

Steps for Moving Men from the Pew onto Ministry: One Pastors Approach

Rev. Cade Christensen, (Formerly pastor of Living Hope Alliance Church, Huntsville, AL), has built his ministry around intentional friendship evangelism, personal discipleship and small groups. Men's Disciplemaking (MD) interviewed Pastor Christensen regarding his approach to discipling men.

MD - Tell us a little about your background. How did you come to know the Lord?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - I became a follower of Jesus in a real way during my third year in college. Though I grew up attending a mainline Protestant church with my family, during these years I never had any real understanding of the Biblical message or my need for a Savior. Throughout high school I began experimenting quite a bit with Eastern spirituality - reading about and practicing Zen meditation techniques and so forth - so I guess you could have called me a 'seeker' in some sense. But, I was simultaneously involved in an increasingly 'darker' side of life - heavy rock music, heavy drinking, pornography, strip clubs, etc. - so there obviously wasn't any power in those Zen practices to change my life. It wasn't until I began attending a student Bible discussion group while at the University of Hawaii that things began to change. There, for the first time, I began to learn that the Bible had something to say for my life. I also was introduced to the Jesus of scripture for the first time. Through those discussion groups, as well as one-on-one studies with some caring and persistent brothers in the Lord, I finally came to believe that Christ was real, living and powerful - and that He died on the cross to secure my salvation. Based on that understanding, I made the decision to repent of my sins, accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and commit myself to Him in baptism. That was Thursday evening December 3, 1987. Since that time, Christ has brought incredible changes to my life in so many ways!

MD - How did you receive the Lord's calling to full-time ministry?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - My call into the ministry occurred very shortly after my conversion. As a new believer, I remember feeling very strongly that the only thing that really mattered in my life now was Jesus, and the mission of sharing Him with others. Within my first year as a Christian, I was already spending much of my time focused on the mission. I was leading a student Bible study group, spending time doing one-on-one studies with seekers, etc. It seemed the most natural thing in the world then to move towards full-time ministry upon graduating from college. That sense of call was confirmed when, after my graduation, the church I was attending asked me to come on staff full-time as a campus ministry worker. Things just progressed from there.

MD - How did you get your start in ministry?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - The first seven years of my ministry were spent working on college campuses. After a year and a half of full-time campus work at the University of Hawaii, I spent two years interning at a large church in Seattle while simultaneously working on a graduate degree. Again, my focus was primarily campus ministry - this time at the University of Washington. After that, I spent three years as a campus minister to students at Western Washington University.

My campus ministry background has been something for which I've learned to be very thankful. Those seven years of campus work grounded me in the importance of things like small groups, personal discipleship, and intentional friendship evangelism. These things have been foundational in my approach to ministry ever since.

MD - What is your philosophy of ministry?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - My philosophy of ministry is really just taken from Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. There He tells us to "make disciples of all nations," baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything He commanded us. As I understand that, making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ is THE thing that that Church is supposed to be about. We are to be

about reaching people for Jesus, and then teaching them to maturity in Him so that they, in turn, can reach and teach others.

At Living Hope, we believe this is primarily an organic process that takes place in the context of authentic relationships as people open up their Bibles, as well as their hearts and lives to one another. For this reason, we place a strong emphasis upon gathering people together into small groups where they can dig deep into both God's Word and each other's lives. We call these gatherings LIFE Groups and Discipleship Groups. It is in the context of these groups where the real nuts & bolts of our ministry efforts take place.

The LIFE Groups (an acronym for Love, Involvement, Fellowship, and Evangelism) are basically evangelistic Bible study groups of between 6-12 people who meet weekly in homes, dormitories, restaurants and coffee shops all over the city. Each group is unique, but they all share the common goal of seeing people grow in their understanding of God and His Word in a meaningful way. These groups are open to visitors. In fact, evangelism is part of their purpose, so members are encouraged to bring their friends.

In contrast, our Discipleship Groups are geared towards bringing about a deeper level of spiritual maturity in the lives of believers than is possible in the LIFE Group setting. These groups are smaller in size (2-4 people), and are the primary vehicle through which we help believers establish a firm foundation in the faith. In other words, we are pursuing the 'teach them to obey. . .' aspect of the Great Commission.

With LIFE Groups and Discipleship groups in place, our Sunday worship assemblies serve more as a weekly 'extended family' celebration, rather than as the core of our ministry. It's in the LIFE Groups and Discipleship Groups that we provide 'nuclear family' connection and training for church members, as well as front line outreach opportunities into our community. Without these groups, the guts would literally be taken out of our ministry.

MD – How do you go about starting small Groups?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - When it comes to Discipleship Groups . . . we just start. We are always on the lookout for people who exhibit a desire to grow further in their faith, and these we try to gather together and disciple, a part from the formal meetings and services of the church. I focus on discipling the men in the church, while my wife works with the women. Also, anybody who becomes a Christian through the outreach of the church is automatically plugged-into a discipling relationship to make sure they experience proper grounding and growth in their new faith. As much as possible, we try and include the person who helped lead the new convert to the Lord as part of the group. That way they get hands-on training in following-up and disciple new believers and can later reproduce on their own.

When it comes to our LIFE Groups, they all trace their beginning back to the first group we started when we initially arrived in Huntsville. I led that first group, but with the intent of seeing others from that group raised up to become leaders over time. A couple of men in the group, who seemed both willing and able, began receiving extra attention from me apart from the group setting. In this way, they could receive additional discipling. As they grew, they were given 'on-the-job' training assignments such as leading the group prayer time, following up with visitors, and, eventually, leading the group discussion itself (at first, once a month, then every other week). Our private discipleship times gave opportunity to 'debrief' and process how they were doing in the larger LIFE Group setting. Eventually, these men were commissioned to take over the leadership of the existing LIFE Group, while I started a new one across town. Having been through the process of being disciplined to lead, part of their commission was to reproduce that process by training others to start and lead future LIFE Groups as well. The process takes time (sometimes a year or two), but the multiplying effect of the ministry is well worth the investment.

MD – How did you begin your ministry at Living Hope?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - Our ministry began very quietly, but intentionally, some seven years ago. The congregation (then called First Alliance Church of Huntsville) was a small, struggling congregation in a declining area of town, desperately in need of renewal. As is the case with so many dying

churches, the congregation was comprised primarily of older members resistant to any major influx of change. While my wife and I felt God really wanted to turn the church around, we also knew that such renewal could only come, not from an outward change in forms, but from an inward transformation of hearts. Any attempt to bring change by means of outward alterations in the way things were done was sure to be perceived as a threat and resisted vehemently by the long-time members. What was needed was much prayer, faithful teaching of the Word within the existing structure, and a 'behind-the-scenes' emphasis on grassroots outreach and discipleship aimed at slowly but surely reaching and teaching a whole new segment of people from the community. In time (I'm talking about several years), these new folks (consisting mainly of those won to Christ through our small group Bible studies in homes and restaurants) became the new majority in the church - and as they did so, things began to really change in the church.

MD – Tell us about your outreach ministry?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - We have a strong emphasis on outreach at Living Hope. But, our approach to outreach focuses primarily upon building relationships with people we meet in the natural settings of life. It's in the context of caring friendships and relationships that the Gospel is best presented and received. Each person has a network of such relationships whether they realize it or not. I'm talking about people with whom we work, shop, play, exercise, go to school, etc. We believe God intentionally brings unbelieving people like this into the lives of each of us as believers. He does this, expecting us to reach out to them. Therefore, we encourage each member to identify these folks, to pray regularly for them, and then to intentionally cultivate a friendship with them in which the message of Jesus can eventually be shared. As some of these friends, co-workers and acquaintances become Christians, they too have a network of relationships that can be identified and cultivated for the Kingdom. The result is sort of like following a 'vein' of gold in mining. But, instead of digging for precious metal, we're following 'relational veins' connecting us with lost souls. The result is very exciting, not only because many different people end up being reached for Christ, but because every single believer is able to be involved in ministry to others in a non-threatening way. That is the 'meat and potatoes' of our outreach.

MD – From what you have said, you focus on the men in your "relational vein."

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - Pretty much. I leave the discipling of women to other Christian women in the church, while I concentrate on the men. As a couple, my wife and I have reached out to and discipled certain women before. But that is the only scenario in which I would do so. It works much better that way, and it's safer. In fact, I rely heavily on my wife, Sandi, to lead the way in discipling the women of the congregation in the same way that I am trying to lead the way in discipling the men. We want to see a whole crop of godly women raised up who are capable of reaching and teaching others, just as are the men.

MD – Has this approach to outreach caught on with others in the church?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - Absolutely! Many members of the Living Hope family are currently in different stages of reaching out to people they meet in the natural settings of their lives. Some are still in the 'friendship building' stage, while others are entering into spiritual conversations and one-on-one Bible studies with people they know. Others have grown into leading other small groups, and ministry efforts.

For example, one man who became a Christian last year, and whom I'm currently discipling, is hosting a LIFE Group in his home each week. Since many of his unbelieving friends aren't yet ready to come to this Bible study, he and his wife are putting on 'game nights' once a month in an effort to bring these unbelieving friends into contact with their new Christian family. Trust and relationship is built during these 'fun' times together, and some of his old friends are now beginning to open-up to the idea of joining the Bible study as well.

Another man who has been through the discipling process with me is currently meeting with an agnostic friend of his who is willing to study through the Gospel of John with him. The two are meeting weekly to discuss the claims of Jesus, and what they mean for his agnostic friend's life.

One other man who has gone through the discipling process is currently leading both a lunchtime Bible study at his workplace and a weekly class for incarcerated men at the state's largest prison. These are just a few examples.

MD – At what point did you launch men's small groups?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - I've been gathering a few men at a time together for weekly times of discipleship and accountability since the beginning of our ministry at Living Hope. This has always been a very 'grassroots' thing (no fanfare or public announcements made). I just began by asking a few men at a time to get together for fellowship, encouragement and study. This model has basically remained unchanged over the past seven years. Though we don't have a formally organized 'men's ministry', a pretty high percentage of the men in our congregation are meeting together with someone each week, as a result of our discipling model. Eventually, as more and more men 'graduate' from this discipleship training and become disciplers of others, we may end up having a more organized system of men's small groups. But for now, these gatherings are just the natural outgrowth of our focus on seeing every person God brings to us presented perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

MD – What format do you follow in your men's small groups?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - Our men's discipleship gatherings differ slightly from group to group, but as a general rule we focus on developing an Upward Spirituality (i.e. our relationship with God), an Inward Sanctification (i.e. personal holiness), and an Outward Service (i.e. the ability to minister to others). I've found that it takes about a year of meeting together to really work through these areas of growth in a meaningful way, and see any sustainable transformation take place. Toward that end, I've developed a simple list of topics to discuss together as a 'curriculum guide'.

Typically, the first 4-months of the year are spent developing our spiritual life through prayer, Bible reading, Scripture memorization, and quality fellowship. The second 4-months take us inward as we focus on overcoming persistent and life-controlling sins through an emphasis on openness, accountability, and the appropriation of Christ's promises (this is something that takes time, but is so important!). The final 4-months of our year together are focused on being equipped for outreach, ministry and the discipling of others.

The great thing is that every time I take a new man through this year-long process, I am able to refine my own lesson material, making it better for the next go-around.

MD – You mentioned accountability. How do you approach this?

Pastor Christensen – We believe accountability is a very important aspect of effective discipling relationships. Therefore, it plays a vital role in our men's Discipleship Groups. Our main tool for promoting accountability is a set of Men's Questions for Growth and Integrity that we've put together (We have a set of Women's Questions too). These questions focus on ten specific areas of a man's life directly affecting his personal spirituality, his family life, and his public witness for Christ. These questions are introduced to group members early in the year-long discipling process; usually around the second month of meeting together. They are distributed on a laminated bookmark that each member of the group can keep in his Bible. The group then begins exploring and discussing God's call to growth and integrity in each of the areas under question. This is done one-at-a-time over a two to three month period. In this way, group members can grow progressively in both their understanding of the concepts discussed and their willingness to develop relationships of accountability with one another. The questions move in a progressive manner, focusing first on a man's 'outer life' before progressing to the deeper questions about his 'inner life.' This allows trust to grow among group members as they first deal with less threatening topics, before moving to things that may be a source of deep shame or regret. As the group progresses, so does the commitment to openness with one another. Group members also commit to praying for each other. Each week, as the next Question is explored and discussed, a new area of accountability is added, until all ten Questions have been addressed. Often, this process takes longer than two or three months. But, we have found that the gains resulting from such an emphasis are far too important in each man's life for us to hurry the accountability process. (Download and reproduce [Men's Questions](#))

Men's Questions

For Growth and Integrity

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17)

1. **How is your Witness?** Have you been a positive witness for Jesus Christ in word and deed? (Acts 4:16-20/5:42; Romans 1:16; Colossians 1:28; Peter 3:15)
 2. **How is your devotional Life?** Have you spent daily time with God through Bible reading and prayer? (Psalm 1:19:7-11/42:1-2/119; Acts 2:42)
 3. **How is your marriage/family?** Have you given priority time and energy to your wife and kids? Has your interaction with them modeled Jesus love and leadership?(Ephesians 5:25-33/6:4)
 4. **How is your body life?** Have you stayed connected through Christian fellowship? Are you making efforts to encourage your brothers and sisters in the church? (1 Thes 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25)
 5. **How is your money?** Has the way you have managed your money honored God and furthered His Kingdom purposes? (Matthew 6:19-24; Proverbs 3:9:10; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
 6. **How is your attitude?** Has your attitude been positive and God-honoring or have you succumbed to negativity and complaining? Are you holding onto anger or bitterness that you need to let go of? (Philippians 2:14-16; Eph 4:30-32)
 7. **How is your speech?** Has your speech honored Christ and edified others? Have you engaged in unwholesome talk or damaged another person with your words to their face or behind their back? (Ephesians 4:29; James 3:1-12)
 8. **How is your service?** Have you had the heart of a servant and made efforts to go out of your way to help others in Jesus name? (Matt 20:20-28; Philippians 2:3-11)
 9. **How is your purity?** Have you been in a compromising situation with a woman or exposed yourself to sexually explicit material? (Matthew 5:27-30; Ephesians 5:3; Job 31:1; Psalm 102:3; Prov 5:6-7; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Rom 12:1-3)
 10. **How is your struggle?** Have you seen progress in areas of personal struggle and temptation? Have you fallen prey to a particular weakness or addiction this week? (1 Cor 10:12-12; Psalm 139:23-24)
1. **Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed? (James 5:16)**

MD – What training do you give your small group leaders?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - Generally speaking, participation in one of our year-long Discipleship Groups IS the training. Because these groups deal with small numbers of people (3-4 at the most), and because they are both informal in setting and relational in style, those individuals who are currently involved in a Discipleship Group should be able to start and lead a new group of their own upon completion of their year. Of course, this sometimes doesn't pan out. Nor again is everyone in a Discipleship Group necessarily gifted to lead. But, everyone who has been through the discipling process should be able to reproduce at some level.

In contrast, becoming a LIFE Group Leader requires a bit more training. There, we look for active participants in an existing group who have the willingness and ability to lead in the future (this takes much prayer and patient observation). Those that fit these criteria are asked to 'apprentice' under the existing group leader (By this, I mean that they receive additional personal discipling, outside of the group context, to help them understand the purpose, dynamics, mechanics and responsibilities of effective group leadership). As part of this process, they are allowed to lead the existing group on a periodic basis. This way, the group leader can follow up on ways to improve. When it is apparent that the apprentice is ready to take on a group of his own, he/she is encouraged to do so, either by taking over the existing Group, or by starting a new one.

MD – What results are you seeing from your men's small groups?

PASTOR CHRISTENSEN - The results of our small group ministry (both LIFE Groups and Discipleship Groups) are very encouraging. Though the investment of time, energy and training in the lives of just a few men at times seemed disproportionate to the initial results, and though there have been occasional set-backs, the cumulative effect over the past seven years of staying committed to the discipling process has been a total transformation of the church! The men of Living Hope Church have a visible passion for Christ and His Kingdom! God has raised up new leaders from among them to take up ministry within our congregation, within their families, and within the community. As a result, our outreach efforts have been multiplied significantly as more and more men (and women!) have learned to live out relational ministry and discipleship skills through their own experience of being discipled. I suppose I could best sum up what has happened with our discipling ministry at Living Hope by likening it to a wave. Though small in the beginning, it has grown in power and momentum as God has moved us along. And as He continues to do so, we can already see this ministry multiplying in impact beyond anything we could have imagined!

MD - Thank You Pastor Christensen

[Basics of the Faith](#) used in one-on-one Discipling.