quiet time? A big difference!! He will have a habit of seeking God’s truth and responding to it. Thus when he hears more of God’s truth through me, it will be natural to respond to it. There’s not much greater we can do for a person than help him have a lifestyle of effective quiet time.

III. God’s Grace and Prayer – People learn as God supernaturally empowers them to respond to his word. We cannot make disciples; God does. This means two things:

1) we must always make God’s demands clear enough so that the person realizes he can only respond by God’s grace and we must keep pointing the person to God’s great miraculous grace. Let me suggest further that God’s grace comes in at every point even in the process of my speaking God’s message to another person. It is God’s grace that has enabled me to respond to his word so that I have any word to pass on. It’s his grace that moves and empowers me to speak, and it is only his grace that empowers the person to respond.

2) therefore, secondly, I must pray for God’s supernatural grace. People will learn as we pray for them.

IV. Love – People learn as we care for them. When people know we care for them and want their best good, they are freed up to listen and learn. They feel helped rather than attacked. A few years ago at Hopkins, I began working with a student named Dave M. As we would meet, I sought to find out how he was doing in quiet time, in witnessing and other areas. But I always felt Dave resisting me. I would come away worn out from another round. Finally one day, I gave up trying to work on anything with Dave and just opened my heart to Dave and told him how I longed for his good, how I longed for him to know God and give himself totally to Him. I told him everything I had done was for this reason and not to put him down. From that day on, Dave and I became close friends. Why? Because Dave knew that I loved him and he began to be able to listen and in fact, he wanted to seek Christ.

We need to be clear however that there is a great difference between a feeling of affection for someone and a *will* to love them. You see, in America we are trained to equate love with feeling. How do we rate romantic love? By the degree of feelings. We're always taking the temperature of the relationship. In the beginning, we say, "I like you". As things go further we say, "I like you a lot ". Then as our feelings get stronger, we say, "I love you," until finally we're "in love", "we can't live without the person", etc. and the top is blown off the thermometer and we "know" it's forever. What is happening? We have found someone we enjoy very much and we want them for ourselves – we can't live without them. They make us feel good. This is a reciprocal love. We love them for what they do for me.

But what happens if the negative begins to outweigh the positive? I no longer *feel* love. And today half the marriages crack up.

Loving each other is an act of the will. It is a deliberate seeking of the other's best good irregardless of any return to me. Thus true Biblical love is a supernatural love that only comes through new birth (I John 4) and which even enables me to love my enemies. This means I can truly care for those I disciple, sacrifice for them, and stick with them.

V. Listening – People learn as we listen to them. Listening is really just an aspect of true caring and love. There are several reasons we must be good listeners.

1. We won't know what the other person needs if we don't listen. To find out what a person needs demands that we listen with our heart as well as our minds. It demands that we listen actively – asking questions seeking to truly understand the person. Some of us need to talk less and listen more to find out what a person really needs.
2. The person can't believe we understand if we don't listen long enough. I'm an analytical, principle man and I am intense. This means that I often see a person's need before they do and because I'm intense I want to deal with it right now and get on to the next thing. But God is teaching me that I must take time with people and listen until I've heard all they need to say so they are convinced I do understand.
3. Listening convinces people we care. Why? Simple. We have to care to listen. People instinctively know that. So few people really listen that we know someone cares when they listen. Let me read an excellent quote by a Christian psychiatrist which gives five more reasons for listening.

An important part of being a friend is to be a good listener. The bridges of friendship are not one way. Traffic should move in both directions and you must *make it easy for your friend to talk*.

1. Intentional purposeful listening will help you accomplish several important things. First of all, it gives your friend a *chance to unload*. When he unburdens himself of an emotional accumulation to a sympathetic and understanding listener, he experiences a great sense of *relief*. Even though the airing of his problem may not bring a solution any nearer, he will be grateful for a chance to relieve the pressure by talking about it.
2. However when your friend has spread out his problem for you to look at, he *sees it in much better* perspective himself. Even while he is talking about it, there may be flashes of insight that will help him unravel the tangles.
3. When someone lays out a problem before you, he is tacitly *giving you an invitation to help* him solve it. Such a confidence is a compliment to you, for it indicates that he believes he can trust you, and thinks you may be able to help him with something he can't solve. You should hold such a confidence closely; you cannot expect to be a confidant unless you keep such matters in trust. As a Christian, the receiving of such confidences bring you high privilege; it opens the way for you to speak of what Christ can do for your friend. You'll get many more such chances if you are a good

listener!!

4. Another value of listening: the sharing of a problem gives your friend occasion to *put a load* on the interpersonal bridge. If he finds it strong enough to carry heavy traffic, your mutual friendship *becomes strengthened for further sharing*.
5. You will *get a better hearing* in speaking to your friend...when he has had a chance to talk first and unload his own burden. A person who is dying to say something is a poor listener, for he is just waiting for an opening to wedge in another installment of *his* story. If you give him a chance to get all out of his system, he'll be ready to give you a turn.

People grow as we listen to them.

VI. Vulnerability – People learn when we openly share ourselves and our struggles. Many of you are feeling that you fall so far short of being the kind of person who could make godly disciples. The demands are overwhelming! Impossible! You're afraid to have anyone follow you because of how far short you fall. Good! Let them know it.

You see, it's not we who make disciples in the final analysis, it's Christ. Only he has the grace to enable a person to follow him. As we take Christ's demands seriously and admit where we haven't arrived yet and trust Christ's grace we can really help people. We need to be vulnerable so that our weaknesses and failures show. Why? so that they can trust us and learn God's grace.

They can trust us because they know we too struggle and can feel with them. We're not so far ahead that they feel we can't understand or that there's no hope for them.

Second, we pass on a trust in God's grace when we can be honest and say we've blown it in some area. And that means it is sin and demands judgment. But we rest in Christ because we know he has paid the awful penalty for sin. Thus the person learns to rest in God's forgiving grace. We must not lower God's standards to make them possible or we'll never know God's grace and we'll deceive ourselves. Rather as we honestly call sin sin and realize there is no small sin, but that all sin could only be paid for by the crushing of Christ; as we do this we see how great and how free is God's grace. We are able to rest in such costly, immovable love.

Also by being vulnerable and not lowering the standards, we pass on God's supernatural empowering grace. We admit that we too are too weak to meet God's high demands and that we too desperately need God's grace to make it next time. And as we move on to trust God in this tough area, people we're discipling begin to see that God will always change us and empower us through his grace.

Don't be afraid of vulnerability. When we cover up we only imply that God's standards really aren't that high after all. But when we're open, casting ourselves on God's grace, others begin to see how great and sufficient is God's forgiving and trusting grace.

How can we be vulnerable like this? By wanting Christ's interests so much that we are careless about our own. When we want to please Christ more than all else, we won't care about other's impressions. We'll want others help and will humbly accept it, because we want to grow. We won't need to hide.

VII. Their Pace – People learn as we go at their pace. We cannot expect others to grow at our pace or at anyone else's. We must not compare them. To do so implies that their worth depends on achieving like someone else. But they may be different and have different gifts and personality. I only help people by helping them respond to Christ's objective standards rather than subjective comparison with others.

Also Christ is full of patience and perseverance with us. So we must be with others. To give up and quit because a person doesn't grow as fast as we'd like is to imply to that person that Christ is displeased or impatient and it may crush him. Whereas, if I'm full of patience and hopefulness the person can trust me and grow faster.

There is a difference between slow growth and no growth. If a person repeatedly refuses to respond to Christ's word through me, then I'm robbing someone else who wants to grow. Also, if I stick with such a person I'm hurting him by saying by my actions that he really doesn't have to obey Christ. He can have

Christ as Savior and not as Lord. This gives a hint as to how to go at a person's pace. We come with Scripture and see how the person responds. If he responds, we move right on. If not, we spend more time or even back up and simplify. The key is that we move at the pace at which a person responds to Christ's word. We need to stay just a little ahead to stretch people – to help them take the next step of faith. But we must not go too far ahead lest we cause too much fear and the person gives up hope.

On the other hand, a person eager to grow may take off like a weed and we have to run to keep ahead. With such a person we need to give truth as fast as they'll take it so they'll be stretched and see the excitement of knowing Christ. Also they will quickly begin to help others and you've multiplied the workers. Besides, this person may begin to teach you all sorts of things.

So people grow as we go at their own pace.

Summary – How then do people think and feel and learn?

People learn most by just being with those who are godly and doing what they do. People learn through apprenticeship. There is no magic method. We must simply be godly followers of Christ committed to his mission and take others with us. Second, people learn as we give them God's word and help them to study it for themselves. Third, people learn as we trust in and lay hold of God's grace in prayer. Only God's power changes people. Fourth, people learn as we simply love them, stick with them, long for them, hope in them and sacrificially serve them. Fifth, people learn as we listen to them which most basically expresses love and enables them to open up to us. Sixth, people grow as we are vulnerable to them so that they can trust us and learn God's grace through us. And lastly, people learn as we go at their pace so that they are stretched, but not crushed. In the final analysis all these are aspects of simply *being* Christ-like. So again, the essence of discipling is *being* a godly disciple full of Christ's demands and grace in Gospel and than taking others with us.

– David English
~ 1976