



Disciple Making & Church Planting:

God's Way to Transform Nations

BY FLOYD MCCLUNG

Jesus bypassed the cumbersome religious structures and irrelevant worship practices of his day, and started something living and organic. The word “organic” is a good one to describe a spontaneously reproducing simple church movement because it describes something that grows naturally, without artificial additives. It consists of elements that exist together in natural relationships that make growth and multiplication possible. That is how a simple church movement grows: it is not a top down hierarchical organization, but a movement held together by people who share the same vision and values. I have observed that successful churches in the conventional church model can actually be a hindrance to a simple church planting movement.



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Notice the way Jesus got the disciples exercising gifts of leadership from the outset, before they were “ready.” Jesus didn’t wait for disciples to be born again, baptized, trained theologically and supervised under a safe religious system with guaranteed controls before He was involving them in leadership. He got them out telling others about Him within a few weeks of being with Him (Matt 10:1–14). He led the movement He began from underneath, very quickly involving the disciples in leadership assignments without mentioning positions or titles. He had a radically different paradigm from that of the religious leaders of His day, and of our day as well. He was training them to lead before they were actually born again, in our evangelical understanding of what that means. After all, the journey of discipleship doesn’t start when a person comes to faith in Christ, but long before.

Movements not just meetings

In his book *Organic Church*², Neil Cole describes his journey from a static kind of church planting model to a dynamic and rapidly expanding organic movement of over 800 simple churches. Cole describes his journey of disenchantment with “church growth” seminars that attributed the secret of growing churches to clean toilets and plenty of parking spaces. Cole comments: “Apparently, the kingdom of God is held up by dirty toilets and poor parking. Jesus will have to wait for us to clean up our act. In India and China, however, where the church

is growing fastest, among the most noticeable missing ingredients are clean toilets and parking spaces.”³

Cole describes coming to the realization that God wanted him to help birth a movement that radically lowered the bar for what it meant to be church, but raised the bar for what it meant to be a disciple in the church. By assertively sharing Christ and making disciples, their movement, Church Multiplication Associates (CMA), grew in just a few years to over 800 churches in more than 30 States in the U.S.A. and 25 countries around the world.

How does such a movement happen? There has to be the blessing of God, for sure. But besides that, simple church movements are spurred in their growth by personal discipleship. It is people discipling people. Programs don't disciple people, buildings don't disciple people...people disciple people. And discipled people transform nations.

In our church planting endeavours in Cape Town, we stress the loving invitations of Jesus to everyone, and then teach the loving commands of Jesus to those who are serious. We lower the bar for doing church so that everyone can be part of it, and we raise the bar for being a disciple so that everyone knows what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, a person who lives a transformed life.

Of the four kinds of soil that received the seed in the parable of the sower, only one kind was deep and lasting. That is what we look for to make our disciples, transform communities, and find future leaders. We consciously and unconditionally love all those we minister to, but we also recognize that some people are hungry to learn more about Jesus and some people aren't.

Formation, not just information

When I think about those who have influenced me most in life, it's a few people who made a significant investment in me. These are men and women who believed in me and took time to impart to me what God had deposited in their lives. The goal of discipleship is not disseminating information, but life-on-life formation. I have heard a lot of great sermons in my days. I have read many excellent books. And I have interacted with world-class leaders. But what really changed my life were those who took the time to get to know me and mentor me. Those are the ones who really impacted me. I can count them on the fingers of two hands. God put something in each of them that was unique, and they passed it on to me. I am what I am today because of those men and women.

People like Gordon Fee. Dr. Fee was one of my professors while I was studying at Vanguard University. He was much more than a professor, actually – he became a mentor. He became a friend. He took time to hear my story. He would come by my room in the residence hall to visit with me and the other students. He would stop by the gym and shoot hoops with us as we practiced for our next game. He invited me to his office to chat. He poked around in my heart when he sensed I was not doing well. There has never been a time I have preached God's word that I was not passing on to others what was imparted to me by this man of God.

Disciple making is the way Jesus did church

Jesus chose a few people and poured Himself into them. He preached to the multitudes, but

He spent most of His time with His disciples. Jesus calls us to follow His example by reproducing what He has given to us in others, who in turn are to invest in others also (2 Tim 2:2). Building a disciple-making culture and birthing a disciple-making movement does not happen by accident. Passionate people catch the fire that burns in them from someone else and in turn pass it on to others. Every person who is influencing other people's lives can tell you about the people who impacted upon them.

There are churches and movements today that produce these kinds of results, while others don't even come close. The reason? Some have caught the vision of relational disciple-making, and others have not. How can we expect to reproduce our lives in others, and see whole cities and nations transformed if we don't deliberately pass on to them what God has given us?

Anything good in our life is the result of our being impacted upon by someone else. It began with Jesus and His disciples 2,000 years ago, and it carries on with us today. If you have hope, passion, a sense of purpose and destiny, it is because you received it from someone else. You are one of many in a long line of people who have touched each other's lives. And if others are changed because of you, it will be because you gave to them what has been given to you. Passion for Jesus and His purposes in the earth is received, nurtured, then passed on to others. That's how it lives on in the Church.

Passion and purpose come at no less a price than Jesus and His disciples paid to possess them. If Jesus walked the way of suffering to receive the blessing of the

Father, do we think we can do anything less? If we are willing to align ourselves with a tribe of people with proven passion, it will mean getting out of our comfort zone, taking up our cross, and putting ourselves in harm's way for the sake of the gospel and for nations to be transformed. If we are willing and obedient, we will experience the same fruit as the first disciples.

Jesus chose personal investment in people's lives as the primary way He did church. The Sunday-centric model of church will not change the world. Some think the church started on the day of Pentecost, but I disagree. Jesus led the first New Testament church. He modelled for us how to do church by the way He gathered and invested in the lives of a few men and women. He modelled a new way of doing church. He gathered, equipped and mobilized faithful men and women into a movement of devoted followers (Matt 28:19–20, 2 Tim 2:2). This kind of one-on-one intentional relationship is the key to helping people get freed from their brokenness and turned on to serving Jesus. Discipleship isn't a school or program, but a lifestyle of passion and purpose passed on through personal investment and involvement in one another's lives (1 Thess 2:18–19; 3:10).

I met a young man named Charles a few years ago. I asked him if he had a dream, and he eagerly shared it with me. "I want to have eight generations of disciples. I am an eighth generation disciple. I have traced it back through the guys in our church, starting about 20 years ago." He named the men in the long chain of relationships that Charles knew by heart, and could articulate the principles that made it so powerful.

"I want to start a church planting movement someday, and I know I won't be able to do it unless I invest my life in others," said Charles. He was right. There are no short cuts to doing church the way Jesus did it. He built a team that became a community that multiplied and grew into a movement. You can build a disciple-making church with two or three generations of disciples, but Charles was already dreaming of more than one church, and more than four generations of disciples. He wanted to build a church-planting movement, and he knew it had to begin with him leading people to Christ and investing in them one at a time.

When I quizzed Charles on what steps he was taking to turn his dream into a reality, he told me about room-mates he was reaching out to and new followers of Jesus with whom he was meeting weekly to have a quiet time and share their faith. He was taking simple, practical steps to turn his dream into a reality. He was faithfully working away at it, and you know what? I believe his dream will become a reality.

Making disciples is not an option, it's a command

Jesus said: "Teach them to observe all things I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19–20) Obedient disciples make disciples. It's the heart of what we do. There is nothing more important than investing our lives in other people. There is no more crucial role for leaders in the church. When leaders invest their lives in other leaders, it's discipleship at its best. Why? Because only those who live with apostolic intent can create a leadership culture conducive to attracting and releasing more leaders. When a leader develops

other leaders, the impact of one life is multiplied many times over. It produces more fruit for the kingdom of God.

Making disciples is personal in nature but transformational in scope

Jesus said we are to make disciples of "all nations." It's God's way of spreading His glory to the whole earth. Personal discipleship connects us to God's global purposes.

Making disciples is God's way of transforming cities and nations

To quote Landa Cope: "A reached community is not a disciplined community." God uses the process of personal discipleship to bring about spiritual transformation in individuals' lives, and in turn, those transformed individuals influence their business, family, school and, in time, whole cities and nations. As Landa says, it is possible to evangelize people by the thousands and millions, but that does not mean they have been disciplined.

Africa, the continent where I live, has actually been evangelized over and over again. But it has not been disciplined. Africa desperately needs a new kind of Christian and a new way of doing church. When we disciple people in small groups, we are doing church the way Jesus did it. He modeled a new concept of church by gathering a few men and women and teaching them to love and obey Him. In this sense Bill Hybels is right: the church is the hope of the world. Hybels declares: "The church is the only God-anointed agency in society that stewards the transforming message of the love of Christ ... the local church is the hope of the world."

If the church is to steward the message in the same manner as Jesus, we must make disciples who know, love and obey Jesus. This means that every aspect of their life must be different: how they work, love their family, tell the truth, handle money with integrity, and reach out to the poor. Personal salvation is not enough. It is the beginning of a relationship with Jesus Christ, but if we follow the example of Jesus, calling people to obey Jesus is the goal. Discipleship is intended by God to lead to transformation, both on a personal level and in the surrounding community.

and women to bring in a great harvest, we're commissioned to do the same thing in our sphere of influence. Jesus did not come to establish an institution called church, but to empower people to do church intentionally. God has a passion to gather a great harvest for His glory—and He is inviting us to work with Him as His co-labourers to draw in the net.

To weave an effective discipleship net means gathering and equipping people to be disciple-makers themselves. That means modeling disciple-making in our lives. It comes down to small groups and

Discipling someone means intentionally identifying with God's interests in that person's life. When someone says yes to your invitation to spend time together, get to know them – ask questions, draw them out, develop genuine interest in their lives. By prayerfully affirming them, you will impart life to them. Tell them God loves them. Pray for them. Bless them. Tell them the things God gives you for them when you pray for them, but don't use churchy language. Your encouragement and belief in them will give them courage to say yes to God's love. Help them realize the great value they have to God. Paul was doing this very thing when he wrote these words to his disciple, Timothy: "I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you." (2 Tim 1:6)

If we don't disciple the hearts and minds of our people, someone else will do it for us. We live in a pluralistic culture. There is a constant battle for people's passion. Every disciple of Jesus is on the front line, frequently alone. Living in such an environment calls for clear biblical thinking, and that means teaching and training. Memorized answers will not be enough. We must not let people think that by going to a meeting once a week they will be ready to face the challenges the enemy throws at them.

We have the awesome responsibility and opportunity to help shape the world-view of people and impart to them kingdom values. We are preparing frontline workers for the kingdom of God. God has called them, placed them where He wants them, and we get to equip them to be "full-time" for Jesus.

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Weaving a discipleship net

When Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew to become His disciples, He called them to be fishers of men. Later, He described the kingdom of God as being like a net that is cast into the sea to catch fish (Matt 13:47). Though Jesus cared for individuals, He longed for many individuals to experience forgiveness of their sins. If we are to weave a net to catch the harvest God wants to bring through our lives, it means weaving a discipleship net. Weaving a net is another way of saying that God wants us to be intentional about winning and gathering and multiplying transformed people for Him. In the same way that Jesus very deliberately selected and equipped men

one-on-one times with people at work and school and who live close to us. If we select and faithfully disciple a few people in our sphere of influence, and they in turn are discipling others, we take the first steps to build a harvest gathering net for the kingdom.

It begins with casting the vision, then inviting people to respond. Jesus began the process of training His disciples by letting them in on the big plans He had for their lives. He told them He was going to make them fishers of men. He told them, "You will see heaven open." Over and over again He encouraged them to dream big dreams for their lives, helping them catch a glimpse of the courageous men and women He was calling them to become. For those who were willing to obey Him, He invested in their lives, then He asked them to disciple others.

The cost of discipleship

Jesus said that for those who believe in Him, they will do greater works than He did. This promise is not a blanket guarantee for anyone who wants to be a disciple, but it is an insight into how much God wants to work through us. The cost is great, but if we are willing to pay the price, we will inherit the rewards of obeying Jesus. Paying the price means making a conscious decision to live full-time for Him at work, in our residence hall at the university, with our neighbors, and with our family members. It means dying to self, exchanging our life for His, confronting strongholds in our lives (2 Cor 10:4-6), living a life of truth and accountability with two or three others on a weekly basis, and walking with others in honest, accountable relationships. God is calling us to father and mother

movements of men and women who will do mighty exploits for God, and that will not happen if we are not diligent in seeking God and obeying Him.

There are churches and movements today that produce these kinds of disciples, while others don't come close. The reason some churches and movements produce these kinds of disciples is because their leaders have been captured by a vision of laying down their lives for the purposes of God. If the people who lead have this kind of passion and vision, it will be passed on to others. Unless we make disciple-making our main agenda, all our visions are fantasy. It's the difference between dreaming and doing. And to do the job really well, we have to make our main business making disciples who make disciples.

Making disciples creates a discipleship culture

When personal discipleship is a way of life for a church or movement, it ensures that what they stand for is passed on. Discipleship helps create a culture. One person cannot do that by himself or herself. A solitary individual cannot possibly be in enough places to influence enough people. By calling us to birth and nurture a disciple-making movement, God has designed a process that has the deepest impact on the greatest number of people. This is how a movement grows to impact upon thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people, all with the same passions and dreams.

Discipleship is the difference

All kinds of programs and strategies have been developed by Christian organizations and local churches to evangelize the world. All these programs and strategies are great. But programs and strategies don't disciple people. Great ideas don't make disciples. Disciples make disciples. There is no shortcut and there is no other way for a church or movement to reproduce itself and to have a transforming influence on a nation.

You won't reproduce the vision and values God has put in you if you don't make disciples. There is no other way to pass on the spiritual DNA God has put in you. There are many methods that seem more glamorous, and there are many approaches to ministry that get more attention. But if you want to build a leadership culture, if you want to impart apostolic passion to your church or movement, and if you want to see the gospel have its desired transforming effect on people and nations, it will happen because you make disciples. f



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