

“Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World”
Why some disciple-makers reproduce when others fail
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How greatly God multiplies his children through you depends more on who He is than on who you are. God can do much more through you than he actually does with you. With many Christians, it could be said that they lacked extended and meaningful daily contact with lost people their own age and gender.

I’m reminded of what Dwight Eisenhower said about the principles of war: The basic principles of strategy are so simple that a child may understand them. But to determine their proper application to a given situation requires the hardest kind of work.

Laborers don’t do well outside of disciple-making movements because they weren’t designed to live and function that way. We can have all the training and good intentions in the world regarding evangelism and disciple-making, but if we are not in a community that spurs us on, we will fail. Becoming part of a team that evangelizes together is the most important thing you can do if you want to multiply.

The groups that do the best job of both helping their members grow and multiplying disciples are the groups that meet for the express purpose of being a disciple-making team. We all need to be a part of a disciple-making team, or at least an evangelism training program, that provides vision, a model, encouragement, coaching, teamwork, accountability, and prayer.

None of us ever graduate from needing a missional community that functions as a disciple-making team. The determining factor seems to be whether or not someone is currently in a missional community that is spurring them on “toward love and good deeds.”

Jesus’ goal was never to build individual disciples. He built a team and expected them to go build other disciple-making teams called churches. After years of living and interacting with other cultures, I think that only an American could conceive of an individualistic, one-on-one approach to disciple-making.

Attempting to multiply individual disciples and not disciple-making teams will inevitably result in failure and frustration. There are many reasons a church could increase in numbers that may have nothing to do with its members doing ministry, multiplying themselves spiritually, or maturing in the faith. Rather than asking the question “Are we growing, we need to ask, are our members leading people to Christ and are they successfully helping new converts grow into mature believers?”

I wonder what would happen though if one Sunday morning pastors stopped their sermon and asked the men they were discipling to come up and join them on stage. Would anyone come up? Would they have stories to tell of how their pastor didn't just teach them the Bible, but actually did life and ministry together with them?

I believe that the single greatest determining factor as to whether people multiply themselves is not the level of their maturity, the amount of training they have received, the receptivity of the lost in their context or how long they have been discipled. But it is whether or not they are immersed in a disciple-making team. Jesus built a disciple-making community.

The presence of these elements will increase the effectiveness of those you lead.

1. The leader constantly champions the vision of spiritual multiplication Casting vision is a process, not an event. We need to get ourselves into communities where we will hear our mission talked about again and again and again.
2. The leader models the vision of spiritual multiplication. It's pretty hard to live out a challenging vision when you don't see your leaders doing it! Leaders must lead the charge in disciple-making, both in word and deed. We should never expect the people we lead to multiply if they don't see us modeling personal ministry.
3. The church or ministry frequently offers ministry training geared toward helping members multiply. Wherever you find disciples exponentially multiplying, you will find an emphasis on training. A pastor may talk about making disciples and lead a couple of Bible studies, but if he is not personally pouring his life into a few and doing practical ministry together with them, spiritual multiplication is not likely to happen.

Is the pastor/leader modeling being a teacher, but not an evangelist/discipler/trainer/coach? Our research shows that receiving ministry training on a weekly basis is what most increases effectiveness in disciple-making. In many churches, the chief way someone is trained to lead in is not through a class. But in multiplying ministries that successfully train people to reproduce. The focus is on apprenticeship to existing leaders, not classes. Many churches have no coaching system for their leaders.

4. Members of the church or small group engage in giving and receiving regular coaching.

It should be no surprise that we found that highly effective disciple-makers received ministry coaching. Receiving coaching is clearly beneficial for those who wish to multiply their lives. We can all benefit from the wisdom, encouragement, and accountability of an experienced mentor. When coaching is taken seriously and done consistently, everyone benefits, multiplication occurs, and the church grows.

The truth, though, is that organisms in nature grow and flourish when they have healthy systems at work behind the scenes. If you find a group that just wants to be “organic” and unstructured, I wouldn’t recommend joining it. It will probably not be healthy for long.

Dave and Jon Ferguson, who lead a movement of multiplying disciples and churches, put it this way: “Developing coaches (leaders of leaders) may be the single most overlooked yet vital task in spreading a missional movement.” I want you to immerse yourself in a culture of multiplication, and you won’t find those where a deep commitment to coaching doesn’t exist.

5. The church’s small groups function as disciple-making teams. The best groups I have ever seen at assimilation and care, though, are those that form for the purpose of equipping and mobilizing their members. Small group leader, are you leading a study or a disciple-making team?

6. The church or ministry regularly offers evangelistic events

7. Those seeking to multiply are characterized by abundant prayer.

Other helpful factors:

- Retreats
- Inspiring large group events Many large group events, however, are simply planned as an end in themselves. Successful multiplication movements work to protect the time of their disciple-makers and make sure that macro events serve micro ministries.
- Focus on new people. It’s important to find a way of meeting a continual flow of new people.
- Demonstrate genuine interest in new people.
- Show the relevance of a relationship with Jesus to current life struggles.
- Share your personal testimony.
- Share stories of answered prayer.
- Pray for people’s current needs.
- Let them see Christians interacting with each other in love.
- Pray for God to create interest in them.
- Help them see they have a sin problem.

- Share the gospel
- Help them make a decision
- Make evangelism a team sport

Nobody but God should really get the credit, and everyone on the team can celebrate.

Discipling others is the process by which a Christian with a life worth emulating commits himself for an extended period of time to a few individuals who have been won to Christ.

The purpose is to aid and guide their growth to maturity and integration into the life of a disciple-making team for their equipping to reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation. It would be hard to imagine a firmly established or reproducing believer who was not deeply involved in a disciple-making body.

Great leaders learn how each of their disciples draws near to God and finds ways to help them do it.

There is pathway, a process: Teaching, Discovery, Obedience, and Transference.

Most of us default to shoving more knowledge into our disciples' brains when they aren't even applying what they have already heard. Did Jesus tell us to make disciples by teaching them all that he taught? No. What are we to teach them? Obedience to all of His commands.

This practice of teaching disciples to obey the Word through discussing and application then holding each other accountable to living it out is at the center of every wildly multiplying church planting movement today.

"What has been my focus: Content or obedience?"

Getting young believers integrated into a small family of believers should always be top priority.

Unfortunately, the focus of most disciplers seems to be on feeding those they lead instead of teaching them to feed themselves. For people to become self-feeders, you will want to help them develop in three areas relating to God's word:

Conviction, Competence, and Consistency.

As a young Christian, I was introduced to the hand illustration used by the Navigators.

Help the people you are discipling become competent in digesting God's Word.

Our best chance at consistency comes when community is combined with conviction and competence.

Besides meditation, scripture memory is probably the greatest turbo charger for Christian growth.

Christians whose growth never seems to take off are most likely suffering from faulty foundations. Use proven materials in laying foundations.

The basic needs of new disciples are the same. Simplicity aids confidence and reproducibility. Reproduction happens more frequently when we give people clear tracks to run on. A new disciple's integration into the family is more important than getting a perfectly customized curriculum in a one-on-one setting.

Keeping the focus on outreach is crucial.

Teach foundations through life-on-life discipling.

Unfortunately, I have seen church after church attempt to train people for just about every aspect of ministry by using only a classroom. We are addicted to the classroom.

Books and lectures are helpful, but when it comes to learning skills like flying, surgery, shooting a basketball, or sharing your faith, there is no substitute for hands-on training.

Start off your one-on-ones with a hug or a handshake, a smile and a few words affirming some positive things you have seen in the person's life or ministry. Encourage them in the Lord. I usually share something the Lord has been teaching me or encouraging me with lately instead of saying, "This is what I think you need to hear from the Word."

It seems less preachy and more powerful that way. Inspire with vision. I take the indirect route in this by sharing a story of how I have seen God working lately and possibly in their discipleship. Offer suggestions and help. If you do this in the right spirit, people won't feel you are meddling. They will feel appreciative and empowered. Uplift them in prayer: Before leaving the time, I try to ask for prayer requests and spend time praying with them and for them.

Unfortunately, most of the emphasis in leadership development focuses on helping people know more.

If an emphasis on the passing along of knowledge through lecture-style teaching would bring about godly disciple-makers, then our churches would be full of them.

As the prophet Daniel says, "...but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action" (Daniel 11:32).

Here are a few things to keep in mind when discipling someone:

Both Self-feeding on God's Word and hearing the Word preached regularly are important. A commitment to obedience. Learning to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Living in Christian community. Hungering for and pursuing knowledge of God. Walking in the freedom Christ provides. Personal evaluation and getting close friends' input on strengths and weaknesses

How to help others deal with a specific character immaturity:

Take the log out of your own eye.

Help them see it.

Here is a method I use when I need to confront people. Pray it through first. Go to them privately. Affirm your love for them. State the problem in a sentence (I suggest writing it out on a 3x5 card). Share a verse (at the most two) on the subject to show God's standard. Give a few specific examples but not so many as to crush them. (If you can only think of one, than maybe it's not a trend in their life and you don't need to point it out. We all have bad moments that aren't characteristic of us, right?) Offer to help them grow in an area in any way they would like. Assure them of your ongoing commitment to them.

Encourage them to get into God's Word about it.

Help them apply what they learn in His Word.

Bible knowledge is not enough. Life change comes from applying what we learn. Our job is to help people walk in obedience to what they read in the Bible, and specific steps are crucial to seeing this happen.

Give them appropriate homework assignments.

Be there to help them if they fail to make progress.

Selecting people to invest in: (2 Timothy 2:2). There are two qualifications Paul mentions to look for in people you will choose to equip: faithfulness and the ability to teach others. I would rather spend my time investing in a "mover and shaker" than in a man who shows up on time with his homework completed yet never does anything with it. Minister broadly and don't hurry the selection process.

Even well-equipped people will struggle to be fruitful and may even discontinue ministry if they are not part of a disciple-making team.

Disciple-makers who said they were a part of a small group that spent at least twenty minutes weekly discussing evangelism, twenty minutes praying for the lost, and twenty minutes doing some sort of evangelism together are far more effective than those who didn't.

One of the most important things we can do to equip our disciples to reproduce is not necessarily to train them further. Instead, we need to make sure they understand how to function together with others as a disciple-making team and develop a deep commitment to do so for the rest of their lives.

First, Cultivate and model a world Christian heart and lifestyle yourself. Worldly Christians do not raise up crops of world Christians.

Give your disciples over to the lord for Him to send out.

Challenge those you lead to go wherever God leads them.

You will never consistently live out what you have learned if you don't live it out in community with other World Christians.

Why not start a missional community specifically for "goers" (aspiring missionaries) in your church or ministry?

Jesus lets the requirements filter the men, not the men filter the requirements.

You can't microwave disciples.

A missionary is someone who goes where they are needed but not wanted, and stays until they are wanted but not needed. Constantly speak of serving God as a privilege. The inaction created by the "wait" lie is as crippling as that of the "You can't do it" lie. Unfortunately, if no one questions the validity of a statement, the lie will live on, keeping people staked and even spreading to others.

In his mind, his church did not exist to enable him to minister. He existed to help them minister.

Could it be that our goal should not be to build a successful ministry, but to help others build theirs? We must empower potential disciples to have a new vision for their lives. The most effective disciple-makers aren't the ones who are the best trained. They are the ones who share with the most people! Let vision, not provision, drive your decisions.

God's finger will not point where his hand will not provide. As Hudson Taylor said, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

The Bible gives us some prerequisites for our visions to become realities.

Devotional consistency. Highly effective disciple-makers have learned that multiplication is a result of overflow, not overwork.

For your vision of multiplication to become a reality, you must die to all distractions that other visions and desires create.

A statement by C.T. Studd comes to mind: "Some men die by shrapnel. Some men die by flames. Most men die inch by inch, playing silly little games."

Get specific about what you're trusting God to do.

Share your vision and plan with others, asking them to join you

Those who succeed in life are not usually those who are the most gifted, but those who are the most persistent. The ministry of exponentially multiplying disciples comes as a result of determined persistence in the right direction over the long haul. We must stop trying to minister as individuals and start functioning as disciple-making teams.