

Research Summary: Becoming a faithful sower of the Gospel

Over recent years MOVE team members have trained over a thousand Australian Christians in simple skills to make disciples who can in turn make disciples. Having trained so many, it seemed prudent to revisit some of those trained and find out how effective the training had been. In an effort to focus the study, given disciple making is intrinsically a broad topic, the specific area of “gospel sharing frequency in the life of the believer” was investigated. The investigation therefore focused on factors that helped an existing believer become and remain a regular, faithful sower of the gospel. A qualitative research process was applied using data gathered from semi-structured interviews with sixteen believers who before training were sharing their faith less than once per week. (Most were sharing perhaps once or twice a month, if the opportunity arose).

Believers who were sharing more than once a week after the training were grouped and classified as L1 sharers; those still sharing less than once per week were labelled L0 sharers. As it happened there were eight in each category – all had been functioning as L0 or L1 sharers for more than six months at the time of the interview.

It was encouraging to learn that the sixteen believers who were interviewed had collectively baptised eleven people and engaged in more than 740 gospel sharing events as a result of the MOVE training and on-going initiatives. (Note that in this study sharing events counted were: sharing your story (testimony), a Gospel presentation, a Bible story or praying with a person who was far from God for a need). On average people who become L1 sharers improved from 1 share per month to eight per month. Often these believers were part of a team already connecting with lost people, however prior to the MOVE training they lacked skill to initiate a spiritual conversation, listen to their friend and then share some “gospel” in response. Prior to the training there was a Christian *presence* - the training helped them get to *proclamation*. For example, it was exciting to hear from Rosalyn¹, who prior to training had never baptised anyone, but in the 2 years since training she has shared the gospel multiple times and baptised 2 people. One of those baptised has in turn been trained and baptised 2 of their close friends! Analysis of the interviews showed that the simple skills taught built competence and confidence leading to willingness to share faith. Trainees also understood that disciples need to take initiative, go to the lost and to be intentional about sharing. This was encouraging.

Positively the training enabled almost all attendees to initiate more gospel sharing, however not everyone continued in this vein. Unless other supportive processes came into play, reversion to L0 activity was likely.

Sustaining Gospel Sharing

Multiple factors were observed by the researcher and identified by the interviewees that facilitated sustained L1 activity. These grouped easily around five themes:

1) TEAM! Being part of a discipling team or community that intentionally connects weekly with people who are not yet Christians was the most significant supportive factor. The disciple making community may run an ESL club, a play group, visit people in their home to share faith or run a discussion group at a university for example. The cluster of supportive activities provided by the teams encountered in this study included: facilitating connection with lost people, friendship, pastoral support, prayer and ongoing training. Every L1 interviewee in this study was part of such a team, while all L0 believers were not part of such a team. It was noted that five L0 sharers were for a period functioning as L1 sharers while in association with a team – now no longer in a team, their gospel sharing frequency has diminished.

2 INNER CONVICTIONS. A number L1 believers reported that they felt compelled to share the gospel. Regularly sharing their faith had become for them a strongly held inner belief seeded from Scripture, sermons, other Christians or from the training experience. Believers spoke of a compulsion to share; feelings of guilt if they remained silent; concern for the plight of lost people and the need for all disciples to obey Jesus' words in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-2). L1 sharers who identified inner convictions as a primary source of ongoing motivation were able to lead others.

3. RESULTS. When believers have taken initiative to share faith and have then seen God do something in people's lives or experienced the Holy Spirit working in them as they spoke, have been greatly empowered to persevere. Results reported were people being saved, friends being interested in knowing more, sensing a closeness with the Holy Spirit as they shared or finding words as they spoke that the believer felt were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Where no results were observable by the believer (eg witnessing in a shopping centre over a 6 mth period) it was hard to sustain outreach. Where L1's had multiple points of contact with the lost, after a time they focused on the field where tangible results had been observed.

4. PRAYER or praying with a partner sustained believers in sharing faith. Most L1 believers had regular prayer partners. Partners prayed for one another and for those with whom they shared. It was interesting to note that on average both L0 and L1 sharers prayed for about 30 minutes per day (the range was 5min to 90 min per day). However, analysis of recorded interviews revealed that L1 sharers mentioned prayer a total of 169 times, while L0's roughly half this at 87 times during interviews. It seems probable that the L1 engagement with the harvest inspired a more mindful and ready disposition toward prayer. Given that half of those interviewed were praying for less than 17 minutes a dayⁱⁱ (some for 5 mins or less), it would seem that prayer and devotional life may be a weakness in the life of Australian believers. Where God is birthing significant discipling movements, extraordinary prayer and fasting accompanied with wide sowing of the Gospel is evident (among other things). On average, leaders in such movements are praying for 2 hrs a day and the average believer is fasting one day a week and involved in regular corporate prayer (Trousdale 2012, Watson 2014).ⁱⁱⁱ The study suggests that we Aussies may need to do some work on our prayer life and our abiding devotion to God! Further, it may be that people who undertake the disciple multiplication training should all participate in a quality short term discipleship course that sets the DNA of the disciple. Such courses cover as a minimum: assurance of salvation, how to pray, abiding in Christ, how to read the word, church and making disciples.

5. TRAINING After the initial training, (usually delivered over eight 2hr sessions with evangelism experience), ongoing relevant training, coaching and peer support meetings were seen to be of help. Effective support revolved around, reviewing the progress of the team, looking for where they may be stuck, debriefing and designing appropriate activity to improve skills. Sometimes teams simply needed to practice what they already knew, or meet to encourage one another, others needed to be coached or to learn conversation skills via roleplays. This renewed competence and confidence, extended skill sets in specific areas of weakness thereby facilitating progress.

Where to from Here?

Many of us see a desperate need for our friends and neighbours to know the living God. We know that the Lord Jesus is so much more compassionate, kind and loving than our friends perceive and that their future is dire without Him. A real move of God is required in this nation in order to bring people to Christ. While it is God who births disciple making movements; it is our responsibility to be disciples who pray AND share Jesus in order to make disciples who are trained to then do likewise (consider

Mark 4:1-25, Luke 10:1-10). These disciples then gather into church structures that are simple and healthy (see Acts 2:36-47).

This study has highlighted the fact that many believers will grow in confidence and competence to share their faith if given opportunity to learn the simple skills required to transition from being a “Christian presence” to becoming a proactive disciple maker. The MOVE training has capacity to facilitate the transition. Critical to the enduring success of the disciple maker is being part of a team that is actively sharing the gospel. In this team the disciple can be encouraged through prayer, problem solving, skills development and companionship to continue with the good work of intentionally multiplying disciples of Jesus.

ⁱ Name changed to preserve anonymity.

ⁱⁱ The range was 5min to 90 min per day. If an interviewee reported praying 3 days a week for 40 mins per day, their average per day prayer time was calculated at $3 \times 40 / 7 = 17$ mins per day

ⁱⁱⁱ See Trousdale, Jerry. *Miraculous Movements* Nashville Tennessee: Thomas Nelson 2012, p56 and Watson, David. Watson, Paul. *Contagious Disciple-Making*. Nashville Tennessee: Thomas Nelson. 2014. Kindle, p79