

Making disciples in small groups

Introduction

This short paper is basically a look at how we can use what is known as a 3 Thirds Group in our work of making disciples and building a disciple making culture within our churches. However, before we come to the 3 Thirds Group itself I want to look at the rationale behind it. This entails examining four issues:

1. Vision, values and structure pp. 2-3
2. Effective change and leadership p. 4
2. Convictions underpinning the 'making of disciples' p. 5
3. Moving people to the right (more closely conformed to Christ) p. 6-7
4. The use of 3 Thirds groups in making disciples p. 8-10

Vision, values and structure

We do what we value and value what we do!

1. I think we would all agree that Christian practices must be rooted in the presence of God. There is no doubt that we all hold to certain principles. However, principles can be covered over in layers of practices, priorities and values.
2. It is hard, but necessary work to dig down into our comfortable practices (methodology). It takes time and effort to penetrate the old priorities toward which we have focussed our actions for years. It will be an effort (and some sacrifice) to break through those things we have valued and to which we have given our time, energy and resources.
3. Often we think we are living out our principles when we are actually living out our practices, priorities and handed-down values that we have inherited from the 'traditions of the fathers'.
4. We will never change a structure, a practice or a priority until we change a value! Why? Because we do what we value and we value what we do!
5. If we have a problem today, it is not one of vision or structure or even practices and priorities - or even principles - it is one of values.
6. We can have correct stated values, but they are not actually implemented. Why? There are a number of possible reasons.
 - The stated value isn't the actual value - 'every member a minister' may be a stated value, but the church may actually value the 'professionals' doing the ministry.
 - Structures formerly developed to implement the value have become the value - e.g. Sunday school, choir, Sunday service!
 - No appropriate structure exists to implement the stated value - e.g. I value evangelism but have no way of doing what I actually value.
 - Two good values are not balanced - one neutralises the other - e.g. a church values celebration worship and small group life. If celebration worship receives the majority of time, effort, resources and acclamation small group life will be neutralised.
 - Dissatisfaction and commitment have not yet built up into action - i.e. innovators are not yet dissatisfied enough to commit to and implement new values and therefore do something about it.

Success	Values	Vision	Structure	
	Vision	Values	Structure	
	Vision	Structure	Values	
	Structure	Values	Vision	
	Structure	Vision	Values	Disaster

Values = underlying biblical assumptions.

Vision = God's picture of the church in the future

Structure = existing forms that influence the church

The above table demonstrates the loss of effectiveness as the order of focus changes from most most effective (top line) to most disastrous (bottom line).

FROM HERE TO THERE

I often use the illustration of a car to make a point regarding vision, values and structures. Imagine having a luxury car e.g. a brand new Ferrari. I know that I want to make a trip from Manchester, UK to St. Tropez in France. I've got the car and I know where I want to go, but if I don't have fuel in the tank I will not go anywhere. The car is equivalent to structure, the destination is the vision, and the fuel represents the values.

In his leadership training seminar 'From Here to There', Bill Hybels talks about vision. He says that leadership is about taking a group of people from where they are at to a preferred place. He says that presenting a compelling vision is not the place to start. People are not going to be willing to embark upon a difficult journey if they are content or comfortable to be where they are at currently.

Every church or organisation I know that has embarked upon a journey into an apostolic future have done so because they were not satisfied to remain where they were, doing the things they've always done. Someone once said that the height of foolishness was to continue to do what you've always done, expecting a different outcome. This is what one might call being in 'maintenance mode'.

In order to be successful in building a discipling culture, those involved must first get to a place where they are not content to remain where they are. Secondly, those involved will have to ensure that the values / principles / convictions they hold will drive the vision they have and the structure development required to move it on.

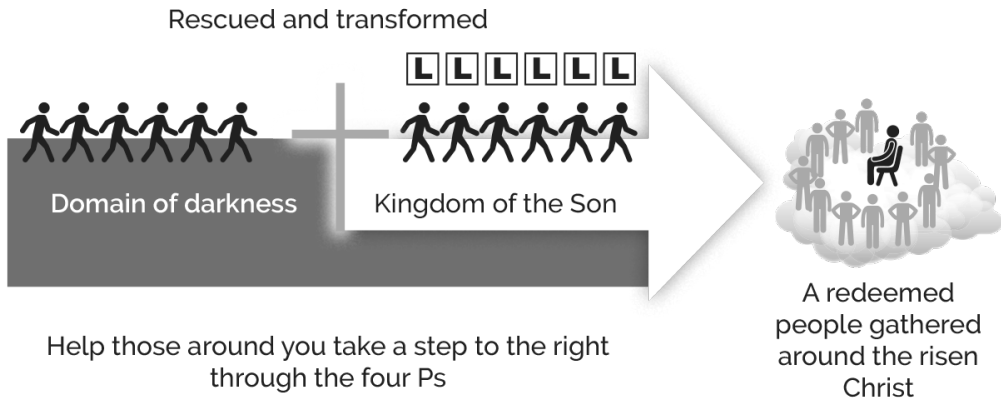
In their book 'The Trellis and the Vine' Colin Marshall and Tony Payne write about a ministry mind-shift that changes everything. According to the book, Christians are meant to be disciple-making disciples and pastors are to be trainers. Unfortunately, most pastors are devoting their time to working on the trellis (buildings, programmes etc.) rather than the vine (people) even though most would agree that the Ephesians 4 ministries are to equip Christ's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph. 4:12). Travelling in France one often sees vineyards. I notice that the support for the vine is minimal - perhaps just a wire. a support structure is necessary but it is not as noticeable as the vine itself!! The question for all of us is, 'has 'administry' trumped ministry?'

Values / principles / convictions

CONVICTIONS AROUND MAKING DISCIPLES


- a. WHY make disciples? We want to make more and more disciples of Jesus Christ because God's goal for the whole world and the whole of human history is to glorify his beloved Son in the midst of the people he has rescued and TRANSFORMED.
- b. WHAT is a disciple? A disciple is someone engaged in transformative learning - the kind of learning where the student's understanding of reality is changed and keeps changing, leading to a transformed experience and life. So, a disciple is a forgiven sinner who is learning Christ in repentance and faith.
- c. HOW are disciples made? The making of disciples is God's work, achieved as his word and Spirit work through the activity of disciples and in the hearts of those they speak to. A definition might look like this: "Disciples are made by the persevering proclamation of the word of God by the people of God in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit". The definition contains 4 'P's which we expand upon in point 4 below.
- d. WHO makes disciples? Our fourth conviction concerns who makes disciples. ALL of God's people are granted the joy and privilege of 'making disciples'. However, it is fair to say that most people in our churches don't see it as a normal part of their Christian life. So, we have to address motivation on the one hand and lack of confidence on the other. Motivation: we don't value the word enough, and we don't value people enough. It's a heart problem! Lack of confidence: first we must lower people's sights from the scary things that they might think we mean by 'word ministry'. The second step is to build people's confidence in simple and varied ministries through teaching, example, encouragement and training.
- e. WHERE are disciples made? Everywhere in life - where we meet with friends, in the home, at work, in our going about our lives. Learning Christ takes place in every facet and activity of the transformative learning communities we call churches; and through our churches, it also happens in every corner of this present darkness.

Moving to the right




The Vine Project
How are disciples made?


Why




What




How



Who



Where



...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. *Philippians 1:6*

We tend to think that if we are going to disciple someone, if we are going to teach them Christ, then we have to take them right from the start of the Christian journey through to the very end. That is just not the case. Our goal is much more manageable and much less ambitious. We just want to help people move one step forward. One step toward Christian maturity. Most of us can't imagine walking someone through the entire disciple making process. But we can all help someone take one step forward.

How do we help people take one step forward? In 4 ways:

- 1: Proclaiming the Word. That is, we speak God's word in a variety of ways to people. This can mean anything from sharing a part of scripture to showing people how to live as an embodiment of God's word.
- 2: Prayer. We know we can't change people's hearts - only God can do that, so we pray that he will.
- 3: People. We pull together as God's people in community. God made us to be in community with one another. We are supposed to disciple each other, that is why we need people around us!
- 4: Perseverance. We keep going. Discipling someone is not a short term commitment - it is a way of life. We keep going, always aiming to help someone take one step forward.



The 4 P's

The first is the *Proclamation of God's Word* in many ways.

- We don't believe that expository ministry is limited to the pulpit. We think that there are a variety of venues for expository ministry because it's simply teaching God's Word with God's intent. Therefore, the first "P" is that we want to find as many venues as possible to *proclaim* the Word of God because that's the means of making disciples.

The second is *Prayerful Dependence on the Spirit*.

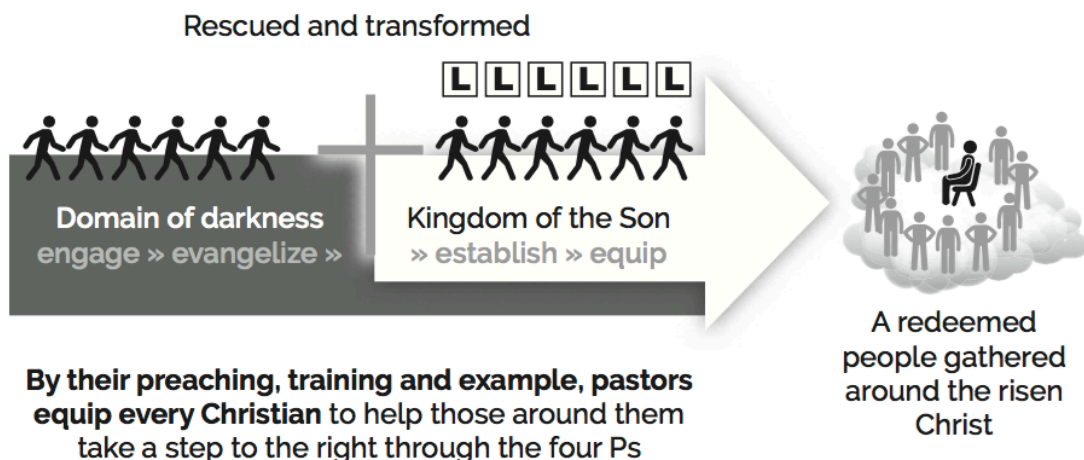
- As Paul reminded the church in Corinth, one waters and one sows and one reaps, but God is the one who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3). Yes, we can pray; yes, we can prepare; yes, we can teach the Word of God; but we need to prayerfully depend on the Spirit. He is the one who makes the difference. He's the initiator. He's the evangelist. It's by the Spirit of God that people come to faith in Christ. And it's by the Spirit of God working through the Word that people grow as disciples of Christ.

The third "p" is *People*.

- Ministry is about people. So often we think of ministry as programmes. So we have the Sunday service, we have Sunday School for adults, we have Sunday School for children, we have the youth group on Wednesday night, we have small groups in homes. We have all these ministries, and we think that because we have all those programmes in place, we're a godly church. There's nothing wrong with any of those programmes, but again, those programmes are trellises. They're structures we put into place so that hopefully we can do prayerful people work as we proclaim God's Word to them. We want to see ministry about people, right? So, how do I minister to these people? Prioritise people before programmes.

The fourth is *Perseverance*.

- This is a very important thing because of our culture's inner and outer pressure to be successful. Our culture focuses so much on growth, numbers – what is dynamic and exciting. But the reality is that most of ministry happens in the trenches. It's slow work. People work is slow. God takes His time. It doesn't happen overnight, and God often works in a small way. It's small, slow, and quiet, but over a period of time, you will see that the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, does terrific work in people.
- Perseverance is very important, because so often, as things are small or we're working through difficult situations with people, we're tempted to give up. We need to press on and persevere.
- It's worth sharing a familiar passage of Scripture that emphasises the perseverance aspect of discipleship: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, **with complete patience and teaching**" (2 Timothy 4:1–2, ESV; emphasis added).



3 Thirds Groups Explained

The 'Three Thirds' format of small group meeting is a tool for evangelism, discipling, leadership development and church formation. It so called because the time together is divided into three thirds. For example, if a meeting is scheduled for one hour there will be three 20 minute sections. If the meeting is schedule for 1 1/2 hours it will be divided into three sections of about 30 minutes.

- The first section looks back at the week just gone.;
- The second section looks up by focusing on the Word of God by inductive Bible study (Discovery Bible Study rather than formal, didactic teaching);
- The third section looks forward to the week ahead.

First Third

Looking back: this is the pastoral or caring element. Everybody contributes by sharing the 'highs' and 'lows'. What went well during the past week and what were the low points? Having done that, it is a good time to briefly pray for each other. Next, it may be appropriate to worship - this could be by singing a song, looking at a Psalm, or even breaking bread together.

The third activity in this first third is called 'Encouragement to Action feedback. How did you get on with the goals you set yourself last week?

The final part of the first third of the meeting concerns vision and basically involves praying for relationships - in Church family, those 'not-yet' believers, and fellow labourers in the harvest.

Second Third

Looking up: this is the new Bible Lesson. Using the Discovery Bible Study method, one person reads the passage or tells the story and then one or two different people recall what the first person said. Then the passage can be read again. After this the group discusses what we can learn from the passage about God? About people? How we can obey (what we need to do or not do)?

Third Third

Looking forward: this again consists of three actions. The first action is to practice with each other sharing today's or a previous Bible study; or practice sharing testimony; or practice sharing the gospel. The second action is to set goals for the coming week. How will you obey what you learned today? What will you undertake to do in the coming week? Who will you connect with? Who will you share with? Who will you train to make disciples?

It's about the C.O.S.T. Connect; Obey; Share; Train.

Finally, we pray and commission one another. Pray for help in meeting the goals we set ourselves; pray for lost people that we know; pray for other needs that we know about.

3Thirds

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgWtcElAok0&feature=share>

3/3s ("three thirds") Format for meetings

< Look back <	^ Look up ^	> Look forward >
<p>1. Pastoral Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - share something positive - pray and thank God <p>2. Worship (a Psalm, some songs, etc.); the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11: 23-29); offerings (Acts 4: 34-35, 2 Corinthians 9: 7-8)</p> <p>3. Accountability in love (summarize how you went with the following)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlights from what you read in the Bible? - How did you see God answer your prayers? - Who did you share the gospel with? - Who did you train to make disciples? <p>4. Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acts 2:36-47 - Church circle - Matthew 28:18-20 - Great Commission - Matthew 9:35-38 - Workers in harvest - #NoPlaceLeft Romans 15:23 Acts 19:8-10 - other tools to cast vision and remember how many lost people in your community. 	<p>5. New Bible Lesson (Discovery Bible Study method)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tell the story - Another person repeats the story - Read the story in the Bible - Ask "What can we learn about...?": <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	<p>6. Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - today's or a previous bible story - 3 circles - testimonies <p>7. Set Goals What will you commit to do and when?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How you will obey what you learned today? - Read the Bible (1 or more chapters a day) - Pray to God about people & needs. - Share the gospel with? - Train another to make disciples? <p>8. Commission / Pray</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for help in meeting the goals - for lost people we know - for other needs that we know about etc.

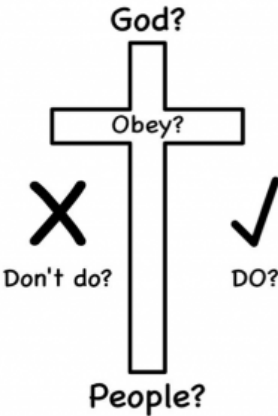
Sample

Meeting topics and bible references

<p>Stories of Hope</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A rich man receives salvation (Luke 19:1-10) 2. The pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-17) 3. A hole in the roof (Luke 5:17-26) 4. Two lost children (Luke 15:11-32) 5. Death and forgiveness (Mark 15:16-39) 6. New life, new purpose (Matthew 28:1-20) 7. What soil are you? (Mark 4:1-20) 8. An unexpected guest (John 20:19-31) 9. Merciful King (Matthew 18:21-35) 10. Healings in response to faith (Luke 8:40-56) <hr/> <p>411 - Matthew 28:18-20</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WHY make disciples? (2 Corinthians 5: 17-21) 2. Who to reach/disciple (John 17:20) 3. WHAT to say? 4. WHEN to do it? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repent and believe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 4:17 - Story: Luke 7:36-50 (The Sinful Woman) - Additional: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10 2. Be baptized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 28:19 - Story: Acts 8:26-39 (Philip and the Ethiopian official) - Additional: Romans 6:3-4, Matthew 3:13-16, Acts 2:38 3. Pray <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 6:9-13 - Story: Matthew 6:5-15 (Jesus teaches how to pray) - Additional: Luke 10:2 4. Go ... make disciples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: 28:19-20 - Story: John 4:4-42 (The woman at the well) - Additional: Luke 10: 1-11 5. Love <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 22:37-39 - Story: Lucas 10:25-37 (the good Samaritan) - Additional: John 15:13, 1 Cor. 13, John 13:34-35, John 14:15, 21:17 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Worship through perseverance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 4:10 - Story: Acts 16:25-34 7. Lord Supper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Luke 22:19-20 - Story: Luke 22:7-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 - Additional: Acts 2:42 8. Give <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Matthew 6: 1-4 - Story: Mark 12:41-44 (The widow's offering) - Additional: 2 Cor. 9:6-11, Acts 4:34-35 9. Gather <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Command: Hebrews 10:24-25 - Story: Acts 2:36-4:47 (The first Church) - Additional: Acts 5:42, 17:5-7, 18: 7, 19: 9, 20:20; Romans 16:1-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:31 10. Begin long term discipleship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Gospel of Mark - Continue using the 3/3's for your meeting with the method of discovery.
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Encouragement to Action

3/3s ("three thirds") Format for meetings

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Accountability is an off-putting word to many.
So we will use *Encouragement to Action* instead.

Think about how you could encourage action on these topics:

1. Praying as Jesus taught us - Lord's Prayer. Luke 11:1-4.
2. Reaching out to our network. Matthew 28: 16-20
3. Handling worry and anxiety. Matthew 6: 24-34.
4. Forgiving others. Matthew 18:21-35.
5. Jesus is alive. Romans 1:1-6.
6. Jesus is God. John 1:1-18.