

Go and Make Disciples

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Part I

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“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Tim 2:2 NIV)

I know an apostle here in the United States named Jim McCracken. Jim has developed an excellent system for discipling those called to full time ministry. He has a box of printed material that he calls, “Bible School in a box.” The material is divided into eight categories: personal witnessing and evangelism, basic truth and church history, counseling, prayer and fasting, missions, public speaking and music ministry, the church in operation, and leadership, discipleship, and ministry. It takes Jim about two years to go through the material with someone. He says that towards the end of that time, his disciple is effectively entering into the ministry.

In his introduction to the outline of the material, Jim states: “When considering the subject of discipling, most New Testament Church leaders will refer to Ephesians 4:11,12, and say that all the believers should be trained to do the work of the ministry. In reality, there is a large gap between what leaders say and what is being done practically. In most cases, leaders who believe in the concept of training and discipling are hoping that it happens...” Jim concludes by saying, in effect, while church leaders hope the process of discipling happens, very few actually have a structured system to accomplish the process. I agree with him.

The last words Jesus spoke as He physically left this world to return to His Father were “Therefore go and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Mat 28:19 NIV, emphasis added.)

In the last half of the 20th century, we have seen worldwide mass conversions of people by the hundreds of thousands. Yet, after a few years, many of those converted have fallen back into life as usual. And of the ones who have continued in Christ, few can honestly say that they have radically changed lives.

As many of you know, I am called to be a teacher in the body of Christ. Because I'm a teacher, I used to attribute the lack of maturity in Christians to a lack of teaching. In my last pastorate I tried to teach people into Christian maturity. We had several Bible classes during the week as well as an extensive Sunday school ministry on Sundays. But after a year or so, I became aware that the same group of people were attending the classes while the rest of the congregation were not attending any! I concluded that teaching Bible classes is not the answer. Teaching the Bible imparts knowledge and does contribute to developing Christian maturity. But while it is an important

aspect of making true disciples, simple knowledge is not enough.

I have concluded that the church has become very good at producing converts, and reasonably good at imparting knowledge, but I don't think we are very good at making disciples. Why is this?

Greek versus Hebrew Concepts

A few months ago I was watching a video tape of a teaching by an apostle. As he was laying the groundwork for his chosen subject, he explained the different world views of the Jewish and Greek cultures. The speaker said that the Greek method of training was through *lecture to a class* while the Hebrew method was primarily *one-on-one mentoring!*¹ (For purposes of this teaching, I will use the word, “disciple” for student, and I use the word, “mentor” to mean the teacher.)

In other words, using the Greek method of lecture, one teacher can impart knowledge to dozens, even hundreds of people. We have adopted this efficient method of instruction in our churches today but the result does not produce disciples, it simply increases knowledge. Look at what Paul told the church at Thessalonica. “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God *but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*” (1 Th 2:8 NIV, emphasis added.) The King James Version says, “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, *but also our own souls*, because you were dear unto us.” (Emphasis added.) This is the Hebrew method of one-on-one instructing. I believe it is this kind of living relationship that exceeds simply the impartation of knowledge. It makes disciples.

The Word “Mentor”

Let me briefly define “mentor.” The word *mentor* comes to the English language from Greek mythology. The mythological story includes a man named Mentor who was an old, wise friend of Odysseus (Ulysses in Latin). Odysseus, before going off to fight in the Trojan War, made Mentor the guardian and instructor of his son, Telemachus. Mentor imparted his knowledge and wisdom to Telemachus by living with him, by daily instruction, and by example. Webster's dictionary defines mentor as, “1. . . the loyal friend and advisor of Odysseus, and teacher and guardian of Odysseus' son, Telemachus. 2. A wise, loyal advisor.”²

Although the first century church grew within the context of the Greek/Roman culture, the church embodied the Jewish pattern of training or mentoring. The first cen-

ture church made disciples by mentoring new converts rather than by simply teaching or lecturing. We know from the book of Acts that they often lived together and shared everything they had with each other. Perhaps this explains why the early disciples of Jesus were so committed and radical! Perhaps this is why the unbelievers in Thessalonica said, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also . . ." (Acts 17:6 KJV)

How many of our converts today turn their world upside down? Not many I fear. I am firmly convinced that the key to true discipleship lies in the mentoring of young Christians by wise, mature, older believers.

Jesus Mentored His Disciples

As one reads the Gospels, a clear picture emerges of Jesus mentoring His disciples. He lived with them, ate with them, taught them, and modeled before them His very life and ultimately, even His death. Certainly Jesus included instruction as a method of imparting understanding to His followers. We have already made the point that lecture is a good way to instruct. But Jesus also spent time with the disciples, mentoring them as a group or one or two at a time. He modeled God the Father before them. Remember when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father? He answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . ." (Jn 14:9 NIV)

Paul Mentored Others

Paul is probably the best New Testament example we have of a church leader who mentored others. He was continually developing younger believers. Clearly he mentored Timothy and Titus. Even in his travels the words "we" seems ever present indicating that he had traveling companions. The time spent together on the long, slow journeys made it possible for Paul to instruct and encourage his companions.

John Mark was one of Paul's disciples on his first missionary journey. (Acts 12:25) But Mark left them at Pamphylia, returning to Jerusalem. (Acts 15:37,38) Apparently Mark's failure to follow through on his commitment made quite a negative impression on Paul. In fact, a dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas over Mark. (Acts 15:37-40) But note that Mark's failure wasn't the end of his discipleship. Later in Paul's ministry he wrote Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." (2 Tim 4:11 NIV) Eventually this young disciple became the author of the second Gospel, the book of Mark.

We see Paul at work making disciples of the Thessalonians. He lived among them and got to know them well. There is no doubt he set an example of Christ-

centered, Spirit filled life for them. In so doing, he imparted not only his knowledge, but his very life to them. He didn't merely teach them, he lived out his faith before them.

John the Baptist is another good example of this kind of living with and imparting of the whole self to others. In effect, John disciplined his followers in a kind of school of prophets where they all lived together, traveling and ministering as a team under his leadership.

All Are Called

It is my conviction that all Christians should be involved in this kind of mentoring process. We are to be either a mentor or a disciple under the mentorship of another. At times we can be both. We can be mentored by someone more mature in Christ than we are, and at the same time, we can be mentoring others. Many have written volumes of books on Jesus' words to "go and make disciples of all nations." I believe that mature and maturing believers should seek out younger Christians and establish friendships with them, thereby setting the stage for the mentoring process. Men should seek men and women should seek women, because part of the process is to model what a man or woman of God is supposed to be.

When I say, "all are called," I don't mean that all want to participate. Scripture tells us that the Lord calls all His children to maturity, but not all are willing. For some, as with the case of John Mark, there is a divine timing to be considered. Apparently Mark was not quite ready for an intense discipleship when he left with Paul and Barnabas. It was later that he became a pillar in the first century church. We may say the same of potential mentors. Some may initially be hesitant but later become fully involved in modeling Christ to younger believers.

There are several ways we mentor or are mentored. The first is what I call being a mentor from afar. By that I mean that inevitably the younger people in the church watch and listen to the older Christians, from the pulpit, or in a Sunday school setting, a women's or men's group, in a church business meeting, at church social gatherings, or wherever. We are being watched and we are watching all the time. This type of mentoring is not particularly personal, but it does impact the church.

The second way we can mentor or be disciplined is to be part of a small group that meets regularly, spends time with one other, and shares their personal lives and prayer needs, as well as some kind of structured Bible study. This is an effective way to mentor if the group is not more than four to six people. If it has too many participants, it often drifts into a teaching setting with good fellowship, but it lacks the intimacy needed to accomplish a deeper mentoring relationship. Often someone will use

this group setting to mentor several younger Christians at a time because it just seems to be a better use of a limited time commitment. And certainly a small group setting is better than nothing at all.

The third way of mentoring is the one-on-one relationship which I think is the best and most effective way to truly disciple another. This type of mentoring inevitably takes place in a family setting, husband and wife, parents with children, and so on. Never forget, your most important disciples are your children and your children's children. Always make time for your own family.

The remainder of this teaching article will deal primarily with the one-on-one relationship, although the same principles can certainly be applied to a small group setting.

The Disciple

First and foremost we must be led by the Holy Spirit in establishing these relationships. As a practical matter, each of us has only so much time and it is important in God's economy that we choose as wisely as we can those to whom we make such a time commitment. I think a good candidate for discipleship is a believer who shows a serious desire to follow Jesus. He or she should want to learn and be teachable and open to correction. Their faithfulness to the word of God and the church should be evident. A good candidate for discipleship must also be willing to make a commitment of time to this mentoring relationship.

Unfortunately, I think most of us have been in relationships where we have been disappointed at the response of the other person, be he a mentor or a disciple. This sounds harsh but I think there are times when the Lord releases us from such a relationship because it just doesn't produce the desired fruit. In a case like this we need wisdom and the mind of the Lord as to whether or not we should end the relationship. Of course, the best ending of a mentoring relationship is when you have mentored yourself out of a job. That's when you have taught your disciple everything you know and he or she has become your true partner in Christ and His church!

The Mentor

In a sense a mentor is a model. Whether we like it or not everyone of us in the church is modeling something. The question is, "Are we modeling positively what is good or are we modeling a negative image of what a Christian is?" Paul understood his inevitable role as a model. Look at his words to the church in Thessalonica. "We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to *make ourselves a model for you to follow.*" (2 Th 3:9 NIV, emphasis added.)

The ideal qualification of a mentor is someone who has all the characteristics as the Apostle Paul. But let's be realistic. Not many of us are that well qualified! So we must settle for something less. I have heard a mentor described as "someone further down the road than the one he is discipling."

The mentor is to become a friend, a listener, a teacher, and an encourager. The mentor's objective is to provide proper guidance, instruction, encouragement, and to be a Christian model for those he is discipling. Indeed, perhaps setting an example of how to live a Christian life is the most important aspect of all for the mentor. Again, I refer to Paul's words, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Cor 11:1 NIV)

At times the Lord will send a mentor to someone for a season, or to help the disciple through a specific crisis in his or her life. Often a mentor will deal specifically with a problem in someone's life such as a family breakup, a serious illness, a period of unemployment, or some other crisis which really shakes the disciple's world. This kind of mentoring is very valuable although it may end as the crisis or situation resolves itself.

Mentoring Objectives

Your personal mentoring relationship can and should have as many objectives as needed to fit each individual situation. But I think every mentor should strive to attain at least the following four objectives.

1. Affirmation

Many young people are withdrawn and lack self-confidence. Some have a negative or poor self-image. God didn't create us this way, nor does He want us to go through life with this negative attitude of ourselves. The truth is that we are created in the image of God and are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. (Rom 8:29) Therefore we must discard such harmful self-images and put on the biblical image of ourselves.

As a young person's mentor, you can play a great role in this self-image transformation by continually encouraging and affirming your disciple. Each time he or she does something well use affirming comments such as, "That's right!" or, "Well done! I'm proud of you!" or "You are doing so well." Speaking these kinds of affirmations have real power in your disciple's soul and spirit.

2. Grounded in Christ and in Scripture

You can learn about a person's relationship with Jesus very quickly by spending time with them. Does his or her conversation speak freely of Jesus? Does he often mention what he is learning from the Lord? Does he speak affectionately of the Lord? A maturing disciple should have a daily, continuing relationship with Jesus. Part of

the mentor's job is to see that the disciple becomes well grounded in his relationship with Jesus.

Every maturing Christian should also possess a good working knowledge of the Bible. This includes the general chronology and incidents of both the Old and New Testaments. Again, you can quickly find out if your disciple has that kind of knowledge of Scripture. If not, your job will be to help him or her learn the Bible, both as to the facts as well as the general principles it contains.

3. Discipline

One of the most vital lessons anyone can ever learn in life is personal discipline. By discipline, I mean learning how to say "yes" and "no" *to yourself* at the appropriate time and then to follow through. Proverbs says, "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Pro 10:4 NIV)

There are two kinds of people in the world, those who are *internally* motivated and those who are *externally* motivated. Internally motivated people are self-starters. Someone must tell externally motivated people what to do, then supervise them to make sure it is done properly. All effective Christians I know are disciplined, self-starters. Try to instill this attitude in your disciple.

4. Integrity

Integrity is one of the most valuable things a Christian can possess. We know from Scripture that God esteems integrity. Note David's prayer, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity." (1 Chr 29:17 NIV)

Since integrity is so precious to God, let's examine its definition. Webster's dictionary defines integrity as "the quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity."³ Since the word "moral" is important to understanding the meaning of integrity, let's also define moral. Webster's defines it as, "1. Relating to, dealing with, or capable of making the distinction between right

and wrong in conduct; 2. In accordance with the principles of right and wrong. 3. Good or right in the conduct of character..."⁴

Part of your mentoring process should be to develop a strong sense of integrity in your disciple. Integrity, or the lack of it, touches every part of our lives and makes a permanent impact on God's church. I cannot overemphasize its importance. As I mentor others, if I am not helping develop godly character and integrity in those over whom I have influence, I consider myself a failure. I believe that strongly in the absolute necessity of Christian integrity!

Let me conclude this Part I by quoting from what the Spirit Filled Life Bible says in its appendix to 2 Timothy about helping someone get motivated for ministry.

Ministry is service, and a "minister" of the gospel is primarily a servant of God's word, boldly and courageously sharing its message. He treasures the word of God and defends it tirelessly, being careful to communicate its truth with absolutely accuracy. This is no easy task because the word of God faces violent opposition. Thus the "minister" of God's word learns that patience, endurance, and hard work are necessary for success in his calling."⁵

In Part II, we will examine in much more detail Paul's epistle to Timothy (2 Timothy) as a superb guide in any mentoring relationship.

1. Message entitled, "Understanding Your World View" by Neal Silverberg. Master Builders Fellowship, 8905 Kingston Pike #12-316, Knoxville, TN 37923
2. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, College Edition, Page 920.
3. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition, 1980.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Spirit Filled Life Bible*, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, page 1859.

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