

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCIPLING BLACK MEN

Why is the discipleship of Black men crucial? How would the kingdom be advanced?

REVITALIZING THE CHURCH

In most churches Black men are disproportionately absent. Investing in the spiritual growth of young Black men is critical to reversing this trend, and their development as Christian leaders and ministers will be essential for the continued vitality of the Black Church.

EVANGELISM

Many Black Male students are gifted leaders and risk-takers, and can help encourage our chapters to engage the campus with the gospel. Black men are also often the best equipped to reach other Black men for Christ.

THE FUTURE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

High rates among Black men of imprisonment, unemployment, and absentee fatherhood are crippling the African-American community. There are limited positive Black male roles for our youth to help reverse this trend. Discipling Black male college students into godly men that will take a Nehemiah-like role in their communities post-graduation will provide the leadership necessary to overcome our current crisis.

GOD-HONORING RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGES

The discipleship of Black men strengthens the community of believers by giving opportunities to model healthy cross-gender relationships. Learning to make Christ-centered choices about relationships in college can equip them to make the more important decision about marriage—a decision which will have a profound and long-term impact on their lives.

LEADERSHIP AND CHAPTER BUILDING

As we see in the chapter builder paradigm, leadership development is essential to chapter growing a fellowship. Men inspire other men to leadership and will call their peers to exercise their gifts to advance God's kingdom on campus.

DEVELOPING WORLD CHANGERS

Black men of character are pursued to serve in many organizations, both in the university and post-graduation. We have an opportunity to influence organizations, communities, countries, and the world through our discipleship of Black men.

MINISTRY DIAGNOSTIC: KEY OBSTACLES

There are a number of obstacles to effective discipleship of Black men. What are some of the key obstacles for your fellowship? Which are ones that you have potential influence over, and that you can prayerfully work towards changing? (If you are working in a multi-ethnic chapter, many of the obstacles listed in that Next Steps resources will be applicable here as well.)

Take some time with your staff or leadership team to discuss the obstacles listed below. Check the 3 issues you believe are the largest obstacles keeping Black students from participating in your fellowship. (Obviously to do this well, you will need to have had previous interactions and discussions with Black male students—for some that might be your first next step.)

UNAVAILABLE

There are disproportionately few Black men on many of our campuses. Those with leadership gifts are often involved in multiple Christian organizations on campus, and therefore have a myriad of demands placed on their schedules. As such, it may be difficult for them to opt into greater involvement and discipleship within the InterVarsity context.

DISTORTION OF MASCULINITY

Many African-American males had few male role models—a disproportionate number grew up without a father in the home. This typically has had negative effects on their understanding of manhood with respect to women, power, leadership, etc.

LACK OF ROLE MODELS WITHIN INTERVARSITY

Most of our Black male students have little or no regular interaction with a Black male staff worker. This impacts our ability to understand and minister to them effectively, and their sense that InterVarsity is a place where they can be developed as leaders and followers of Christ.

FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES UNATTRACTIVE

How does the chapter fellowship together? What does the group do for fun? If the fellowships times and hangouts don't incorporate the types of activities many Black men typically enjoy, they will be less interested in being involved in the community.

KEY OBSTACLES CNT'D

ASSIMILATION CONCERNS

For multi-ethnic chapters, Black men often perceive (correctly or incorrectly) that involvement will require the adoption of majority culture. Assimilation dynamics are often a stumbling block to effectively reaching the Black community. Further, given the historical context of Black/White relations, there are negative associations for being a part of a “White organization.” There is often an associated sense that they lack agency or power in the organization.

RELEVANCE FACTOR

Though there are similarities between the issues that students deal with, some of the primary struggles, needs, temptations, and sins that students face differ across racial, cultural and gender lines. The topics and discipleship areas that the InterVarsity fellowship emphasizes may not seem relevant to the everyday lives and interests of many Black male students.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IS UNAPPEALING

Many Black men find involvement in Christian community unappealing. They may primarily associate it with restrictions, rules and judgments regarding dating and sex, drinking, parties, etc.—and ultimately a loss of freedom. Following Christ may appear as something in which they will lose much and gain little.

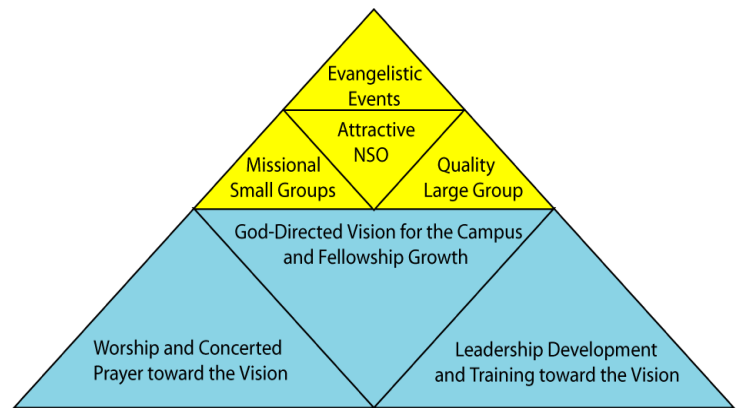
OTHER: _____

MINISTRY DIAGNOSTIC: FELLOWSHIP ASSESSMENT

What are the core weaknesses for your fellowship in discipling Black men?

The principles for effective discipleship of Black men can be assessed in the context of the overall chapter building framework. Greater effectiveness will involve integrating this value into your overall chapter building efforts.

In which areas is the integration of this value strongest, and in which is it weakest? Where might be the most strategic areas to focus?



Take some time with your staff or leadership team to review the categories below, check the 2 areas you believe are strongest, and 2 that are weakest. Remember that the blue bottom 3 triangles are the “behind the scenes work” that lay the foundation for the rest of the pyramid. You may make short-term gains without those 3, but they will be critical for longer-term and larger scale advances.

VISION

Does your fellowship’s vision meaningfully include discipleship of Black men? Does the student leadership understand why effectiveness in this area is critical to attaining the fellowship’s goals?

PRAYER

Is this an issue that your fellowship prays about explicitly? To what extent is this issue a concern in the fellowship overall?

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Are there leaders in your fellowship who are being equipped for effective discipleship of Black men? Are they aware of the obstacles that need to be overcome?

FELLOWSHIP ASSESSMENT CNT'D

QUALITY LARGE GROUPS

Are your large groups attractive and relevant to Black men? Are they taken into account as the speakers, format, atmosphere and objectives for your large groups are decided upon?

MISSIONAL SMALL GROUPS

Is there a ministry or small group(s) in your fellowship that sees effective discipleship of Black men as a critical component of their mission?

NEW STUDENT OUTREACH

Is your New Student Outreach attractive to Black men? Are there intentional efforts made to do things that would draw them?

EVANGELISTIC EVENTS

Do your evangelistic events engage issues of interest to Black men? Are they aware of your events, and are they being effectively invited to them?

NEXT STEPS I: LOCATING PEOPLE RESOURCES

As you begin to diagnose your situation, you probably will need to find people who can assist you. These might be people who can advise or counsel you. Even if they cannot do it regularly, they might be willing to sit down with you once or twice to provide insight and suggestions. There might also be people who can speak at Large Groups or retreats, train staff or student leaders, invest in your Black students, etc.

Look at the ministry obstacles and challenges that you listed, along with the priority needs you determined in your fellowship assessment. Who might be good resource people? Here are some questions that may help you find them; go through each of these questions with your Staff or leadership team. You may need to find other students or local community members to help you answer some of these questions.

1—Are there any predominately Black churches that students on your campus attend? Are there people in these churches that could be potential resource people? Ask students who attend.

2—Are there any Black Christian faculty or staff on your campus?

3—Are there Staff in your region (Black and Non-Black) who have had some success in discipling Black men? “Who can help you identify staff outside of your region who would be willing to provide guidance?”

4—Are there people on your campus who may not be Christian, but have some training/knowledge regarding dynamics with Black men? Take an opportunity to connect with them and see what applicable insights they have.

5—Are there people organizing events that you could take your students to which could help them grow in ministry to Black men?

6—Have you asked other staff in the area/region about resources they could suggest? Are there local community members or students who can help you with these questions?

NEXT STEPS II: STRATEGIC TIPS

As you discern strategies to move forward in this area, your best resources will probably be people resources and material resources. Additionally, we have included some strategic tips that have been effective in different InterVarsity fellowships. Many of these tips are relevant to students in general and not solely to Black men. Go through this list with your staff or leadership team, and determine some strategic next steps that you can take.

CAST A LARGE VISION HIGHLIGHTING LONG-TERM IMPACT

Because Black men are in high demand for leadership and involvement, there are many competing forces for the most gifted leaders. It is essential to call them to a vision of involvement in campus ministry and kingdom purposes that explains the potential impact of their investment in the chapter.

AFFIRM THE IDENTITY OF BLACK MEN AS BLACK MEN

Many Black men are confronted with negative ideas of Black masculinity that are sometimes unfortunately reinforced in Christian circles. This is often coupled with a perception that Christianity is somehow “feminine.” Seek out ways to call out and affirm their inherent worth and value as Black and as male.

BUILD INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY WITHIN THE BLACK MALE CONTEXT

Typical ministry contexts can often be unappealing and intimidating to Black men. Seek opportunities to interact with and understand Black men on their turf—in contexts where they enjoy respect and “feel safe.”

EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT FORMATS FOR ENGAGING IN DISCIPLESHIP

There is a tradition of discussion and debate, storytelling and testimony within the Black community. Sometimes traditionally styled small group Bible studies that limit opportunities for incorporating story and testimony are not the most effective ways of engaging Black men. Unstructured and informal gatherings can be the key to discipleship. Experiment with different formats and methods for dialogue and discipleship, and be careful not to hold any too tightly.

STRATEGIC TIPS CNT'D

USE SCRIPTURE TO CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES AND FALSE IDENTITIES

Unfortunately, many Black men have either freely embraced or felt pressured to embrace false identities that are destructive rather than edifying. Use the word of God as a way of speaking truth into Black men's life that will liberate them from negative stereotypes.

ENGAGE BROADLY IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Because of the rich history of involvement in social justice through the years, Black men have a desire to pursue justice that is all too often limited to community service within their own context. Cast vision that will motivate Black men to not only be community changers, but world changers.

INVEST IN INFLUENTIAL MEN

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2). An investment in even a few Black men can have a significant impact as they impact other men. There may be strategic men to invest in who have great potential even though they are not currently involved in your fellowship.

SPEND SIGNIFICANT TIME BUILDING TRUST PRIOR TO INVITING COMMITMENT

Black men are often seen as a scarce commodity to be exploited, contributing to unhealthy relational patterns. Also, because the demands and obligations often placed on Black men are high and because negative experiences with spiritual leaders are common, it is critical to spend significant time building trust relationally with these men before inviting them into commitments of leadership and service. Informal and unstructured times are important for building trust.

NEXT STEPS III: SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Here are some passages that have been helpful for Staff in Discipling Black men. We've also included a brief listing of some of the main points derived from each passage.

JOEL 2:25-27—RESTORATION

God desires to restore the years (integrity, honor, etc.) that have been taken from our Black men. In contrast to the denigration with which men of color are often met, God promises that His people will "never again be shamed."

2 TIMOTHY 1:3-13—STIR UP THE GIFT

Many Black men have natural leadership abilities, yet are hesitant to lead out in a Christian context. Paul reminds Timothy of the legacy of faith passed on by his mother and grandmother and to "stir up the gift" that is already in him and "do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord." This scripture speaks not only to innate abilities to advance the Kingdom of God, but also strips the excuse of not having a father that many black men could use.

EZEKIEL 3:16-21—WATCHMAN FOR THE PEOPLE

Black men undeniably have influence on their campuses and beyond. This passage speaks to how Black men, particularly Black Christian men, need to stand up and in a sense take ownership of the spiritual development of their brothers. It helps cast a larger scale vision for leadership that highlights the long-lasting impact black male leaders can have on others.

DANIEL 1—ANTI-ASSIMILATION

There are many opportunities for talented Black men to choose out of the things of God. This passage gives a powerful illustration of strong men retaining both their religious and ethnic identity amidst pressures to assimilate.

OT CHARACTER STUDIES IN LEADERSHIP

Character Studies can be an engaging approach for discipleship through bible study. Following the life, successes and failures of Biblical leaders can help students identify with the challenges and potential impact of godly leadership. Some good examples: Moses, Daniel, Joseph, David and Solomon.

NEXT STEPS IV: MATERIAL RESOURCES

Often there are material resources (books, bible study guides, training exercises, etc.) that can be helpful. As you are determining the “next steps” in advancing your ministry, here are a few material resources to keep in mind:

BOOKS AND PUBLISHING: UNDERSTANDING BLACK MALE CULTURE

Murrow, David “Why Men Hate Going to Church.” This groundbreaking book reveals why men are the world’s largest unreached people group. With eye-opening research and a persuasive grasp on the facts, Murrow explains the problem and offers hope and encouragement to women, pastors, and men. Why Men Hate Going to Church does not call men back to the church-it calls the church back to men.

Kunjufu, Jawanza, “Adam Where Are You.” This book raises the question of why most black men don’t go to church. It asks why the percentage of African-American men is greater in Islam than in Christianity? It asks, how can the church draw African-American males into its ranks?

Woodson, Carter G. “The Miseducation of the Negro.” A classic by C. Woodson on the negative effects of American Society on African Americans.

Simmons, Darryl, “Sound the Trumpet.” Darryl Simmons explores the struggles that African American men confront daily. Like a beacon of light, these powerful messages present an awakened spirituality as an alternative to such escapes as drugs, crime, and sexual misconduct.

Key, William and Smith, Robert Johnson, “From One Brother to Another.” This collection of voices reflect struggles, triumphs, hopes, and dreams of African American men of all ages and socioeconomic levels as they reflect on issues that affect them every day. The authors present reflections on such themes as unity, peace, justice, faith, liberation, family, cooperation, perseverance, responsibility, hope and diversity.

Hooks, Bell, “We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity.” In these critical essays, Bell Hooks examines what black males fear most (maternal sadism, loss, emasculation) and probes the depths of their longing for intimacy, for fathers, for meaningful relationships. Highlighting the value of a feminist approach to understanding black masculinity, Hooks looks at the way patriarchal thought and action undermine black male self-esteem. With compassion and generosity, Bell Hooks contends that black men become loving individuals only as they accept full accountability for shaping their destiny.

MATERIAL RESOURCES CNT'D

BOOKS AND PUBLISHING: USEFUL FOR DISCIPLING BLACK MEN

Jakes, T.D. "He-Motions." A spiritual guide for men on how to balance the conflicting demands of today's world presents biblically based recommendations on how to fulfill God's intentions, in a volume that also offers women insight into a man's emotional mindset.

Eldredge, John, "Wild at Heart." Wild at Heart takes men on a journey through which John Eldredge encourages them to be dangerous. Simply look at the dreams and desires written in the heart of every boy: To be a hero, to be a warrior, to live a life of adventure and risk.

Stoker, Fred and Yorkey, Mike, "Every Man's Battle." Every Man's Battle shares the stories of dozens who have escaped the trap of sexual immorality and presents a practical, detailed plan for any man who desires sexual purity-perfect for men who have fallen in the past, those who want to remain strong today, and all who want to overcome temptation in the future.

Munroe, Myles, "Understanding the Power and Purpose of Men." Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men by Dr. Myles Munroe tackles the critical issue of men's identity in the climate of today's ever changing cultural standards and reveals how men can fulfill their true destiny and potential.

BCM NEXT STEPS SUMMARY

TARGET AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

What are the 3 key obstacles you are seeking to address?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

What two areas of chapter building are weaknesses you need to invest in?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

NEXT STEPS TO TAKE:

What two areas of chapter building are strengths you can capitalize on?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Which strategic tips in particular will be helpful as you take your next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Who are people resources that can help you take your next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

What might be important scriptural and material resources for taking these next steps?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____