



**BIVOCATIONAL & SMALL CHURCH
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**GROWING DISCIPLES IN
YOUR CONGREGATION**

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Discipleship That Matures Membership

Targets matter! Each of us has a target whether consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally and proactively or passively. How you shoot at your target also matters. Some may shoot and then draw a bulls-eye around the hole while others draw a bulls-eye and then shoot at the target. One thing is for sure, you will hit what you aim for! This illustration shows the importance of being captivated by a compelling vision, a well-defined mission, a definite strategy and an intentional plan to mature your membership through an effective disciple-making process. In this article we will explore several components involved in developing a plan for your church. These components will include determining where to begin, to evaluating current reality and envisioning God's desired future, defining a disciple and what disciple-making is, and developing steps on how to design a disciple-making plan.

DETERMINING WHERE TO BEGIN

The first, most appropriate, and foundational place to start is with the Bible as our source and Jesus as our model. When it comes to disciple-making, Jesus drew the bulls-eye and established our target. So we must begin with the model of Jesus. He demonstrated the most effective way to make reproducing disciples. He also left us with both instructions, examples and mandates to fulfill His calling and commission. Whatever strategy, plan or process we utilize, it must be biblically, theologically and practically sound as well as Bible based.

So, how did Jesus make disciples? As Jesus went about preaching and teaching, large numbers of people followed him almost everywhere he traveled. They came for many different reasons. Jesus used the opportunities to teach the masses. He told parables that related to everyday life to help the people understand their need to be saved and become disciples. Jesus was clear about his vision and mission to seek and save the lost. He never allowed himself to lose sight of that mission and remained true to it until it was finished. In order to continue his mission, he knew he would have to develop disciples

who would obediently carry out that mission after he was gone. This would not happen by only speaking to the masses. He would also have to establish smaller groups of disciples to pour his life into. Although he met and taught smaller groups of people in homes and synagogues, he still needed to narrow the size of the groups to allow for more effective discipleship. So Jesus called the twelve to be with him and follow him. Mark 3:14 says, “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” Notice the intent was that they spend time with him, then the mission would follow later. It was a calling with a cost. In Luke 9:23 Jesus said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Narrowing the group even more, Jesus spent more intimate time with Peter, James and John who were known as the inner circle. As each group became smaller in number, Jesus offered more comprehensive instruction and explanation while building deeper and more intimate relationships. He adapted his approach to each size group with different processes and methods. Jesus modeled what he taught so they would be able to catch the vision and carry out the mission beyond the three years of his earthly presence.

Some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples following his resurrection were given in Matthew 28:18-20 which states, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” This passage represents the biblical mandate given to each and every church to produce reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ final words to his disciples before ascending into the heavens were stated in Acts 1:8. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” This passage represents the biblical mandate given to each and every believer to be a witness and missionary by personally sharing your story and God’s story of salvation with those far from God and making disciples who continue to do the same.

The Apostle Paul used a similar approach to disciple-making as is revealed throughout the Book of Acts and his Epistles. He spent time teaching the masses in the synagogues wherever he traveled. He established more effective disciple-making as he ministered and taught in homes. But his most effective disciple-making occurred with individuals such as Timothy, Titus and Mark. In some cases he spent 2 to 3 years 7 days a week making disciples and developing leaders who would reproduce the witness and make more disciples. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, “You, therefore, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

We are called to pass on the faith and teachings of Jesus Christ. Our calling and commission as believers is to be followers of Jesus who make followers of Jesus while the calling and commission of each and every church is to produce followers of Jesus who make followers of Jesus. This concept includes the idea of the personal spiritual development of each believer as well as the responsibility of mentoring those we bring to Christ until they repeat the process by doing the same.

The second place to start must be with the leadership in the church. Any effective disciple-making strategy must have the full support of the pastor and church leaders. It must be a priority as they continually cast the vision and expectation of multiplying disciples throughout the congregation. The most effective disciple-making process or methods may include but cannot be exclusive to the preaching and teaching ministry of the pastor in the pulpit. Neither can disciples be fully developed only through the use of smaller crowds such as Sunday School classes although this may contribute to discipleship. The most effective means for disciple-making is found in much smaller and intimate relational environments such as small groups of 6 to 8 or even as small as triads. These much smaller groups offer life-on-life experiences for much deeper and transparent relationships and greater instruction in the application of biblical principles and personal spiritual development. Jesus’ methods were different based on the size of the crowd. Though he taught with parables among the masses, he provided deeper explanation to his disciples.

The pastor may model the process of disciple-making with the deacons or a small group of men with the stated expectation that they each would

develop other small groups in the future. This represents the movement from the masses to the intimate group in a disciple-making strategy.

Evaluating Current Reality and Envisioning God's Desired Future

The third place to start is by getting a snapshot of current reality to evaluate the attitude and readiness of the congregation to make disciples.

The North American Mission Board reports that 70-75 percent of Southern Baptist churches in North America have plateaued or are declining in number with another 10-15 percent at or near risk. This means that 80-90 percent of Southern Baptist Churches are not healthy, disciple-making congregations.

Evaluate the current reality or state of your church in relation to disciple-making. Then consider what the church would be or look like if God's dream, vision or future for disciple-making became the reality. Compare the two realities? What does the gap look like between the two realities? Which of the following descriptions best characterizes the attitude of your congregation?

The strategy of a dying church is to "first bring the lost into our institution, then once they are members, they can enjoy the benefits of the club." Christians in dying churches believe they are called out to form a distinct society or institution. They tend to retreat into fortresses and caves of institutional elitism for protection. This church suffers disconnect from the Great Commission. Members do not see themselves as witnesses or missionaries and are disengaged regarding outreach but rather place that responsibility on paid staff. Following certain rules and undertaking various institutional responsibilities allows them to enjoy specific privileges. Calling a pastor means he will minister to the members rather than equip the members for ministry. The club offers personal refreshment and assures that their needs will be met by a personal chaplain. What growth happens is usually by additional people being added as a result of the pastor and/or staff doing the outreach.

The strategy of a healthy and growing church is "first go out among the publics of modern culture to forge new links with

Jesus, and then invite people into companionship with the body of Christ.” Christians in growing churches believe they are called out to form a distinct apostolic witness about Jesus, not their church or denomination. They see themselves as a community in which participants all experience a constant connection with Jesus, enjoy the fruits of the spirit which come from a relationship with Jesus, and purposely reach out as the body of Christ. Continuing to deepen faith and hope, growing in awareness of self and mission, and sharing love with complete strangers characterizes these believers. An attitude of bringing abundant life to others is their priority. They see the role of pastor and staff as equipping them to do the ministry. Growth is experienced as exponential potential with all believers serving as missionaries and reproducing disciples. There is a close connection between church health and its disciple-making strategy. In a healthy church, disciple-making efforts are intentional and deliberate. Their approach is individually oriented and their motive is missional.

One can also ask the following questions to test and evaluate the readiness of your congregation to become reproducing disciples that reach people:

1. Are you committed to Jesus Christ . . . or to a particular doctrine, denomination, or church?
2. Do you speak of faith as an experience with Christ . . . or as a heritage that you protect?
3. Do you believe that ministry is to make disciples and missionaries . . . not decisions and members?
4. Do you design mission for the needs and yearnings of the public . . . or the needs of church members?
5. Do you quickly grasp unexpected opportunities . . . or do you worry about rules and procedures?
6. Do you promote mentoring or midwifing relationships . . . or do you just nominate people to office?
7. Do you build small groups . . . or wrestle with power cliques?
8. Do you worship with excited expectancy . . . or do you worship in order to discharge a duty?
9. Do you expect newcomers to be accompanied by spiritual guides . . . or do you just wait for them at the door?
10. Do you value changing lives . . . or do you value belonging to an institution?
11. Do you ask for radical commitment . . . or do you not expect much from people?

The response to the previous comparisons and questions will determine where your church is in the process of disciple-making. It also reveals your real target and strategy. Many Christians have the perception that attending church, attending preaching, singing in the choir, attending Sunday School, participating in a study course, watching a video teaching series, joining the church and being baptized, going on a mission trip, being a member of a committee, and believing in Jesus makes one a disciple. These activities can certainly be part of discipleship but, more often than not, serve as substitutes leaving one unprepared and unable to make disciples or followers of Christ who make followers of Christ. The question is raised, “Can one really be a true follower of Jesus and not make followers of Jesus?” Can one be a disciple without being obedient to the calling of Jesus to be a reproducing disciple?

Defining a Disciple

For purposes regarding this document, we will offer a simple but working definition of a disciple based on Matthew 4:19 where Jesus said, “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” A disciple is identified as a person who is following Christ, is being changed by Christ, and is committed to the mission of Christ.

Defining Discipleship as an Intentional Process

Discipleship is the process of nurturing a disciple of Christ to maturity, helping them to discover and develop their gifts and potential for mission, and for reproducing themselves for perpetuity. George Barna, founder of The Barna Group, a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans, and the intersection of faith and culture, stated that the process of transforming a convert to a true disciple is what discipleship is all about. In his book, *Growing True Disciples*, Barna held that the strength and influence of the church is wholly dependent upon its commitment to true discipleship. A core challenge to believers and to the local church is producing transformed lives and seeing those lives reproduced in others. He defined discipleship as becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ. Disciple-making is not optional.

Barna research showed that just one percent of adult believers contend that they have the spiritual gift of evangelism; while less than one-tenth (of the adult believers) said they have never intentionally built a relationship with someone in the hope of being able to lead the person to Christ. On the side of the unchurched, the same report also revealed that most unchurched people have never been invited to a church by a Christian and, further, indicated that most unchurched people have never been told by a Christian what it means to believe in Jesus Christ and never invited to embrace Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

DEVELOPING A DESIGN FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING

Effective disciple-making will not happen by chance. An intentional, definite and clear strategy must be developed and implemented if lives are to be transformed. Let's explore the necessary steps to take in developing a design for disciple-making or a discipleship ministry that will mature your members.

Step One: Know your purpose – making disciples. Discipleship and disciple-making must start with the pastor and leadership. The pastor must give disciple-making highest priority and continually hold it up to the congregation as the standard for following Jesus. God has been waiting for the church to lay its to-do-lists at His feet, seek His face, abide in Him, and trust and obey Him. The purpose should be articulated constantly to the congregation.

Step Two: Cast the vision to the congregation and plan with a vision. Asking questions such as: “Where are we now? What is God calling us to do? What are our goals? How do we plan to get there?” can reveal the gap between current reality and God's desired future and help develop a clear vision. The average Christian has extensive head knowledge about God but doesn't really know God well enough to believe Him when He gives a directive in life. Emphasize God's desire to move every believer from being a fan admiring Jesus to a completely committed follower of Jesus. Help the congregation

recognize that God uses His living Word, home and family, other believers, everyday circumstances of life and spiritual exercises to transform disciples into the likeness of Christ. Help them understand and realize that spiritual warfare, ways of the world, war against self, lack of faith, lack of knowledge and understanding, dangerous drift, rebellion, and distraction are part of Satan's arsenal used to hinder their transformation. Evidence of spiritual growth and maturing discipleship is modeling love, trusting, obeying, living in harmony with God's Word, seeing the world through the lens of scripture, having a relationship with other believers, and making God's love known to others.

Step Three: Create and develop your Discipleship Team and determine needs. As a starting point for a broader church-wide discipleship ministry, determine the needs within and without the congregation and select specific ministry actions that can be initiated in a disciple-making process. Consideration could be given to ministries such as member assimilation, growing spiritual maturing, strengthening families, equipping leaders and addressing needs represented in people groups inside and outside the congregation. Then plan and offer discipleship experiences and approaches such as ongoing groups, short-term groups, support groups, individual study, and retreats.

Step Four: Explore various disciple-making models and develop your own. There are many different models available for addressing disciple-making for larger groups, ongoing groups, short-term groups, support groups, small groups, triads or individual discipleship needs. Studies such as Experiencing God, Beth Moore Bible studies, and Prayer and Spiritual Awakening studies are valuable series that can be used in the larger group setting. However, in most cases, the missing piece of disciple-making in this setting is follow-up life application. As already stated, the most effective disciple-making models are found in small groups, triads or one-on-one settings where the following components are implemented. Emphasis on the Word of God, relationships with others, and accountability regarding follow through are three components that are essential to any effective disciple-making process. The entire purpose of the disciple-making process is to walk with a group of people until they have personally experienced God and duplicate the process with other current and potential believers.

Following are a few examples of available disciple-making processes:

Bill Hull, author of *Jesus Disciplemaker*, developed and used the following process to mature membership and develop leaders. Believers were enlisted into small groups that met weekly and that continued over a three-year process. The intended result of the process was followers of Jesus who are reproducing the process with others in making disciples. The process was comprised of four parts:

- 1) **Come and See** – evangelism which was embryonic in nature and purpose and represented those who were new converts. This part was designed to help these disciples understand who Jesus is and what their relationship with Jesus demands. Participants spend about 4 months in this stage.
- 2) **Come and Follow Me** – establishing the disciple in the relationship with Jesus and helping them grow deeper in the Word of God, stronger in their relationships with one another, and experience accountability in life application of the teachings they receive. Participants spend around 10 months in the deeper level phase.
- 3) **Come and Be with Me** – equipping that challenges the disciple to make the commitment to give up everything on a permanent basis to this calling and lifestyle. This phase continues for about 20 months.
- 4) **You Remain In Me** – Focusing the disciple to become a well-equipped leader and to duplicate the process with others.

In *Transformational Discipleship*, Barry Sneed and Roy Edgemon offered a similar process based on the following principles as built-in components implemented in each small group meeting. It was possible for this type of process to continue indefinitely without any regulated time frame. These principles are considered primary in the development of each believer from conversion to mature reproducing disciple. The premise in their approach was for a disciple-maker to walk with a group of people until they have personally experienced God. The six principles introduced in this process are:

- 1) **Relationship Principle** - transformation takes place in relationships of which the relationship with Jesus is foundational to all others.
- 2) **Followship Principle** - Jesus calls every believer to follow Him.
- 3) **Empowerment Principle** - believers must be empowered to serve.
- 4) **The Lifestyle Principle** - transformed believers naturally express biblical examples and insights in everyday life.
- 5) **The Accountability Principle** - every

believer is accountable to God. **6) The Flexibility Principle** - diverse people need flexible and adaptable ways to experience spiritual transformation or change.

Randy Pope, author of *Insourcing: Bringing Discipleship Back to the Local Church*, tells the story of how a personal, life-on-life missional discipleship was developed and implemented and resulted in deep spiritual growth and outreach in his church. Journey groups (life-on-life) consisting of 6 to 8 people committed to a one year Covenant with one another would meet weekly. These journey groups can last up to 3 years with some rotation of members. Concentration was placed on five important emphases otherwise known by the acrostic TEAMS. The emphases are Truth, Equipping, Accountability, Mission and Supplication. The first six meetings focused on spiritual disciplines in the following progression:

Week 1: Glory – Why we embrace Christ: finding the missing piece that satisfies.

Week 2: Glory – How we embrace Christ: embracing Christ in personal worship.

Week 3: Grace – Why we embrace the cross: learning to rightly relate to God.

Week 4: Grace – How we embrace the cross: embracing the cross through spirit-filled living.

Week 5: Truth – Why we embrace the Word: following God's plan to Glory.

Week 6: Truth – How we embrace the Word: living as ambassadors to a broken world.

Five foundational areas (emphases) are built on in every meeting for 3 years:

Truth: what God has revealed for His people to know, understand, and obey.

Equipping: massaging God's truth into life so that it becomes understandable and usable.

Accountability: asking the hard questions to encourage living fully for Christ.

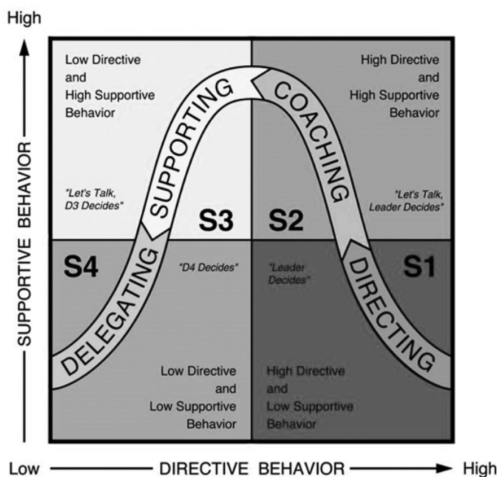
Mission: engaging with the lost world in order to impart the gospel through word and deed.

Supplication: engaging in conversation with God to express dependence on him.

T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution (Training for Trainer), developed by Ying Kai and written by Steve Smith, offers a reproducible disciple-making process especially adapted for people who are oral learners. Ying Kai developed this process of disciple-making on the mission field in China and witnessed it resulting in a church planting movement. The strength of this model is simplicity and duplicity. The overall process concentrates on four fields: 1) **Empty or Entry Field** (who do you know that is lost among family and friends). 2) **Seeded Field** (sharing the gospel). 3) **Growing Field** (discipleship plan). 4) **Gathering Field** (church formation). A fifth area includes the development and multiplication of leadership. Lessons are developed and taught using the Bible storying method. Each weekly meeting is divided into the following thirds: 1) **LOOK BACK** - Member Care, Worship, Accountability, Vision Casting. 2) **LOOK UP** - New Lesson. 3) **LOOK FORWARD** - Practice the Lesson, Goal Setting and Prayer.

The preceding discipleship processes represent only a few of those available. Many other options can be found and explored. The most important thing for a pastor, leadership or church is to develop a process that will be most effective in maturing your membership. You may explore many models and utilize various components out of each, but, in the end, the process needs to fit your needs and strategy.

Whatever process you adopt or develop, helping members to move from infancy in their relationship with Christ to maturity as a reproducing disciple should be the ultimate goal. Ken Blanchard offered great advice in Situational Leadership and Lead Like Jesus regarding the best progression for accomplishing this result. The graphic below



Most of the time our biggest mistake is starting with directing and jumping to delegating which leaves those enlisted totally unequipped for the assignment or task they have been given or asked to accomplish. Situational Leadership provides a format for overcoming that inadequacy. The beginning step in discipleship is Directing and involves sharing the truth, telling the person what to do and why (I do, you watch). The next step, Coaching which involves equipping the person for the task by showing them how and doing it with them (I do, you help -limited participation). Next, Supporting by holding them accountable, getting them started and keeping them going (You do, I help). Finally, Delegating the mission by letting them do it (You do, someone else watches). One additional but important part is Supplication which includes Kingdom prayer, praying for them and with them.

Step Five: Enlist and train leaders.

Step Six: Persuade people to get involved.

Step Seven: Promote opportunities and discipleship experiences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, disciple-making is the biblical mandate God has given to every believer and church. The employment of steps like determining where to begin, evaluating current reality and envisioning God's desired future, defining a disciple, defining discipleship as an intentional process, and developing a design for disciple-making can result in obedient and mature members.

CONTRIBUTOR BIO:

My name is Lester Evans. Judy and I were married May 11, 1973. We have two daughters. Jessica, our oldest daughter who has Down's syndrome, is moderately handicapped and now resides at the Younce House, an assisted-living group home in Franklin, NC. Our younger daughter, Tanya, is currently living in Winston-Salem, NC and is a Crime Scene Investigator with the Forsyth County Sheriff's Department. We reside in Otto, North Carolina in Macon County where Judy and I both grew up.

I became a Christian in 1971 and received God's call into ministry in early 1972. I have received degrees from Mars Hill College (B.A.), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M. Div.), and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (D. Min.). I have served as a pastor in five Baptist churches in North Carolina. For thirteen years I served as Director of Missions for Macon Baptist Association in Franklin, NC. Since 2002, I have served with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina as Team Leader of Associational Partnerships where my responsibilities include working with 78 Associations in North Carolina, General Seminary Extension, Bivocational Ministries, Appalachian Regional Ministry (NAMB), Demographics, Ministry Partnership Agreements, On Mission Celebrations, Church and Community Ministers and various other responsibilities. I have participated in mission and ministry projects from the local to international levels, worked with local community action agencies in order to address pressing needs, and served as a coach and consultant for various ministry needs.



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