

Go therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations! ^

The great commission – a call to go and make disciples! But HOW do you make a disciple?? I think the first step in knowing how to “Make a Disciple” is knowing what a disciple IS! This seems like an obvious first step, but you would be surprised (or maybe not) at how many people don’t ask the question “what is a disciple” or consider how to make one. It is a little like saying that you want to grow corn but you’ve never studied the water cycle or soil science. Or that you want to build bridges but your never studied physics or civil engineering. If we are going to answer the call of Jesus to make disciples, these are important questions to ask.

Let’s start with the question, what is a disciple?. First, in my paradigm, a disciple and a believer are different. Just because a person is a believer, it does not necessarily mean that they are a disciple. Just because a person acknowledges Jesus is Lord of the universe, it does not necessarily mean they have made him Lord of their life. ^

Jesus describes a disciple this way: ^

John 15:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ^

John 15:8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. ^

Luke 14:25 A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, “If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and

sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.... So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own. ^

John 8:31-32 Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

In all these verses, Jesus does not talk about what you believe or think, but rather talks about a disciple being a person who turns, follows him, learns to love radically like him, and remains in the Word of God – learning and bearing fruit, and is willing to give up everything to do so.

Inherent in being a disciple is the willingness to engage in a relationship with God, with others, and with yourself, and allow these relationships to change you. In other words, to be a disciple means to change and grow.

So how do we, you and I, make disciples? ^ How do we help a person learn how to be faithful to the teachings in God’s word? Or help them grow in love and compassion continually, until they radically love like Jesus? How do we help people become so convinced of God that they are willing to give up whatever He asks them to? How do we develop the character and spiritual acumen that yields good fruit?

How you answer these questions is part of how you make disciples of your Philosophy of Discipleship. ^

A Philosophy of Discipleship is a description of your own ideas and beliefs about who a disciple is and what discipleship looks like. When I stated that in my

paradigm, a believer and a disciple are different, I am letting you in on part of my philosophy of discipleship.

You may have heard of a philosophy of ministry. A philosophy of ministry has to do with your ideas of your personal calling and how that fits into the church or organization as a whole. These are good, and everyone in ministry should have one.

But a philosophy of discipleship is different. It contains your ideas about who we each are called to be and how we help each other get there. I believe every Christian that intends to heed the call of the great commission should have a philosophy of discipleship.

My quest for a personal philosophy of discipleship led me to pursue neuroscience and cognitive psychology. My degree is in Mind, Brain, Education, or essentially, how a person learns.

So what can brain science tell us about how to make disciples? A lot.

I first became interested in brain science when I helped run a Christian wilderness school called Solid Rock Outdoor Ministries, which was ministry out of a Foursquare church. We took teens and adults backpacking, rock climbing and technical snow mountaineering. I wanted to be able to teach someone something just once, like how to tie into a rope, and have them remember it with a high degree of accuracy. After all, their life and the lives of their teammates all depended on how well they could remember safety and technical training.

What was unique about Solid Rock was that we taught about Jesus the same way because on a 1-day course, the stakes were just as high. Eternity was a stake

whether it was their salvation, or just a greater yielding to the Lordship of Jesus in their life. Our sacred task was to listen and discern what God was doing in each person's life and partner with the Holy Spirit with great intentionality for as long as they were with us.

See, modern education philosophy holds that I own an idea or information and "give" it to you. However, you are not a blank slate, an empty vessel to be filled with idea, or a brain in a vacuum. The Holy Spirit is active in each person's life and as disciple-makers, we get to work with Holy Spirit and give honor to God for how he has lead people to the moment where we have the privilege of becoming part of their story. Each person is created in the image of God, and as a disciple maker, I get to walk with you for a space of time on your sacred journey. By acknowledging these realities, we honor the Imago Dei and the work of Holy Spirit in each of our lives.

Those are some foundational ideas in my philosophy of discipleship.

But let's look at a little of other philosophies of discipleship that are out there. Here are a few examples of some I found on the internet. (3 examples) ^ ^ ^

Most were like this. I did not pick the bad ones to make a point, I pick the better ones I found, to make a point.

These are not philosophies of discipleship, most a depictions of a membership process. But more importantly, you cannot use these to equip others in the process of disciple-making.

The very obvious problem is that people confuse discipleship in the Kingdom with becoming a member of a church.

Beloved, this is a place where we can do better, where we can be more intentional. Instead of acting blindly or haphazardly, we can be more aware of WHAT we are doing and understand WHY we are doing it. Articulating a philosophy can help with that.

Ideally, a philosophy of discipleship would contain your personal answers to questions like: ^

What are the characteristics of a disciple? ^

What are the actions of disciple? ^

What is God's role in make disciples? ^

What is my role is making disciples? ^

What is the disciples role? ^

But deeper than that, a Philosophy of Discipleship has to include your **theory of change**. ^

How do people change? ^

What does that look like? ^

How long does it take? ^

What part do I play in facilitating change? ^

It also needs to include your personal **theory of learning** ^

How do people learn? ^

What helps them learn? ^

What hinders their learning? ^

Transformation and paradigm shift only happens in the conscious mind. How do you think that happens?

And finally, it needs to identify methods and practices of discipleship. ^

This may be a curriculum ^ or processes ^, like daily bible reading. But those methods or practices of discipleship are only one small part of a Philosophy of Discipleship, and honestly they are the most contextual and should be the most adaptable ^ and ABANDONABLE part of your philosophy.

Foundationally, a holy fear of the Lord should keep us sober-minded and the universal call of the Great Commission should give us hope that we too, can make disciples. The truth is that discipleship does not have to be mysterious, or miraculous. We can approach it with the intentionality and excellence of a farmer.

But let's ride that analogy for a moment. The bible often uses the analogy of farming to illustrate forming disciples. So let us consider for a moment what if we farmed the way we make disciples?

What if we watered our farm once a week for an hour and half? ^

What if we put all of the fertilizer in the middle of the field and expected the crops to go it when they need it? ^

How good of a farmer would we be if we never learned about the nutrients plants need to grow? ^

How good of a farmer would be if we never learned about the role seasons play?

How good of a farmer would we be if we tried to plant the same kind of seed in every kind of soil?

A good farmer knows their soil, knows their plants, knows their craft.

Being a good farmer, or good disciple-maker is not hard, actually it is easy. Really, what it comes down to is being intentional about the right things at the right time.

Let me show you what is possible when you become an intentional disciple-maker and articulate your philosophy of discipleship. ^

I worked for 12 years at the Christian wilderness program called Solid Rock Outdoor Ministries as the program and administrative director. We required every staff member to write a philosophy of discipleship and every instructor developed theirs during the 3 week instructor training course. They were not fancy and had no academic citations. Often they were written out in short paragraphs in people's field journals. But each employee was required to have one. Each employee understood that disciple-making was their primary job.

We never told them what to write. We hired individuals from across the denominational spectrum and people's theology varied greatly. But what we found was that the simple process of articulating their philosophy and beliefs made them intentional disciple-makers. They looked for opportunities and

engaged them. They made the most of teachable moments. They also prayed with intent and purpose for their students. Every staff member acted as good farmer.

In my time at the ministry, I oversaw and was accountable for the discipleship growth of over 4000 different students as facilitated by about 100 different staff members. In that time we never saw less than 85% of the students experience transformation. Some courses resulted in 100% transformation. ^ In terms of discipleship, this meant that no less than 85% of the thousands of students who came through the wilderness program had a revelation regarding their relationship with God, even on one-day courses. On our 40-day courses, students experienced transformation so profound that I could trace across the stages of faith development. ^

The enemy of effectiveness is a lack of intentionality. My hope and prayer is that we will be a people that take the great commission seriously. I pray that we may be a people who truly understand our calling to make disciples in the same way a farmer understands farming or a civil engineer understands bridges. I also pray that the Lord may find us not just operating in our talent, but also being excellent in our craft. ^