

Why Make Disciples?

This is truly the starting point. Unless we own the answer to this question, everything stops with the next distraction. Life has way too many alternatives if we aren't thoroughly convinced that we need to make disciples. So let's digest the answer.

Jesus made disciples. He called them disciples and the writers of Scripture called them disciples. Disciples reflect the mind, character and priorities of their master. They accept, live by and help spread those teachings the rest of their lives. Jesus called his disciples into a progressive, relational covenant and walked closely with them for several years. All of them entered into a unique, relational walk that radically changed their lives forever. Jesus knew them by name and interacted with them all intimately. We see but a tiny glimpse of all that happened during those three years.

We have many pictures of preaching to a variety of groups and numbers of people. We even have mass conversions. But we don't see mass discipling. The only examples we see are relational conversations with one, two, three, twelve and many other people listening in. Jesus shared His thoughts, convictions, truths, and His priorities in discussions as he walked with these committed individuals. He practically lived with these men and women. He encouraged them, challenged them and helped them reshape their values and purpose for living.

Discipling Details

Robert Coleman wrote a masterful, classic book called "The Master Plan of Evangelism." He carefully assessed and categorized the actual, deliberate strategy of Jesus as He was building a movement of disciple makers. Buy the book! Here are the eight categories that Coleman observed in Jesus' plan:

- 1) Selection** – Recruiting the Right People
- 2) Association** – Spending Lots of Time Together
- 3) Consecration** – Calling for Surrender and Obedience
- 4) Impartation** – Fully Investing Everything for Kingdom Living
- 6) Delegation** – Building Personal Responsibility in Kingdom Ministry
- 7) Supervision** – Releasing with Healthy Accountability
- 8) Reproduction** – Helping Multiplication Begin

Each of these areas of process and resolution are personal and accountable. Can you see the natural progression in His plan? Jesus knew His disciples and walked with all of them through

these eight phases. By the time He left them, they were ready to multiply their own movements of disciplemakers.

Let's get to the answer to our question- why make disciples? Jesus recruited and took the time to make authentic, maturing disciples. He walked and worked with them, showing them how to reproduce authentic disciples. He knew He would leave them in charge of His great mission. They had to be mature enough to stand strong on their own. As Jesus prepared to leave, He shared His final challenge: "Go and Make Disciples!" This command, make disciples, was to be passed on to all of His future disciples until His return. "As you are going, baptize them and teach them to obey." The very words He used point to a repeated process of continuous disciplemaking. So that includes all of us today! This is why we make disciples. It is the Plan! It's what He left us to do!

Our Current Dilemma

Somewhere along the way, someone forgot to tell us that we have to be disciples who make disciples! Can you believe that? Jesus stated this earth-shattering command right as He was leaving, and, at some point, someone forgot to pass it on. Now, many of us are as guilty as that someone. We have the same Bible with the same verses, but many of us haven't known what to do with it. We weren't disciplined and we've barely seen any examples of it in our church experience.

We have lots of answers and excuses. "The world is different today. Our busyness and commitments would never allow us to do what Jesus did. Most people won't slow down enough to be disciplined. We're lucky to have them come to anything with any regularity. Here's our best solution. Disciplemaking is the program of the local church. People are disciplined by our preaching, our teaching, our classes, and our home groups. At our best, we group disciples for effectiveness and efficiency. We put people through disciplemaking courses or help them get into a group that disciplines them. We pour in all the truths about God and how to live a godly life. In this busy and distracting world, we're doing the best we can. There probably is no real way to do anything more today." Is that the truth? Is that what we have to live with?

Here's the problem. We're not making real disciples! We're filling churches with partially committed believers, and many of them never really grow up. They're adult Christians, but many of them are still walking around in diapers. How sad. Now, some people simply grow up and become disciples and disciple makers because they are hungry, determined or disciplined. They run at truth, sit, listen and learn to feed themselves. Thank God for self-starters. Many of our programs are good and are helping people who have some level of discipline and are motivated. We shouldn't stop what we're doing. But most believers don't go beyond Sunday

morning attendance. Isn't that true? And many of the rest never really grow up.

It certainly helps to draw people into smaller settings like a class or a small group. People do grow more in those environments. But I've watched the results of decades of small groups and Sunday school classes, and most of them are not producing authentic disciples! So many people won't grow up and become fully developed disciples by themselves. God knows that! I don't believe He ever intended for us to limit ourselves to these types of settings. Most of them don't provide the criteria and certainly not the personal coaching that's necessary to help people really become all that they're meant to be. God commanded **us** to make disciples. This was not simply a group statement. It was meant to be taken personally. He commanded Peter, James and everyone else sitting there to each go and make disciples who would then go and make more disciples. We are all commanded to do this main thing, and we are all personally responsible to pass on this life that He has given to us!

Back to the Plan

Disciples are made, one person at a time! It takes the investment of time, commitment, energy and resources. It can be done one-on-one or in small groups. Either way, it shouldn't and can't successfully be done quickly. In fact, it's been proven that we can have great long-term success if we take our time and build healthy, confident disciples who know how to reproduce what they have received. This is how we change the future of the church. And that's how the movement started. That's what Jesus did in the first place. We need to return to our roots and restart something great again!

Let's talk about movements. Movements capture the hearts and minds of followers. They may be program-driven in the beginning, but programs never carry movements. Healthy movements continue long after leaders and programs die. In most churches, leaders move and many programs change or die. That's why discipling shouldn't focus on a person or a program. It needs to have the intentionality of producing independent, multiplying disciples or it too will die. Most churches can't point to a lot of fruit from programmed discipling twenty to thirty years later.

Parents produce movements. Think about that concept. We have children who we help grow up, they get married, and then they repeat the same process. I'm in the middle of five generations of over a hundred relatives building a Kingdom legacy. It's so natural. You can't stop it. What we instill in our children will be passed on for generations. This is one way to make disciples. It's part of the plan. Why wouldn't we want to capture the same dynamic in the rest of our lives? Disciple three, help them disciple three, help them disciple three and then help them disciple three! That carefully-focused strategy will produce well over one hundred

disciples, ready to keep on investing in others, in just four generations. Now, that sounds exciting. That sounds like a movement. That kind of strategy will change the world. And isn't that what we want? Isn't that what He wants?

The next big question has to be: What in the world are we building? What is an authentic disciple? Two different opinions will produce two completely different products. One person may look very educated, but he or she may not be living anything like how Jesus intended them to live. Another may be passionately running hard at Kingdom living, but he or she doesn't really understand the Word! You can see why it's critical that we take the time to define and understand what an authentic disciple is from God's point of view.