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The Discipleship Mirage - Part 3 ***Creating a Disruptor***

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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.

In the American church, a tradition has also built up over the years that provides the framework for how things are done. Different denominations may have slightly different ways of doing certain things, and occasionally new innovations emerge, but even with that the basic approach is still the same. For instance, different churches, or denominations, have different organizational structures, but every structure supports a fairly standard set of practices. And even though various churches have different worship styles, they all generally approach worship services in quite similar ways. Even churches that have different demographics generally have the same essential program structure.

Traditional Approach

As we look at church programming, pretty much all churches have certain elements that they

include. They will generally all at least aspire to having a worship service, a Bible study program, a prayer program, age group programs, men's and women's programs, and discipleship training programs. Where there are differences, it is usually the result of the demographic makeup of the church. And even those that are not able to support particular programming elements would if they were able. Some of the programming might happen weekly, some monthly, or even just periodically, but these are the kinds of programs that typically exist in most churches.

As a general rule, the program that gets the least traction is the discipleship training program. The reasons for this are multi-faceted, but perhaps it can best be explained by noting that the ones most attended get the most attention, while those with the least participation are less emphasized. As a result, the worship service gets the most attention, while discipleship training tends to get the least.

A New Paradigm

While there is nothing inherently wrong with the traditional approach, it does have certain limitations. Those limitations are alluded to in the explanation above, but they tend to be primarily determined by the amount of participation they garner. And in most cases, the most dramatic place where a weakness shows up is in the discipleship training arena. This says nothing, of course, about the relative importance of the smaller programs. Obviously it is extremely important for believers to be trained in ways that are not easily dealt with in the other programs. But the reality is the reality.

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This brings us to identify exactly what is being missed when discipleship training is not able to be fully dealt with in the church programming. What exactly should be covered by discipleship training efforts that are not comprehensively dealt with in the other programming?

As we look at this, it is important to point out that the things mentioned here are not completely ignored in other programming. There is, certainly a lot of overlap. Virtually every pastor, Bible study teacher, and the leaders of other programs will touch on the discipleship training topics in various ways and at various times. However, there is generally no way to deal with them in a comprehensive way outside of the kind of deliberate and concentrated effort that is possible in a discipleship training course.

So what topics are we looking at specifically?

Christian Doctrine

The truth is, Christian doctrine is, in some way, dealt with every time a person studies Scripture. This occurs in the pastor's sermons, in Bible study classes, and in every other venue where the Bible is being taught. However, these opportunities are virtually never systematic. As a result, over a long period of time, believers will receive teaching about the various Christian doctrines. But without a systematic treatment, it is very difficult for most people to mentally organize it in a way that allows them to have a solid grasp of the core essential beliefs of their Christian faith, as well as how to apply this in other areas of their Christian life.

Evangelism

Most Christians recognize the importance of sharing their faith with those who don't know Christ. The Bible is quite clear that we should

do this. That said, most Christians could not systematically do it even if someone walked up and asked them to explain how to become a Christian. This kind of training almost demands a special discipleship training effort.

Apologetics

Christian apologetics is the effort believers make to back up the authenticity of their faith. Sometimes this is done in the context of answering people's genuine questions as they seek to understand the Christian faith. At other times it comes into play when antagonists seek to attack our faith. In order to deal with whatever situation comes up, believers need to be able to address the questions.

When people have genuine questions, the answers are found in the Bible. Thus, Christians need to have training to pick up on the questions and know how to answer them. When people are attacking, we need to know how to respond on two levels. First, we need to know answers related to our own faith, but we also need to be able to spot and exploit the weaknesses of the beliefs of the antagonist. The kind of knowledge needed to address these issues needs special discipleship training.

Bible Study

Most churches have a dedicated Bible study program such as Sunday school or perhaps a home group study. There is, certainly, much good to be said about these Bible study opportunities. But even with this there will be gaps depending on the particular literature being used for the study. One of the more common gaps is the difficulty in discerning how the various passages being studied express the core beliefs of a biblical worldview. There needs to be a thread that ties all of Scripture together that is often never even considered. There is a way to incorporate that unifying thread into a Bible study opportunity using a worldview paradigm.

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It should be noted that using this paradigm is helpful not only for group Bible study opportunities, but individuals, as they study the Bible in their personal devotions, can also greatly benefit from this approach. Once the concept is understood, it becomes almost automatic.

Understanding Other Religions

Understanding the core beliefs of other religions can sometimes be rather confusing. The main reason for this is that, most of the time the entire underlying belief structure is so different from our Christian beliefs that it seems totally illogical and unbelievable. Yet people believe them. As such, not only when we wish to share a witness to one of these people, but even when we just want to interact as friends, the lack of understanding gets in the way. For this reason, it is very important for Christians to make the effort to gain this understanding. This also generally requires some kind of dedicated discipleship training effort.

Not New – Just a Different Perspective on the Old

The actual material that Christians need to learn in the process of discipleship training is nothing new. In fact, much of the New Testament was written for the very purpose of providing this kind of knowledge for the new Christians in the early church. So what we are looking at here is not new material – it is just a new way

to approach the delivery of the material.

While the material that Christians need to grasp has not changed, the societal context we are immersed in has changed dramatically over the last several generations. And with this changed context, Christians must deal with beliefs and influences that did not used to exist in America. With that changed context, it has become essential to also change the way we deliver our discipleship training. In saying this, we are not talking only about programmatic changes (though there is an element of that, as well), we must also address the scope of our training. Before we only needed to consider basic Christian beliefs. In our modern societal context, we need to also understand the changed belief environment that we now live in.

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The worldview discipleship approach being shared here has the potential to have a transformative impact on the Christian discipleship ministry of the local church – and by extension, all of society. We live in a culture where, for most people, the truth is a mirage. And because of that, our traditional approach to discipleship training has created a parallel discipleship training mirage. It is now time to disperse that mirage.

Up Next: An Introduction to Christian Worldview Discipleship Training