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How to Solve the Church Discipleship Dilemma

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In practical terms, this article may be one of the most important that I have ever written. It addresses a problem and offers a solution to one of the churches' most fundamental struggles in modern society.

There is a lot of talk these days about the need to strengthen discipleship training in churches. Most Christians simply do not have the knowledge and skills to effectively deal with all of the false beliefs, societal turmoil, and overt persecution that is being thrown out at them. At the same time, implementing that kind of training in our churches remains one of the most elusive things to actually pull off. There are numerous reasons for the difficulty. Among the most prominent is a dearth of comprehensive resources to do the job, and it seems that it is increasingly difficult to find the time (both in the church program and in people's individual lives) to pull off something like that.

But there is a way to do it – one that doesn't require a massive restructuring of a church program. It does, though, require a different way of thinking about discipleship training. But once a church buys into this new perspective, discipleship training miracles will happen.

You may be aware that there have been various companies over the last couple of decades that have been genuine disruptors in their industries – companies that have caused radical change in an existing market because of an innovation that was always a possibility, but no one saw it until the disruptor came along. The amazing thing

about these innovations is that once they were implemented, the concept seems so obvious that people wonder why no one ever thought of it before. And once people see it, they can't unsee it. Companies such as Tesla in the auto industry, Airbnb in the vacation rental arena, Amazon in the retail market, Netflix in the streaming video space, and Uber in the taxi industry immediately come to mind. The approach I am suggesting here for the church has the potential to have that kind of transformative impact on the Christian discipleship ministry of the local church – and by extension, all of society.

This approach is based on a worldview paradigm. It is a way of systematically incorporating ALL of the essential core Christian discipleship elements into a church's already existing programs in a way that doesn't require restructuring or endless classes. It involves helping church members grasp this transformative discipleship approach (that they won't be able to unsee after they get it), then taking that mindset and applying it in the already existing programs and activities of the church. Doing this will, literally, transform the church into a lay seminary – a place where Christians will be equipped to become transformative agents of Christ out in the world.

Foundational Training – The Starting Point

In order to pull this off, there is one piece of the puzzle that will have to be added new to the church program. It is not an ongoing program, however. It is an orientation into the worldview mindset and methodology. Once these principles are grasped, they can be applied in every part of the already existing church operation. It is as simple as that.

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What Does the Foundation Consist Of?

Perhaps this all sounds a little too good to be true. After all, churches have been trying to pull off something like this forever. What, exactly, are these principles that make this approach different?

1. Understanding the Worldview Concept

The word "worldview" is kind of interesting in itself. In fact, for most people, the word almost seems to self-define. It is the way people view the world, right? Well, that is not totally false, but it is also rather incomplete.

A worldview is technically defined as the assumptions people make about the nature of reality. Or put another way, it is the unconscious beliefs that people hold that defines what they understand to be real vs. what they believe to be fantasy. Everyone has a set of worldview beliefs, but, in truth, most people could not define them if they had to. After all, if you believe something is fantasy, you would not even entertain the idea that it should be taken seriously.

And this expresses precisely what is happening massively in our world today. We hear people expressing beliefs that seem, to us, totally absurd, and we wonder how in the world they could possibly believe them. We see this prominently in politics, people's views of sexual morality, race relations, public education, and in many other areas. At the same time, those people you think have fantasy beliefs ... they are thinking the same thing about you. This is the bridge we have to cross to effectively express the gospel in our modern world.

2. The Core Elements of a Worldview Paradigm

The essential core of every religion, cult, and philosophy in existence can be analyzed and

compared by answering three simple questions:

- What is the nature of ultimate reality? (Belief about God)
- What is a human being? (Belief about man)
- What is the ultimate a person can achieve in this life and how can it be achieved? (Belief about salvation).

Every belief system answers these three questions in its own unique way. It is true for our own Christian faith as well as every other belief out there. When it comes to the Christian faith, we get our answers to the questions from the Bible. Other beliefs have different authority sources that provide entirely different answers to the questions.

3. Making Worldview Beliefs Conscious

As long as those underlying beliefs (our own and others) remain unconscious, it is impossible to even begin solving the problems Christians face as they try to express their Christian faith in society. Thus, the key to implementing this worldview paradigm is to first make worldview beliefs conscious. When this is done, the very concept of faith opens up in a way that before would have never even been considered. This is where the disruption of our traditional way of thinking comes into play. We make worldview beliefs conscious by coming to a concrete understanding of worldview concepts.

Application of the Foundational Training

Once the paradigm is understood, the worldview principles can be inserted into every part of the church program. With that insertion, everything the church does will begin to clearly, deliberately, and consciously express a biblical worldview.

One of the problems almost every church runs into as it operates, is that, in spite of the fact that what is being taught and expressed is an expression

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of the Christian faith, the operation becomes mechanical. We get so good at "doing church" that we can keep the organization running and the programs going even as the spiritual heart of the body gets sucked out – we do it entirely unconsciously. What we have to always keep before us is that the Christian faith is not the operation of an institution, but a personal interaction with a personal God who has adopted us into His family. Sadly, coming to take that for granted is a hazzard all churches face.

To be sure, adopting a worldview paradigm does not guarantee that this won't happen. It does, however, keep the object of our faith (a personal God) before us in every aspect of the church's programs and activities.

So just how does this get applied to the various programs and activities of the church? Let's look for just a moment at the most prominent ways this would work.

1. *Preaching* - When it comes to preaching, it is mostly the pastor who has to make this idea work within his sermons. This does not require a change of preaching style, nor does it proscribe particular content. What it does require is that in the course of preparing and preaching his sermons, the preacher must become consciously aware of and express the answers to the worldview questions that are embedded in the Scripture passage he is dealing with. That's all. This puts the worldview beliefs directly from the Bible into people's consciousness. As an added bonus, if the congregation is trained in the worldview paradigm, they will pick it up as the pastor preaches and understand the message at a deeper depth.

2. *Bible Study Program* - In order to apply worldview principles to a Bible study program, it is not neces-

sary to change literature or teaching style. However, the teacher or leader of the class must also include an explanation of how the passage of Scripture being studied answers the three essential worldview questions. And as was mentioned about preaching above, if the members of the class are up to speed in their understanding the worldview paradigm, they will easily pick up the teaching and understand in greater depth the Bible passage being studied. By the way, this can also be applied by individuals in their own personal devotional study of Scripture.

3. *Evangelism* - Many people struggle to know exactly how to share the gospel message with others – particularly with people who believe other religions. But it all comes into focus when looking at it using a worldview paradigm. Every gospel presentation method in existence has its own unique way of explaining the gospel message, but it will never be anything more than giving the answer to the three essential worldview questions based on what is taught in the Bible. Understanding the worldview paradigm gives profound insights into what needs to be addressed when sharing the gospel.

4. *Apologetics* - Typically, people think of apologetics only as the process of answering people's questions and objections to the Christian faith. Certainly it includes that, but there is way more to it. Those who question or attack the Christian faith, do so based on the beliefs of their own worldview foundation. By making those aggressors share how they answer the three essential worldview questions based on their authority source, we can immediately grasp where they are coming from. From there, we can legitimately make them defend their answers before we need to feel compelled to acquiesce to their be-

lief assumptions. This puts us on equal footing with them as we explore the various objections they might throw out.

5. Understanding Other Religions - Every religion, cult, and philosophy in existence is built upon the platform of one of four possible worldview categories. We get at their essential core beliefs by coming to understand how they answer the three essential worldview questions. Of course, each belief system (religion, cult, or philosophy) will have many of its own unique beliefs and doctrines, but the essential core will ALWAYS correspond to those of its worldview foundation. Knowing this information allows us to immediately understand the core beliefs of any faith system, along with the ability to have an intelligent discussion about faith matters with any person.

6. Living the Christian Life - The Christian life is not simply a matter of knowing Christian beliefs and doctrine. It is the living out of a life that is continually being transformed to conform to the image of Christ as we live life in a vital, personal relationship with Him, day-in-and-day-out. This represents the "sanctification" element of the salvation process (one element of the core essentials of a biblical worldview). We come to know what that looks like as we read God's revelation (the Bible) and live our lives based on its teachings.

Bottom Line

Obviously, it is impossible in an article of this length to go into any kind of depth concerning the worldview paradigm. What we have been able to do here, however, is to give a big picture understanding of what it looks like, and how it is possible to solve the discipleship training dilemma that is present in virtually every church. The details of this solution will look slightly different in each church, but every one can use this methodology to provide profoundly in-depth Christian discipleship training to virtually all of their members all of the time. It is my earnest prayer that you will find here keys to revitalizing the discipleship training efforts in your church.

[And let me offer you one more possibility. The very purpose of **MarketFaith Ministries** is to provide training and resources to churches to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." On the **MarketFaith Ministries** website, at www.marketfaith.org, you will find tons of worldview resources related to all the things discussed in this article. Additionally, it would be our great joy to work with you individually in order to explore how to most effectively apply these principles in your church. To explore this possibility further, feel free to contact us at info@marketfaith.org.]

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