

The Hunt for a Discipling Environment in a New Community (or Life after a Campus or Military Navigator Discipling Environment)

The next step after coming out of a great discipling environment for many can seem a bit scary and unsettling for many people. What church should I attend in this new city or place? How do I find a good fit where I will receive “soul-care” like I had with the Navs or other Christian organization?

Here are a few suggestions in this pursuit for another discipling environment. Stay in touch with a good mentor-coach from your current discipling environment, maybe for a lifetime, or at least until you get re-established in a new environment where someone is personally looking out for your Christian maturity best interests.

As you assess the landscape of church options in your new location, consider the following scenario. First, there is no “perfect” church or perfect discipling environment/organization, only the one the Lord wants you to be in to grow (see Hebrews 10:24-25: “Do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some...”).

Second, consider in your new community location the “ant-trail” pattern. Often churches opt for a one-contribution role in a community and not a broader discipling role that experiences people coming to Christ, being established in an initial walk with Christ, and then going on to maturity and multiplication—even into starting other ministries. As you talk with people in your new community, you can often identify the “ant-trail” that believers make in the community, starting at one church where perhaps they came to Christ, then eventually moving on to another church where they received some help in beginning to walk with Christ, and then eventually moving on to another church where more in-depth resources were offered for growing deeper in Christ.

Some churches with a “one-contribution” mentality often developed that way out of the gifting of the present or prior long-term pastor. This type of church may be very good at one main contribution, be it outreach, or initial Christian maturity in how to walk with Christ, or in how to really know the Bible, or some other particular facet. If the Lord were to lead you to be part of this type of church fellowship because you really need their particular strength in your life, just realize that other facets of discipling will be missing and your time there might be limited until you develop the strength that they offer in their environment. Perhaps the Lord is leading you to that church to broaden their contribution toward discipling. Again, a good mentor-coach from your previous discipling environment would be a good one to coach for this type of decision because, hopefully that person knows your strengths and non-strengths and would be a big help to you in this decision.

As you assess your particular new community for a church talk to others in the churches you are considering who are like you and who perhaps have a similar value system as yours for discipling. Always be careful not to criticize any church because you may inadvertently discourage a ministry that for some reason God wants. Remember what the Lord told John and the other disciples about not telling some ministry to stop and how Paul

exhorted the believers to not put a “stumbling block” before others (see Mark 9:38-39, Romans 14:13, Ephesians 4:1-3).

Of primary concern in your search for connecting to a body of believers in a new location is that “sound-doctrine” is being preached and lived out by the leaders and the body of believers. We, of course, want to be connected with a ministry where the Word of God is taught and practiced well (see Acts 20:32, Titus 1:9, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

A good perspective to keep in mind for a discipling church or environment is found in Psalm 107:35-43. This passage expresses how God changes a “wilderness.” Basically, it identifies that God uses two sources to change a wilderness: “pools” and “streams.” Pools are where living things go to—a place where one gets refreshing water. Streams are those refreshing water sources that carry their benefit out into remote areas of the land. A desirable church or ministry utilizes both of these two sources of refreshing water which God uses to change a wilderness community of lost people. Pools are where people gather and get refreshed with the living water of great teaching and encouragement. Streams are where people are equipped to walk with Christ personally, to share Him with others, and to disciple others out in the community. When you find a church that is a great pool of refreshment for you and that equips you to go out to minister to the lost and to disciple others, you have found an ideal discipling environment in my opinion.

Also, in the church environment is there the opportunity for you to contribute your gifting? Is your gift valued and is there the opportunity for you to develop even more skill with it? Remember, we are to serve in the body of Christ, contributing the gifts the Lord has given us (see Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Peter 4:10).

Another perspective that you may find helpful in selecting a church body or ministry is discerning if the leaders, especially the senior or preaching pastor, communicate a personal hunger for God and His Kingdom. Do they talk about their own discipling experiences and allow others to share theirs as well?

The Scripture says that, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Leaders who express a personal hunger for God are those to be around (see Luke 1:53), for they will have fresh insights into the person of God and His ways. When leaders express experiences of discipling out of their own lives, you know discipling is on their hearts. When they don’t talk about it, it usually isn’t on their hearts. They may be great teachers but not that great practitioners or discipling makers themselves. After all, shouldn’t you in some way model your life after those you are learning from or being led by (see 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7)?

One final comment to add in considering which local body of believers to connect with relates to our own responsibility to care for or manage our own household well (see 1 Timothy 5:8, also 1 Timothy 3:4,12).

Is the environment you are selecting a great one for your wife and your children? This, of course, is a major consideration in your choice. Many of the same principles mentioned above apply for them as well as you consider what local ministry to connect with. After all, you do want your wife to be encouraged and motivated in her walk with Christ and given the opportunity to use her gifts and to have her ministry to others in the community developed

as well. And likewise you want your children, if God has blessed you with them, to grow up longing for God, to know Him more and more, to walk with Him, and to be His disciple—able to minister to others as well, even as a youth.

Good hunting...

Sam

Contributing to a Discipling Environment

Scripture Passages mentioned:

Hebrews 10:24-25 - And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Mark 9:38-39 - John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

Romans 14:13 - Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Ephesians 4:1-3 - I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Acts 20:32 - And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Titus 1:9 - He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Psalms 107:35-43 - He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. ³⁶ And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; ³⁷ they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. ³⁸ By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish. ³⁹ When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, ⁴⁰ he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; ⁴¹ but he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. ⁴² The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth. ⁴³

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

Ephesians 4:11-16 - And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

1 Peter 4:10 - As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Luke 6:45 - The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 1:53 - He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

1 Thessalonians 1:5-7 - because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

1 Timothy 5:8 - But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.