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Disciple Making in the Local Church Paper

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by

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**Introduction**

As Jesus prepared to ascend to heaven to sit at the Father’s side, He gave His disciples final instructions as to what they should do after He left their presence. In Matthew 28:18-20[[1]](#footnote-2), Jesus said “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.” Creating disciples was meant to be a primary task of His disciples.

In the late twentieth century, church began to use talented preachers who were able to draw large crowds to hear them speak. These men persuasively convinced men and women of their need for salvation, and large numbers of individuals accepted Christ as Lord. Many of these people had come to the saving knowledge outside of a personal relationship with a believer. To meet the need of discipling these new believers, churches developed programs with classes that new believers could attend to learn Christian doctrine and to learn how to read the Bible. Over time, these programmic approaches produced many individuals who knew God’s Word, but who did not apply those principles to daily life. They felt validated as believers because they were knowledgeable about God’s Word and adhered to the religious practices of the religious tradition that they knew. Today, our churches are full of these “carnal Christians”, rather that disciples who know God’s Word and earnestly work to lead others to a saving knowledge of Christ, and to teach them how to be reproducing disciples like themselves.

This paper will describe how disciples are made, and what roles the local church, the pastor, the Christian community, and their spiritual gifts are supposed to play in the disciple creation process.

**How Disciples are Made**

Coleman reminds readers that Jesus did not come to Earth and setup up a discipleship program.[[2]](#footnote-3) Jesus chose to model how to make disciples so that those of us who followed Him could read God’s Word and see His life in action. Jesus did gather thousands together at times to share the truth of God’s love with them and to give them clarity about the character of God. After Jesus spoke to those crowds, He would slip away with a much smaller group. This group of around seventy to eighty, was further divided into a small group of twelves that Jesus spent most of His time with. He would engage them in discussions about the truths He had shared and listen to their thoughts. At times, Jesus would correct their thinking and propose other thoughts to consider. Jesus modeled relational discipleship in His actions with the twelve disciples.

In addition to teaching them, Jesus gave them practical assignment to put their new knowledge into practice. In Luke 10:1, He sent them out into the neighboring villages to share their faith with others and asked them to report back what they had experienced. The essential element of spending time together and expressing concern for the new believer as well as helping them understand their place in the Kingdom of God is what is necessary to create a disciple. Knowledge alone does not aid most individuals to move into the practical application of their faith. Also, many of the realities of a spiritual life require confirmation from another believer. God’s ways are not man’s ways. In many cases, a new believer must unlearn key assumptions or consider conclusions they have made apart from God’s Word. Mature believers are needed to lovingly guide a new believer as they implement the truth of God’s Word into their lives.

As they learn, the new believer must be encouraged to share what they know with other. Ying Kai has grown a church of over one million believers in China by asking new believers to simply share what they learned the prior week with those they that love.[[3]](#footnote-4) The Holy Spirit can do much with a disciple’s simple obedience. It is key to remember that being a disciple requires that we obey Jesus’ commandment. It is simply not enough to know the commandments.

**Role of the Local Church**

It is important to consider the definition of the “church”. A church is not a building but is an organized group of believers who work together. This group of believers establish and work toward objectives that are clearly given in Scripture, such as the Great Commission, or toward purposes that are revealed to the by the Holy Spirit.

The local group of believers should value disciple-making and seek to help establish a model of disciple-making that is effective. The mode of how mature believers meet up with new believers, the number that are discipled at one time, and the material they utilize are all choices that the local church can make unique choices to implement.

The body of believers must prioritize disciple-making rather than hoping that a few of the members will be the ones to “get it done”. Apathy toward discipleship leads to a weakness in disciple-making ability over time. If a church does not disciple new believers, it is likely to have a short lifespan.

**Role of the Pastor**

The pastor of the church must believe that disciple-making is of high value for there to be a disciple-making culture. His leadership is vital to promote the need for people to be discipled and to encourage those who disciple others. It is not necessary for the pastor to be a disciple-maker, assuming there is a strong effort being put forth by other believers. It is vital, however, that the pastor model what a disciple should look like. The authors of *Discipleshift* suggest that “A pastor must be immersed in the Word of God, yielded to the Holy Spirit, and in relationship with other people.”[[4]](#footnote-5).  The pastor’s ability to live an authentic and transparent like provides an example to new believers of how to apply God’s truth to their lives.

The pastor should continually remind the congregation that they will always be bringing new believers into their fellowship, teaching them what God’s Word says and how to apply it to their lives, and then teaching them to value investing in relationships with others so that they can help others on the discipleship journey.

**Role of the Christian Community**

Simply put, the body of believers would not be necessary if the pastor could disciple everyone himself. If that were even possible, it would severely impact the number of people who could be discipled. There simply would be a lack of supply of disciplers. Mature, godly men and women are vitally needed to move a culture of discipleship forward. Each of these individuals know people that are in their spheres of influence that they can witness to and help lead to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Their presence also provides more people to meet with and to help guide new believers as they grow in the knowledge in the Lord. God purposes people to meet different people and to minister to differing ages of people. Some are very gifted to work with children or with youth. Others are more adept at communicating with adults. The variety of talents within a body of believers is a strength of the church.

They also have the ability to pray specifically for a new believer needs because they have the time to get to know them individually. There is not enough time for a pastor to be that aware of everyone within there church. Dempsey and Early say “In disciple making, there is a personal dimension to spiritual growth, and there is a public expression of the individual serving the kingdom as well. Christian leaders develop disciples, and the disciples accomplish the mission of Christ.[[5]](#footnote-6)  God intentionally placed His message into His people to share relationally. He made mankind to be relational beings and we can best disciple others by being relational.

**Role of Spiritual Gifts**

God’s Word tells us that each believer receives one or more spiritual gifts when they are saved (1 Cor 12). These unique gifts are given to serve the “church” and are part of God’s intentional plan to have believers work cooperatively. No one person has all the gifts. Some may only show one gift, yet it is highly developed. New believers can learn how the Spirit of God empowers believers by seeing mature disciples utilize their gifts. A person with the gift of evangelism can take new believers with them to show how they approach unbelievers. A person with administrative gifting can demonstrate how they thoughtfully approach problems and create simple, effective solutions using their gifts. Such examples are very helpful to allow new believers see how other believers serve God and how the new believers gifting can make a different within the Kingdom of God and in ministry to those far from God. Each person within the body of believers has a role to play in discipling new believers.

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented how disciples are made and what roles the local church, the pastor, the Christian community, and their spiritual gifts are supposed to play in the disciple creation process. Discipleship is an area that churches need to invest their time and attention toward so that the Kingdom of God can be effectively shared with a lost world. God placed this responsibility upon disciples and gatherings of believers should energetically work on this high calling that God has placed upon their lives.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), Chapter 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution,* WIGTake Resources (2011), Kindle, Loc. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples,* p.98. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Rod Dempsey & Dave Earley, *Disciple Making Is . .* (B&H Publishing Group, 2013). Retrieved from https://app.wordsearchbible.com, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)