

THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Connecting Chicago disciples with each other, the Midwest and the world

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The Apprenticeship of Christ

My wife, Tricia, and I are currently reading *The Great Omission*, the sequel to the 1997 bestseller, *The Divine Conspiracy*, written by Dallas Willard. This book has piqued my mind and caused me to review my walk with Christ as a disciple—or my “apprenticeship of Christ.” At a recent midweek in the Chicago Region, I asked people to respond to the following question: For the past few months, have you been under the apprenticeship of Christ as understood by the Scriptures? By their responses, I knew this material I was contemplating was spiritually relevant for them as well. So I would like to suggest a few ongoing criteria to evaluate our apprenticeship in light of the charge the risen Christ gave to His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matt. 28:18-20a)

The Great Omission

There is a huge crisis in Christianity today with those who call themselves Christians but who are not actually living as disciples of Christ. Most of the problem with these individuals lies in the absence of observing the will and mission of Jesus. This, Willard describes, is *The Great Omission*—“the governing assumption today, among professing Christians, that we can be ‘Christians’ forever and never become disciples.” The great omission from the great commission, he says, is not obedience to Christ, but discipleship, or apprenticeship to Him. “Through discipleship,” he says, “obedience will take care of itself.”

The Great Disparity

Ron Sider’s book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, revealed with statistical proof that divorce, spousal abuse and promiscuity among teens don’t differ much between professing Christians and the secular world. Willard has a name for these results, when people profess

Christ yet miss discipleship. He calls it *The Great Disparity*—“on one hand, the hope for life expressed in Jesus—found real in the Bible and in many shining examples from among His followers—and, on the other hand, the actual day to day behavior, inner life and social presence of most of those who now profess adherence to Him.” So in a recent meeting in the Chicago Region, we made a list of what apprenticeship of Christ should look

like, and we did the same for religion without Christ. Then we discussed how we would go about renewing our apprenticeship. There were many great responses such as this one: “To dig deep and study our Bible to get it right.” This individual was absolutely right. So let’s do some of that all-important Bible study at this point in the article.

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Bible Study #1

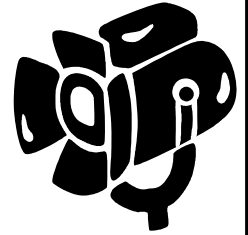
Examine the root and various forms of the word *disciple* as used in Scripture: The noun *mathetes* refers to “a learner” or one who accepts instruction, and appears roughly 250 times in the New Testament. (Matt. 11:2, Luke 5:33, John 3:25, 9:27) The verb *matheteuein* means “to be/become a disciple” or “to disciple” and appears in the Bible four times. (Matt. 13:52, 27:57, 28:18-20, Acts 14:21-22) The verb *manthano*, “to learn”, is used about 25 times, meaning “to learn with a moral bearing and responsibility.” (Matt. 9:13, 11:29, 24:32, John 6:45, Acts 23:27, Gal. 3:2, Phil. 4:9, Titus 3:1, Heb. 5:8) These terms indicate apprenticeship (or discipling) as “the voluntary instruction and learning process that leads to strengthening and joy that focuses on devotion to Jesus.” In short, apprenticeship is focused on strengthening our spiritual lives in the life of Christ.

Bible Study #2

One place in Scripture where being a strong apprentice of Christ is evident is when Peter and John were before the Sanhedrin: *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men*

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Ministry Spotlight



Southland: A Breakout Region

In the book, *Breakout Churches*, the author lists a number of factors that identify a church that has broken out of mediocrity and become a light on the hill. If the factors named in the book are indeed indicative of these positive changes, then the Southland Region is on the verge of being a breakout region! There has been tremendous change and repentance in the region during the past six months, and it is our goal to fulfill the stated vision for the Chicago Church in 2006—“*That every member’s spiritual fervor is evident and growing as God produces fruit in each house church.*” In this region spotlight, we are excited to share just a few examples of the different breakouts occurring in the Southland Region.

First, the women’s ministry is being ignited and called higher. We have recently begun a women’s Bible study series on Saturday mornings. And by the power of the Spirit, 50 women attended last week’s meeting! With a weekly time of worship and teaching, the women are becoming more and more committed to glorifying God in their personal lives.

Seeing a need for a powerful and growing men’s ministry, a *Thirteenth Warrior* group was also started. This group of men meets every week for a time of learning, confession, repentance and encouragement. The kingdom of God in Chicago needs strong spiritual men to lead God’s people in fulfilling our vision. With late night prayers, daily prayer requests from one another to offer up to God and a personal call to excellence, these men are beginning to fan the Spirit into flame in the Southland Region.

During the past year, we have also begun to ask the question about the relevance and attraction to visitors of our worship services. We live in a post-modern world that is different from the world many of us were converted in during the 1980s and early 1990s. In light of this, we have begun to work on different sermon series to attract the lost and inspire the disciples. Our first project was a five-week series based on the television show *CSI*, called, *CSI: Investigating Spiritual Relationships*. For five weeks, we dealt with the topic of discipling relationships in our region. Our video and

drama team filmed four episodes with the look and feel of the actual program. With clever innovation, we successfully communicated the “crimes” taking place in our spiritual relationships. Two months later, we began a four-week series entitled *Prison Break*, also based upon a popular television series. This eye-opening series dealt with the prisons we often find ourselves in but are unable to break out of without help. It has been really great to see how we can be relevant in our presentation of the gospel and help the saved and the lost draw closer to God.

All of these programs are simply tools to help us become a breakout region. Yet we understand that it is at the personal level that the greatest changes must occur, and house churches are a great tool to help bring that about in every disciple. And it has been very exciting to see the development of our house churches in the region. Every member is part of a dynamic house church which meets every week. By spending great time together, the disciples are beginning to get a vision for their own lives. A particular highlight among the small groups in the Southland Region is the *Deleon House Church*. This is a group that is formed of families who have teenage boys. And they are always together! After church, you will always find them barbequing and having great fellowship together, along with participating in some crazy dominos competition. The camaraderie in their house church is phenomenal and a model for all the other groups. The fathers often get together just to confess sin and talk about their lives and how best to raise their boys to love God. And they have already had one individual baptized into Christ and added to their pace-setting group! This group has thrown out all the excuses for not meeting together on a regular basis, and God is blessing their decisions.

As the year goes on, and as we move into the second half of 2006, we realize that we still have a lot of work to do to be the region God wants us to be for Him. But we feel faithful and hopeful that we are moving in a positive direction and that we are truly becoming a breakout region!

Mike Kwasniewski

Reviews and Previews

Eurasian Missions Update

Through this past Sunday, we've collected \$460,530 to support the work in Eurasia. This amount is 92% of our goal of \$500,000. **Thank you** for your generosity! Donations for this year's collection will be accepted through the end of July.

Youth Camp Underway

Two of our four youth camp sessions ended yesterday with the return of campers from Camp White Eagle and the Rock River Christian Camp. Beginning today is the annual Trip Camp for high school students and the Discover Camp for those who will be entering 5th and 6th grade.

Stewardship Update

The numbers that appear below represent the average weekly regular contribution and poor contribution for the Chicago Church that have been given for the first six months of 2006.

January.....	\$74,377
February.....	\$76,240
March.....	\$80,377
April.....	\$74,625
May.....	\$71,142
June.....	\$69,724

Thank you for your continued support! Let's continue to honor the Lord with our wealth. (**Proverbs 3:9-10**)

West Region Erik Svendsen

As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9:1-3)

"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." (John 9:10-11)

Like the man Jesus healed who was blind from birth, Erik Svendsen knew a healing was required in his life. But he didn't know what that healing was or exactly how it would come. Corresponding to his desire, God moved in Erik's life to give him the best opportunity to find Him (**Acts 17:24-26**), and a brother from the North Region, Ricky Trinidad, reached out to Erik at his workplace about six months ago. Erik was working for Ricky at the time and he was very eager to begin studying the Bible.

As Erik began to study the Scriptures, he had many questions about his faith. They were simple questions, but foundational to the development of his convictions. Some of Erik's questions were the kind that wouldn't be answered until he was in heaven. As a sign of his progress, he was able to leave those unanswerable questions in God's hands and move forward toward the waters of baptism.

He took to heart the challenge to read his Bible and pray on a regular basis, and these disciplines really helped to developed his faith and walk with the God. Throughout

the course of his studies, Erik often said, "I don't know what God is calling me to, but I do know it's something special." And just like the man born blind, God had a plan for Erik that His amazing work might be displayed in his life as well.

As he continued to study, Erik gained a strong desire to pick up the intensity of his studies. The brothers studying with Erik met with him multiple times a week, whenever he was available. It included late nights, early mornings and studies during lunch at Erik's workplace. It wasn't long before Erik was ready and, in essence, said, "There's water, why shouldn't I be baptized?" When asked what it was that made him turn his life over to Christ, Erik simply said, "I want to have my sins forgiven." He also had taken special note of the genuine life the disciples were living. He was greatly encouraged the Christians were not just a bunch of 'super religious' people, but real men and women seeking a real God and following Him with all their heart.

Erik was baptized on June 29th and is a joy to have as our new brother in Christ in the West Region. Erik, along with his wife, Andrea, and their one-year-old son, Jack, live in Willowbrook.

**Conversion
Corner**

Welcome New Baptisms!

Chicago

- Keisha Bayliss
- Tonja Girten
- Mia Webster

Metro

- Niquia Simbler

North

- Willie Washington

West

- Erik Svendsen

The Apprenticeship of Christ (Cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

had been with Jesus. (**Acts 4:12**) These two disciples were certainly strengthened in the life of Christ. As Willard says, all the church needs “to fulfill Christ’s purposes on earth is the quality of life He makes real in the life of His disciples. Given that quality, the church will prosper from everything that comes its way.” And the early church did prosper because of the few who had been with Jesus.

One obvious way we can grow in Christ is when someone shows us how to do everything He commanded. (**Matt. 28:19**) Bible study and sitting at the feet of a mature spiritual figure is incredibly meaningful (**Acts 2:42, 18:24-26**), and we will never outgrow the need for this process. However, it is certainly not the only way Christ is formed in us. It will take much more than that to be strengthened in the life of Christ.

Another way we grow is through the power of God’s Spirit. While Jesus returned to the Father to sit at His right hand and intercede for us (**Rom. 8:34**), it is the Holy Spirit who came to complete what Jesus started. (**John 16:13, Acts 1:4-5, Gal. 5:16-25**) Paul wrote these important words about the ministry of the Spirit: *For those whom God foreknew, them He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.* (**Rom. 8:29**) The Spirit works in our meetings (**Acts 4:31**), in tragedy, through prayer (**Eph. 6:18**), in compelling notions (**Acts 20:22**) and during changes in our lives. (**Acts 8:29-39, 16:7**)

Apprenticeship of Christ not only involves being taught by others to obey the teachings of Christ and being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but other measures can help prepare us for Christ’s formation in our lives. The exercise of disciplines such as personal Bible study, prayer, fasting and meditation enable us to dwell on God’s thoughts, reflect on our lives and concentrate on spiritual matters. Sadly, some of these disciplines are rare in the church today and not enough people can echo Paul’s words to the church in Philippi: *I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.* (**Phil. 3:10**)

Helpful Practices

Christianity is a one-another religion and Jesus’ discipleship involves other people getting involved in our lives. (**Matt. 28:19, John 13:34-35, 17:22-23**) Here are some important practices in following after the teaching and heart of Christ, and all have something to do with how we treat each other. **1) Trust Each Other’s Hearts.** We’re not expert heart surgeons. As we show others how to do everything Jesus commanded, we must begin with trust, not accusation. (**1 Cor. 13:7**) Unless we have knowledge otherwise, we should assume the best before judging. **2) Respect.** By letting mature Christians define the form of discipling they desire, we convey respect. (**1 Pet. 2:17**)

They must be able to choose. However, everyone—elder, evangelist, teacher, group leader and newest member—must be involved in active apprenticeship. The various means of this apprenticeship could include the following:

- Peer discipling with those of equal maturity
- Prayer partners where one is the clear teacher
- Small group of people with similar needs
- Multiple spiritual mentors to address different areas
- Recognized leader over others

The human part of this apprenticeship is about conspiring together, not competing, evidenced by all the “let us” passages in the Bible. It’s not “the arrived” people helping the “never-good-enough” people. It’s fellow Christian helping fellow Christian, all of it being done according to ability, maturity, knowledge, growth and spirituality.

Conclusion

We began as a congregation in 1982 with every disciple expressing constant learning and one-another involvement as a vital conviction. In the past few years, many of us lost our way and a time of great discouragement and great disparity occurred. But it could have been much worse. Some fellowships, movements and churches are still in a kind of crisis that’s much like a lobster in a pan of increasingly hot water. In that kind of situation, people don’t even realize they are spiritually dying. In my opinion, our international fellowship of churches went through a radical yet necessary crisis where we came to greater conviction about our motivations, relationships, structures and many other things. Speed to address these weaknesses led to both positive reactions and painful regrets, with both good and evil consequences. One of the saddest consequences was a significant abandonment of Christ’s apprenticeship by numbers of people. For some, more spiritual footing has been lost than for others. Yet we all can regain our footing. As we do, I believe the following traits will mark our walk with Christ:

- We will achieve the reality and presence of having been with Christ.
- As we go, we will disciple many to Christ from different cultures.
- We will submit ourselves to Jesus’ life-plan to learn everything He intended for us to learn.

You may be experiencing Christ’s transforming apprenticeship right now. Or, this article may spur you on to make some personal decisions to get involved once again (or for the very first time) in the apprenticeship of Christ. Just be sure you’re not committing *the great omission* and missing *the great commission*, only to end up experiencing the *great disparity*.

Steve Staten