

EDITORIAL COMMENT



A Call to Radical Disciple-making

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

Is God trying to get our attention? I have never seen anything like it. Pastor David Platt of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama released his book *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* in May of this year. It already has 370,000 copies in print and is in its 18th printing. It has spread largely by word of mouth across the country. A neighbor came up to my wife recently and spontaneously asked, “Have you seen this great new book called *Radical*?” It has been as high as #18 on Amazon and has even caught the attention of columnist David Brooks of the *New York Times*. (See his column of September 6.)

Popularity is not usually an important thing to measure, but when a book with such great biblical content starts to catch on, we have to ask, “Is God doing something new in our day to awaken his Church?” “Is He calling His people to radical discipleship for the sake of God’s glory in all the earth?” I believe He is, and that the Church is in desperate need of the biblical message that David Platt presents in *Radical*.

David’s message has the potential to change the way we do both church and mission. It calls us to reorder our priorities to what God cares about. With a clarity and passion that is rare, David boldly lays out a vision of the Church’s mission in this world that is wholly biblical and God-centered. David writes, “The message of biblical Christianity is ‘God loves me so that I might make Him—His ways, His salvation, His glory, and His greatness—known among all nations’” (*Radical*, p. 70).

David calls the Church to a sacrificial commitment to reaching all of the unreached peoples so that God’s glory is

made known in all the earth. This needs to be the guiding vision and purpose for every church. Without it we are set adrift on the endless rolling sea of a self-centered gospel where the believer’s only destination on the horizon is his own blessing. We report on this stunning new book and its young author starting on page 6.

In addition to *Radical*, Floyd McClung has released his new book *Follow: A Simple and Profound Call to Live Like Jesus*. Both of these books are calling the church to “radical discipleship.” On top of this, the latest edition of *Operation World*, which helped lead David Platt to his mission vision, is now available. We have arranged special quantity discounts on all three books for *MF* readers. See page 16 for more information.

Doing Church as Jesus Intended

How do we determine whether a church is successful or not? Is it the size of the church service on Sunday morning? Is it the size of the church budget or the number of activities for kids, young adults, women, etc.? There are many criteria that we could use, but the real question is whether we are doing what Jesus has called us to do. The only standard that counts is His. If we are not doing what Jesus has called us to do, then it does not matter how many people we can get into a building on any given day of the week.

Getting Our Priorities Right: Making Disciples

So what has Jesus called us to do? In Matthew 4:19, Jesus says to Peter and his brother Andrew, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” We are to be followers of Jesus who, with God’s power, make other people follow-

ers of Jesus too. We call this discipleship. Jesus confirms this calling for us all in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Paul clarifies this calling in 2 Timothy 2:2, “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.” This is what Jesus has called the Church to do—to make disciples who can make disciples. Everything we do as a church must be evaluated on the basis of whether it helps us accomplish the goal of making disciples who can make disciples, both within our own culture and cross-culturally in every people. That must be our standard for success as the Church.

So how are we doing overall? Are we effectively making disciples that are making disciples? As I reported in my editorial in the Sept.-Oct. 2009 issue, over half of our young people are walking away from the church in college. Josh McDowell says that unless something is done quickly to change this situation, the current adults will be “The Last Christian Generation.” According to George Barna, only a small minority of the people in our pews hold to sound biblical doctrine. Even fewer share their faith with others. The overall American church is not growing. At best it is barely hanging on against the onslaught from a hostile secular culture. Our common model for doing church is for people to “pray the prayer and sit in a chair”¹ and listen to the pastor. It is not making disciples who can make disciples. The global missionary effort will never succeed if we simply bring this broken model of doing church to every tribe and tongue. But if we make disciples who make disciples, as God has designed His Kingdom to grow, the gates of Hell will not stand against the onslaught of Christ’s advancing Church.

What is the Problem?

Like the culture at large, our church culture in America is centered on entertainment, not on equipping people as effective disciple-makers. The pastor is the “performer,” and the people are the spectators. Most churches think they can grow if only they have a gifted speaker who can draw a crowd on Sunday morning. They spend much of their energy, time and money on perfecting the Sunday morning “show.” How many churches focus on looking for pastors who have a demonstrated ability to make disciples who can make disciples? There is nothing wrong with having a wonderful worship service, or a pastor who is a great teacher, but if that is the main focus of a church then it is out of focus on what really counts.

Disciple-making takes place through intentional relationships where spiritual life and maturity can be passed on from one person to another. A pastor cannot personally disciple hundreds or thousands of people by himself, but that is what our current church model expects

him to do. The Sunday morning sermon is not discipleship. We need a new biblical model for doing church that equips all believers to be disciple-makers, not just the pastor. Here is one notable example from which we can learn.

From its founding, Real Life Ministries of Post Falls, Idaho has been committed to creating a new model for doing church. They determined that absolutely everything they did would be to achieve the goal of making disciples who can make disciples. They are based in a small town of just 26,000, but in just 12 years they have grown from a church plant of four couples to 8,500 members. They have also established six other church plants in their area, each with over 1,000 members. From 2002-2006, they were the fastest growing non-denominational church in America. Every year hundreds of people come to faith in Christ *for the first time* through their 600+ home-based discipleship groups. It is not the pastor of the church who is leading these people to faith. It is the disciples of this church making new

disciples. The late Avery Willis, former director of operations for the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptists, believed this was the best model of church-based discipleship he had ever seen, and he gave the last days of his life to promoting it. NavPress has also been so impressed with their work that they are partnering with them in developing discipleship materials.

The church provides frequent training for church leaders in their discipleship model. For more information, go to RealLifeMinistries.com/association_immersion and check out “An Overview of the Discipleship Process” (23 min. audio), or call 208-777-7325. We need to learn from each other if we are to develop new church models that work. The global Church must learn how to make disciples who can make disciples, or the task of discipling the nations will always remain a distant and unattainable vision. We must answer God’s call to radical disciple-making. 

¹ Pastor Jim Putnam, RLM



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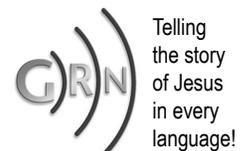
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