

One-on-One Discipling: One Pastors Approach

Alliance pastor, Rev. John Janney, makes discipling men a key component of his ministry. C&MA Men's Disciplemaking (MD) recently interviewed Pastor Janney regarding his approach to discipling men.

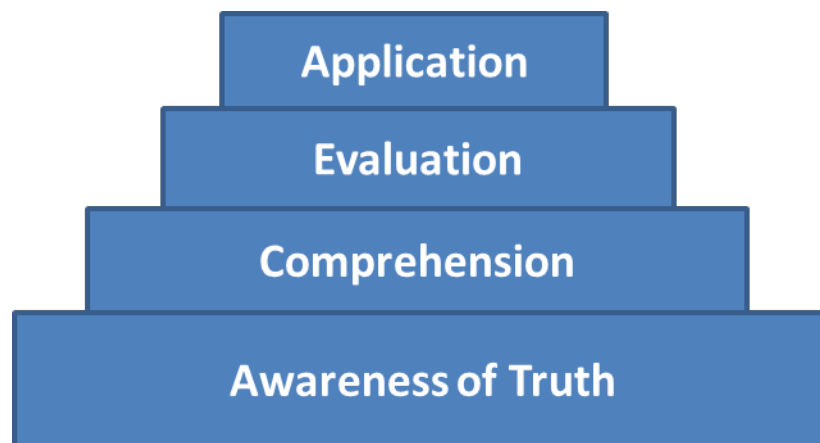
MD - If I understand correctly, you disciple a few men in the church at a time and then send them on to disciple other men.

PASTOR JANNEY – Generally this is true, with this exception: I encourage men to disciple others, but ask them to consider discipling their wives and teens/older children first--strengthening the home and beginning to invest on-going discipleship across both genders. I do not, ever, disciple a woman outside of our immediate family. Thus, if this pattern (and method) is to spread well through our church, it needs to be family centered. Truthfully, however, to this point, I've personally disciplined 13 men, one of whom moved to Florida before we finished our process. Of the remaining 12--at least to my knowledge--only four have undertaken to disciple another. Of that 12, one is on the mission field and four others--including the one above--have moved out of the area. Thus, the practical, on-going results in the church are still to be played out. However, the four of whom I am certain have undertaken to disciple others, all are still here. More realistically, however, my pastoral mentor--who developed the 'method' that I use--told me years ago that only a portion of those disciplined will ever have the sense/call to disciple others. Thus, while there is a small paper back 'text book' that forms the skeleton of what is done, framed around the book of John, I do not give a book to a man I've disciplined until after he has selected a disciple and they have actually planned their first meeting. (Note: the book to which Pastor Janney referred is no longer in print.)

MD - What priority do you give to discipling men?

PASTOR JANNEY – In terms of time and on an on-going basis, this comes in second, behind message preparation. In terms of heart orientation, this is my top priority. In America today, if men are to live anything like a victorious Christian life, they need much more than preaching. They need someone who will love them enough to get 'into' their spiritual lives, find out where the needs are, and direct the person to the Lord through the scripture. Then there is real hope that the man will be able to be the true spiritual head of the home and, where appropriate, true spiritual leaders in his church.

Some further clarification: I see a hierarchy of development in a person's life. It would look somewhat like an Aztec 'pyramid':



Hierarchy of Spiritual Development

Even in my own life, and observably in the lives of others, there is a pattern to spiritual growth, beginning with the awareness of truth. ("You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free!") After that, a person begins to gain an apprehension/comprehension of truth, etc.

My observation is that people in America rarely go beyond the apprehension stage.

If you ask about truth--as a teacher would on a test--they can give the right - Sunday school answer. But, if you inquire more deeply into how that truth is actually permeating their lives, the gap is enormous. This study is designed to move a person through the basic teachings of the Christian life and insists that the person apply the truths. (In fact, in a former church, I simply stopped meeting with a man because he was not carrying out the 'homework' assignments. And we never finished the process because he would not commit to do what was assigned. And I would do the same today in a heart-beat.) This is not about gaining knowledge; it is about elevating a spiritual life.

MD – How do you start?

PASTOR JANNEY – After being here for about four months, and having time to pray about and evaluate our men, I simply invited two men to begin to meet with me--individually-- for a maximum of 13 'sessions'. Usually, with schedule conflicts, etc., this expands over a four-month period of time. Thus, it generally 'works' that I have three 'seasons' of discipling each year. And I do try to work with men co-incidentally, so that I'm not at the beginning of one study with one man, in the middle with a second, and toward the end with a third. (But, also, truthfully, I've found that I cannot personally disciple well more than two men co-incidentally. The time in prayer and preparation, and in the actual discipling, plus the spiritual battle that intensifies during the process, means that my limit is no more than two simultaneously.) But, plainly, I just started. That is, I made no fanfare, no public announcement, no broad-based invitations, I simply began discipling men.

MD – Whom did you select to disciple?

PASTOR JANNEY – Not to over-spiritualize, because there was some human thought/deliberation in this: but, primarily, I simply sought the Lord concerning who would be the most likely reproducers, and then approached the men individually. A few declined at first, and some have uniformly declined to this day. But, generally, the vast majority has welcomed the opportunity when invited.

I'll also admit a tendency to disciple younger men (28 - 35/40), primarily because they are in the formative years of their families and they will have the longer and greater impact for the Kingdom. Just recently, however, a man in retirement asked me to disciple him. His heart is so very genuine that I will begin with him on the next cycle. But that would not be my pattern.

MD – Why do you disciple the men individually?

PASTOR JANNEY - I approach discipling as a spiritual life study—asking in-depth, personal questions about where a man actually 'is' in his spiritual life--what are his struggles/failures/'besetting sins', etc. Thus, it really does not lend itself to more than one-on-one. Few guys will be really vulnerable if a third guy is there to listen in.

My pastoral mentor did do some group discipling while we were in seminary. However, that focused more on the content, than on the actual spiritual needs. That is, it was taught more like a class, than like a discipleship. I'm fairly sure that he has not done anything like that in the intervening years. I've never felt that the objective involved in the process would be well-served in a group.

MD – You mentioned that you base discipling on the Book of John. How do you approach the study?

PASTOR JANNEY – Properly speaking, the study centers on the book of John. However, this is not a verse-by-verse study. It is a study of doctrine/provision--teaching about who God is, what he has done for us, and what he promises to do--and duty--what the disciple is to do in his life as a result of God's provision. Thus, in any given chapter, there are relatively few verses that are actually covered. Even then, I trust the Holy Spirit to guide me concerning which are most fruitful for this man, rather than simply trying to go through a system.

MD – Why thirteen sessions?

PASTOR JANNEY – Thirteen sessions, hard and fast. There must be a set beginning and end, not an 'apron string' between me and the disciple.

MD – How did you identify men for the second generation discipling?

PASTOR JANNEY – I don't do this. I guide 'my' disciples into how they should go about selecting another to disciple, and then trust the Lord to guide them.

MD – What were some of the lessons learned in your discipling ministry?

PASTOR JANNEY – The key is prayer and then trusting the spirit's guiding in questions and emphasis. Again, this is about identifying where the greatest spiritual needs are in a life, and then going to scripture to form the truth basis for spirit-guided uplift.

MD – What would you do differently in the future?

PASTOR JANNEY – Make more concerted effort to have monthly/bi-monthly follow-up meetings with those disciplined. One thing that I've not been able to effect--simply by virtue of the busyness of our men's schedules-- is to get the disciples together for mutual edification. I tried it once, with only two or three showing up. Thus, to this point, the second generation efforts are not nearly what I'd hoped for.

I do strongly believe that once the 13 sessions are done, the disciple needs to know that he is released...that this isn't a 'life sentence'. But I recognize more clearly that there needs to be more on-going contact than I have done deliberately. But--granting myself some grace, too--this is the first church in which I've done anywhere near this number of men--including the church where we ministered the longest. Thus, this is a relatively new experience for me, too. On the other hand--at least here--most of the men whom I've disciplined have moved into church leadership. Thus, generally, I have at least monthly contact with the vast majority, but in a functional/goal-oriented/ministry-oriented way.

MD – Thank you for sharing with us, Pastor Janney.

Testimony.

Serving as a missionary overseas, I see firsthand the importance of Godly leadership and a strong mentoring process. This series strengthened me in areas of doctrine, biblical accuracy, and other essentials for Christian growth. I recommend this study as it both challenges us spiritually and relationally. I pray it will become a tool for developing faithful men who in turn build up other men in Christ. Eric Eshbaugh, Africa Regional Media Consultant, Burkina Faso