

This past Sunday I preached at Fellowship Church of High Springs, Florida, a church that is pastored by one of our former Associate Pastors, Jeff Powell. Jeff served on our church staff from 1998 – 2002, and then in 2002 we helped him launch a new church that was closed down by Hurricane Katrina. Following Katrina, I helped place him on staff with a pastor friend of mine in Knoxville, Tennessee, and then he was eventually called to pastor Fellowship Church. I've preached for the Fellowship congregation a number of times throughout the years since it was started by Charles Pinkerton (another former Celebration staff member) and is located outside of Gainesville, Florida near where my mother lives. Jeff and his wife Jane and their precious children (there are four of them now) have been greatly loved by our staff and church family, and we are excited and delighted to see and hear what the Lord is doing these days through their lives and ministry.

Jeff has shared with his staff and congregation about the investment I've made into his life and ministry over the years. He has communicated to them that he's learned much over the years about ministry and leadership by serving with me, observing me, dialoguing with me, and growing along with me. His comments to them remind me that over and over in the Scriptures the Lord directs us to continually be involved in encouraging, equipping and empowering other believers. Jesus said that all of us are to "*go and make disciples*" of others, teaching them what we have learned from the Lord (Matthew 28:19-20). Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:2: "*Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also.*"

So here is my question for you – "Who are you investing in by spending time with them, seeking to encourage, equip and empower them?" When I ask that question of people, they often give me a blank look and simply shrug their shoulders. The idea that they should be "investing in others" in order to help them become better disciples of Jesus has never even crossed their mind, in spite of the fact that the Bible is filled with texts that depict or direct believers to be doing exactly that.

Other responses I receive when I ask that question are: 1) "I don't know how to disciple others;" or 2) "I don't have the time to disciple others;" or 3) "I don't feel qualified to disciple others." Regardless, however, of what we think or feel or what excuses we may come up with, in His last words to us Jesus demanded that we spend time "discipling others." The question is, are we going to obey or disobey the Lord in regards to His command that we are to "go and make disciples?"

Let me give you a few suggestions on how you can begin to obey the Lord and get involved in discipling others. First, make sure that you progress through our *BELONG TRACK* classes and materials so that you will not only be disciplined yourself, but you will become familiar with the initial discipleship curriculum we utilize at Celebration Church. Second, look around in your *Life Group*, find some newer Christians in your Group, and ask them if you can spend some time with them sharing with them what you've learned from the Lord. If you're not in a *Life Group*, get in one right away so that you can be a part of the discipleship ministry of Celebration Church and so that you can be a good model to other Christians, demonstrating to them the importance of connecting with other believers for Bible study, fellowship, ministry involvement, etc. If you can't find any newer Christians (or even some non-Christians) in your *Life Group*, invite people you know from work, school, neighborhood or even our church services to visit your *Life Group*,

communicating to them how much your Group has meant to you, and how it will help them in their spiritual growth.

Third, take the discipleship materials that correspond with the different events in our *BELONG TRACK*, and work through them with one or more of the new believers that you know. You can do this by meeting with them for lunch or coffee on a weekly basis for several weeks, or by meeting with them for 30 minutes before or after your *Life Group* meeting. These discipleship materials include the *Live, Grow, Encounter, Share* and *Lead* books that were written by our friend and Cell ministry guru, Joel Comiskey, that are being utilized by large numbers of churches around the world that are experiencing significant spiritual and numerical growth.

Fourth, communicate with your Community Pastor your intentions and involvement in investing in others by discipling them. He or she will be able to help and coach you in this fulfilling ministry of leading others to experience a stronger walk with the Lord.

“Discipling others” is one of the most fulfilling activities we can ever be involved with in our lives. Not only are we obeying the Lord’s “Great Commission” when we are taking the time to disciple and mentor others, but also: 1) we are experiencing the joy and blessing that comes from investing in others, 2) we are creating life-long friendships, and 3) we are leaving a godly legacy that will continue as the people we’ve encouraged and equipped do the same for others in the coming days (2 Timothy 2:2). Let’s all see what we can do in the coming days to be “difference-makers” in the lives of others.

Pastor Dennis