

## **“Discipleshift”**

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It is becoming painfully evident that getting more people on the rolls has not resulted in a corresponding increase in transformed lives.

A plan by which intentional discipleship, developed through personal and group relationships, becomes the center of church life.

There are always two issues at stake: choosing the right destination and choosing the right leadership style and way to get your people to the right destination.

Attendance, busyness, construction, finances, and programs are not real indications of success. The core question of effectiveness — the question that ultimately matters — is whether the people who are getting saved are being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Are we making mature disciples of Jesus who are not only able to withstand the culture but are also making disciples of Jesus themselves?

The solution to our ineffectiveness as churches is to train people to be spiritually mature, fully devoted followers of Christ, and then in turn to have those disciples make more disciples.

Every church has its focus and its methodology for achieving its focus whether it realizes it or not.

Lecturing is the least effective way to teach anything and leads to few really understanding the truth that the teacher wants them to understand.

God’s idea of real relationship includes being together, yes, but while we are together, we are being transparent and authentic with a goal — to become a disciple of Jesus who can make disciples of Jesus.

The Bible refers to disciples around 270 times, but to Christians just three times. So a focus on discipleship is the first overall shift with which we must grapple.

Discipleship is the emphasis. Relationships are the method.

Defining disciple. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Whenever any group sets out to work together to accomplish a goal, the tasks, methods, and objectives need to be defined, clearly communicated, and understood by everyone involved.

“What is a disciple?” In all our years of asking this question, we encountered only two churches in which the entire team of leaders agreed on the same definition.

Big problems begin to arise when a church doesn’t agree on its basic definitions, direction, and philosophy of ministry.

There are two practical criteria that must guide any proposed definition of a disciple. First, the definition needs to be biblical (as Jesus defined it), and second, it needs to be clear.

Make sure your definition is biblical and clear and that your people are speaking the same language.

Matthew 4:19

1. Follow me
2. And I will make you
3. Fishers of men

Responding to the call to follow Jesus meant allowing him to unmake them and then remake them into his image — as his disciples.

This second attribute of a disciple is primarily a spiritual response to the Holy Spirit.

Discipleship, at heart, involves transformation at the deepest levels of our understanding, affection, and will by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God and in relationship with the people of God.

Putting all three attributes together, we see that a disciple is a person who

1. Is following Christ (head);
2. Is being changed by Christ (heart);
3. Is committed to the mission of Christ (hands).

There is a solid, organic structure in place to help them move forward in spiritual maturity.

Know where you want to go, and once your definitions are in place, you'll be ready to ask the next question: how do people begin to grow in their faith? Where do you start the process?

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (ESV). We apply this to mean that a true disciple of Jesus is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins with Jesus on his mission.

Time in a church building does not have any bearing on a person's true state of maturity.

Spiritually mature people fail, but the longer and deeper the walk, the shorter the time period between the mistake and the repentance.

How a disciple grows in four main spheres of life:

1. In his relationship to God
2. In his relationship with God's family, the church
3. In his home life
4. In his relationship to the world

This means that in each sphere, a disciple understands God's commands and submits to his authority (head), is transformed by Jesus (heart), and joins Jesus on a kingdom mission (hands) in all of these areas of their lives.

Sphere 1: The Centrality of a Relationship with God

Sphere 2: Relationships within the Family of God, the Church

Sphere 3: Relationships at Home

Sphere 4: Relationships with the World

## From Informing to Equipping

If you were to peek under the hood of their church, you'd find that these men were not really reproducing disciples as much as gathering people together.

The biblical model for church community is an authentic and healthy transparency that repeatedly points people back to the gospel.

The first part of this shift — from informing people to equipping them — begins with the character of the leader, not with what he does.

“You can't lead where you don't go, and you can't teach what you don't know

The four relational environments are:

1. Intimate discipling (one leader interacting with 1-3 people)
2. Personal discipling (one leader interacting with 10-12 people)
3. Social discipling (one leader interacting with up to 120 people)
4. Public discipling (one leader interacting with larger crowds of people)

Modeling plays such a huge part in parenting and disciple making.

Their job wasn't to perform; it was to coach others — and that made all the difference.

Some church leaders see their role as similar to that of a star athlete. They want to excel and lead the team by their own personal achievements.

The people on their team exist to fulfill their own personal mission for significance. But leading in the church is more like being a really good coach.

It's about shifting the spotlight from the pastor as the star player to the pastor as the head coach.

If we place the bulk of our resources into the weekend services, is it any wonder that so many Christians today don't have a biblical worldview?

If a pastor is not developing and nurturing key relationships in which he is equipping others to follow Jesus, then he's not doing what Jesus modeled for him to do.

If you want to make the shift from informing to equipping and be a disciple-making pastor, your ministry needs to revolve around the following.

1. An authentic disciple
2. A discipleship-systems builder
3. A developer of leaders

A pastor is to create a system in which people are taught how to be disciples. In other words, he and his team are called to lead in the development of a church-wide system that will make disciples who make disciples.

Most leaders are too busy trying to do the work in the church themselves, and therefore don't have time to see and develop the leaders God has sent them. They are too busy playing every position on the team to develop anyone.

The process; I do, You watch. We talk. I do. You help. We talk. You do. I help. We talk. You do. I watch. We talk. You do. Someone else watches.

The vision is that the church's primary mission is to create disciples who create other disciples, just as Jesus intended us to do.

What you celebrate, your people will aspire to.

What a church measures is indicative of that church's vision.

As a pastor, you are not discipling everybody yourself. Rather, you are creating a system in which everybody in your church can be disciplined.

We place such a high importance on relational environments because that's the methodology Jesus used — and because it worked!

The relationships that begin in our small group go far beyond the meeting time.

If you're not careful, you can go to this meeting, and teach that class, and visit the Sunday school party, and wind up spending your life carrying on a program, and never reproduce disciples.

We've mentioned before how there are three necessary components to the disciple-making process.

The Word of God,  
The Spirit of God  
The people of God.

We define our small groups as biblical relational environments. The Bible is vital to the disciple-making process.

Yet even though we are involved in the process, the power to change comes ultimately from the Holy Spirit.

Preaching is a key part of the disciple-making process, but preaching alone will not make disciples.

We want churches to make the shift from program to purpose, from activities that just draw crowds or impart information to activities that take place in relational environments where discipleship occurs.

Share  
Connect  
Minister  
Disciple

Jesus shared who he was through words and deeds.

They connect with him in a relationship

Jesus trained them to minister to the lost

He deployed his followers to disciple others.

In our churches today, we too need to focus on those who are responsive; those who demonstrate spiritual hunger and a desire to grow.

Since making disciples is the main reason why a church exists, everything in the corporate body of the local church needs to be aligned in a way that funnels people toward these discipleship environments; the most notable of which is the relational small group.

Having a lot of unconnected programs in a church not only raises the question of effectiveness; it also creates a quality problem. The more programs you have and the more they are disconnected from a common purpose, the harder it is to lead, organize, and do things that really matter.

Each ministry and its leaders must be aligned to the overall purpose, and whatever you do needs to move people to the next stage.

To say yes to your calling, you must necessarily say no to a lot of good things, and when you say no to a lot of good things, you say no to a lot of good people who don't understand why you're saying no.

Good teaching doesn't just inform the head; it also seeks to affect a person's heart and hands.

There is only so much energy in the church, and we must direct our people to things that make the biggest difference.

For any ministry to take place in a church, it must have five key components, or it must lead people to another ministry in the church where these components are present. The five components are:

- (1) A clear goal,
- (2) An intentional leader,
- (3) A biblically relational environment,
- (4) A reproducible process
- (5) A supporting organization.

Let's consider some of the specific components that make a small group an effective tool for disciple making.

Shepherding

Teaching

Authenticity and Accountability

The important part is that a small group is a biblical relational environment in which discipleship takes place.

Rather than gathering and acquiring an audience, you have released an army on your community.

It is more important to evaluate how many people go out than to evaluate how many show up.

More people does not necessarily mean better people and more eternal significance.

It takes a while for pastors and Christians to start thinking of themselves as equippers and ministers who make disciples, and this is a vision that needs to be presented to congregations and recast more than once.

### **Step 1: Develop Biblical Vision**

- How does the Bible define discipleship?
- What does the Bible say a disciple looks like?
- What is the discipleship process as we see it happening in Scripture?
- What are the specific phases of discipleship, as seen in the scriptural models?
- How will everyone in our church come to know this process?
- What characteristics (values) must be present for real-life discipleship to occur in our church? (Values include: love, acceptance, and accountability.)
- How will our church (at every level) emphasize the discipleship process?
- How will our church practice keep the focus on discipleship by making church “simple” and “clear”?
- How will our church raise up, reproduce, and release disciple-making leaders?
- How will our church serve as an attractional light on a hill?
- How will our church send people out to serve incarnationally in the community?

### **Step 2: Create a Common Language**

If you are to succeed as a team, you must create a common language — using the same words and the same definitions.

Just make sure everyone in your church agrees on what your language means.

So it’s vital that your church develop common goals, terms, and language and then progress from there.

### **Step 3: Develop the Disciple-Making Process**

You must make sure that the language and process you have developed is easy for your people to understand and to use.

If you don’t get everybody on the same page — and keep getting everybody on the same page — then big problems will arise.

If you’re a church leader and your church has a playbook, then right up front it helps answer a well-meaning person who wants the church to go another direction.

### **Step 4: Live Out Your Vision**

Once you’ve got the vision worked out, the terms defined, and the processes established, then it becomes all about implementation.

### **Step 5: Assess, Correct, and Encourage**

As you begin to implement discipleship, the large-scale steps are fivefold:

- (1) As a team, develop the biblical vision for your church;
- (2) As a team, create a common language and definition of terms;
- (3) As a team, develop the process for creating disciples, then put this process into the hands of the frontline soldiers;
- (4) Consistently live out your vision, and consistently recast your vision;
- (5) Constantly assess, correct course, and encourage.