

CRAIG ETHEREDGE

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*Giving Your
Life to What
Matters Most*

A Discipleship.org Resource

INVEST IN A FEW

Giving Your Life to What Matters Most

CRAIG ETHEREDGE

NASHVILLE, TN

BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH

THEME: DISCIPLE MAKER



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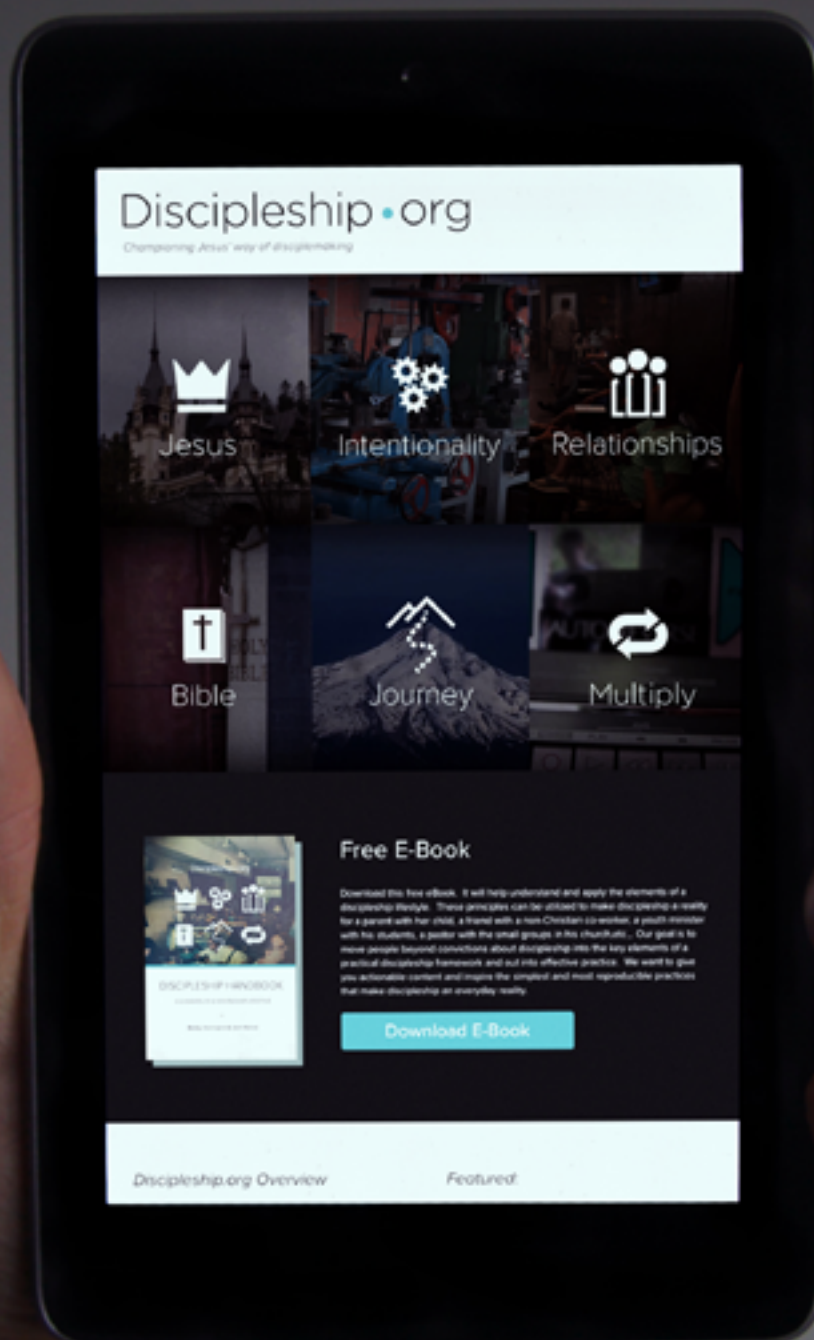
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Invest in a Few: Giving Your Life to What Matters Most

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Introduction

MY JOURNEY OF SPIRITUAL INVESTMENT

The content of this book comes from how God used various disciple makers to invest in me. I am amazed at how God has brought great people to spiritually invest in me over the years, including my parents who first spoke the gospel over me and helped me come to faith in Jesus. I had youth pastors who poured their lives into mine and spent endless hours answering my questions and teaching me to read and love God's Word. In college, a retired businessman reached out to me and welcomed me into his home, where—along with other college students—I learned what it meant to follow Jesus on a secular college campus.

While in seminary, God brought an older man that stood about 5 feet 2 inches named Cecil, who taught me how to pray. Then, there was a former Olympic wrestler named Dave, who gave me a passion for disciple making. While pastoring my first church, God planted three professional executives in my life who taught me how to share the gospel and train businessmen to walk with God. Then, later God brought strategists like Bill Hull and Dann Spader into my life—each of whom instilled in me a passion and a vision for making disciples the way Jesus did through the local church.

Invest in a Few

Thinking about these men, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. Each one shaped my life and their influence continues to impact me to this day. I'm convinced that life change happens when one believer invests in another person to help them walk with God, reach their world, and invest in a few. I'm sure that when you reflect on your spiritual journey, you could list people who have had an incredible impact on your life, too. That's how God works—he works through one life touching another life, and that life touching yet another. That's God's plan to change the world, that's investing in a few.

Over the years I've noticed that many Christ followers have a desire to make a spiritual investment in others, but they don't take action to do that. Many simply don't know what to do, and others aren't sure they are really qualified to make such an investment. For some others, they simply don't believe that God could use them in such a significant way. If those describe you at all, I want you to read this next sentence slowly and think about its meaning for you: God has already given you everything you need to begin a movement that can change the world.

Do you find that hard to believe? Then, keep reading. This reveals Jesus' call to make disciples. By reading this book, you will learn the secret to making a lasting impact on the lives of others who will in turn do the same. You will discover some "field tested" principles and practices to help you make disciples to the ends of the world. It is my hope that this book inspires you to fulfill Jesus' great commission in your lifetime. Let's get started.

Chapter 1

THE GOAL

Before I went to Israel, I had no idea what it would look like. I went with a group of people from our church studying the life of Christ. Our hope was that by walking in the footsteps of Jesus—literally—we would better understand being a disciple of Jesus.

To this day, one site in particular remains clear in my mind as both stunning and significant for disciples of Jesus: Mount Arbel. The sun was bright and the sky clear from the top of this mountain. This was a special mountain to Jesus and to those who followed him. It stands today (like it did over two thousand years ago) as one of the tallest peaks around the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel.

As we stood at the top of Arbel, we could see for miles. To the north was the peak of Mount Herman, the largest mountain in Israel, to the east were the Golan Heights, separating Israel from Jordan, to the south were the fertile farmlands of the Jezreel valley, and to the east were two tall towers of a major electrical plant next to the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima, where the Apostle Paul set sail for Rome as he carried the gospel to the West. From one panoramic view, you can literally see the nations. This was precisely why Jesus chose this place to give his followers what we call today, “The Great Commission”.

Jesus' Mountain

How can we be sure, though, that Jesus stood on Mount Arbel and not another mountain around Galilee? Various clues point to this conclusion: the mountain stands along the well-traveled route called “The Valley of Doves” connecting the Sea of Galilee and Nazareth. Since Jesus lived in Nazareth most of his growing up years, he must have traveled this way many times. Another piece of evidence is that Arbel is the tallest mountain in Galilee. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that after Jesus’ resurrection, he gave instructions for his disciples to go “to the mountain” in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). While he didn’t specify which one, the disciples certainly knew the place. It was, in a sense, their mountain because they had been there many times before. While we have no archeological evidence that Jesus delivered the Great Commission on this mountain, it makes the most sense if Jesus was making an important point about evangelism. If Arbel isn’t the mountain, then I’m not sure which one it would be.

So, go there with me: imagine that the wind is blowing in your face as you look down the mountain to the land below. Your feet are standing at the exact place where the disciples stood. Jesus’ words cut through the air:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Big Vision

What was Jesus’ goal by doing this? He was casting the vision of a global movement of multiplication. Just days before, they had seen

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him crucified at the hands of the brutal Romans, hung on a rugged cross, and despised by the religious leaders. They saw his body taken down and placed in a tomb. Three days later they saw Jesus rise from the dead, his body now transfigured yet still bearing scars from the cross.

All of this was in preparation for their new mission in life. Now he was challenging them and commissioning them to invest their lives in a movement that would change the course of human history and alter the eternal trajectory of millions.

It was a big vision then. It is still a big vision today.

Chapter 2

THE END PRODUCT

Jesus' commission was clear, "Go make disciples of all nations." The key command—the divine imperative—is to make disciples. But what exactly is a disciple?

The life of Vince Lombardi, who was arguably one of the greatest football coaches of all time, provides a great analogy for the importance of answering this question about the nature of a disciple. He was such a great coach that the Super Bowl championship Trophy was named after him as the "Lombardi Trophy". Part of what made him so great was that he was a stickler for the fundamentals. Legend has it that one practice he stood in front of his team in stone cold silence, football in hand, surveying the men in the room. No one dared speak. Finally, he broke the quiet with the now famous words, "Men, this is a football." He was simply bringing them back to the basics. That's what we need to do in making disciples sometimes: we have to go back to the basics.

What is a Disciple?

If Jesus told us to make disciples, then we need to clearly know what a disciple is. After all, we will be answering to Jesus the substance

of our work in disciple making one day (1 Corinthians 3:12-13). The term “disciple” that Jesus used in Matthew 28:19 is the word *mathetes*, which essentially means “to learn” in Greek. The Hebrew term for a disciple is *talmidim*, which is also derives from the word for “to learn” (in Hebrew) and was used for a young man who left his home to study under a Rabbi.¹ Therefore, a disciple is, at the core, a learner. However, a disciple is more than just one who learns religious information and more than just a student who merely acquires biblical facts. To find out more, you have to dig deeply into the culture of the Old Testament because disciple making didn’t start with Jesus—it pre-dates him.

The idea of disciple making is rooted in the Old Testament. The ancient prophets often pulled around them young men to train on how to serve God (Isaiah 8:16). Master teachers regularly trained temple musicians in special schools for the purpose of serving in temple worship (1 Chronicles 25:8). Later, Rabbinic schools were established for the purpose of raising up teachers and leaders. In the days of Jesus, there were many different kinds of disciples: “disciples of Moses” (John 9:28), “disciples of the Pharisees” (Matthew 22:16), “disciples of John the Baptist” (Matthew 9:14), and “disciples of Jesus” (Mt 28:18-20)—and that’s just well-known Jewish disciples (in addition to non-religious disciples like those in philosophical schools and other contexts). Therefore, in its most basic definition, a disciple was a person who follows a master teacher to become like him and to carry on his work.

Now underline that last statement and think about it. A disciple followed a master to eventually become like that master and carry on the master’s work.

In the New Testament, the term “disciple” is primarily used to describe a follower of Jesus. The term is used 261 times in the Gos-

pels and the Book of Acts. It's clear that a "disciple" of Jesus is used synonymously with a "believer" in Jesus. For example, in Acts 4:32, "those who believe" are later referred to as "disciples" in Acts 6:2. As we move past the Book of Acts into the Epistles, the term "disciple" begins to fade away and it is replaced with terms like "brother" and "sister", "saint", "believer", and "Christian". That "disciple" is used so many times in the early days of the church reveals how important it was to the earliest Christians. Therefore, it should be important to us, too.

Fuzzy Vision

Clarifying the definition of a disciple is critical if you are going to be committed to making disciples. You can't have a fuzzy vision of your "end product" (to use industrial language, if I may). Just as a tire factory knows what a finished tire looks like and a computer manufacturer knows that computers are their final project, healthy disciples of Jesus know what disciples are and how to make them.

The Apostle Paul was very clear on what he was producing in the lives of every person he met and every church he planted. He wanted mature disciples, people who had learned how to obey God by following Jesus. He said this in various ways, not always using the word "disciple", but always referring to the characteristics of a disciple, one who is mature in Christ.

Read what he wrote to believers in Rome to see if you can pick up on Paul's "end product": "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). And to the churches in Galatia he wrote, "I am again in the anguish

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of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19). Then, to the church at Corinth he wrote, “But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him” (2 Corinthians 3:18, TLB). Then, to the church at Colossae he wrote, “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29, NIV). From these verses, it’s clear that Paul’s goal was to see people become more and more like Jesus. He wanted people to be conformed to the image of Jesus, to be mirrors that reflect Jesus, to be matured into the likeness of Jesus.

Paul’s end product was Christ-like followers and this should be the end product of every church and disciple maker. As you pour your life into another person, you are not just trying to convey biblical knowledge; you are not simply trying to form a learner; instead, you are investing your life into men and women who will follow Jesus, grow to be like him, and carry on his work.

PART ONE

HOW TO IDENTIFY DISCIPLES

So now that we've made clear the goal and the result of investing in a few, let's look at the essential dimensions of a disciple. A disciple is essentially an obedient learner, as we've discussed, but how does one recognize a disciple in the world? Part 1, which comprises the next three chapters, describes the three essential dimensions of a disciple's journey as they follow after Jesus and become like him.

Chapter 3

ARE THEY DEVOTED TO CHRIST?

A disciple of Jesus is like a 3-D image. When you think of something being three-dimensional, it's fully orbbed and lifelike. Three-D images often appear on a movie screen, where characters seem to jump off the screen at you. Think also of how 3-D printers produce fully dimensional products. In the same way, a true disciple of Jesus has three dimensions that make them fully mature, fully orbbed, and Christ-like. The first dimension of a disciple is that he is devoted to Jesus. That is, this person has become convinced that Jesus is the Christ and that salvation is found in no one else but him. This is where disciple making begins. It begins when a person turns from their sin and turns to Jesus as the forgiver and the leader of their life. There is no disciple making apart from conversion. Jesus modeled this for us.

Born Again

As he picked up the preaching mantle and began to lead the movement of God that John the Baptist had begun, Jesus started preaching a simple message. It only had two major calls to action: Repent and believe (Mark 1:15). The reason? Because “the kingdom of God is

near.” With these words Jesus was saying, “It’s not enough to be religious; you must make it personal with me.” A religious leader of his day named Nicodemus helps us understand what this means.

He came to Jesus one night, not wanting to be seen by his colleagues (after all he had a reputation to protect). He had a burning desire to know God, so Jesus told him plainly, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). Just as you are born into your earthly family, in the same way you must be born into God’s family. Nicodemus was a religious man: he knew facts and he was devoted to ritual and tradition as a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, but Jesus told him, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This is where discipleship starts.

The Gospel at Starbucks

I remember having coffee with a young man at a crowded Starbucks. He had been attending church in his hometown for several years and was feeling an urge to go into vocational ministry, so he asked me to meet with him. As we settled into our seats, I asked about his spiritual journey and how God was moving in his life. He was a lean, sharp-looking young man in his early twenties. He spoke with excitement in his voice. For the first half hour he talked about how much he loved the people in his church and how he really enjoyed serving in his church’s youth group. I listened intently.

Then, I asked, “So, tell me—when you gave your life to Christ?”

He paused and looked at me as if he didn’t understand the question.

So, I rephrased my question: “I mean, tell me when you became a Christian—how did that happen?” He mumbled something along

the lines of “I’ve always believed in God” and “I was confirmed at the age of twelve.” It was obvious that he was grasping for words.

That night, I spent my time talking to him about Jesus, how much God loves him, and that God created him to know him in a deep and personal way. I explained that our problem is sin, which has separated us from God, and that we are all cut off from him.

What surprised me as I spoke with him was how this man, who wanted to go into ministry, seemed to be hearing some of the basics about full devotion to Jesus as if for the first time.

I remember saying, “Look around this crowded coffee shop.” His eyes scanned the room, briefly glancing at the faces of the people standing in line to order.

“Everyone in this room and everyone in our world has fallen short of God’s design for them. Everyone of us is separate from God and helplessly lost.” I could see his demeanor change as he absorbed the heaviness of those words.

I continued “But that is why Jesus came. God sent his only Son to die on a cross, where he absorbed the wrath of God and paid sin’s penalty on our behalf. He died, was buried, and three days later, he rose from the dead, conquering sin and death and the grave. If you will turn from your sin and turn to Jesus, he promises to forgive you and restore your broken relationship with God.”

I let the words hang in the air.

Then I asked, “Have you ever done that?” After a good while, he simply said, “No, I haven’t.” In fact, he wasn’t sure if he was ready for that kind of commitment. Going to seminary was one thing to him, but actually following Jesus was altogether different.

As we left the coffee shop that day, I wondered how many other people are just like this young man: church-ed, involved, and sincere—

but lost. The first step in becoming a disciple is coming to faith in Jesus. Paul put it simply, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God that raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NLT). A biblical conversion involves an acknowledgment of sin before God, a belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and a belief that only Jesus’ death and resurrection can pay for one’s sin. At that point, a turning from my sin and trusting Jesus in simple faith is required. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “You must be born again.” A true disciple is one who is devoted to Jesus by being born into God’s family through faith in Jesus.

Chapter 4

ARE THEY DEVELOPING IN CHARACTER?

The second dimension of a disciple is that they are progressively developing the character and competencies of Jesus in their life. Remember that a disciple is one who actually follows a master teacher to become like him. Therefore, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus and is progressively becoming more and more like him. Theologians call this “sanctification”—the process by which the Spirit of God molds and shapes believers into the image of Christ.

Jesus prayed this for his disciples the night before his death: “They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth” (John 17:16-17, NASB). The basic meaning of “sanctification” (*hagiazon* in Greek) is to be separate or set apart. Just as Jesus was set apart for a redemptive purpose to ignite a global disciple making movement, so his followers have been “born again” and set apart to join Jesus in his mission (John 3:7; 20:21). That involves walking as Jesus walked and doing what Jesus did (1 John 2:6; John 14:12).

There are two primary areas where a disciple needs to develop: inner character and core competencies.

The Inner Character of Christ

First, a disciple must develop the character of Jesus. This is Christ-likeness on the inside. Paul was referring to this when he urged the Philippians, “Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had” (Philippians 2:4-5, NLT). The word “attitude” (*phroneo*) here means to think in the same way or have the same disposition. Paul was encouraging these new believers to have the same attitude, thoughts, character, and internal disposition as Jesus. He just mentioned a few ways they could do that: by being like-minded, not looking out for their own interests, caring for the interest of others, and considering others more important than themselves. All these are attitudes reflected in the life of Jesus. So, what are the character qualities of Jesus?

You probably can’t find a better list than in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (ESV). These are called the “fruit of the Spirit”, and since Jesus, too, had the Spirit, he perfectly lived them out. He expressed ultimate love and joy; he exemplified peace and patience in all circumstances; he modeled kindness to the forgotten, goodness to the wayward, faithfulness to the faltering, and gentleness and self-control in even the worst of situations. A disciple is growing in these areas of character, learning, day-by-day, to let the Spirit of God control them, change them, and lead them. This person is not who they used to be. Are they perfect? Not even close. But are they making progress? Absolutely.

The Core Competencies of Jesus

Second is developing the core competencies of Jesus. This is Christ-likeness on the outside. When Jesus called his disciples to “follow him”, he trained them over a period of years to be like him and to carry on his work. In order for this to successfully happen, they needed to master certain core competencies to do the job.

Think about how this works when someone learns a trade. When a master electrician, for example, trains a new apprentice, his goal is to make that novice competent in every area of their job. Certain skills must be mastered in order for the novice to become a master—certain problems that need solved and certain pieces of knowledge that need to be learned to carry on the work. In the same way, Jesus trained his men in certain competencies so they could carry on the work he had begun.

You may ask, “What kind of competencies did Jesus train in his disciples?” As you read through the Gospels, some of these competencies come quickly to the surface. For instance, Jesus trained his disciples in God’s Word. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus quoted the Scriptures over seventy times. Jesus also trained his disciples how to pray. Sometimes he would even pray all night before big decisions or when facing the heavy pressures of ministry.

Jesus also trained his men how to communicate the gospel. He modeled public and personal evangelism and sent out his disciples to do the same. He trained his men to invest their lives in others to make disciples as he made disciples of them.

Jesus prioritized relationships, choosing to invest the majority of his time in a few people rather than give all of his attention to the clamoring crowd. In this way, Jesus was training his men to invest in a few others. He knew this would make for optimal impact.

Invest in a Few

Now these are just a few of the competencies Jesus developed in his disciples. True disciples of Jesus are progressively growing in these competencies by learning to carve out time for prayer and God's Word, intentionally building relationships with people far from God, and sharing the gospel—investing their life in a few people in order to show them how to walk with God.

Chapter 5

ARE THEY DEPLOYED INTO THE WORLD?

The final dimension of a true disciple is deployment. True disciples are engaged in the ministry of Jesus. More specifically, they are making disciples by walking with God, reaching the world around them, and investing in a few. “Deployed” is an action word, a boots-on-the-ground word.

This word reminds me of several friends of mine over who were in the military. One friend in particular was a commander in the Air Force during Operation Desert Storm. He flew several sorties into enemy territory during that conflict. For him, deployment meant leaving the safety of home and engaging in the battle.

Now apply that image to the mission of Jesus. A true disciple is a deployed disciple. He isn't just someone who simply believes in Jesus and spends his time working on spiritual disciplines like reading his Bible and prayer. He is actively advancing the kingdom of God by reaching people for Christ and helping them walk to maturity. He has skin in the game, having left the bench and walked onto the playing field.

Harassed and Helpless

One day as Jesus was traveling from village to village, teaching and ministering to the crowds, he was overcome with compassion. He saw that they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). The word “harassed” here—*skullo* in Greek—means “to be mangled, torn apart, or cut to the bone”. The word “helpless” (*rhipto*) means “to throw to the ground”. Jesus saw these people the way his Father saw them: victims of the enemy—hurt, betrayed, abused, torn apart, beat down, discarded, and walked on. They had no one to care for them.

I’ve seen my share of hurting people. I’ve walked through the slums in India where children are playing on garbage heaps, subsisting without clean water or shelter. I’ve been in inner-city schools, tagged and marked by the local gangs. I’ve looked into the eyes of the homeless, the single mom, the elderly, and forgotten. During the economic recession of 2008 and 2009, the United States job market lost 8.4 million jobs. At the time, those jobs represented 6.1 percent of all jobs in the nation. I saw the implications of this loss up close, because the area I’m pastoring today was hit especially hard. All those people were hurting for one reason or another, just like the people Jesus describes in Matthew 9 who were “harassed” and “helpless”.

I’ll never forget seeing a middle-aged man standing on a street corner dressed in a nice suit and tie, briefcase at his side, holding a handwritten sign, “I need a job.”

He looked harassed, helpless.

Jesus was broken for these people. When I stop long enough to see people the way God does, my heart breaks, too. In that moment of his honest emotion, Jesus called for a solution. What’s the solution to the pain and heartbreak in our culture?

Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37). He said our response to human suffering in the world is prayer. We are not to pray, “Lord, help these people. They are really hurting.” Instead, we are to pray, “Lord, help these people by sending more laborers into the harvest field.”

Working in the Harvest

We often hear the verse just quoted when someone is making an earnest plea for more volunteers at the church. The children’s workers are running low, for example, so the pastor quotes this passage and the signup sheet goes out to the information desk near the exit sign. Jesus isn’t telling us to pray for more volunteers within the church, though; he’s telling us to pray for people to be sent out from the church into the harvest field. The harvest is where the lost people are. The harvest is where the hurting, the harassed, and the helpless are—those who need the hope of the gospel.

True disciples are deployed into that harvest field. They intentionally and purposefully seek out those who are far from God and they invest their lives in a few believers to help them walk with Jesus. Many disciples today are doing just this, even in the face of hostility and resistance.

While on a trip to Bangalore, India, I had the opportunity to sit with pastors who have suffered greatly to follow Jesus. We gathered in an upstairs cinderblock building. Fifteen to 20 Indian pastors sat politely in their seats, excited to hear what our team had to say to them. A local denominational leader who had wanted to encourage pastors in his district organized the meeting. I was the scheduled preacher for the day, but I was humbled because I realized that I was sitting among

giants. Every one of these men had come from a Muslim background and had chosen to follow Christ at the risk of his life.

One pastor heard the gospel in his remote village over a radio broadcast. He wrote in to request a Bible. For months he studied it in secret. When he was discovered to be a Christ follower, the village men beat him severely and threatened his life. His mother helped him escape as he left behind his wife, children, home, and job. After leaving, he had absolutely nothing.

Then, I met a young woman named Fatima. When her family learned that she was a Christ follower, they threatened her with death—an honor killing. Later, she escaped and found refuge among Christians. In the years that followed, she married a Christian young man and had a small child. Over time, she was able to communicate with her father and mother. Their hostility toward her seemed to have abated, but when she returned home to retrieve some personal documents, her brothers beat her husband and her. This had happened recently, so as she told me her story, I could still see her bruises and the blood in her eyes.

Jesus warned his followers that deployment into the harvest field wouldn't be easy, but he promised that he would be with us. Can you imagine a cadre of men and women in your church, who were trained and mobilized to reach people with the gospel? Can you imagine hundreds of people trained to invest in others and show them how to walk with God? Jesus could. That was his vision for his church. It still is.

PART TWO

HOW TO MAKE DISCIPLES

The three chapters of Part 1 have given you an idea of the three essential aspects of a disciple. But the question remains: *How do you make a disciple like that?* That question has been a driving force in my life for many years. After spending time studying the life of Jesus, I discovered that Jesus not only gave us a picture of a disciple, but he also gave us a process to make disciples. In this next Part, we are going to dive into the four-step process Jesus used to make disciples that changed the world. We will see how he selected the men he disciplined, how he cast vision for disciple making, and how he leveraged the power of a small group to make a huge impact.

Chapter 6

MAKE DISCIPLES LIKE JESUS

Now that we've looked at the dimensions of a disciple and toward the aspects of how to make disciples, let's go back up to the mountain in Galilee. Remembering this scene will give us a clear vision of the end goal.

Jesus is casting his global vision to his disciples. He says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, NASB). As we have already seen, embedded in this vision statement is the purpose of the church—to make disciples. That is, the church exists to make disciples. Also embedded in this statement is the process of how to make disciples. This is incredible and serves to underscore the brilliance of Jesus. In one sentence he summarizes the product and the process!

Go Make Disciples

So, what's the process? From this passage, we can discern that Jesus taught disciple making with four clear steps. (Even though it's

not quite as simple as four “steps”, these steps will give you the basic framework of Jesus’ method.) The first step is to engage with spiritual explorers about the gospel of Jesus. As we have already seen, evangelism is the first step in the disciple making process. An evangelist once told me, “You can’t spell gospel without spelling go.” I like that. Jesus told his men to “go make disciples.” While not all of us are called to be missionaries, we are all called to be proactive. That’s what we can each take away from this verse: Jesus’ heart for us to go and move and shake the world for his kingdom. The word “go” is actually a participle in Greek and is better read, “as you are going, make disciples.” As you are going along your normal routine, make disciples.

The gospel in the early church was clearly relational. The word often translated “household” (*oikos* in Greek) is used repeatedly in the New Testament. While it is usually translated “household”, it was also used in a broader sense to include extended family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. The early church grew rapidly because they took the good news of Jesus back to their *oikos*. When Jesus healed a man possessed by demons, he told him to go back and share the good news with his family (*oikos*; Mark 5:19). When Zacchaeus came to faith in Christ, Jesus declared that salvation had come to his house (*oikos*; Luke 19:9). So disciple making begins with going to your established relationships and telling them about Jesus (see also John 1:40, 4:53; Acts 16:14-15; 16:30-34).

The second step in the process is to connect new believers into a biblical community. Jesus said in our passage to baptize new disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism not only identifies the person as a follower of Jesus but also includes them in the new community of believers where they can grow and be nurtured in the faith. As you look throughout the Scriptures,

you find new believers being baptized and immediately included into the new community of faith—the church.

When Peter preached the gospel at Pentecost, thousands heard the gospel and believed in Jesus. We read that immediately upon their profession of faith in Jesus, they were baptized: “So those that received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:41-42). It’s clear that once a person believed in Jesus, they were quickly baptized, identifying themselves with Jesus. They were included into a new community of Jesus followers. These new believers were not baptized to just go home and continue life as before. No, they were baptized and then they became “devoted” to the apostles’ teaching, and to the fellowship of their new community of believers. They were even devoted to breaking bread together and praying together. Baptism and fellowship went hand in hand. From this point forward, the normal pattern of the Christian experience was for baptized believers to immediately be included in the fellowship and community of believers. In fact, it would have been inconceivable in the New Testament to find a baptized believer who refused to be a part of a local church. Even those who seemed to be baptized when there was no church became instrumental in starting new churches. The Philippian jailer who was baptized with his family at night is thought to have become instrumental in the new church at Philippi that supported Paul in his missionary journeys (Acts 16:33). The Ethiopian official that was baptized in the desert after hearing the gospel from Philip is thought to have carried the gospel to Ethiopia and started the first church in Africa (Acts 8:35-38). Jesus set the pattern in motion: once a person comes to faith in Christ, he should immediately be baptized and included in a local community of believers.

The third step is to train disciple makers to walk with God. Jesus said disciples are to learn to obey him in everything: “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:20, NASB). In this phase of disciple making—and it continues forever in a sense—the disciple is trained to walk with God on their own and to begin to develop the character and competencies of Jesus. In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul says “train yourself to be godly” (NIV). Paul said that just as the athlete “goes into strict training” to get a temporary crown, he disciplines himself for an eternal reward (1 Corinthians 9:25, NIV).

This phase of equipping and training involves discipline, including teaching disciples how to read God’s word on their own and cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer; it involves teaching how to share their faith and reflect the love of God to the people around them; and it involves teaching disciples how to trust Jesus with every circumstance of life, putting him first in everything.

The fourth and final step is not clearly stated in this passage, but it is implied. Jesus said disciples are to obey everything he commanded, which includes the command to “make disciples.” Jesus intended for his disciples to make disciples. Therefore, the fourth step is releasing new disciples to multiply their life in others. Before his death, Jesus told his men, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8). Maturity multiplies. A mature plant bears fruit, a mature animal produces offspring, and a mature follower of Jesus multiplies disciples.

The Promise

That’s what happened in the early church. In Acts 6:7, Luke says “The word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.” So, Jesus gave us a clear prod-

Invest in a Few

uct: make disciples. He also gave us a clear process: engage explorers, connect believers, grow disciples, and go multiply. Jesus also gave us a wonderful promise: “If you make it your goal to make disciples and you follow the process I have given you, then I will be with you—always—to the very end of the age.” That’s an incredible promise for you and me. When we are committed to making disciples the way Jesus did, we will never lack his presence, and along with that, his power! Now that you have a good idea about the product and process of disciple making, it’s time to get down to practice of making disciples. The first question is, *Who should you disciple?*

Chapter 7

CHOOSE DISCIPLES WISELY

Making disciples begins with people, but the question is who? This is a crucial question, because you may never have invested your life into another person or you may not be sure how to get started. If either of those is you, don't worry. God is preparing you right now to make a lasting investment in others' lives, one that will result in their spiritual growth. You are about to have a front row seat to God working in a powerful way to build another person up!

So how does one choose a person to disciple? Selection is really important, because you don't want to choose a person who will not be committed to the process. What's the way to find the right person? As you move forward, let me encourage you not to just look for the most holy person you can find. Sometimes the greatest disciples are pretty rough at the beginning.

Think of how Jesus chose the twelve. They were not the brightest and best of their day—that's for sure. Most likely these men had been overlooked or discarded by the religious leaders of their day. They were common men. So, don't let external signs deter you. Instead, we should look at Jesus' example and what he did. Here are some things we learn from Jesus.

Pray for Disciples

First, pray. On the night before Jesus chose the 12 men he would invest his life into, he spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). I'm sure Jesus prayed for the Father to make it clear to him who he should choose. At the very least, he was praying for specific people he had in mind. What else was he praying for that night with such a major decision? So, should you start with prayer.

I remember one man telling me, "Craig, just ask God to give you one man. Then, when God gives you a man, pour your life into him." That's good advice for those just starting out. Don't worry about the number of people you disciple; worry about your faithfulness with those God's given you.

When I was a young pastor, I began to pray for God to give me a man to disciple. One Sunday afternoon a young man named Gibson, whom I had never seen before, walked into our church. He was a young new college graduate. We met in the hallway, and I felt a strong impression to spend more time with him. Before long, I asked him if he would like to get together to read the Bible, pray, and grow spiritually. He immediately said, "Yes!"

Over the following months, I met with Gibson and a few other young men in our church for Bible study and prayer. I invested my life into them and each of them began to grow.

Years later, Gibson joined our staff, helped us launch a new church campus, and eventually planted a new church in Philadelphia. One day we were talking about that first meeting in the hallway, and I told him that I had been praying for a man to disciple. He said, "Well, I had been praying, too. I was just driving by the church and I felt the Spirit of God tell me to go inside. That's when I met you." As we re-

called this encounter, we both sat there amazed. I prayed for a man to disciple, and God brought him to me. I'm convinced that if you, too, begin to pray for God to bring you a disciple, he will.

Look for Persons with Spiritual Interest

Second, look for those who have an interest in spiritual matters. As Jesus prayed about whom to select, he chose men that had already shown a high interest in spiritual things. Jesus didn't have to twist their arms. After all, it was Andrew and John that pursued him in the very beginning (John 1:39). After this meeting, he spent almost two years with them, watching their behavior and seeing their hearts. Out of his relationship with them, he was able to choose men who were eager to grow.² When the Apostle Paul chose Timothy, he noticed that Timothy had a good reputation and was eager to grow (Acts 16:1-3). The best disciples are those in whom the Spirit of God is already at work, which is often seen as a hunger for spiritual things.

We call those people "poppers" at our church. Just like popcorn, when the spiritual temperature turns up, they are the first to pop! Their spiritual light is on. They are showing up to church regularly, asking great questions, and applying what they learn. They are honest in their struggles, joyful in their life, and thankful for all that Jesus has done for them. They're going for more of God's truth in their life, responsive to instruction, and eager, ready, hungry, and quick to respond. Start looking around you. Ask God to show you the ones that are eager and ready to grow.

Find the Faithful, Available, and Teachable

Third, look for F.A.T. people. That's right, F.A.T. people who are faithful, available, and teachable (the first letter of each word

makes F.A.T.). Paul told Timothy to invest his time in “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Choose people who are faithful to do what you are training them to do. You certainly don’t want to put time into a person who will not be faithful to do what you call them to do. That’s why Paul told Timothy to look for faithful men. Jesus chose faithful men.

Also, choose people who are available, who will create time in their busy schedule to meet with you for training. I have been discipling men for many years and I will often see a man who is eager and faithful, but he is not available. He has too many demands and too many distractions in his life to grow. Jesus said that these people are like a seed sown among the weeds. They hear the Word and they begin to grow, but the “care of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things” strangle out the potential for growth that God is working in their life (Mark 4:19). Therefore, they don’t really bear lasting fruit in their lives. Choose people who are teachable, not those who argue every point or play the critic. Look for those who are teachable and eager to learn.

Over the years, I’ve found that people who fit this description are those that quickly take what I’m saying and put it to practice.

The last thing I’ll say about how to pick persons to disciple is this: don’t be afraid to disciple people older than you. I’ve noticed that many people are reluctant to disciple anyone older than them. They reason, *What do I have to offer a person that should be teaching me?* But remember that spiritual maturity and physical maturity are not the same. If God has brought people into your life to show you how to walk with God, then why would you keep that from others? Timothy was a young pastor, yet he was called to invest in faithful men. Don’t worry about the age of the person you are discipling—look for the

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heart of the person. If they are faithful, available, and teachable, then pour your life into them. There is no telling what God will do with a person like that!

Chapter 8

CAST THE VISION

Once you have chosen the persons God is leading you to disciple, approach them and ask if they would begin meeting with you and a few others for the purpose of spiritual growth. How does one have that conversation with a potential disciple? The best example is Jesus, so let's look at how he cast the vision of discipleship with his few men.

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water. They caught fish for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him” (Matthew 4:18-20).

Notice that Jesus took the initiative here. He approached them. In the beginning, Andrew and John took the initiative, seeking out Jesus with their spiritual questions. They were showing eagerness and teachability, but when it came down to inviting these men into a discipleship relationship, Jesus took the initiative. That means, you need to reach out first. When you see a person who is eager and ready, approach them first; don't expect them to approach you.

Have the Conversation

When you approach them, pick the right place to talk. Meet with them in a setting that will be comfortable and natural for them. Jesus talked to these men at their workplace, which was on along the Sea of Galilee. This was a very comfortable place for them. Maybe you could invite your friend to lunch at a restaurant or coffee at a local shop. It needs to be neutral ground and a place where they will feel the most comfortable. The reason is because what you're asking them can feel very intimidating. The more comfortable they feel on the front end, the easier it will be for them to process what you're inviting them to do.

Also, try to pick a good time. Jesus didn't try to force this type of conversation in the middle of the workday. These men were about to get off of work, mending their nets and making preparations for the next day. In the same way, choose a time when a potential disciple will be most responsive to you. If they are really busy during the day, then try to meet on the weekend. If they are exhausted at night, try to meet in the morning.

I try to make it a practice to say, "God has really put you on my heart and I would really like to get together with you. Is there are time that would work best for you?" Let them set the time and the place.

As you settle in for your meeting, begin by just getting to know what God is doing in that person's life. Ask questions like, "So how are things going in your life right now? What stressors are you facing? How can I be praying for you?" Questions like this help you know them better and demonstrate your genuine concern for their wellbeing. Then, you can pivot the conversation toward disciple making. You can say something like, "I wanted to meet with you today because

God has been teaching me something lately that made me think of you.” Now you have their attention.

Make the Ask

I’m going to give you one method you can use to make “the ask”, but feel free to adapt it or use another method. There’s no silver bullet, but there are ways of moving the ball down the field. Get out a piece of paper and write the words “Explore”, “Connect”, “Grow”, and “Multiply” across the top of the page. Explain that these are the four major steps Jesus used to make disciples that changed the world. The “Explore” stage is when a person is exploring the claims of Christ and seeking answers to spiritual questions. The “Connect” stage is when a person comes to Christ, becomes a part of a church, and begins to serve in some way. The “Grow” stage is when a person meets with a smaller group of people so they can grow spiritually. Then, the “Multiply” stage is when a person begins to invest their life in others to help them grow.

Once you have established Jesus’ plan with them, share your own story. Tell them about the time you were exploring God and what life was like before you met Jesus. Then, briefly tell about how you came to Christ and connected with a local church. After that, share how someone approached you to join a discipleship group and tell them the difference Jesus made in your life as a result of their investment. Then, tell them that you desire to invest your life, just as others have invested in you. Once you’ve gone this far, you can simply ask them, “Has anyone ever invested in your life to help you grow like that?”

This is a great time to hear more about their spiritual growth progress. If they have never been discipled, then show them that their next

step is to move to the “grow stage”. At this point you need to make the ask: “I would like for you to pray about joining me and a few other people in a discipleship group.”

It is important to clearly state what you are asking them to do. After asking them to join your group, tell them what is involved. Let them know how often and where you will meet. Ensure that the group will pick a time that works best for everyone. Assure them that the first goal is to impart practical help on how to walk with God in a deep and personal way.

Cast the Larger Vision

Once you have communicated some of the practical details, it’s time to cast the overall vision. This is what Jesus did so powerfully. When Jesus saw them fishing on the Sea of Galilee, he knew there was more for them. For their whole lives, these men had dreamed only of catching fish and making a living for their families—doing what their fathers had done before them. Jesus had a greater vision. No longer would they give their lives to just catching fish—from now on they would fish for men! Their lives could count for more. God could use them to ignite a movement that would change the world. This is the vision you need to cast.

You can say something like, “I have become convinced that God has a better plan for our lives than we have for ourselves. Many times we have a small vision for our life: being successful in business, having nice things, being happy, or attending church services. But these things are temporary and too small. God has a bigger vision for your life. God wants you to walk with him in a deep and personal way, God wants you to reach your world and help people come to know

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Christ, and God wants to use you to invest in a few people who will be world changers.”

Put these things into your own words—that’s important—but the key is to cast a vision of something much greater than what they are currently experiencing. There is, wrapped up in every person, the potential for greatness. Often times, though, it is the person you least suspect whom God uses in incredible ways. So, cast the vision and allow the Spirit of God to draw them to this next step.

After casting vision, give them a clear next step. You might say, “I want you to pray about this for the next few days and I will call you to see what you think.” There is no need for them to make a decision right away. In fact, Jesus said it is important to count the cost (Luke 14:28). Close in prayer and assure them that you will be following up. If they are ready to get started, set a place and time for your initial meeting.

This initial meeting, where you ask them to be discipled by you, is an exciting one, but it can also be intimidating. Let me encourage you: it is not your job to try to convince a person to be discipled—it is only your job to give them the opportunity to be discipled. The decision is up to them. You are not responsible for their response. You are just responsible for making yourself available. If God is at work to draw them to this next step, then they will be eager. If not, then you will know it isn’t the right time. Either way, God will use you in that person’s life to encourage them toward growth.

Chapter 9

LAUNCH A GROUP

Now that you have had individual conversations with potential disciples, it's time to gather the new disciples into a group. Years ago, there was quite a bit of discussion among disciple makers about whether discipleship should take place in a one-on-one context or within a group. There are strong arguments on both sides, and quite honestly, both are fine. I have discipled men one-on-one and I have used a group to disciple them. What matters most is simply that you are investing in another person's life.

That being said, I have found that the optimal environment for making disciples is a small group of three to four people. If you have a group of two, then if one misses the group time, it leaves you with only one other person. As a result, often that person is reluctant to meet that week because they don't want to leave the other person out, so the group time is delayed. If you have more than four in a group, I find it very difficult to personally invest in that number of people given the demands of my own schedule. Therefore, for me, groups of three to four seem best. They are large enough to continue the continuity of meetings if one misses but small enough to personally invest in each group member.

Looking through Scripture, it is clear that God does amazing things in groups. Even God himself exists in the context of a group,

the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26). When God made man, he created him not for isolation but for community, boldly declaring that it is “not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Then, God placed him into close connection with his wife so they could make a family where they could all grow and develop. This principle doesn’t stop there, though; throughout the entire story of the Bible, we find people growing in the context of community.

Big Change in Small Groups

Take a brief survey with me of the landscape of the Old Testament to see how often God works through groups: when God called Abraham to travel from his hometown to the land of Canaan, he chose a small group comprised of his wife, Sarai, and his nephew, Lot, along with his many servants. When God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage, he chose others to go with him—namely his brother, Aaron, and his sister, Mariam. When God chose to conquer the Promised Land, he called two men (Joshua and Caleb) to lead the way. God gave Noah three sons, surrounded king David with his 50 mighty men, and gave Elijah a helper named Elisha. When you begin to look at Scripture through the lens of community, you see it everywhere. The life of Jesus and the early church reveals this principle, too.

When Christ came to ignite a movement, he did it through a group. He chose three to be his core disciples (Peter, James, and John) and he personally invested in 12. He invested most of his time into a few men, those he chose from the crowds. The Apostle Paul traveled with others as much as possible. He went with men like Luke, Timothy, Titus, Barnabas, Silas, and Mark. If you look at the metanarrative of the gospel story, you see the overarching principle that God does

big things through small groups. This has also been the case throughout church history, too.

Men like Saint Patrick of Ireland and John Wesley of England used small groups to transform people and cultures. Today, many of the largest churches in the world are structured around small groups. I agree with Greg Ogden, who has said that groups of three or four (what he calls “triads” or “quads”) are the most effective way to transform men and women into Christlikeness.

Two Are Better Than One

Why are groups so important to disciple making? King Solomon answers this question in Ecclesiastes 4:9: “Two are better than one.” Life is better when we live together. Why? He gives four reasons in the whole context of this passage:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

The first reason is that we work better together. That is the meaning of verse 9, “because they have a good reward for their toil.” Just as teams tackle a project better when they work together, we serve God better in small groups. As your group begins to meet, you will be working together to learn how to walk with God, reach your world, and invest in a few. You will soon discover that there is a powerful synergy found in groups versus serving God alone.

Second, we learn better together. That’s why Solomon writes, “If

they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up” (v. 10).

This wisdom from Solomon may come from shepherds in ancient times. They helped one another, especially if one of them fell down a steep ravine or a concealed well. The shepherd would need someone to help him out. In the same way, we help each other learn and grow in a group. The people in your group may not physically fall into a hole, but they might fall into discouragement, bad decisions, or even sin. They might fall prey to an unhealthy relationship, and it is in those times that disciples need people around to help them. We learn better through others’ insights into the Scriptures. We learn better through mutual accountability and encouragement. We learn better through collective wisdom and prayer.

Third, Solomon says we experience community together: “If two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” (v. 11). Shepherds in the field could freeze in the cold, desert night if they’re alone, but two shepherds could keep each other warm. In your group, you will find the warmth of community, a bond that is forged during your time together—one that will last for years to come. When I see men that I’ve discipled years ago, we still have a close bond of friendship—because we experienced community together in our group.

Lastly, we are stronger together. Solomon says, “Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (v. 12) As you begin to invest in other people, Satan is not going to like it. The Apostle Paul warns us that we don’t struggle against flesh and blood, but against “the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). As you seek to follow Jesus and grow to

become like him, your group will experience spiritual warfare: temptations will assault you, conflict will rise up, schedules will become overwhelming. All of these are designed to distract you from doing the one thing Jesus commanded you to do—to make disciples.

Better Together

How will you fight through that battle and come out stronger? Do it together. When you pray together, confess your sins together, and find encouragement among each other, you become stronger. Just as Romans soldiers covered each other with their shields in battle and worked together to defeat their enemy, your group will see God respond in powerful ways as you fight back to back for each other.

Now let me say a quick word about gender-specific groups. While churches will often use groups of men and women together for mutual encouragement and community, I strongly believe that intensive discipleship should be men with men and women with women. Why? This clearly was Jesus model. While Jesus had both men and women followers, those in whom he personally invested were all men. Also, as you look at Paul's instruction to Titus, he specifically instructed women to train women and men to train men (Titus 2:1-6). Gender-specific groups allow you to have an environment of more comprehensive openness, transparency, and accountability that would not be present with a mixed group. Gender-specific groups also allow you to address common challenges that are more common to men and to women. For these reasons, it's important to keep your intensive discipleship groups men with men and women with women.

PART THREE

HOW TO MULTIPLY DISCIPLES

Up to this point, we have discussed some practical steps for launching your discipleship group. However, once you get your group going, there are some common challenges you may face as you invest in a few. So, in this section we are going to tackle a few of the most common challenges, namely how to find time to make disciples, how to see real life change in those you disciple, and how to ignite a movement of multiplication.

Chapter 10

MAKE TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST

I saw an illustration that has stayed with me for years now because it showed so well our limitations of time. A woman took a large glass jar with various sizes of rocks, pebbles, and sand. She put all the rocks into the jar. As she struggled to get all the rocks in, it became clear that this task was harder than it looked. After she had done all she could do, there were still rocks left on the table. Then, she emptied her jar and tried again—this time putting in the big rocks, followed by the smaller rocks, then the pebbles, and last, the sand. Amazingly, she got all the rocks in the jar.

In many ways, our lives are like this glass jar. We have a certain capacity for doing good things, and that capacity is limited. We have only a certain number of hours in the day. The rocks and sand represent various tasks and priorities that demand our attention. The big rocks are the most important things like work and family. The smaller rocks are less important things, and the sand represents trivial things we do each day that are usually necessary but not very important in the grand scheme of life. The trick is fitting all we need into the time we have. If you try to randomly push everything into your schedule,

you will most likely leave out something important. Your family isn't going to get your best, your work will suffer, and your list of tasks won't get done. Certainly, the time to make disciples will disappear. But if you intentionally place the big rocks of your life in first, intentionally making room in your schedule for what matters most and fitting the rest around those things, you will be able to accomplish all the things God wants you to accomplish.

Finding the Time

As I talk with people who successfully make disciples year after year, I have discovered that each one of them named disciple making as a big rock in their lives. Making disciples wasn't something they did with their extra time; it was a top priority with a primary spot in their weekly schedule.

If you are going to make disciples that make disciples, you must make it a priority in your life. That's what Jesus did. During Jesus' ministry he prioritized investing in a few. Around halfway into his public ministry, Jesus spent four times as much time with a few as he did with the crowd.³ While the masses constantly demanded his time, he intentionally and purposefully invested his life in a few who would multiply. You may think, *How can I do that? I'm already so busy!* Let me give you a few suggestions.

i. Take an inventory of your schedule.

The man who discipled me, shared two key words with me that have helped me assess my schedule. He said, "Craig, you must eliminate the things that are not very important so you can concentrate on what's most important." The key words were "eliminate" and

“concentrate”. Take a look at your schedule. How much of your time goes into things that are not important and don’t matter for eternity? What things could be eliminated from your life? How could you concentrate your time and be more productive?

2. Repurpose the time you already have.

Many people will say, “I’m just too busy to make disciples!” Usually I will ask, “Did you eat today?” “Yes,” the person will respond. “How many times did you eat?” “Three times,” they will say. “You ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner?” I ask. “Yes, that’s right.” Then, I’ll say, “If you eat three times a day, then you have at least three opportunities in every day to make disciples.” What if you took just one mealtime a week—one meal out of twenty-one mealtimes—and gave it to the Lord for the purpose of sharing a meal and making disciples? As you begin to look at the time you already use, you will be surprised to find there are many ways to repurpose your time for making disciples.

3. Make an appointment.

Usually, we make appointments for the things that really matter. If you are sick, you will make an appointment with a doctor. If you need legal help you will make an appointment with a lawyer. What matters most gets put on your calendar as an appointment. Why not make an appointment with your group to make disciples? It is just as important as any other appoint you have on the books, if not more important.

When I begin a group, I will set an appointment for that group meeting. It may be early in the morning before typical work hours. When I schedule a meeting like that, I make it my first appointment

for that day. It gets scheduled for each week on my calendar. Other groups may meet early on Saturdays. That, too, becomes an appointment I set for as long as the group exists, if possible. Carve out time to make disciples by making appointments and keeping them.

4. Be flexible and creative.

Many times the people you are discipling have changing and flexible schedules. So, don't be afraid to be fluid, flexible, and creative. One time I was discipling a pilot whose scheduled changed every week according to his flights. We had to change our meeting time every week, but we remained faithful. Another time, I disciplined a professional golfer who was out of town extensively during golf season. We met as a group and had him conference call into our meeting every week. Technology allows us to communicate in creative ways. Don't let the inability of a regular meeting keep you from investing in someone's life.

Ultimately, making disciples is a matter of the heart. Jesus said, "Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21, NIV). He was saying our time, talent, and treasure will always follow what has our heart. We always find time and money and energy for the things we love the most. So make following Jesus and investing in others people the heartbeat of your life and when you do, you will find the time necessary to accomplish it.

Chapter 11

KNOW THE SPIRIT'S ROLE

Ignace Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) was a prodigy pianist and composer. He took piano lessons from the age of six. He entered the Warsaw Conservatory at the age of twelve and by eighteen, he was appointed as professor. He was a master piano composer and performer, mesmerizing audiences across Europe and America.

As the story goes, the Great Paderewski was preparing to play a concert in a certain city. The stage was set. A beautiful ebony grand piano sat strategically placed on center stage. A mother brought her son to the concert in hopes of renewing his interest in playing the piano. As the audience settled into their seats, the young mother noticed that her son was missing. Then, in horror, she watched her young boy walk onto the stage, climb on the piano seat, and begin playing “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star”. The audience gasped as Paderewski appeared. He placed his arms around the child and—to the audience’s surprise—began to play “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star” with him. Together, they made a beautiful arrangement of melodies, counter melodies, and harmonies. All the while, the great composer whispered in the boy’s ears, “Don’t quit—you are doing great. Keep going!” That night the small child and the master composer made beautiful music together. When the song was over the audience burst into applause.

This story illustrates what happens when we partner with the Spirit of God to make disciples. In many ways, we are like that young boy. We can't do much, but with the Spirit's power, God can do amazing things through us. It's important that as you invest in people, you are clear what your job is and what the Spirit's job is. Let's first look at the Spirit's role in making disciples.

The Spirit's Role

The Holy Spirit is the one who causes spiritual growth to happen. Without him, you can't make someone grow anymore than a farmer can make a crop grow. Spiritual maturity is a divine work of God and a miracle to watch. What does the Spirit do in the lives of people that affects their growth? First, the Spirit gives new life in Jesus. He is the one who opens our minds and hearts to hear and respond to the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). As he brings God's Word to the heart of a wayward person, he also brings conviction of sin, righteous, and judgment (John 16:8-11). He is the one that draws us to Christ, causes us to be born again, makes us new on the inside, and places us into God's family (John 6:44; 3:5-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 12:13). From beginning to end, the Spirit draws us and brings us into a relationship with Christ.

Once a person is a believer, the Spirit's job is not over; in fact, he's just getting started. The Spirit lives in every follower of Jesus (Romans 8:9-11). He actually takes up residence in our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He leads us, teaches us, comforts us, and grows us to look more and more like Christ (Romans 8:4; John 14:26; John 14:16; Titus 3:5-7). He helps us in our weaknesses, guides us into truth, empowers us to serve God, gives us courage to tell others about Christ, and pro-

duces lasting change in our lives (Micah 3:8; Romans 8:26; John 16:13; Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:22-23). As we abide in Christ and keep in step with the Spirit, he works through us to produce lasting spiritual fruit that will remain forever (John 15:4-5; Galatians 5:25; John 15:8). In reality, it is the Spirit who does the work of growing every believer toward maturity and fruitful living. You may ask, “If that’s the case, then why don’t we see more people fully mature and following Jesus?” The answer to that question lies in our part of the spiritual growth process.

Our Role

While the Spirit does the work of growth on the inside of us, we must participate with him. Paul told the believers in Philippi, “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Philippians 2:12-13, NLT). The Spirit is the one who gives us the power and the desire to please God; it is our job to work hard to obey God and revere him in everything we do. The Spirit does his work, but we have work to do, too. So, what’s our role?

First, we must live under the control of the Holy Spirit day-by-day and moment-by-moment. Paul called this “walking in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). We need to keep in step with him and walk at his pace along the path he has for us. Imagine walking with a good friend along a well-worn path. As you walk together, there is fellowship, you talk about what’s on each other’s heart, you share openly and freely, and you are both headed in the same direction. That is what God wants with us. He wants to walk with us step-by-step through each day in constant fellowship, leading us and directing our lives through

his Spirit. Unfortunately, many people don't walk in fellowship with the Spirit like this, but everyone who has the Spirit living in them has the choice to live in step with the Spirit.

Why? Some resist the Spirit's direction. When the Spirit prompts them to speak, they stay silent. When the Spirit prompts them to forgive, they hold on to the offense. When the Spirit prompts them to act, they stay still. Disobeying the Spirit's leading is called "quenching" the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Just as you quench a fire by pouring water on it, many people quench the Spirit's influence in their lives simply by disobeying him.

Another reason some fail to walk in the Spirit is by doing the things the Spirit warns them not to do. If you begin to veer off road from God's will, the Spirit will warn you, convict you, and challenge you. But if you ignore the Spirit's warnings and persist, you "grieve" the Spirit (Ephesians 4:29-30).

Now imagine you have a friend who loves you and only wants God's best for your life. What would happen to that friendship if you constantly offended them and ignored their loving direction in your life? That friendship would become distant. You wouldn't know the personal fellowship you had at first. That is what you are doing when you willfully refuse to disobey God. Repeatedly quenching and grieving the Spirit virtually brings all spiritual growth to a screeching halt. This is why so many never grow and never produce spiritual fruit in their life.

So, our job is to keep in step with the Spirit and follow his lead and obey his promptings (Galatians 5:25). In order to be used by him, we have to abide in Christ through prayer and God's Word, seek to obey all that Jesus has taught us in every part of our lives, and be busy making disciples that make disciples (John 15:4; John 8:31; Matthew

Invest in a Few

28:18-20). It's a beautiful thing to watch the Spirit of God work with the people of God. That's what I've tried to describe here. When we do our part, we know that God always does his part, so what are we waiting for? Let's do this!

Chapter 12

MULTIPLY YOUR LIFE

When you decide to make disciples, you make the choice to multiply your life. You're deciding to think beyond our own interests to look at the bigger picture of God. It is the choice to participate in the great movement in the history of the world. Steve Addison in his book, *Movements That Change the World*, gives an insightful definition of movements and how they are born. He writes:

Movements are characterized by discontent, vision and action. Discontent unfreezes people from their commitment to the way things are. Movements emerge when people feel something needs to change. If the vacuum created by discontent is filled with a vision of a different future and action to bring change, then a movement is born. Movements change people, and changed people change the world.⁴

Movements are hard to define. You can recognize one when you see it, but pinning down a definition is challenging. That is why I love this quote here, because Addison clarifies and expresses the basic elements, the foundational principles behind any sweeping movement. Movements are born in a vacuum of discontent, he says, and brought to life through the actions of people who are committed to a common cause. This perfectly describes the movement Jesus created.

People who knew they were far from God and in desperate need of a Savior felt the vacuum of discontent. Jesus—through his death, burial, and resurrection—demonstrated that he alone could fill that vacuum—that aching hole for a relationship with God in each of us. Then, Jesus cast a compelling vision to his disciples: “Go make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-20). And those disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, did exactly what Jesus had commanded them to do. They saturated Jerusalem with the message of the gospel. They spilled out in the regions of Judea and Samaria declaring that hope of salvation is in Christ alone. They took that message to the nations and made disciples as they went. They were people of action, committed to the common cause of the Great Commission and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The movement Jesus started is still moving forward, still growing, and ever expanding. How can you join this movement?

The answer is simple: multiply your life by making disciples.

Imagine the Impact

Think about it this way. If 10,000 churches reached even 1,000 people every year for Christ, that would be amazing, right? Imagine your church leading 1,000 people to Christ every year! As great as that sounds, it would take 700 years to reach the more than seven billion people on the planet at that rate. That’s way too long, because that’s the rate of addition. There is a better way, the way of multiplication.

What if you lead one person to Christ and trained them for one year to walk with God, share the gospel, and invest in others. In the first year, there would just be the two of you. In the second year, there would be four. In the third year, you would have eight on your team. And by the fourth year, you would have 16. Not a whole lot? Imagine,

though, if you continued that process over time, by year 33 you would have 8.5 billion reproducing disciples! That's more than the population on planet earth. This was Jesus' strategy. It was quite simple—every disciple makes disciples. Every Christ follower invests in a few.

This is what Paul instructed young Timothy to do with his life: “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). Paul told Timothy, “Hey, find yourself some faithful men. Teach them what I've taught you, and then challenge them to do the same.” In this way, Paul was challenging Timothy to multiply his life! I can hear his now, “Timothy! Hey, don't waste your life. Multiply it for the cause of Christ to the third and fourth generation!” This is what God has called each one of us to do—multiply our lives.

Ignite a Movement

Are you multiplying your life? Paul could see a movement behind him four generations deep: from Timothy to his faithful men and the others they discipled. Jesus also saw a movement behind him four generations deep: Jesus, the twelve apostles, the seventy-two, and those they led to Christ (Luke 10:1). And when Jesus heard that the movement has reached the fourth generation, the Scriptures say he was “filled with joy” (Luke 10:21, NLT). Why was he so joyful? Because he knew that the movement was now four generations deep... it was unstoppable! You can ignite a movement to the third and fourth generation, too!

One day you could look over your shoulder and see the people into whom you have invested multiplying their lives into others, and those they invested into are multiplying their lives into others, too.

Invest in a Few

One day, by God's grace, you could see a movement spread from your influence that could literally change the globe and impact the nations in a way that continues until Jesus returns—that can actually happen!

You must first decide to multiply your life. The hope of the world rests on a few people who, by the grace and power of God, are willing to multiply their lives into others. The whole kingdom of God rests on the shoulders of men and women who are willing to multiply their lives. I can't think of anything more important. There's nothing I would rather to give my life to more than being a part of this movement of God.

Will you join me and invest in a few?

Endnotes

Chapter 2

¹ Anne Spangler and Louis Tverberg, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2009) 54.

Chapter 7

² Dann Spader articulates this separation of approximately 18 months to 2 years between Jesus' first meeting with John and Andrew in John 1:39 and when he recruited them for discipleship training in Matthew 4:18-19 in his book, *Four Chair Discipling* (Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2014) 48. See also Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry's *A Harmony of the Gospel* (Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1978) 348.

Chapter 10

³ Dann Spader, in his lecture on the life of Christ, indicates that according to his research in the gospels, Jesus is mentioned spending time with the crowd 17 times, but with "the few" 46 times, *Disciple-making from the Life of Christ* (Chicago: Sonlife Classic, 2009) 8.

Chapter 12

⁴ (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, 2009) 29.

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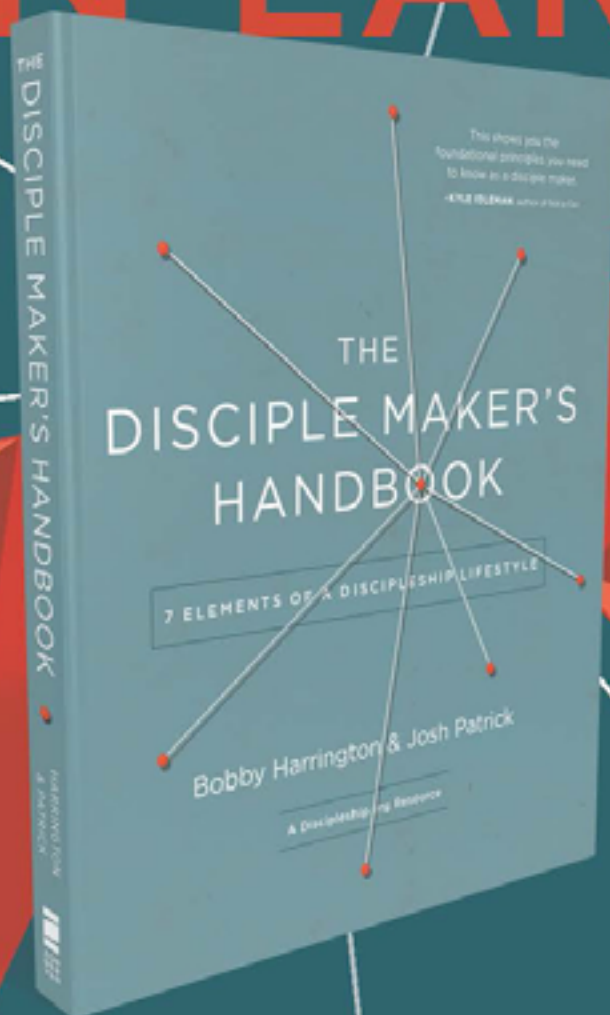
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