

Man in the Mirror: Experience vs. Learning vs. Relationship

I was at a national meeting for another ministry recently. The Christian Service Brigade works with churches to help their men leave a legacy with the boys.

They do this through a military flavored combination of earning badges, camping and outdoor activities, and discipleship. I was struck during the weekend by the connections many of these teen-aged young men had with the adults they were with. While they were certainly “normal” adolescents—playing basketball, and riding skateboards during free time, for instance—there was also genuine affection. It was obvious that they all enjoyed being together.

Now you’ve probably read or heard about all the statistics about young people leaving the church after high school. Youth groups are exciting, the worship songs are awesome and the conferences they have are pretty intense. But still, kids just aren’t “sticking” in church. We’re giving kids great Christian experiences, but apparently that’s not enough.

I also meet a lot of adults, men in particular, who aren’t into church that much, even if they are going. Even though there are great preachers, interesting classes, well-written books and high quality videos and podcasts, their faith is not really that important to them. So we’re teaching great principles in lots of new and compelling mediums, but apparently that’s not enough.

Which brings me back to the Christian Service Brigade (CSB). Could it be that exciting experiences or the accumulation of knowledge aren’t enough, or even a biblically sound way of discipling people?

I was in a CSB Stockade and then Battalion in my church

growing up. This is what I remember about it: Bob McGillion, Jake Hoffman and Bob Washburn. Sure, we went camping, almost froze to death climbing Mt. Washington, and learned Bible verses. But what I really remember about it was not what we did or learned. I remember those men pouring their lives into me, living their lives in front of me, challenging and training me to live as a man of God.

That's the key: relationship.

When John's disciples approached Jesus in John 2, Jesus didn't try and teach them anything or show them a great sign; he invited them to come spend the day with him. When he called Peter and Andrew, he said, "Come follow me. I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). These are practical, relational invitations Jesus makes. Jesus didn't say, come and watch, or come and learn, he said come and follow. Spend time with me.

I love the feeling I get from experiencing a great worship song or conference. I love to study and learn Scripture. But Christianity is not about emotional responses or accumulating knowledge. It's about living in relationship with God and other Christians (the Great Commandment). Jesus never said, "A new commandment I give you: learn more Bible verses." He said, "Love one another" (John 13:34).

Maybe we need to stop worrying about giving men an intense experience or perfect teaching. Instead, perhaps we should focus on inviting men to be in relationship as we pursue Christ together. What does that look like for you and the men in your life?

Brett Clemmer is a Christ-follower, husband, father, rock climber, runner and avid reader. He lives in Central Florida and works for Man in the Mirror. In his role as Vice President of Leadership Development, Brett spends the majority of his time writing, training and equipping church leaders to disciple men. Brett co-authored *No Man Left Behind*, a

guidebook for church leaders who want to build male disciples in their church. He is active on Facebook and Twitter, and maintains the One Man, Under God blog at .