

Our Greatest Need—Experts at Discipleship

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Whenever a student leaves the program prematurely, I'm deeply disappointed. What causes even more disappointment is to see a student graduate from the program and then within a few days, weeks, or months go back to their old way of living. Thank God for the many who do continue to serve Jesus with all their hearts. So what makes the difference?

After working in Teen Challenge ministry for over 30 years, I am firmly convinced that the quality of the staff has a direct impact on the quality of growth our students experience while they are under our care.

Today students come to Teen Challenge with incredibly deep hurts—many not directly related to their drug addiction. The damage from sexual abuse and other types of abuse needs more than a solution of “Just leave it at the altar.”

The longer I work in this ministry, the more firmly I am convinced that the “Jesus Factor” is the key to every student becoming established in a whole new way of living.

Very few staff come to Teen Challenge trained and equipped to be effective in this ministry. I'm not simply talking about TC graduates who become staff. The same holds true for college or seminary graduates.

I believe our staff need to be better equipped for effective ministry. If Teen Challenge is to see more graduates find true deliverance from all their addictions and life-controlling problems, then we must have staff who are experts.

We do not need experts on substance abuse, with state license—though I am not against those who pursue that training. Nor do we need experts in counseling—even though this field also brings many helpful tools to relate to the needs of the students.

We do not need more experts on the Bible—though many Bible college graduates today come with lots of teaching on the Bible. When you look at our 40 year history, we have seen staff with no degrees to staff with earned PhDs. Education alone has not been the key to increasing our effectiveness in ministry.

What Teen Challenge must have if we are to experience success is staff who are experts at Christian discipleship.

Every staff gives lip service to Christian discipleship, but do we truly understand and practice principles of discipleship on a daily basis? The heart of discipleship is captured in the simple message of Jesus—“Follow me.”

Helping believers become disciples is no easy task—even Jesus struggled at times over his 3 year discipleship training with his twelve. Discipleship is more than praying and reading the Bible. It’s more than handing out disciplines to students.

Discipleship is about personal application of Biblical teachings. Helping students relate the struggles in their lives to the teachings of the Bible will always be a continuing challenge for each staff.

So what makes a staff an expert at Christian discipleship? You must have a comprehensive understanding of each component of discipleship and know how to guide a new believer into applying it in his/her life in such a way as to produce balanced growth.

In the sidebar is a list of 10 characteristics of Christian discipleship. As staff we need first to be working on implementing these in our own life. Then we need to be looking for ways to help students understand these and apply them as well.

As we focus on developing students into disciples of Jesus, we can be confident that the “fruit” of our ministry will remain. However, if our focus is simply on getting them off drugs, on rule keeping, and outward conformity, our graduates will have built their house on sand, set up for destruction when the tough storms come after graduation.

Space does not permit a detailed description of the steps we need to take to become experts at Christian discipleship. All I can do is point the way and say—this is the path we must pursue with great diligence if we are to see continuing success in the lives of Teen Challenge students.

Ten Characteristics of Christian Discipleship

By Dave Batty

1. **Christian discipleship is Christ-centered, not man centered.** We need to teach them how to focus on a personal relationship with Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-2
2. **Discipleship is future oriented.** Jesus said, “Follow me,” which speaks to the future. He did not say “If you want to be my disciple, first clean up your past.”
3. **The element of the miraculous.** Christian discipleship is built on the greatest miracle of a lifetime—salvation. We can anticipate other miracles in our daily walk with Jesus.
4. **It’s action centered, not simply information centered.** Personal application of Biblical principles is the heart of Christian discipleship—not simply learning head knowledge.
5. **Discipleship is always by choice.** Jesus said, “If you *want* to be my disciple . . .” We cannot force anyone to be a disciple of Jesus.
6. **Christian discipleship involves obedience.** The simple call of discipleship is Jesus saying, “Follow me.” This could be restated—obey me.
7. **Christian discipleship is based on a power source outside of myself.** It’s not self help, it is recognizing that I am weak, and without His power working in me, I am hopelessly lost.
8. **Christian discipleship is love centered.** The two greatest commandments focus on love. As staff we must be experts at loving before we are experts at anything else—the 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love.
9. **Christian discipleship is character centered, not success centered.** The challenge of developing Godly character is foundational to true spiritual maturity. Success in the eyes of the world or the church is of little consequence if Godly character is missing.
10. **Discipleship is time limited.** We have a small window of opportunity in which to instill in new believers the basic steps of true Christian discipleship. This will have a vital impact on their future spiritual fruitfulness.

There are other elements of Christian discipleship, but these 10 give us a starting point on developing a comprehensive understanding of this vital component of our walk with Jesus.

This is also covered in the staff training course, *Keys to the Success of Teen Challenge*, by Dave Batty. For more information, visit the website: www.iTeenChallenge.org