

Why Invest in the Men?

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Every Friday morning I meet with about 6-8 men from the local church where I serve. From the very first week that I moved to St. Louis, I have endeavored to meet faithfully with these band of brothers. I remember the very first Sunday I was on site pastoring Christ Fellowship Bible Church, I called all the men to the front after the worship service and told them of my passion to meet with them, invest in them, pour all that I am and have into them, and disciple them. After a brief discussion, we chose 6:00-7:30AM every Friday morning for our study time. And to this day, six years later, we still meet to pray, talk church ministry, and study the Word together.

A typical format of our Friday morning meetings is fairly simple and straightforward. From 6-6:30AM I often will pour out my heart and work through practical church-related items and ask some thought-provoking questions to generate discussion (e.g., why do we do music the way we do? Why don't we have this or that?). Sometimes I lead in exegesis of a hymn to teach the men to think thoughtfully about the music we sing. Other times I'll lead in a brief biography study through a man from church history (I love the Puritans so often they will hear of a Puritan!). We have worked slowly and biblically through all the elder-qualifications, the church mission statement, how to lead at home, and the importance of family worship. All this said, I try to discuss practical ministry-related items with the brothers for the first 30-minutes. Then from 6:30-7:30AM we dig into the Bible in our study. Over the years, we've studied verse by verse through Romans, John, Joshua, Philemon and we're currently progressing through Proverbs. We've also had lengthy and in-depth studies on family worship, expository preaching, expository listening, family worship, biblical forgiveness, and biblical counseling. We finish everything and conclude in prayer by 7:30AM sharp so the brothers can depart and get to work.

Why is it so crucial for me to invest in the men?

1. Joyous Obedience

As a shepherd called by God to care for the souls of Christ's sheep, He calls me to entrust biblical truths to other faithful men who can in turn teach others also (2 Tim 2:2). Therefore, I count it a joy to obey God in the discipling and mentoring of other men. I think of the example Moses set in discipling Joshua. I consider Paul's example in mentoring and discipling young Timothy. I think of the many companions that accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. Rarely was Paul alone. So first and foremost, I count it a joyous privilege and divine blessing to obey Him in the duty of investing in the men that He brings to the church where I pastor.

2. Internal Transformation

As I meet with the men every Friday morning, the transformation is not only for the men who study the Word together with me, but one of the glories of leading the morning men's studies consists in the internal transformation that God works in *my own soul* in my own time of personal study and prayer *prior* to meeting with the brothers. I consider my time of preparation

for the biblical counseling study we had a few years back, or I reflect on our verse by verse study through Romans or the Gospel of John, or now working progressively through the Book of Proverbs, one of the foremost blessings comes from my own time of prayerful study in the Word, in exegesis, in commentary work, and diligently laboring for practical application points. In a word, why do I invest in the men of the church? In my preparation and study, my own heart is pierced, convicted by truth, and taught by God's Spirit. And for this internal transformation and divinely worked sanctification that takes place in my soul, I am profoundly grateful and blessed.

3. Leadership Development

Jesus spent much time with His disciples. He invested in men to lead. He knew He would soon depart from this earth, ascend to heaven, and the work of gospel-proclamation would rest upon the shoulders of His followers. So he devoted Himself to developing leaders. Part of my motive in meeting with the men every Friday morning is to develop biblical leaders to serve in Christ's Church. I understand the Spirit appoints men to ministry. I simply cannot make a leader. I cannot force someone into leadership nor should we lay hands on a man hastily. But I can, and indeed I must, give myself diligently to the training of men for ministry. I do this by modeling timeliness, faithfulness, punctuality, preparation, accurate hermeneutics, systematic theology, and a towering trust in the authority, sufficiency, and reliability of Scripture. I trust that the Lord will raise up elders and deacons from the Friday morning study as they receive the Word, grow in their theological precision, and live out biblical manhood in the home, in the church, and at work.

4. Family Discipleship

I can't disciple the wives of the church. Nor should I. But I can disciple the *men* of the church who will disciple their wives and children as the family shepherds of their homes. So I invest in the men on Friday mornings so that I can disciple, more or less, the entire church through the heads of households. I hope to model for the men the primacy of Scripture, the glory of Christ, the wonder of the gospel, and the precision of theology so that they can learn and do these things in the contexts of their own family environments. Our church doesn't have a youth group, nor do we have thriving children's programs, nor do we have a full-blown women's, or men's, or retired, or singles, or college ministry. But what we do have is a solid and robust commitment to the investing of godly men to teach other men who can teach and disciple their wives and children. And, the women can encourage other women (even the singles, the widows, the divorced, the retired, the young singles). And the men can encourage other men! The goal is for the Friday morning men's study to be a model of Bible-centered discipleship so that the men can do this with others -- starting in their own homes with their own families.

5. Contagious Influence

It blesses my soul to hear of people in the church meeting with other believers for fellowship, Bible reading, and study together. I take great joy in knowing that people meet together in "Bible-open" discipleship relationships so that men disciple other men and women disciple other women -- both young and old. I invest in the men on Friday mornings to also instill in the

brothers the paramount necessity and urgent importance of regular encouraging one another in the things of God, from the Word of God. Then, the brothers seek out another man in the church -- whether it be a visitor, a regular attender, a fellow church-member, or a teenage child to get to know -- to take what we're doing on Friday mornings and do this on their own throughout the week. This then produces an inter-personal web of discipleship relationships that permeates the culture of the church. Far from it being only the pastor-shepherds who do the soul-care of the sheep, this then produces an entire church that is involved in, committed to, diligently and proactively overseeing the spiritual wellbeing of the fellow members. So I meet with the men on Friday mornings because it also has a contagious influence on others who see that there's nothing flashy, catchy, entertaining or super-difficult about the discipleship relationships in the Word. Then they reach out to others and care for and admonish others in the Word on a regular, consistent basis. May God bless these labors for His glory and for the spiritual edification of His church.