

## **115. Cultivate Disciples** **By Arland Steen**

### **Supreme Scripture**

Matthew 28:19-20:19 (NKJ): *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Cultivating Disciples is one of the five purposes I believe God has for us as a foundation for our lives.

He gave this to me several years ago when there was emphasis on purpose statements for churches. I was prayerfully considering how I could phrase the mission of the church in an easy-to-remember way. He said to use the alphabet:

- Adore God
- Befriend People
- Cultivate Disciples
- Develop Ministers
- Exert Influence

So, I phrased it like this:

Our purpose is to BEFRIEND people and point them to Jesus,  
CULTIVATING them as His disciples,  
while DEVELOPING their unique abilities,  
thereby EXERTING Godly influence in the world,  
bringing ADORATION to His name.  
This is our Purpose Statement.

### **Cultivating Disciples**

*We nurture believers to maturity through intimate, accountable relationships using God's Word as our guide.*

Discipleship is an intentional relationship; one in which we walk alongside others in order to encourage, equip and challenge each other to grow toward maturity in Christ. When Jesus commanded us to make disciples, He spoke the mission statement for the church. Making disciples ensures that the gospel is embedded deeply in the lives of believers. They will then serve as mentors to future generations. Jesus always lived with a view to the end of His earthly ministry. The preparation of a few who would carry on His ministry after He ascended to the Father was ever before Him.

Our Champions4Christ or C4C groups serve as a vehicle for discipleship.

### ***The Jesus Way***

Luke 5:1-11

When Jesus stepped into the lives of Andrew, Peter, James and John and demonstrated His divine power with the catch of fish, their response was one of amazement, fear and humility. When He offered His bold invitation for them to join Him in catching people, they left everything and followed Him. Jesus spent the next 3.5 years discipling them and then sent them out to do the same.

Mark 1:17 NASB: “Come, follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”

### Come

The invitation was to leave everything behind – nets, boats, possessions, relationships, aspirations, dreams and plans – to pursue something wholly new and different.

### Follow Me

This represented their new direction and commitment – an all-consuming allegiance.

I will make you to become

This was Jesus promise of transformation, or His work in their lives. You can’t purchase His work in you with material things.

Matthew 8:18 (NKJ): *And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side.*

This is a strange verse compared to today’s ministry practices. The fact that the crowds coming to hear Jesus were growing doesn’t seem to be that significant to Him.

Matthew 5:1 (NKJ): *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.*

Here again, instead of playing to the crowd, He gets in a boat with His disciples and crosses the lake. Sometimes we have to make a choice – invest in a crowd or in a few?

### Fishers of men

These four steps sum up the plan Jesus uses even today for making disciples.

### **The Intention of the Church**

Jesus gave ministry for 3.5 years and after His death the church is in shock. Then 3 days later the world-altering resurrection occurs. For 40 days Jesus appears to His followers in various locations and gives them irrefutable proof He has conquered death. In the final moments before His ascension He gives *His final instruction*, which we read at the beginning.

It is His purpose for the church for centuries to come. There is no higher authority for this comes from the lips of the Son of God.

Of all things happening today, this task is the most important task of all.

The discipleship process is not complete until the disciples we make are making other disciples.

**If you had to choose only one activity on earth to do – this is the one.**

Secondary methods of discipleship are good teaching/preaching, Sunday school, small groups or any other group methods but we haven’t tapped into the main root of discipleship until we create the right environment.

### **Paul’s Method**

Personal Investment because the only way to make disciples is to get involved intimately in the lives of the people you are trying to influence. God got involved with us through Jesus. Paul got involved with the Thesalonians:

- Like a mother  
1 Thessalonians 2:7 (NKJ): *But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.*
- Personally  
1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NKJ): *So affectionately longing for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

Paul was not an untouchable authority figure who kept himself at a distance. He got involved in the lives of those he disciple.

- Like a father

1 Thessalonians 2:11 (NKJ): *We exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children.*

Notice the emphasis on the uniqueness of individuals. No two human beings are the same, and no two are at the same point of growth and need. A father must foster the unique character of his children, and so must a disciple.

### **Paul's Strategy**

Most church strategy today:

- Property
- Programs
- People
- Preaching

We think that making disciples must take place through programs in a performer/spectator relationship. A few people plan the activities that are spoon-fed to the many. Or, bureaucrats devise a system that people are herded through and disciples are expected to be mass-produced. But programs are task-centered and cannot respond to the unique character of the individual. Programs are the quick-fix approach to discipleship.

Paul's strategy:

- Preaching
- People
- Programs
- Property

Paul first proclaimed the Gospel. Those who responded became the object of his investment of time. Programs developed from the spontaneous context of discipleship.

### **Paul's Focus**

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (NKJ): *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians.*

Paul's mention of two companions gives us insight into his strategy. He was very conscious of his responsibility to pass on his faith. He chose people to be with him so that faith could be imparted in the context of real life. And, this investment was over a long period of time.

### **Paul's Vision**

2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NKJ): <sup>1</sup> *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* <sup>2</sup> *And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

Paul didn't choose Timothy because he could carry the luggage. He saw the quality of faithfulness in Timothy, which would well serve the future church. Paul raised Timothy in the faith just as a father would his child, teaching him his trade and addresses him as his son in the faith. Timothy is to continue to pass the faith on to reliable people. Paul wasn't concerned about passing on programs or property. The test of his ministry was whether disciples were being produced for future generations.

**Paul's Motivating Passion**

Colossians 1:28-29 (NLT): <sup>28</sup> So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect (mature) in their relationship to Christ. <sup>29</sup> That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.