



The Lost Aspect of Disciple-Making

An old Navigator once told me, “Laborers are like manure. It stinks when they are all in one place. You have to spread them out to do any good.” Probably no one reading *Mission Frontiers* would argue with the idea that laborers need to be spread out. However, some may question the claim that “*You* have to spread them out.” After all, isn’t making disciples *our* part, and sending them out *God’s* part? Let’s wrestle with this question and unpack how we might recapture the biblical practice of *exporting* disciple-makers.

Does Something Smell Wrong to You?

To illustrate the urgency of better understanding our role in sending laborers, let’s compare two areas of the world. Alabama, where I now live, has a population of 4.7 million. Sixty-seven percent of those meet the criteria to be considered “born again” by the Barna Group. If just 10% of those actually labor for Christ, the number of workers in Alabama would still be a whopping 315,000! That’s one laborer for every five Alabamians who are not born again. Part of me says, “Praise God for what He has done in Alabama.” But another part of me says, “Something doesn’t smell right here when there are 132 million Shaikh of Bangladesh and none of them know Christ.”

Our churches and ministries have worked hard to *Evangelize* the lost, *Establish* them in their faith, and *Equip* them to labor. But have we ended the intentional discipling process too soon? Have we failed



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to finish the job by not *Exporting* (mobilizing, deploying, sending) more of those we have equipped? Or is that overstepping our role in the Great Commission?

The Biblical Basis for Exporting

Jesus commands us in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples” and in Matthew 9:38 to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” A quick reading of these two commands, without consideration of the rest of Scripture, could lead to the conclusion that our job is to “make disciples” and it is God’s job to send them out. But let’s think about this for a minute.

Jesus didn’t say anything about praying in Matthew 28 when he commanded us to make disciples. Does that mean that we can make disciples without prayer? Of course not. I can’t think of any activity in the Christian life that we should attempt without prayer. Activity without prayer usually doesn’t end well, does it? What about prayer without activity? That doesn’t usually result in much fruit either.

1 Corinthians 3:6 illustrates the need for both human activity and dependence on God for fruit. “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” If God doesn’t want us to *Evangelize*, *Establish* or *Equip* disciples by prayer alone, why would we think he wants us to become passive when it comes to the *Exporting* process?

After Jesus emphasized to his disciples the need for prayer regarding the mobilization of laborers (Mt 9:38), what did he do? Sit and watch to see what would happen? No, the very next thing he did was to send out his disciples. If we want to follow the example of the master disciple-maker, what are the exporting activities in which we are to engage?

Exporting Activities

When we do make an effort to send out disciples, our involvement is usually limited to making disciples aware of the needs of the world and challenging them to go. But is there more we should be doing? Let’s look to the Scriptures for our answer.

1. Challenging to a missional life

Challenging someone to a missional life is not an event that takes place once a disciple is mature. It is a process that should begin at the start of the discipling relationship (Mt 4:19) and continue indefinitely (Mt 9:36–38, Mt 28:19, Jn 21:15–17). We can't stop here, though. We need to challenge people to not just give their lives to evangelism, but to the evangelization of every people group. They must come to the point that they see this as central to the heart of God and as the "grand narrative" of Scripture and history. It is usually not until someone is gripped with this realization that they develop a life-changing conviction and ambition for all nations to be reached. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* is a great tool that many disciple-makers use to build this conviction into their people.

ex·port: [v. ek-sport]

to send or transmit (ideas, institutions, etc.)
to another place, esp. to another country.

2. Commissioning with a specific mission

When most of us think about commissioning someone, we imagine this scenario: A church member feels God may want him to serve on the mission field. He investigates different sending agencies and maybe talks with his pastor. After making his decision, he comes to the church and asks if they would commission him. This is the "Volunteer seeking the church's blessing" model. While there is nothing wrong with this, we more frequently see a different model in Scripture: the "Faithful laborer gets conscripted model." In this model, a volunteer doesn't approach the church leadership; the church leadership approaches someone who is faithfully laboring, and his future location of ministry is determined more by ministry leaders than by personal leadings. Here are a few examples:

2 Tim. 4:11: "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

Titus 1:5 "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you."

Acts 15:27 "Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing."

Acts 15:40 "but Paul chose Silas..."

Are we not seeing more laborers exported to the least-reached peoples because God is not doing His

part in answering our prayers? Or could it be that we are failing to fulfill our responsibility of actively identifying and selecting laborers and challenging them to specific missions? A successful veteran missionary friend of mine says that when he heard the voice of God telling him to go to the mission field, "It sounded a lot like the voice of my mission pastor." I have heard quite a few other missionaries tell stories of how they ended up on the mission field as a result of a phone call from that same mission pastor telling them "We need someone like you in country X."

3. Connecting to other laborers

After years of watching multiplying disciples leave the college campus and bear little fruit in the "real world," I concluded that you can't take a multiplying disciple out of a disciple-making movement and expect him or her to continue to multiply. God didn't design us to function well independently. This was confirmed by a quantitative research study I did in 2006 which surveyed several hundred disciple-makers. Unfortunately, churches that function as disciple-making movements are hard to find. The good news I discovered is that the size of a church doesn't matter. A few people meeting in a living room can be just as much of a disciple-making movement as a megachurch. The *culture* of the church is more important than the *size* of the church.

Since getting graduating seniors connected to the right multiplying movement is often more of a process than an event, campus ministers who need to stay focused on the campus might want to partner with ministries that specialize in this, such as Every Ethne, The GoCorps or a local mission pastor. For those looking for a disciple-making movement within the USA, a phone call to a local Navigator representative might be a good place to start.

A Final Challenge

A remote village is under attack. Women and children are in danger of being slaughtered by a vicious enemy. The need of the hour is for a platoon of Green Berets to deploy and do what they have been trained to do. The Commander-in-Chief says, "Go." What will happen if the commanders at the Green Beret training camp don't actively mobilize those whom they have worked so hard to train? That's right, nothing. Will you follow the example of Christ and accept the call to add action to your prayers for the exporting of laborers? 🌐