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POSTCARDS FROM CORINTH REVISITING CAMPUS DISCIPLESHIP

GIVING A BIBLICAL CHALLENGE

This is the Users Guide for personal discipleship. While The Compass provides content for one-on-one discipleship, Postcards addresses the practice, philosophy, and difficult issues that are a part of discipleship. Here, for example, is a partial list of the topics covered:

Habitual Sin, Authority Issues, Christian Counseling, Fasting, Theological Conflicts, Coaching Through Trials, Challenging to Conferences, Confronting Sin, Ministering Cross-Culturally, The Role of Faith, Difficulties in Sharing the Ministry of the Spirit, Selection, Conflict Resolution, Why Does Leadership Matter, Conducting Basic Follow-up... Postcards contains 47 articles on all critical issues of discipleship.

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BUILDING MOVEMENTS: SEND: A BIBLICAL CHALLENGE

UNDER CHALLENGED: WHY NO ONE RESPONDS TO INVITATIONS

One responsibility of a discipler is to be a fork in the road for young followers of Christ. That fork is a “biblical challenge.” It is a well-executed, carefully worded, nonmanipulative, visionary, confrontation with the truth, like the one given by Steve Jobs.

The difference between an invitation and a challenge is a small but significant one. An invitation says, “Come if you want,” “Come if you can” or “Come if you have nothing better to do.” The problem is that disciples don’t want to do many things that would benefit their spiritual growth; they are as initially reluctant as John Sculley. The other problem is that they can’t: at least in their minds they simply don’t have the time. The reality is, of course, they can, but it would require the reordering of their priorities.

A challenge, therefore, goes beyond invitation. It contains a compelling vision of why this course is the right one, why passivity or neutrality on the issue is unacceptable, and compels a commitment. Reread the challenge of Steve Jobs to John Sculley and you’ll see all of these elements, you will also note that he said “no” to a simple invitation.

Why we choose to invite instead of challenge is quite simple. A strong challenge can strain a relationship, puts us in an uncomfortable authoritative role, and risks that our disciple will take a step back rather than forward. On the positive side, that sounds a whole lot like the way Jesus dealt with His disciples.

The bottom line need to challenge disciples is that they will not respond to an invitation to do many things that will be to their spiritual benefit (I certainly didn’t). In campus ministry, there are a small handful of opportunities for growth that will often require such a challenge.

THE CHALLENGE OF JOBS

As legend has it, Apple Computers was started in the 70s by two guys in a garage— Steve Woz and Steve Jobs. Woz was the technical genius, Jobs was the visionary. Jobs had a vision of literally changing the world with what he considered “insanely great” computers. He had a passion for the Macintosh.

In fact there’s a story told about how Jobs got the president of Pepsi Corporation to leave his prestigious, secure, and well-paying job to come work for his upstart company. He gave the president his pitch told, and told him of the need. But the Pepsi executive wasn’t willing to leave behind his future of power, prestige and money. Not willing to accept a “no,” Jobs looked at him and said, “Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?” With that question ringing in his ears, John Sculley left Pepsi, and came to work for Apple.



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THE CHALLENGE TO SMALL GROUPS

It would be nice if all disciples saw their need to be involved in community and upon conversion committed to join a Bible study and bring refreshments to the Weekly Meeting. But this side of the Second Coming that ain't gonna happen, so to invite them to a Bible study is like inviting them to join a book club—"Sure sounds like fun. How about if I meet you there?" Why should they bother, they have no idea what this thing will belike, and they have a spiritual counselor who makes a house call once a week.

What they need is to be challenged. The first aspect of a challenge is a compelling spiritual passage. The passage should demonstrate the need to take steps of obedience in order to grow. I have often used the Parable of the Sower. Parables with questions work better than the bluntness of a single verse, "What this verse says is you should go to my Bible Study."

Next, communicate why you think they need to be involved in a small group. This would include the spiritual benefits to them as well the biblical reasons why this needs to be a priority. Take time to go through some verses. Share your own story of how being in a small group changed your life. Paint a passionate picture. Honestly, if they don't get plugged into a community of believers, things do not bode well for their spiritual future. Our faith was designed to be lived out in community and you break that design principle at your own peril.

Challenges should not be open ended or vague, but must contain a specific commitment: this group will meet for seven weeks and will last for ninety minutes. When you give time parameters, the ones you challenge have the opportunity to count the cost and the limited duration makes it feel less like their opting into Social Security. It also shows what your expectations are: a challenge for seven weeks means you expect them to attend your small group for seven weeks. So include the itemized receipt to let them know the exact costs.

Challenges always end by asking for a decision—"So, who's with me!" This is the hard part because you become the fork in the road: they must say yes or no. You have taken away the option of neutrality by drawing a line just in front of their toes and asking them to either step over it or away from it. The gamble is that they will step back, the alternative is to perpetually invite them to something they will never know the benefit of until they actually get involved.

Finally, put your challenges on paper. Paper makes everything more real, which is why people have business cards even when they don't have a business. It makes the challenge more tangible and carries the appearance that you're not simply making this stuff up—it must be real, it's on paper. It also provides you with something to refer back to should they not follow through on their commitment.

CHALLENGES TO LEADERSHIP



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“Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless— not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:7-8).

The challenge to leadership contains the basic ingredients as the Bible study challenge but with a few additions. First, stress the spiritual requirements, as exemplified by Paul’s Pastoral Epistles. The issues faced by Titus “pursuing dishonest gain” might not be something to specify but be very clear what those requirements are: “The role of leadership requires that you are having a daily quiet time, involved in a small group, taking out the garbage, wearing deodorant, etc.” Even if they decline the leadership role they should feel honored that they were asked. It’s hard to find a place where Jesus bent the requirements of discipleship to accommodate hesitance—“OK, you don’t have to sell everything, but at least get rid of the major appliances.”

Communicate the commitment and expectations: “We will meet once a month without exception.” Because so much happens at conferences, it is crucial that you include in the requirements for leadership, attendance at major conferences. Perhaps an allowance for one truancy a year, but any more than that will compromise your leadership structure.

And throughout any challenge, communicate the heart behind the request or requirement: “The church would look quite differently if Jesus was never able to gather the twelve together in the same time and place” or “People will be sharing their heart, joys, and even sin, so you could imagine how it might feel in that environment if some weeks you showed up and others you didn’t.”

CHALLENGES TO CONFERENCES

Does going to a conference make someone a better Christian, or not going mean they are not walking with God? Obviously not, but it is one of the few places on the planet where one experiences true biblical community and where community is created. Community to a Christian is as water to a plant: it is that important. Therefore sewing your disciple into a community of committed Christians is perhaps the greatest way you will ever serve them. A challenge is the way this service is executed, because until you’ve been to a conference it will always sound like the waste of a perfectly good weekend. Your spiritual child needs to eat green beans and simply offering them on the menu is not going to get the job done.

A challenge to a conference focuses on two things: the benefits of going and addressing the obstacles to not being able to come. First, go through the many benefits of being at the conference using God-inspired overstatement where possible: “It’s like putting your spiritual life on steroids.” Next, ask the question: “What would be some of the potential barriers for



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you attending this conference?” Write them down as they speak and address each one. If it’s money, offer a scholarship; if it’s an upcoming test, go with them to the dumpster and help them rummage for the discarded answer key (It’s just a joke).

If all of this has been to no avail, I would be quite pointed: “I’ll be honest with you. I really feel that this is the next step for you spiritually. You’ve hit a ceiling to how much you can grow on your own. Would you be willing to pray about it and honestly tell God you are willing to do whatever He shows you?” There is a point when you can press too far, especially for someone new to the ministry. But if you have been involved in a discipleship relationship for a year or more, and they still remain on the periphery of community, you must take a further step and become not only a fork in the road but a fork, spoon and knife.

SUMMER PROJECTS

Perhaps your persuasive skills and empowerment by the Spirit far exceed mine, but to challenge someone to give an entire summer of their lives is difficult. I’ve found it better to challenge them to a retreat and have them learn about summer projects through a promotion at the retreat before I ever address the issue. It can also be helpful to inform them of a summer project that aligns with a known area of interest: perhaps an inner city project, or hiking in Yellowstone. I generally sit down to challenge someone to a summer project if I have leverage for doing so: if a person has articulated a desire to do full-time ministry, or holds a leadership role in the ministry.

If they have been considering full-time ministry, it is only logical that they give it a try for a summer. They will never have the opportunity again, unless they’re fired from a job, to devote an entire summer to ministry. It is wise stewardship on their part to invest a summer before investing their lives. If they can’t carve out a summer for ministry, it’s unlikely they will have the tenacity to leave their life and career trajectory at some future point to abruptly enter the ministry. People take progressive steps of faith and obedience, not leaps, though our minds like to rationalize to the contrary.

I also challenge students to a summer project if they have significant leadership in the ministry. I come to them as a co-laborer asking them to consider the additional training they would receive. The reality is, which I am choosing to communicate, is that they are critical to the ministry and an increase in their training would be an enormous boost to the ministry.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38).

Pastors serving Christ under communism, church planters in South America, evangelists in Asia, missionaries to the Muslim world. Trace back the spiritual journey of today’s most influential Christian leaders and you’ll find that most of them came from a campus ministry. They were involved in a campus movement just like the one you’re in (perhaps from your



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campus), which led them to a vocational choice of fulltime ministry.

Which leads to an important question: Where will the next generation of Christian workers, pastors, and missionaries come from? From the college ministries of Campus Crusade for Christ and other Christian groups in the United States and around the world. From these campuses will come the generation of laborers who will help see the Great Commission fulfilled.

For this reason our role in raising up Christian workers is arguably the most influential in all of Christian ministry. Many Campus Crusade staff desiring to serve internationally have remained on U.S. campuses knowing that every year they remain they will multiply themselves many times over in laborers for the spiritual harvest.

Consider Roger Hershey, the former campus director of Miami of Ohio. On his wall is a map with more than 500 pins placed in locations all over the world. These pins represent the students that have been involved in his campus ministry and now serve as pastors and missionaries around the globe. In raising up these laborers, Roger's ministry and influence now extends to the hundreds of ministries begun by his disciples and hundreds of thousands reached with the gospel, making Roger's impact for Christ beyond calculation. Can you think of another church or ministry that sees this degree of influence for expanding the kingdom of God?

This is just the spiritual reality: the most committed and best trained students reside in our campus movements. If God is going to call people into the harvest, we should expect that it will be from among our ministries. It certainly has been historically.

For this reason, Campus Crusade as a ministry does its fair share of recruiting because even the "called" need a little push out the door (I know of what I speak). But in so doing your disciples can feel like they are perpetually being recruited to ministry or Campus Crusade staff. On the positive side, if your disciple has gone to enough events they've already heard a challenge to full-time ministry. This takes some of the pressure off of you—they've heard, and the Holy Spirit is at work.

But you are their spiritual parent and how and when you challenge them (provided you believe they are qualified), will be a significant event. In light of people's sensitivity to pressure, and the recruiting environment of Campus Crusade, I seek to have one, and only one, conversation on the matter—unless they bring it up at another time—and I am very sensitive as to when that conversation should take place.

A student I disciplined once told me, "I feel like I am always being challenged to join staff."

I asked, "When have I ever mentioned joining staff to you?"



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He had to say, “You haven’t.”

In our Campus Crusade environment, I have deemed that one strong challenge is more powerful than many challenges, and my challenge is usually to join the staff of Campus Crusade (unless it has become clear in our relationship that they have a calling elsewhere). The reason is disciples only need to be challenged when obedience requires a nudge, and without such a nudge obedience seems unlikely. Other vocational ministry options, including seminary or a pastorate, particularly because they do not require raising support, do not require a nudge. On the other hand, a willingness to join staff with Campus Crusade and raise support, will also make them available to God for any possible missionary post or organization to which they might be led.

Some of what I share with a disciple is written above. If God is at work in their life, little of what I say will be new, but what I focus on, are the sticking points: their reasoning and obstacles.

I pray as they speak asking God to show me if there is any layer of rationalizing in their thinking process. The bottom line is that those feeling they should enter the ministry will usually not deny the fact, but will struggle with postponing the event: I need to work for a few years, pay off debt, live at home and be a witness to my parents for a year, get my masters, get married, go to seminary, etc. Sometimes the reasons are legitimate, many times they are not.

It is only when you’ve been in ministry for many a few years, that you realize you’ve met few people who didn’t need to do something first, which makes you more discerning to what appears on the surface to be legitimate reservations. As they speak you begin to hear Luke 9 rattle around in your mind:

He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:59-62).

God will give you wisdom on how to gently uncover some of the sticking points, but it is not your responsibility to convince them. It is your responsibility, with wisdom from the Spirit, to unveil hidden fears and motives as to where and why they might be delaying obedience; to tell them what you honestly think of their plan, to challenge thoughts and assumptions that are clearly not true or biblical, and to call them to pray about certain issues with a willingness to do whatever God reveals to them. To be the best detective, you too must be open to whatever God is saying even if it means they should not go into ministry.



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Obstacles are more fun to discuss. They are not rationalizations, but legitimate barriers to which God will provide solutions if your disciples seek to do God's will and He is calling them into ministry.

SUMMARY

This is a sample of a challenge sheet.

MARK 4 "PARABLE OF SOWER"

- Why is wealth deceitful?
- How have you felt the busyness of life?
- What does it mean to bear fruit?
- Which soil are you? Which would you like to be?

PURPOSE OF A LEADERSHIP GROUP

- Learn how to effectively lead a small group (Mark 3:14).
- Grow in spiritual leadership (1 Timothy 3:1).
- Learn how to better disciple others (2 Timothy 2:2).
- Build biblical community (Philippians 2:3-4).
- Encouragement and spiritual accountability (James 5:16).

BENEFITS OF A LEADERSHIP GROUP

- Personal character development and leadership development (Galatians 5:22-23).
- Training in ministry (Colossians 4:17).
- Deep Christian friendships (1 Thessalonians 2:7-10).
- Opportunity to trust God in greater ways (Hebrews 11:6).
- Cultivate a deeper walk with Christ (Psalm 42:1).

QUALIFICATIONS

- Heart that is actively seeking to know Christ more intimately.
- A desire to be taught and learn from others.
- Consistent personal evangelism.
- Development of a Bible Study that you would lead.
- Commitment to at least one conference per semester.
- Weekly time commitment for semester: 6.5 hrs.
- Leadership meeting (2.0 hrs.) Weekly meeting (1.5 hrs.)
- Leading Bible study (2.0 hrs.) Discipleship time (1.0 hrs.)

CHALLENGE

- Do you want to be in a leadership group?
- Read Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, Deuteronomy. 23:21-23.
- Are you willing to commit yourself faithfully to these qualifications?