

Making Disciples

Long Beach Alliance Church • June 12th, 2011 • Pastor Chris Lankford

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

~Jude 17-21 (NASB)

1) A Full Menu Of Small Group Options

- A) From the earliest days of the church, people gathered together in homes to discuss God's Word and enjoy the benefits of following Christ together (Acts 2:42).
- B) We have continued to follow this example in our church with numerous opportunities to study God's Word through an abundance of different options, ministries, and opportunities. Our elder leadership spends a great deal of time evaluating and considering the impact of each study in the church, giving guidance where needed.
- C) Typically, a person comes to church on Sunday and engages one bible study, and then goes to another bible study during the week, which is normally a different mid-week study than their significant other/spouse, which is

also different than whatever their children are studying. For the truly engaged couple, they might also attend another bible study designed for married couples, where they will engage still another bible study. And of course, for the über-engaged follower of Christ, they also have their own personal bible study which they are working through each week. Normally, each of these studies is from a different portion of the Bible.

- D) On the surface of it, this seems like a great method for discipleship. We are a church which is highly committed to Bible-centered small groups, and we encourage every person to be involved in as much as possible.

2) The Discipleship Route Dissected

- A) However, our elder leadership has also noted that some of the effects our process of discipleship can be detrimental.
- B) First, we have noticed that the process for discipleship in our church is quite complicated, especially for newcomers. Everyone is invited to participate on Sunday mornings, but after that, what you do next to be discipled is vague. There is no clear process of discipleship, but rather we go with the "more is better" approach, lots of varied options which may or may not lead to a discipled individual.
- C) Second, we have noticed that people are extremely busy trying to do all the different activities which go on at our church. Different ministries actually end up competing for your attention, participation, and support. We have highly successful ministries, and some which are not so successful.
- D) It is not unusual for families/friends to be involved in so many different studies and ministries, they are seldom united together in their discipleship. Reaching out to neighbors or friends with the gospel is almost impossible. We are far too busy to reach out to others.

- E) Third, we have noticed that the primary mouthpiece of our elder teaching, the Sunday Morning Service, is one of the highest areas of investment, but one of the lowest areas of discipleship. In some ways, the Sunday morning sermon is a stand-alone time, with very little discipleship impact on the rest of our church ministries. Rather than being central (Acts 2:42), it is one of many equal options.

3) An Alternative Approach For Discipleship

- A) For over a year, our staff and elder leadership considered all of these issues (and some others which also contribute, but are too lengthy to discuss this morning), we felt challenged to retain the great things (biblically centered small groups, commitment to discipleship, authentic relationships) while improving the areas of ministry we felt needed refining (complexity/simplicity, more is better/less is better, lots of options/centrality of Sunday sermon).
- B) From these discussions, and after a much prayer, reading, study, and more meetings than you can imagine, our elder leadership began to develop a more clear idea of how “Growth Groups” can impact our church for the better. Here are some of the key ideas...
- C) First, we want to simplify the process (or path) of discipleship at our church. Simply, we want everyone who comes to LBAC to attend the Sunday morning church service and a mid-week growth group meeting. When it comes to discipleship, this is all we are asking. While some people who are growing will also have the honor of serving in a ministry (another mid-week commitment), all we are seeking is Sunday morning, and a growth group.
- D) Second, we understand that if we are going to add something to our schedules, something else must be removed. We cannot simply keep adding things into our

church schedule without taking other things out. In order to accomplish this, we are choosing to have a “dress rehearsal” this Summer where all small group bible studies at the church are placed on temporary hiatus, in order to make space for Summer Growth Groups (SGG).

- E) In our studies and reading, statistics have revealed that churches with less things on their schedule actually encourage people to focus on their growth and discipleship more sharply, and make it much easier for newcomers and friends to get involved more easily.
- F) Third, we want to create a greater level of discussion surrounding the central teaching aspect of our church, the Sunday Morning sermon. My great desire as lead pastor here at LBAC is that our whole church be able to join together in discussion, interaction, and deeper transformation which flows out of the Sunday morning teaching time.
- G) Following the principles of greater simplicity and maximizing connection for our church body, our Growth Groups will be spring-boarding from our Sunday Morning sermon series, centered on growth which flows from the central teaching of God’s Word each week.
- H) In the past, we have attempted to “engineer” the small group experience by controlling everything from who is in each group to how long groups meet. We recognize that this kind of “group engineering” has been unfortunate. Growth Groups will be different. There will be as little group engineering as possible. Our desire is simply that each group will be hosted and facilitated by consistent and committed leaders. We are (quite happily), leaving the rest up to the Holy Spirit. My invitation to you is to give it a try, engage authentically, and be prepared to talk about your experience at the end of Summer...