

Pastor's Perspective: Emphasizing Discipleship

June 2019

My apologies! I intended to write this next *Pastor's Perspective* in March but obviously I fell way short of that mark. Allow me to give you a little window into some reasons behind this delay. In late October I noticed something wasn't quite right in a deep part of myself. It's hard to explain but I found myself easily exhausted and at times acutely unable to concentrate. The first few instances I pushed through or took a short rest but continued at pretty much the same life pace. But then some of the mental and emotional symptoms worsened causing me to miss several days of work including a couple of important meetings. I became more alarmed and sought help. I knew I was surrounded by supportive people at CCAM and when this time of need came for me, their supportiveness showed to be true. Several people prayed specifically for my health and pitched in to take some of my responsibilities. This prayer, support and counsel carried me to the vacation time in Florida that we had scheduled nearly a year in advance. The rest and fellowship enjoyed during the break were healing for me and my family.

Looking back, I see that there were several extra stressors and disappointments over the last 18 months that I had failed to take into account and appropriately deal with. I did not do an adequate job of caring for myself and we all paid a price: myself, my family and CCAM. Again, I am sorry and appreciate the grace many of you have already extended!

Now, on to the original intent of this *Pastor's Perspective*. During the last month of 2018 and the first four months of 2019, the messages coming to us on Sunday morning were almost entirely from the gospel of Matthew. We began with the spotted lineage of Jesus and concluded with what we affectionately call "The Great Commission" where Jesus handed the mantle of his mission off to His disciples imploring them to go and make more disciples. Discipleship is the directive given to those who would follow Christ. This is, at least in part, why CCAM has made it her mission "To know Christ and make Him known."

We have a discipleship-focused mission statement but do we have discipleship-focused practices? Are we making more disciples and becoming better disciples ourselves? While I believe most of us would agree that CCAM's goal is to make more disciples rather than more CCAM members and that membership of any organization is less important than discipleship of Jesus, there is a concern that we have nonetheless evolved over time toward a membership focus. On and off for over a decade now the leadership of CCAM has been wrestling with how to handle church membership. Who's a member and who is not? What makes one a member? What's the connection between baptism and membership? What are the benefits of membership? Do we exist for our members or for those who have yet to become members? These are but a few of the questions that stir this conversation.

Membership is important at some level to the structure of any organization but I believe we would do well to lead the conversation, focused on discipleship rather than on membership. Doing so would allow the principles of discipleship to be the 'horse' that drives the 'cart' of membership. Whatever it means to be a disciple of Jesus then would lead what it means to be a member of CCAM - a people desiring to follow Jesus and point others to do the same.

Right now, the answers to these questions are not crystal clear to us in leadership but it is a great first step for us to actively engage them as we are. Interestingly enough, the above mentioned 'delay' has allowed the timing of this installment to be impeccable, if not providential, as I set out in March of 2018 to systematically describe where I was leading. I couldn't have anticipated we'd be where we are in the conversation today. I'm sensing this is a season of slowing down and paying closer attention to the Holy Spirit guiding us. Living it out takes a considerable amount of effort and in this vein I plan to continue the topic of "emphasizing discipleship of Jesus more than conversion, church attendance, or denominational affiliation" again in the coming issue of *The Pastor's Perspective*.