

Discipleship: “Life Transfer”

By Bob Young

“Holistic small groups are the natural place for Christians to learn to serve others—both inside and outside the group—with their spiritual gifts. The planned multiplication of small groups is made possible through the continual development of leaders as a by-product of the normal group life. The meaning of the term ‘discipleship’ becomes practical in the context of holistic small groups: the transfer of life, not rote learning of abstract concepts.” (*Natural Church Development*, Christian Schwarz, p. 32).

The church is talking about discipleship. I am glad! I receive emails asking me to define discipleship. Several have asked me to teach a class focused on biblical discipleship. What is the difference between evangelism and discipleship? What does it mean to be a disciple? What is the difference between being a Christian and being a disciple?

The last sentence in the Schwarz quote helps us wrap our minds around the biblical idea of discipleship. Discipleship involves “life transfer.” Disciples are made by disciples. Disciples who are committed to making more disciples learn and practice the skill of “life transfer.” The new life that is initiated in baptism must then be shaped and fashioned by teaching, time together, mentoring, modeling, and sharing life. “Life transfer” occurs most simply when people interact and spend time together. Spiritual life transfer requires that the time spent together provide opportunities for shared spirituality.

A mature discipleship may learn how to experience “life transfer” in personal relationship with Jesus – learning Jesus’ will, spending time with Jesus, knowing Jesus’ word and will, knowing Jesus. But that is not the way discipleship begins.

Read Matthew 28:18-20. Making disciples involves baptism “plus.” I rejoice when people are baptized because the door has been opened for future spiritual and faith development. I also know that a person who is baptized but whose life is unchanged is worse off than before (2 Pet. 2:20-22). A person who is baptized without “life transfer” that leads to life change, characterized by new commitments to worship, relationships, service, and shared body life in community of believers has gotten physically wet without changing the spiritual condition. Such a one has washed the exterior without washing the interior.

Making disciples involves baptism and teaching – new life in Christ must be followed by life transfer!