Catalyst for Change

Clem Boyd

Aaron J. Cook

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/staff_publications

Part of the Christianity Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.
Aaron Cook ’99 became the Director of Discipleship Ministries in the summer of 2014 and is beginning his sixth year with the 2019–20 academic year. Before that, he served as Director of Guest Ministries at Scioto Hills Christian Camp, where he was responsible for staff recruiting, training, and discipleship. He and his wife, Laurie (Jelinek) ’99, have four children, Aleena, Dylan, Lila, and Isabella.
Aaron, what does it say to you that Cedarville has a director of discipleship?

It makes me really thankful that Cedarville is committed to discipleship. However, what’s more encouraging is just the regular interactions I have with faculty and staff across campus because of the heartbeat of discipleship here. Honestly, I think it’s funny sometimes that my title is the Director of Discipleship when I’m surrounded by disciplers.

How do you view your role?

I see my calling, responsibility, and passion to be twofold. Number one, to promote spiritual growth in the lives of students and teach them to multiply themselves in the lives of others. And then, to encourage 2 Timothy 2:2 relationships all across campus, either formally or informally. I don’t care what department they come under; I just want to encourage it. I want to encourage faculty, staff, and coaches to invest in students. I don’t feel it’s dependent upon me, but I get to cheerlead it. I want to encourage them as a teammate.

Where do you focus your efforts?

The greatest emphasis of my time is building into Discipleship Council and Discipleship Leaders.

I pour into the Discipleship Council (DC) members, and they pour into D-Group (Discipleship Group) leaders, who then invest in the members of our 115 D-Groups, which each has about eight to 10 people.

We have 13 members on council, who are all past Discipleship Leaders, and we may add one more in 2020–2021. We decide on the members in February for the next academic year.

Three to four years ago, I also started meeting weekly with our class chaplains and Student Government Association chaplain for discipleship. I’m also responsible for our Fit to Be Tied program for dating and engaged couples and Tied and True, which is for young marrieds.

What does that investment look like?

Discipleship Council has a weekly meeting on Monday nights. We focus on reading Scripture, prayer, and discipleship training. We encourage, advise, and offer input. We always eat — it’s a chance for Laurie to cook for them — and they interact with my kids, which is so great. There’s some logistics and counseling on how to deal with different issues.

But mainly, the Monday meeting really flows out of their own personal time in the Word. We go through a DVD
curriculum on *Desiring God* by John Piper. It’s the idea that God is most glorified when I’m most satisfied in Him. That was paradigm shifting for me.

I figure if I can press them spiritually, that will overflow into the lives of others. I put a huge emphasis on helping them to grow in their spiritual disciplines, and our discussions are facilitated largely out of those disciplines.

And, of course, to be a discipler, our own spiritual vitality must be strong. It’s not dependent on us, but God works through us, so there’s a great need for us to abide in Christ.

Q: What happens during that Labor Day retreat?
A: We go down to Scioto Hills and sleep out under the stars in hammocks. We cook breakfast over the fire, and then we do some training. Jeremy Kimble (Director of the Center for Biblical Integration and Associate Professor of Theology) comes with me, and usually some past Discipleship Council members help out.

But the weekend is not only for the discipleship leaders to be led, it’s a real training opportunity for me with the DC members on how to lead other leaders. At the end of the weekend they’re able to see how relationships were transformed in just a couple of days, and that is what we want to reproduce in our D-Groups. So, it’s not just instruction on how to do it, but they get to experience it happening.

It’s 2 Timothy 2:2: “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

Q: How do you approach spiritual growth?
A: I’ve really found if I can help students regularly engage in God’s Word in an increasingly rich way, they will grow for a lifetime. That’s the single most important discipline that I can help them develop. Time and time again when I’m interviewing students, and I interview more than 100 for discipleship leader positions, their spiritual lives exploded when they developed a regular time of reading and meditating on God’s Word.

Q: What Scriptures inform the way you disciple?
A: Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” My greatest mission in life is to make Christ my greatest delight, and everything else is going to flow from that.

John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” I feel like my main objective is to teach students to abide in Christ and how beholding Christ in His Word, which is the primary way He has revealed Himself to us, is the method and the means of transformation.

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Q: What is your goal with each person touched by Discipleship Ministries?
A: There are different books that we choose for D-Groups to go through, and there are different books of the Bible that we study, but all of that is a means to develop Psalm 1 individuals. We want to develop joyful meditation on God’s Word that
cultivates happy, resilient, fruitful individuals for the good of others and the glory of God.

The maturing Christian radically understands what they deserve because of sin and what they get because of Christ’s righteousness, which produces a thankful person. That person comes across as happy and is a compelling and attractive individual who earns a platform for the Gospel.

We want to cultivate those kinds of people, and teach them the process of how transformation happens through beholding Christ in His Word regularly, and then developing friendships that exist to struggle alongside one another toward maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28). Between these redemptive, reproducing relationships and this interaction with Christ through His Word, if we can give students a taste for this and develop this sort of a direction in their lives, they will go on.

The measure of our success in large part comes 10 to 15 years from now. I tell my students even in the interview process, “I want you to have a great experience here, yes, but I have tremendous expectations of you if you’re going to serve here. And we will see how successful we are in 10 to 15 years. I want to be having conversations with you about your ongoing multiplying discipleship relationships.” That’s the heartbeat of what I’m thinking about all the time.

Clem Boyd is Managing Editor of Cedarville Magazine.

DISCIPLESHIP FOR COUPLES

Discipleship Ministries offers two programs during the school year to support and encourage biblical, God-honoring marriages: Fit to Be Tied, which is for dating or engaged couples, and Tied and True, which builds up and strengthens newlyweds and young marriages. Think discipleship for marriage.

Fit to Be Tied is comprised of five group seminars led by Cedarville faculty and staff members. Then, couples are paired up with a faculty or staff mentor couple from their local church. “They meet regularly throughout the year to discuss the group sessions and how this information plays out in marriage on a day-to-day basis,” explained Aaron Cook ’99, Director of Discipleship Ministries.

In addition to the group seminars, student couples also take the SYMBIS Inventory, a premarriage analysis that measures a person’s spending habits, conflict type, level of intimacy, personality, conversation style, and desires. Each Cedarville mentor couple is certified to administer SYMBIS and helps the student couple understand their test results.

Tied and True consists of six different panel discussions throughout the school year that are led by faculty and staff couples. They meet in homes for the panel discussions, then meet as gender-specific small groups on a weekly basis working through This Momentary Marriage, a book by John and Noel Piper.

Those groups are led by student couples. Aaron and Laurie meet with the leaders for coaching and encouragement, which adds another element of discipleship. Tied and True had almost 30 young couples last year, and Cook anticipates the program growing.

“I think there’s just a lot of confusion about marriage in our culture,” Cook said. “There’s so much brokenness that there’s a bit of apprehension and fear, but students are seeing the compelling marriages of our faculty and staff. We want to help them start good conversations in an environment that will point them to biblical truth.”

Cook recalled being drawn to the marriages he saw on campus when he was a student. “Dr. (Richard) Blumenstock ’63 was a big part of starting Fit to Be Tied, and I saw how he spoke about his wife,” he said. “I remember Paul and Marilyn Ware, seeing their relationship; Glenn ’82 and Nancy Knauff; and Tom ’80 and Amy Hutchison, and I wanted that. In like fashion, our students are seeing the same thing, and they’re asking the question, ‘How do I build a marriage like that?’”

According to Cook, both programs are teaching students to be proactive navigating life and marriage in a biblical way. “We want to take away some of the misunderstandings and incorrect ideas that come from the low view of marriage that we see in society,” he said.

“There’s not a single perfect marriage,” Cook added. “We get into trouble when we keep things hidden and we don’t get help. Everyone has issues. We just need to encourage an atmosphere where it’s not only OK, but it’s expected that you look for help.”