

How to begin Disciple-making in your Church

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1) Contemplate the dilemma that your ministry probably faces; you have far more work than workers. The problem manifests itself as you keep bringing the weight of ministry needs to the same tiny group of workers. They become bent over as they seek to shoulder more of the labor. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37). It was a deep compassion for people which motivated Jesus's shepherding words. He said we should beseech the Father to send laborers into the harvest. Remember, it is God's field, not your own field (v. 38).

2) Confirm your convictions and vision regarding discipleship ministry. You need a proper biblical understanding of discipleship as clearly spelled out by our Lord in the Great Commission (see also Colossians 1:28-29; and 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13; 1 Timothy 2:2).

3) Recognize that the Great Commission is your church's primary business. We must understand the significance of Jesus's last command. Here is how you are to live, in light of the fact that Christ is anointed King. Therefore, this is how you are to serve the anointed King: make disciples in obedience to Christ. We cannot truthfully say we are serving the King unless this command of His is our priority. Discipleship is the obedient response to who Christ is as Lord.

4) Remember that you are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Obedience to Him begins by recognizing that he has asserted his rightful authority and lordship over us. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Christ is saying, "I should have your reverential fear and respect. I bought you and paid for your sins with my life blood. You must submit and obey me and be spent for your King." This starts by the determination to obey Him in all things, and to be teachable and available.

5) Regard this command to make disciples as a task for all believers, and not just Christian leaders. The Father is gathering worshippers to worship and serve the Lamb (John 4:23-24). Thus, our soul-winning, training, teaching and equipping involves fitting people to be true worshippers. Disciple-making is a task for all believers. All true Disciples of Christ are disciple-makers. Therefore, disciple-making is the task of every true believer; if you love the Son of God you are to commit yourself to complete the task (Col 1:28-29).

6) Respect the entire process of disciple-making from beginning to end. Jesus commands us to *go*. That means we must take the initiative to *make disciples* beginning with preaching and sharing the gospel. To *baptize* means these are newly saved converts. It is your task to instruct them to *obey/observe* all that Christ has commanded. To follow Christ is to keep Christ's

commandments and to live them out in daily life. We are not done in this endeavor until that person stands in Christ's presence. Be faithful in every step in the discipleship process:

- a.) Learn to **engage the lost**. This creates an opportunity to evangelize them.
- b.) Learn how to **share the gospel** in a conversation.
- c.) **Establish new believers** by teaching them to observe what Christ has commanded. Teach them the fundamentals of the faith and the key truths of Christianity. Help them start consistently observing spiritual disciplines (prayer, study of the Word, meditation and memory of the Word, evangelism, fellowship and worship, etc.).
- d.) **Equip new believers in the essentials of the faith** so that they may edify others. Equipping is training in righteousness. This involves cultivating consistent obedience to what Christ has commanded. Help them learn to assist others in their growth in the faith. Again, the wonderful benefit of obeying the Great Commission is this: the fruit of this entire process is that you will get deacons, elders, and shepherds—you get more workers for the harvest.

7) How would disciple-making look if you had a discipleship-minded church? First you must ask where your church is weak. Is the weakness in engaging the lost? Is it in evangelizing the lost? Is it in establishing and equipping new converts to observe all of Christ's commandments? Is it in equipping church members and training them for the service work of ministry? Is it in providing a clear pathway to ministry and maturity?

A very important question for developing shepherds and leaders in your church is as follows: Do you believe that there are clear pathways in the ministry in your church to move a new convert all the way to serving as an elder? Envision how this might work in a discipleship minded church. Consider setting up a class that shows how a newly saved person can deepen their commitment to Christ. Establish a class on marriage and family. Establish a class on how to lead a home fellowship. Set up a two-year program to train people to be Bible study leaders.

8) In order to grow shepherds and leaders in your church, you must have a pathway for them to grow and to be developed. Then, the people in your church must know that these pathways to maturity exist. They must become familiar with these pathways. The problem in the church globally is that there is far more work than workers. A ministry lacking workers needs a clear visible available pathway to get there. Both Jesus and Paul ministered by a pathway—they gave special attention to a small group of men all before setting them loose in ministry.

9) Embrace a vision for discipleship which includes a pathway, and start making some necessary changes:

- a.) Clarify your convictions. State what you believe about disciple-making. You will only be convincing if you are clear and passionate about the mission. Do not wait for people to

come to you. Pursue them and train them. Start with the key people who have caught the vision for disciple-making. Do not try to convince the entire church. Focus on the ones who will be ready to own discipleship. Concentrate and invest in those who are your current leaders as well as your potential leaders.

b.) Convince key leaders to hold the same convictions about discipleship. They will be able to convince others. This will result in an army of people at your side to help you disciple. You can raise up disciples by mentoring within small group ministry—this creates a desire in individuals for discipleship. In that context people will be convinced of the necessity of personal involvement. They will act out the same convictions that you are modeling. As they grow as disciples, teach them how to make appointments with church members in order to check on their spiritual health, and to pray with them. Remember, disciple-making is nurturing, and monitoring, and teaching obedience to Christ's commands.

c.) Consider each individual in your ministry and how to help them grow in the discipleship process. We call this 'mapping'. We want to determine where they fall on the maturity pathway, or maturity map. The basic regions of the maturity map are: *conviction; character; competency*. This pathway to maturity is also designated as *head, heart, and hands*. Workers can be assigned to help occupy each ministry step necessary to help people along the spiritual path to maturity. These "path-guides" are stationed at points along the way.

d.) Once the above is in place, then you can chase after this vision corporately. This is the wonderful benefit of obedience to the Great Commission. Then, the day will come when you won't have to hunt for workers because you have grown them in your church. These workers are then implemented into specific ministries; the entire life of the church thrives. Unleashing workers to ministry is mediated by the mentoring that takes place in discipleship, not by programs. The greatest progress in spiritual growth is always traceable to the investments made through personal development—that involves hands on, life-on-life equipping and soul care.

10) Why does growing a culture of discipleship in your church require such a massive mind-shift? First of all, what is the missing "X-Factor" in the church the today that is neutralizing obedience to the Great Commission? Answer, church members are warehoused because the church has forgotten the corporate dimension of sanctification. The church seems to have lost the truth that the believers' progress towards spiritual maturity is deeply tied to the contributions they each make to spiritual growth of one another.

The church has a desperate need to recover deep community. The biblical pattern for the body of Christ is that church members are to challenge one another to live out the implications of the supremacy of Christ in every area of life. This is our mandate— that our Savior may be seen as infinitely beautiful before one another. We are to live out the great story of Christ's

achievements for unworthy sinners.

But personal shepherding is needed for this to happen—sitting beneath a pulpit alone won't make this take place. We have to help one another live out the implications of the gospel in our particular relationships and vocations. Therefore, the life of the body exists to manifest life-on-life soul care unto the glory of Christ and the maturity of the saints. This means it is New Testament normative for us to prayerfully speak the Word into one another's lives with accountability, transparency, and with 'sermonizing' communications of mutual edification.

But, without a massive mind shift, the default mode is spiritual passivity. The nerve of the Great Commission is severed when the congregation believes that only a professional clergy is qualified to build up, teach, admonish, and contribute to each person's spiritual maturity. This default mode of visualizing solely a professional ministry kills the perception of the priesthood of the believer. And when the priesthood of the believer is obscured, it becomes incredibly problematic to advance the Great Commission.

Career pastors are inadvertently contributing to this problem because they have not thought out and, cast a vision for shared ministry with non-vocational shepherds. Vocational pastors may speak about a fully ministering church, but in practice they may feel more carnally secure when the clergy-laity divide is separated by a no-man's land.

If we are to faithfully cast this vision for discipleship we must fervently communicate what Christ requires of His true followers. Thus, the terms of discipleship as laid down by our Savior ought to be accompanied by the teaching that we have every resource in Him that is necessary to fulfill what He requires.

11) Here are some of the 'drivers' of biblical discipleship in the church:

- a.)** Intentionality, there are no coincidental disciples. We must be utterly deliberate in our disciple-making in order to 'hit the target' outlined by the Great Commission.
- b.)** Christ's pattern for His church is an 'every member ministry' with no spectators. How we 'do church' must be a theatre for what it means to obey the Great Commission.
- c.)** Discipleship mediates ministry, ministry is not mediated by programs. Disciple-makers equip, and then unleash their disciples to ministry. It is through the personal training and development provided by discipleship that the members of the body of Christ are equipped to do the work of the ministry.
- d.)** Disciple-making envisions, and depends upon a continuum of mutual edification. A fully corporate commitment to mutual edification means that the life of the body exists to nurture disciples at each stage of spiritual growth. Therefore, every true Christ-follower is contributing to the spiritual growth of other believers. It takes disciple to make a disciple (Note the clear chain of entrusting: Christ entrusting truth to Paul, Paul entrusting God's truth to Timothy, Timothy entrusting to faithful men, faithful men entrusting to others—2 Timothy 1:12-14; 2:1-2).

e.) Disciple making according to our Savior is how we will plant churches and how we reach the world. We cannot improve upon our Savior's mission's strategy. The Great Commission is how we are to multiply disciples (2 Tim 2:2).