

**Core Seminar**

**Discipling**

**Class 12: Hazards & Joys of Discipling**

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1. **Introduction**

Sadly, this is the last class of the Core seminar on Discipling. I hope that you are leaving this class more excited about discipling others than you were coming in.

In this final week, we want touch on two final subjects: (1) the dangers of discipling, both to the discipler and the disciple; and (2) the great joy that God gives us in discipling others.

1. **Seven Dangers of Discipling**

We are going to consider seven dangers for discipling relationships. As we walk through these dangers, think specifically of a discipling relationship you have and consider where these attitudes have encroached.

What are negative characteristics that discipling could cultivate in the heart of a discipler? Let’s start by considering four dangers that discipling poses to the Discipler.

1. **Self-importance**

*Problem*: We can place ourselves on a *spiritual pedestal*. We see ourselves as important because we are meeting with and influencing a younger Christian. We are tempted to think that through our prowess, gifts, strategies, time, and energy, we have changed the life of another person. We might attribute changes in their actions/perspective/theology to our work.

*Correction*: The apostle Paul saw tremendous changes in the lives of others through his work, but look at how he describes himself. “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me“ **(1 Corinthians 15:9-10)**. When we are tempted to think our hard work has transformed people, we are reminded that it is God’s grace that changes people. Remember that both you and your friend are sinners, and it is purely by God’s grace that you both came to love Christ. God’s grace had a clear effect on ***your*** life. So also, God will use you as a means to point younger believers to Christ, but ultimately it is not you, but God’s grace, that transforms them. As disciplers, we need to follow Paul’s example and remind ourselves that our strength, teaching, and wisdom come from God. Ref. James 1:17: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

1. **Self-reliance**

*Problem*: We can get so caught up in our discipling relationship that we forget to turn to God for answers. We are quick to give answers right out of our hip pockets. We are so preoccupied with (maybe overwhelmed by) the nitty, gritty details, sins, and struggles of horizontal relationships that we don’t turn vertically to look for the grace and strength that is meant to equip us. We forget to ask, “What is God doing in their life?”

*Correction*: As disciplers, we need to turn to God quickly and to rely on Him. Be slow to give “answers,” quick to listen, and quick to turn to God in prayer. We are made to be dependent on God. As a discipler, consistently remind yourself of your need for God, over and above everything else in this world, including yourself. Ask yourself questions like: Am I sharing my own opinion too quickly? Have I taken time to search the Scripture to see what God might say in this situation? Self-reliance can promote quick and less careful responses to our discipling friend’s struggles. Reliance on God promotes more careful and Christ-centered responses to our friend’s difficulties.

1. **Don’t be program-minded**

*Problem*: Discipling is a process, not a program. Sometimes we get so caught up in our discipling agenda that we overlook some of the immediate and general struggles that our friends have. Be flexible with immediate needs that come up! Or, don’t be so prideful about your “original plan” that you fail to put down a book that is simply not helping your friend.

*Correction1*: Don’t let your concern with implementing your agenda cause you to be unaware of what is going on in your discipling friend’s life. Don’t start meetings by *always* launching into your pre-set discipling agenda. Be willing to tackle unexpected crisis or day-to-day struggles that might arise in their life. But realize that a balance needs to be struck: be willing to adapt to problems that arise, but don’t be so flexible that you’re changing topics every single week. Be discerning about how to get through material you want them to learn, while at the same time being flexible enough to address struggles that your discipling friend needs to sort through.

Correction2: If the material does not seem to be helpful, then don’t be so prideful that you are unwilling to consider a different course of action. Demonstrate humility by reviewing your meetings together, from time to time, to see how helpful they are.

1. **Sense of failure**

*Problem*: A discipling relationship isn’t going as you had hoped. Maybe you don’t see any growth, or you see a friend wrapped up, seemingly inescapably, in a particular sin. Maybe you don’t get along well together. All these things can be discouraging, and you might feel like you‘ve failed in the discipling relationship. For some, you might even come to the point where we are so disappointed in ourselves that you begin to doubt God’s ability to work through you.

*Correction1*: Consider that you are only *one means* of God’s work in your discipling friend’s life. When you disciple within the context of a church, there are usually multiple means (other relationships, personal study, preaching in the worship services, core seminars, etc.) that provide teaching and grounding in the Word.

Consider also the promise of God’s Word that it will not go out void (Isa 55:10-11). You can’t expect that you will always see immediate and tangible fruit in your discipling. And, don’t let a lack of tangible fruit cause you think you are doing no good. Trust that God’s Word will bear fruit. Try to be less focused on yourself, and more focus on God’s Word as a means of change. Pray that God would use you to minister his Word, and pray for a godly attitude about discipling.

*Correction2*: Be willing to encourage them to meet up with someone else. There is nothing wrong with ending a relationship if it is just not working. The kingdom of God does begin or end with you. If God is not using you to help this person grow, be humble enough to admit it and encourage them to find someone else.

There are also several dangers that discipling poses to those we are discipling.

1. **Inappropriate Intimacy (in cross-gender discipling)**

*Problem*: Studying together, sharing struggles and praying together presents a very close setting. Discipling someone of the opposite sex can lead to inappropriate intimacy between a man and a woman.

*Correction*: In short, in-depth discipling with people of the opposite sex should be avoided (unless you’re married to that person). If there is someone of the opposite sex that needs discipling, look in your church to find someone who is a mature believer and the same gender as the person.

1. **Dependency on the discipler**

*Problem*: After meeting for a while, your friend might become dependent on you for Bible study, prayer, recognition of sin, knowledge of the truth, etc.

*Correction*: As disciplers, we need to encourage them to build up Christian disciplines and knowledge for themselves, that they might have a *personal* walk with Christ. For things that you do together, like Scripture study and prayer, maybe have them teach you what the passage says. That forces them to learn how to study and teach the text to someone else.

What you don’t want is someone who so dependent on you that they stop living faithfully after they stop meeting with you. What happens if you (the discipler) were suddenly hit by a bus today? Would your discipling friend continue to pursue faithfulness, or would they stop because you are no longer around? What you want is to produce people who are in eager pursuit of these things (Bible study, prayer, recognition of sin, knowledge of the truth, etc.) long after the discipling relationship has ended.

1. **Trusting you too easily – taking your word for truth without thinking**

*Problem*: Your friend might turn to you for the truth without considering it themselves. You notice they never raise questions to you, or they always take what they read in Christian literature to be the truth. Only the Bible is the inspired Word of God. At times, your friend might go to the extreme and feel an exclusive allegiance to you.

*Correction*: When you know that someone has put a high degree of trust in you, be very careful about the example you set and the advice you give. Emphasize to them that their accountability for the decisions they make is to God alone, and they must seek his will and not yours. Encourage them to always examine your conversation in light of Scripture and to make Scripture the golden standard by which they compare everything. Also, encourage their friendships with other Christians—especially those outside your own social circle.

In all these areas, we should proceed with caution, but also proceed boldly, trusting and depending on God.

## The Joys of Discipling

###### Cultivate a taste for the pleasure of discipling.

###### Despite what we may know about the dangers associated with discipling relationships, we must remember that discipling is a great joy! It is a pleasure to be used by God as a source of spiritual encouragement that produces significant and lasting fruit in the life of another human being.

Is this a pleasure for which you have cultivated a taste and enjoyment? Many people spend a considerable amount of time working to acquire a taste for things like wine or caviar or a dozen other things that are of limited or no worth. Have you worked to acquire a taste, a capacity for enjoyment in things or great worth, even eternal worth? Have you cultivated a capacity to enjoy the pleasure of discipling?

Discipling another person, being a conduit used by God to pour spiritual encouragement into another human life, is wonderfully *potent* pleasure. If you are a genuine Christian you should have the capacity in you to find some of your greatest satisfaction in this specific pleasure. Cultivate it. Decide that you will work to find some of your fullest joy in the expression of this discipline.

###### Savor the joy of seeing your church prosper.

What is more, a lifestyle steeped in a commitment to discipling through you local church has another significant joy. Not only will your commitment to discipling potentially bless the individual you are spending time with, but there is also a very good likelihood that your church itself will be blessed and built up by your work of discipling. A church full of relationships where Christians are caring for and taking responsibility for each other will almost certainly be a more healthy church overall. When you disciple an individual in your local church, you are not just helping that one person, but you are also building up the whole body of Christ.

###### Savor the joy of being fruitful for the kingdom.

I hope that all of us desire to see fruit come from our own obedience and labor for the kingdom. Well one of the most clearly fruitful things that we can do in our efforts for the Kingdom is to encourage another person in their own discipleship. We know that God intends to keep and preserve his own to the end. And we know that God will do that through means, through things in this world that he has set up to accomplish spiritual ends…things like preaching, Bible reading, and fellowship or discipling relationships with other Christians. So if you want to increase the potential of your own life being fruitful and useful for God’s kingdom, then begin to build discipling relationships. We have seen throughout this class that God says he will us this means—discipling relationships—to build up his church. *Would you consider involving yourself in God’s plan for your friends?* Be a source of encouragement and blessing for them and you are very likely to be fruitful for the kingdom in big ways. I don’t know if God will redeem our culture, or cause my favored political party to prevail. I don’t know if my business skills with produce wealth that I can lavish on his church or if my medical research will eliminate vast human suffering. But I do know that God intends to grow and bless his people through the encouragement of other Christians. So if I want to play the odds, so to speak, on what is most likely to result in good and lasting fruit from my life…engaging in discipling seems like an obvious and wise choice.

In our fallen state every good thing has the potential for misuse, and discipling is no exception. Still, there is no denying that this should be a source of pleasure for a genuine Christian. To look back on a year spent in diligent labor at discipling and to see fruit, to see a life that has expanded in its capacity to understand and enjoy the work of God, this is real, lasting pleasure. Not the temporary pleasures of the world that will fade in a few months or years. Joy in fruitful discipling is a 10,000 year pleasure…the kind of pleasure that will still be bringing our hearts to rejoice in God’s kindness in using us for his glory…even 10,000 years from now and beyond.

###### Savor the joy of seeing a culture of discipling in your church.

We want to see a culture of discipling develop in our churches. When you have a culture of discipling in your local church, you have lots of people within that community that experience the joy of discipling and are eagerly pursuing it on their own.

Why is *a culture* of discipling important? We want to see *entire* communities defined by biblical markers. American culture encourages the *individual* pursuit of our desires. Christianity encourages the *corporate* pursuit of God’s desires.

When people walk into a community that is marked by discipling, it will be noticeable. People will begin to desire it for themselves and (hopefully) will begin to pursue it.

How do you get a culture of discipling in your church? Certainly the leadership of the church should have a vision for building a culture of discipling and set an example of discipling others. But you also want every Christian in that church to understand that discipling—whether that is being a discipler or being someone who is disicpled—is a responsibility for anyone who calls themselves a believer.

###### Spinning them up and spinning them out…for God’s glory.

The goal of your discipling is not just growth and health in one individual, but replication of disciple-making disciples. This is one of the most difficult tasks in discipling, and it is the source of both the deepest sense of loss and the most profound and substantial joy. In your work in the life of another believer, your goal should be to spin them up and potentially, ultimately to spin them out of your life.

In my own experience in discipling the difficulty and the joy of this have been clear on many occasions. Let me explain what I mean by this. I am not saying that we should view our discipling relationships as some temporary project. There are people that I’ve spent time discipling that I still meet with and enjoy time with after years and years. But, if I’m really blessed by God in a discipling relationship, then the very fruit of the relationship will cause it to change wonderfully over time. The person that I was encouraging will begin to grow to the point that they begin to pour themselves into others in perhaps much that same way that I was privileged to pour my life into them. Sometimes this means that I begin to meet less often with this person as their limited time begins to be filled up with others that they are seeking to bless. This doesn’t mean that I “dump” my friend after some set period. But it does mean that for the sake of God’s kingdom I am not clingy or possessive. If I begin to see the very spiritual momentum that I was used to infuse into their life begin to spin them away from me and into a host of other fruitful relationships, I will praise God. Praise God that he favored me to be an instrument to help another brother or sister in Christ become a net exporter of spiritual encouragement into the lives of others. That’s what I mean by “spinning them up and spinning them out.” It means viewing your relationships as an opportunity to bless multitudes through the work of those that you yourself have encouraged.

1. **Concluding thoughts on discipling**
2. **Discipling is the work of the church, not just leaders.**

It’s not just the job of the elders and “prominent” people at the church. This is a ministry that requires a lot of time and commitment from many people. It’s the job of a healthy congregation to disciple one another.

1. **Discipling can be a way to spread blessing beyond CHBC.**

CHBC is a transient church, meaning that folks don’t tend to stay here for long periods of time. It may be that as you work to model good discipling and to serve a member of this body, you may be planting seeds that will yield fruit in churches you have never heard of. As members of this body are built up by your work in their lives, then you can touch and bless the larger body of Christ.

1. **Greater emphasis on discipling starts with you!**

If all of this sounds good to you, then realize it is probably God’s will that this growth in discipling starts or even grows with you. Don’t walk away from this class thinking “this is great, I hope more people at CHBC do these things.” Walk away asking God to help YOU to be a catalyst in someone else’s life. YOU go out and look for ways that you can intentionally relate to others in the church with a deliberate eye toward doing them good spiritually.

1. **Continue to grow in your own discipleship of Christ.**

And for some of you this may mean resolving, with God’s help, to shore up your own relationship with Christ as a first step to encouraging others. For all of us, it means deliberately seeking to know more and more of the comfort of the Gospel so that we can comfort others with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted. As a faithful member of a church, you are like a pregnant mother who knows that she isn’t just eating for herself but also for the baby that she carries. In much the same way you, as a member of a local church, are not just seeking spiritual nourishment for yourself, but also for the others around you. Don’t just study God’s Word for yourself. Rather, eat well, feed on God’s word, so that you can nourish in your discipling relationships. As you do that, I think you will find your own innate spiritual appetite increasing, to your soul’s good and God’s glory.

1. **Seek out people and opportunities to encourage others.**

And finally, keep in mind that all of this will probably not just happen without your own effort. So much of the New Testament if drenched with the twin truths of the overarching work of God AND the imperative call to human effort. So it is with discipling. It is unlikely that you will be fruitful in discipling by chance, so to speak. But, as you deliberately seek out people and opportunities to encourage others, you may be amazed at the work that God will do through you. Don’t be passive. Be active in working, with God’s help, to labor for fruitfulness in discipling. Look for people to encourage. Plot how you can be a spiritual blessing to others. Think and act on plans to have fruitful conversation. Be active in seeking to be an overflowing fountain that pours blessing into the lives of others in this church.

That is what it means to be a real discipler. To be one who knows the Grace and wisdom of God’s Word and who intentionally, actively sets out to find ways to pour this encouragement into the lives of others. Fundamentally, that is what you were created for, that is what you were redeemed for, that is what you have been blessed for. Go out from this class and don’t just agree that many of these things are true – feel the rich depth of the truthfulness of what’s been said by pouring yourself with abandon into the lives of others. Be a source of spiritual encouragement, for your good and for God’s glory.