

Brothers and Sisters, Please Stop “Training”¹

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Fifteen years ago, “Church Planting Movement” (CPM) was a relatively unheard-of—and even widely questioned or opposed—concept. Today, many different types of ministries and efforts are being labeled “CPM.”

Definition of CPM

Over the last 20 years, as we have come to better understand this God-phenomenon called Church Planting Movement, the definition has become clearer.

- A Church Planting Movement can be expected to be in place when four or more separate streams of new disciples and new churches are multiplying past the 4th generation in a relatively short time (months or years, not decades). Generation 1 is counted as new churches composed of new believers, not pre-existing believers. Generally, a CPM does not emerge until there are at least 200 new churches and they are led indigenously by believers that have arisen from the harvest.
- Our goal is sustained CPMs 1) in which the vision is owned and led by biblically qualified leaders who have arisen from the harvest, 2) which have stood the test of time

and persecution, 3) which number well past a thousand churches and 4) which are cascading into other people groups and regions. Generations often become impossible to number, but 15, 20 or 25 generations of new churches are not uncommon.

The heart of CPM praxis is pouring our lives into local believers in a way that helps them become 1) whole-hearted followers of Jesus (life transformation and devotion to Jesus) and 2) fishers of men (Mark 1:17). In this process, many become catalysts of movements. The two common avenues of finding local believers to invest in and train are 1) winning them to Christ through evangelism and 2) casting vision to existing believers to pursue Father’s heart for movements, and then to be trained and walk this road together.

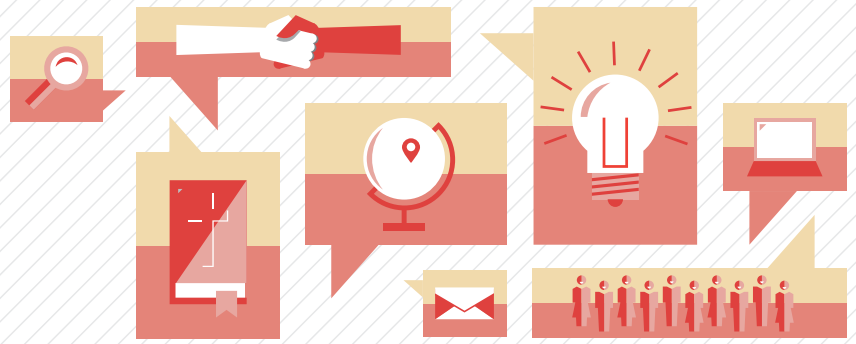
Training Disciples For a CPM

The primary term that has arisen to indicate discipling that results in equipping believers to do the work of service (Eph. 4:11-12) is “training.” In the early days of movements, the word “training” was chosen to differentiate it from misconceptions associated with other great terms:

- Teaching—Teaching the Word of God is essential. “Training” emphasizes that the teaching should result in heart obedience in the listener (doers of the Word, not hearers only).
- Discipling—Discipling often conveys the idea of receiving for personal spiritual growth. “Training” emphasizes that a disciple not only receives but is also equipped to pass on what he or she receives.

Training describes a process of regular (usually weekly) life-on-life teaching and discipling that results in the disciples 1) growing in Christlikeness through genuine life transformation (“following Jesus”) and 2) being equipped, encouraged and held mutually accountable to make disciples of others who can repeat the discipling/training process (“fishing for men”). Training places emphasis on developing an environment and structure to multiply discipleship at every generation.

Training has always been meant to equip disciples in a way that can result in true life transformation and movements of disciple-making that spread throughout a city, region or people group.



EVENTS CAN CHANGE HEARTS BUT ONLY FREQUENT DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING CAN CHANGE STEPS.

Training was never meant to refer to pop-in-pop-out conferences or events. Training “events” can change minds and hearts but do not usually change hands and feet (lifestyle). Only regular life-on-life training changes lifestyle.

Unfortunately, today many people refer to pop-in-pop-out training events as “training.” In a best-case scenario, we pop in and have amazing God-encountering conferences. God convicts the group of wrong thinking and practice. He moves the hearts of listeners to cooperate with Him to see movements of disciple-making emerge. In less ideal scenarios, we pop in and pass on CPM principles, but there is no real heart change.

Regardless of what occurs in such pop-in-pop-out conferences, a disconnect emerges IF there is little (if any) weekly follow-up. When there is no regular, life-on-life mentoring, coaching, modeling and discipling, the

hopes of disciples raised in the training events become dashed.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. (Prov. 13:12, ESV)

We give hope but defer fulfillment through lack of regular follow-up. Disillusionment sets in. We have inoculated them against kingdom movements.

If this is what someone means by training, I say, “Brothers and sisters, stop training!” Remember: events can change hearts but only frequent discipleship training can change steps. If all we do are training events, how can we help disciples through the problems and discouragement that inevitably follow when they try to change their lifestyles and encounter spiritual opposition?

The goal of our training is 1) life transformation (including church formation) and 2) movements that

can spread through a region. The ideal situation is for us to cast vision deeply (which can be through an event) but then have 12-24 months to deeply invest in groups of local believers through weekly/bi-weekly discipleship training that walks them through the stages of a movement.

Let’s look at two scenarios of movements in Acts that rang out through the Roman world and see how Paul trained them: a 3-week model and a 3-year model.

3-Week Training Model: Thessalonica

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-2, ESV)

It appears that Paul only stayed in Thessalonica for about three weeks

before he was chased out by persecution. Even so, something amazing emerged from this launch:

*You became **an example to all the believers** in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has **the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere**, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you **turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God**, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thes. 1:6-10, ESV, emphasis added)*

Two characteristics are apparent from Paul's letter to these dear believers shortly after his departure:

1. True life transformation – they are an example of faith and radical turning from the old ways
2. Regional movement – their example and witness has reverberated throughout the region

3-Year Training Model: Ephesus

In Ephesus, on the other hand, Paul built a base of operations in the province of Asia for three years (Acts 20:31).

*This continued for two years, so that **all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord**, both Jews and Greeks And this [the seven sons of Sceva incident] became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, **confessing and divulging their practices**.*

*And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So **the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily**. (Acts 19:10, 17-20, ESV, emphasis added)*

The same two characteristics emerge in Ephesus:

1. True life transformation – deep sins are being rooted from their heart in reverence for the Word of the Lord
2. Regional movement – everyone in this Roman province of Asia has heard the Word of the Lord

The Training Process that Resulted in Movements

According to Paul, it was the *manner* of interaction that was the critical factor in these God-movements.

Lifestyle of the 3-Week Training Model

*Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know **what kind of men we proved to be among you** for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thes 1:5-6, ESV, emphasis added)*

*But we were **gentle among you**, like a **nursing mother** taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you **not only the gospel of God but also our own selves**, because **you had become very dear to us**. For you*

*remember, brothers, our labor and toil: **we worked night and day**, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, **how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers**. For you know how, **like a father with his children**, we **exhorted** each one of you and **encouraged** you and **charged you** to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thes 2:7-12, ESV, emphasis added)*

With just three weeks, Paul took up the role of mother or father, exhorting, encouraging, and charging these new believers day and night. He imparted his very life rather than popping in and popping out. He was an example they could emulate of holy conduct. The Thessalonians had become dear to him and he imparted his life to them. For three weeks, he was all in. He then stayed in contact in the years to come through 1) personal follow-up visits, 2) emissaries, 3) letters and 4) taking Thessalonian believers with him at times (Acts 20:4).

Lifestyle of the 3-Year Training Model

*But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, [Paul] withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, **reasoning daily** in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:9-10, ESV, emphasis added)*

*“You yourselves know how **I lived among you** the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all **humility***

IF YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN BRING REAL HEART CHANGE AND LAUNCH TRUE KINGDOM MOVEMENTS THROUGH TRAINING EVENTS ONLY, I ADMONISH YOU TO STOP TRAINING OR CHANGE YOUR APPROACH.

and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:18-21, 31-32, ESV, emphasis added)

Whether Paul had three weeks or three years, he conducted his life and ministry in the same manner. The picture of training that emerges here is one in which every day he was training. He did this in an incarnational life-on-life manner, admonishing and teaching with tears. He trained not just in the hall of Tyrannus (public) but house to house. For Paul, training was pouring his life into disciples and commending them to God and His Word.

Implications for Our Training


Training of disciples is essential if movements are going to emerge. But our term “training” must mean what Paul did with his disciples. Training conferences can help us filter for hungry disciples, but only regular, life-on-life training will change lives and impact regions. Paul reasoned in the synagogues (events) to find those who would believe and walk with him in kingdom movements. He then imparted his life, day and night, to those who walked with him.

A goal of every conference should be to identify men and women we (or co-laborers in that region) can regularly pour our lives into in the weeks, months and years to come in the various locations in which we work. Sometimes, we will have only a short time to share our lives, like Paul had in Thessalonica. Sometimes we will have years, like Paul had in Ephesus. But regardless of the length, the hope of our training is to impart our very lives to these disciples and commend them to God who can equip them to be ministers of His grace.

How often must we interact? In some refugee situations, colleagues know they have only a few weeks with new believers, so they meet like this for training every day. In usual situations, colleagues train disciples weekly. In busy urban environments, some colleagues train their

disciples every other week and encourage them to start their own training groups on the off weeks. The least frequent I have seen anyone train believers in a way that resulted in life transformation and a Church Planting Movement was once a month. Less frequently than that and it is too difficult to bring real implementation that results in life transformation, healthy church formation and multiplying generations.

So, brothers and sisters, do not stop training events if you are using them to find disciples to invest your life in. But if you believe you can bring real heart change and launch true kingdom movements through training events only, I admonish you to stop training or change your approach.

At the end of the day “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Such lifestyle training was Paul’s model. Does it sound much different from what Jesus did with His disciples? 

1 In January 1995, John Piper published an article entitled “Brothers, Tell Them Not to Serve God!” in which he admonished readers not to serve God in the wrong way. That article deeply impacted me and this title honors that spirit.