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How Jesus Made Disciples

WINFIELD BEVINS



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“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” – 2 Timothy 2:2

Many Christians and churches will never reproduce themselves. The result is that they take their faith and legacy with them to the grave. Nearly four thousand churches close every year in North America. Ed Stetzer estimates that 70% to 80% of all evangelical churches in the US have either stopped growing or are in decline! What does this mean? Simple: the church in North America is not reproducing. We need to become a reproducing disciple making movement once again.

The ultimate goal of discipleship is to reproduce disciples with the gospel through developing disciple making leaders and church planting. Reproduction ensures that a movement will live past its founding stages. The church was never intended to be an end in itself; rather it is called to reproduce and fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples. Reproduction is the goal of every living thing. We see this throughout the pages of the Bible. The Bible is full of reproductive language. God created humankind, animals, and plants to reproduce. Reproduction is also seen in the agricultural language that Jesus uses throughout the gospels.

Reproducing disciples is the result of selecting, training, and empowering leaders who will in turn reproduce themselves in others. This begins locally with the church and then can take place on a larger scale through reproduction of church plants regionally and internationally. You can be a part of a 21st century disciple making movement that can change our postmodern world for Christ.

Reproducing Disciples: A Few Good Men *and* Women

The most powerful paradigm for reproducing disciples is the discipleship methodology of Jesus. In *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman tells us that Jesus' plan of reproducing disciples, "was not with programs to reach the multitudes but with men whom the multitudes would follow...Men were to be His method of winning the world to God. The initial objective of Jesus' plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to His life and carry on His work after He returned to the Father." If we are to be like Jesus, we must invest our lives in faithful men and women who will reproduce themselves in others.

Robert Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism* offers the following eightfold way Jesus trained the twelve disciples; selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction. In this section, I will summarize Coleman's analysis of Jesus training of the twelve disciples in this section and apply it to reproducing disciples.

Selection

It all started when Jesus called a few men to follow him. Jesus did not choose everyone he met to be his disciples. He took very seriously the selection of men he trained. Rather than focusing on the multitude, he only chose twelve. The reason for his selectivity was intentional. He chose twelve men and a number of women to instruct and train. They would in time reproduce themselves in others. A few good men and women were Jesus' master plan of reproducing disciples.

In a similar way, we must be selective in the people with whom we choose to disciple. We should look for people who are faithful, willing, and able to reproduce their discipleship in others. Disciple making does not require a degree or Bible college education; rather we should seek to find men and women who have a passion and a hunger to for Christ. Willingness to answer the call to follow Jesus is the only requirement to be a disciple of Jesus.

Association

Jesus was intimately involved in the lives of his disciples as they followed Him. His training method was spending time with His disciples. Coleman points out that Jesus had no formal training or education; He was His own school and curriculum. This is a radical concept for those of us who live in the 21st century. Whenever we find someone, who seems called into ministry we send them off to let someone else train them. The New Testament model of discipleship was homegrown, natural, and organic. Discipleship happens as men and women spend time with their spiritual mentor.

In a similar way, we should be in the lives of the people we are seeking to develop. We should schedule time with people who we want to disciple outside of normal church functions. We should schedule times to play, pray, and share a meal together with the people we are discipling. This means that discipleship will require something of us. Discipleship costs us something even for those of us who are called to disciple others. We must sacrifice our time, energy, and emotion in others if we are to fulfill the discipleship task of making disciples. I believe this is one of the number one reasons that churches don't disciple anymore. It takes "too much" time.

Consecration

Jesus expected His followers to obey Him. He sought to create in His disciples a lifestyle of consecrated obedience. Discipleship is about a total consecration to the Lord. As disciples, we need to submit and obey God's word and plan for our lives. However, many of us have trouble submitting. We live in an individualistic culture where people do not want anyone else telling us what to do. That is why submission and obedience to God is so hard as well as important. When we become obedient to God in every area of our lives, we will experience victorious Christian living. God can only use men and women who are willing to obey Him.

Impartation

Jesus gave himself away to His disciples by imparting to them everything that the Father had given Him. He gave Himself freely. He imparted not only Himself, but also spiritual truth about life and ministry. He taught them about the scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus imparted Himself to His disciples, we must seek to give ourselves to the men and women that we are called to serve. There is a transfer of godly wisdom and character when true discipleship takes place. As leaders, it is important for us to grasp that we have a spiritual responsibility to impart ourselves in others if we are going to make disciples.

Demonstration

Jesus demonstrated how the disciples should live the Christ centered life. One reason Jesus had such a lasting impact on His disciples is that He lived the message before them daily. He was the message and the method. By walking with Jesus, they saw how He lived His faith in the real world. He prayed before them. He fed the poor. He had compassion on the multitude. He healed the sick. In other words, He lived the life that He wanted to reproduce in His disciples. After Jesus' death and resurrection, He expected His disciples to say and do what He said and did.

It is important that we practice what we preach, because the people we are training

will follow our life and example. It is not enough to preach the gospel, we have to practice it daily. Our personal walk with God is one of the most important factors in developing godly leaders. We will reproduce what we are. The most powerful message is a life lived for God. Make sure that the life you live is worthy for others to follow.

Delegation

Jesus assigned His disciples work. He developed His disciples by delegating ministry responsibilities to them. He sent His disciples out and gave them real ministry. Hands on experience was a vital part of Jesus' discipleship curriculum. It's funny that churches make people do things even Jesus did not do. Some churches make people go through a yearlong process before they can serve in any capacity in the church. Likewise, some people spend years in college and seminary with little if any real ministry involvement. Churches need to rethink delegating spiritual responsibility to people, especially new believers. Is it any wonder our discipleship is often anemic? Sadly, most people think the pastor is supposed to do everything in the church. We must not forget the power of involving people in ministry.

Supervision

Supervision is important. Jesus supervised His disciples. Whenever they returned from a ministry trip, they would report to Him. This allowed a time for the disciples to reflect, review, and to receive instruction from Jesus. Supervision is an important part of leadership development, especially when dealing with new believers. We want to delegate and empower people to act, but we also need to help supervise them to make sure they stay on track. Many times people will get into trouble without proper supervision. Supervision is an art. On the one hand, if we are not careful, we can micro-manage people. On the other hand, we can be so loose that we don't supervise people at all.

Reproduction

Jesus expected His disciples to reproduce His likeness in others. He imparted His

message and mission to His disciples so that they would reproduce themselves in others and make disciples of all nations. The Great Commission implies that the followers of Jesus will reproduce themselves and “Make disciples.” Reproduction is how the Christian movement was born.

Today, what has become a 2.1 billion-member movement started with only twelve disciples. I want to return to the analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-17. The purpose of the Vine (Jesus) and the branches (us) is to bear fruit. Christians are to work for and expect a harvest (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2). Let us commit our lives and our churches to reproducing ourselves in others in order to make disciples of our communities and our world.

We need to rediscover the reproductive nature of the church. We are called to select, train, and send missional disciples of Christ out into the world who will be able repeat the process of discipleship. What we need in our day is an organic disciple making movement that will train and send men and women to be reproducing disciples of Christ.

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