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Life-on-Life Discipleship

Thomas White

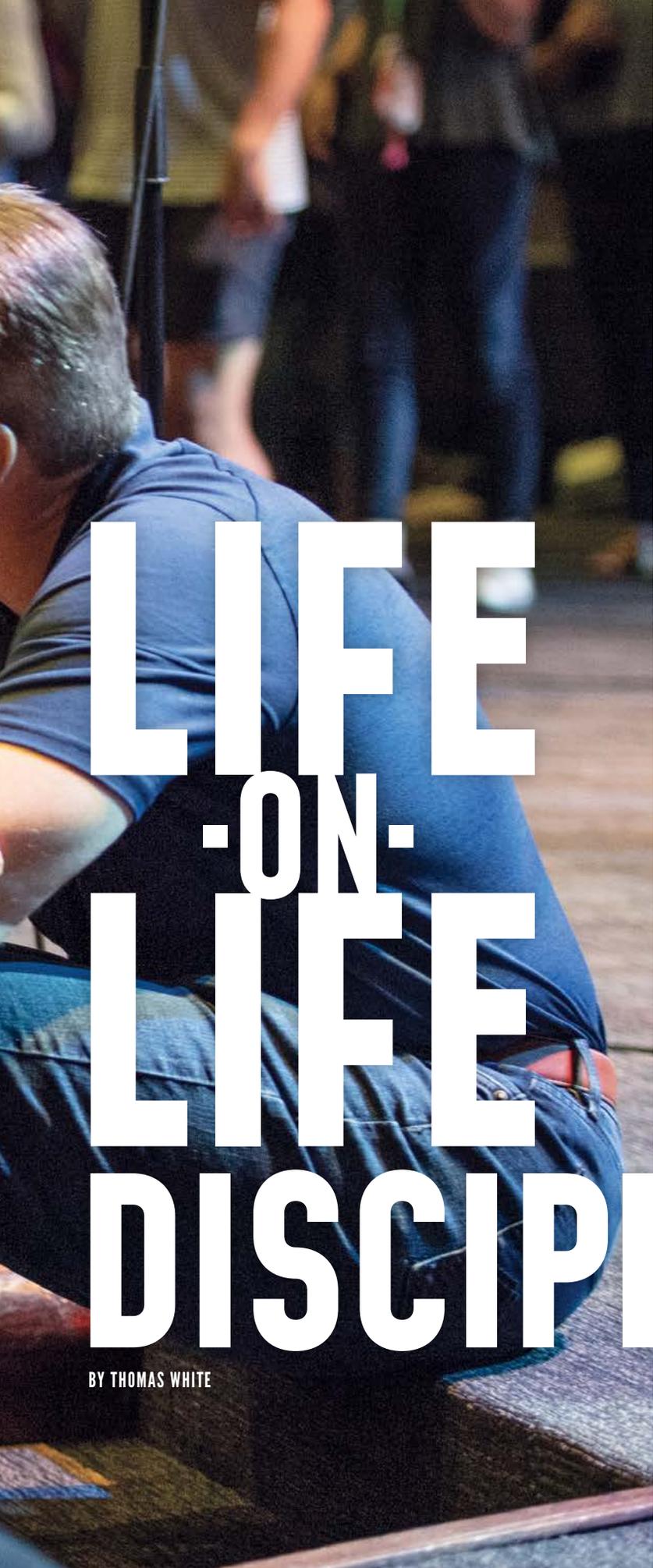
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LIFE -ON- LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

BY THOMAS WHITE

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s you are going, make disciples, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 contains one imperative and three participles. The imperative is “make disciples.” The participles are “as you are going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” Modern evangelicalism breaks this imperative into multiple discussions. We discuss evangelism, missions, and discipleship often in separate categories. Yet the command to make disciples is accomplished by going (missions), baptizing (evangelism), and teaching (discipleship).

At Cedarville University, obeying the Great Commission means a culture of making disciples by going, evangelizing, and teaching until the Word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16).

2 Timothy 2:2 says, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” We desire to be a campus of 2 Timothy 2:2 men and women who entrust the teachings of Scripture to our students, who then live on mission for Christ wherever He sends them, teaching others also. We even expect and have this happening on campus as juniors and seniors mentor and disciple freshmen and sophomore students with the expectation that rising juniors and seniors will continue to pass on the biblical wisdom they have learned to each incoming class of Cedarville Yellow Jackets.

In order to cultivate students for this mission, they must become Psalm 1 Christians. These students don’t walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit

in the seat of scoffers. Psalm 1 paints the picture of a person who delights in the Scripture (the law of the Lord) and meditates on God's Word day and night. This person is like a tree planted by water, receiving all the nutrients needed to produce fruit in its season. We focus on learning and living out spiritual disciplines because unless students learn to nourish themselves through reading, meditating on, and memorizing the Word of God, they will soon dry up once leaving the greenhouse of Cedarville. These spiritual disciplines will allow them to continuously receive the proper spiritual nourishment for the rest of their lives.

We want to prepare students to live a life filled with the Spirit, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, to be producers and not consumers in solid biblical churches, and to surround themselves with genuine, authentic Christian community to support, challenge, rebuke, or correct when necessary.

IN OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We take discipleship so seriously that we added it to our mission statement.

"Cedarville University transforms lives through excellent education and intentional discipleship in submission to biblical authority."

Don't miss this! Intentional discipleship in every area of the campus makes all the difference.

We require a profession of faith for acceptance to Cedarville. Many Christian universities readily accept nonbelievers. Those universities, by necessity, have a different mission and atmosphere on campus. They rightly focus on evangelism and sharing the Gospel with their students. It changes the way chapel functions because you have a mixed audience, some are lost, some are skeptical, some disinterested, and others engaged. At Cedarville, we have chapel five days a week with congregational singing and text-driven preaching. We focus on discipleship, growing believers, and rooting them deeply in Christ. We want a text preached, which means a text explained, illustrated, and applied so that the listener understands the Word with a call for life change.

Think about the difference in Bible minor classes when a university accepts lost students. The teacher must present the material in an apologetic manner because some number in the class do not believe the Gospel. The first Bible minor class of

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five at Cedarville is called "The Bible and the Gospel," which restates our vision "for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ." This class first clarifies the Gospel for those students who may have a false profession of faith. Secondly, it teaches believers how to share their faith, and third, introduces a basic hermeneutic so that students understand how to read and apply the Bible for themselves. Thus, we first address the Gospel, but then quickly move to our goal of creating Psalm 1 students. Our classes in Old Testament, New Testament, and Theology 1 and 2 make up the remainder of our Bible minor. These classes work from a biblical foundation to a historical consideration of the faith, resulting in proper theological formulation for practical application.

Beyond chapel and the Bible minor, every element of campus changes when the focus of a university centers on discipleship rather than evangelism. Residence hall life with the Resident Director and Resident Assistants becomes life-on-life discipleship. Meetings with faculty advisors transition into time for mentorship and prayer. Athletic teams focus more on making strong followers of Christ than wins or losses. Students are encouraged to sign up for Discipleship Groups and Global Outreach missions trips as part of what we do and not just something for a small segment of the campus. From the warm smiles all over campus, to spontaneous times of prayer, to skateboards and bike racks with no locks, the community changes when a Christian university chooses to focus on discipleship rather than evangelism. This begins with the students you recruit and accept.

It continues through bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs, with each progression adding further theological depth and a nuanced understanding of how that applies to each discipline, resulting in students fully prepared for His purpose in any given vocation.

FROM THE TOP DOWN

Trustees at Cedarville University all profess faith in Christ and personally affirm the doctrinal statement yearly. More than 50% of our Board must also be involved in vocational ministry. Those who set the trajectory understand the importance of discipleship.

The President of a Christian university must be "Theologian-in-Chief," making sure that all areas of the



campus remain committed to the fundamentals of the faith. Without this, a campus can easily slip into a silo mentality, thinking discipleship isn't everyone's business.

My grandfather pastored a Baptist church. My father pastors a Baptist church. I consider myself a Baptist preacher who happens to serve as a university President. And at Cedarville, I follow previous presidents who were pastors or evangelists.

We expect Christlike servant leadership that treats every employee relationship as an opportunity for discipleship. Employee reviews in which strengths and weaknesses are discussed provide life-on-life opportunities to encourage and challenge fellow believers to good stewardship before the Lord.

Some may contend that faith and academic disciplines remain separate. Wrong! Our faith affects every academic discipline and every area of life. Those who compartmentalize their faith do not truly understand the task of a Christian university or how faith should influence our beliefs. This means the classroom provides a great opportunity for discipleship in every academic discipline.

A right understanding of Scripture informs every academic discipline on campus and if it doesn't, then that campus is not genuinely a Christian university. For example, the theology of the fall informs the necessity of a separation of powers in political science. The value of life created in the image of God informs our practice in nursing, pharmacy, and health sciences. That God has intricately woven us together in the womb (Psalm 139) makes human anatomy a classroom full of

worship to our Creator and not a series of facts about another animal that evolved on planet Earth.

Each faculty member in appropriate ways disciples students in the classroom with a biblical worldview, revealing how that affects their given discipline. Believing in the authority of Scripture means we reject some areas of a discipline, affirm others, and redeem some secular concepts that have a biblical foundation. This type of education makes a Christian university truly Christian. Without it, you may have Christian teachers conveying a secular education alongside a few Christian traditions such as chapel, worship, and missions trips attached as unnecessary appendages.

The students at Cedarville catch this vision. They catch it from our faculty and staff members and implement it in their own lives. Juniors or seniors often decide to remain in small residence hall rooms simply to invest in and mentor younger students. In true 2 Timothy 2:2 style, they pass on what they received upon first arriving on campus.

When a campus catches the vision for genuine authentic Christian community and a culture of discipleship, it makes a noticeable difference. In fact, you might say it creates life-on-life discipleship at every level and in every area of the campus.

Thomas White is President of Cedarville University. He earned his Ph.D. in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.