making disciples

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The Biblical Discipleship Bull's-Eye

The target may represent an entire country, a city, a local church, a particular ministry within a church, or small group within a ministry. Each sphere includes those who need salvation or sanctification and training for ministry.

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The Practical Discipleship Plan of Attack

Jesus called disciples, lived and associated with them, taught them, modeled for them, partnered with them, delegated assignments, did follow-up, and then He left. We are here, not because Jesus filled stadiums with hundreds of thousands of people and preached great messages, but because He focused on twelve ordinary men.

The Biblical Discipleship Bull's-Eye



The Christian life is simple. It's hard, but not complex. Christians follow Jesus. Our fundamental responsibilities involve watching and learning from Jesus, loving and worshipping Him, then submitting and obeying everything He's commanded. We follow Jesus. In other words, *we are His disciples*.

Too often, however, Jesus is only a tangent in a Christian's life. We easily confuse weekly, religious routine for supernatural relationship. We schedule meetings instead of living life like Christ. We read books, take classes, create programs, organize or attend conferences, and publish podcasts rather than wearing Jesus' yoke and learning from Him. Ironically, many good things intended to help us follow Christ more closely can potentially turn our attention away from Him.[1]

And when we miss the heart of the Christian life we inevitably make a mess of the simplicity of Christ's commission, namely, to proclaim His gospel. We're called to follow our Lord and represent Him to the world. We work on His behalf, under His authority, and for the sake of His kingdom. And what has He charged us to do? Follow Him and help others follow Him. In other words, *we are to make disciples*.[2]

1. Make no mistake, I have nothing against scheduled services and small groups. I love books and retreats. I think we're crazy not to maximize the Internet and iPods for ministry purposes. But let's not get so involved admiring the china pattern that we forget the point of the plate is to carry the food.

2. Matthew 28:18-20

How could we Christians muddle our mission so miserably? For all her progress, how did the church get so busy that she forgot her most important work? Though exhausting, the assignment is not confusing: make disciples.

To **disciple** means to guide or direct someone to be a personal follower, student, or learner. A disciple not only studies from his master, he imitates him. Making a disciple involves teaching, modeling, steering, leading, escorting, and guiding. It requires time, energy, and commitment. Group meetings (of the entire flock or in smaller segments) play a part, but disciple-making doesn't happen without personal, house-to-house[3], one-on-one attention.

3. Acts 20:20

In barest form, making disciples means *following Jesus by helping others follow Jesus*. So how do we get started and then what do we do? Enter the **Biblical Discipleship Bull's-eye**.

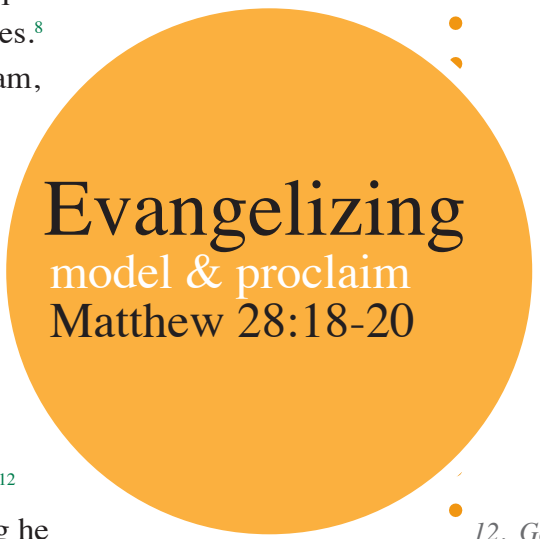
This is not new, though we dare not take our familiarity—with the gospel or the Great Commission—for granted. Nor is what follows a program. Yet this paradigm should shape every Christian's approach to relationships, use of spiritual giftedness, and strategy for shepherding/making disciples. Everyone[4] fits somewhere on this target. So in order to follow Jesus more closely ourselves and help others do the same, it's important to identify the Three Target Levels of Discipleship.

4. Where by "everyone" I mean everyone, believers and unbelievers.

Target Level One:
Evangelizing

Disciple-making starts here. This is the first and broadest circle on the bull's-eye, meaning it encompasses the most people and is the initial step to present every man complete in Christ.[5] Helping others follow Christ begins with **Evangelizing**.

The Bible reveals that the God who created everything[6] is holy[7] and requires holiness from His creatures.[8] But the first man, Adam, disobeyed[9] God; and every man since is a sinner[10] by nature who also disregards and defies[11] God's law. The consequence of man's rebellion is death—physical and spiritual[12]—and there is nothing he can do to escape[13] on his own. That's the bad news.



5. *Colossians 1:28*
6. *Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 11:3.*
7. *1 Samuel 2:2; Joshua 24:19.*
8. *Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 15-16*
9. *Genesis 3:1-19; Romans 5:12, 15, 19*
10. *Ephesians 2:1-3*
11. *Romans 3:10-18, 23*
12. *Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 5:12*
13. *Job 14:4; Jeremiah 13:23; John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 2:14*

But God offers forgiveness and righteousness for all who repent and believe.[14] He sent His Son[15] to bear the punishment for our iniquity[16] on the cross.[17] We who confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead will be saved.[18] Then God begins to deliver us from the power of sin[19] and promises to conform us into the image of His Son.[20] That's the good news!

Proclaiming this gospel—*evangelizing*—is where disciple-making starts and can be seen in different forms. For example, there is lifestyle evangelism[21] where the gospel is communicated implicitly. Our conduct as Christians should stand out in such a way that others see our good works and glorify God.[22] Our transformed lives[23] are to shine for Him and make others ask why we're so hopeful.[24]

However, all the lifestyle evangelism in the world cannot communicate Jesus as Lord, the sin/death problem, and the cross/faith/salvation solution. Those truths require words. So evangelism must include verbal, explicit communication of the gospel. Why is it that the feet of those who bring good news[25] are so praiseworthy? It's because faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.[26] The gospel must be clearly stated before it can be believed, and it must be believed before a person can become a disciple.

14. Acts 2:38; Romans 1:16

15. John 3:16

16. Isaiah 53:4-6

17. Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20; 2:14

18. Romans 10:9-13

19. Romans 6:6, 14, 17-18

20. Romans 8:29-30

21. 1 Peter 2:11-12

23. Romans 12:1-2

24. 1 Peter 3:15-16

25. Romans 10:14-15

26. Romans 10:17, James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25

Jesus obviously expected us to start with evangelism since He commissioned us to make disciples from all the unbelieving people groups.[27] The King Himself determined this broad target. We *model* and *proclaim* the gospel to those in this outer circle on our bull's-eye. We desire men everywhere to believe the gospel. That involves more than getting someone to pray a prayer. We want them to meet and know Christ, to learn to observe everything He's commanded.

27. *Matthew 28:18-20*

In other words, we aim for their regeneration.[28] The people in this outer circle are spiritually dead. We proclaim the gospel and pray that God will create new life. This is where we start in our disciple-making and shepherding.

28. *John 3:5-7*

One of the reasons I've spent so much time on this is because *evangelism is just as important in our churches and small groups as it is to the nations*. John MacArthur painted this stark picture:

> Our main mission field in America today is within the church.[29]

29. Hard to Believe, *p. 101*

Our congregations include crowds of spiritually dead people; after all, the wheat and tares mix[30] until Christ's coming. So churches need to

30. *Matthew 13:24-30*

evangelize the church-goers. Small group leaders can't take the gospel for granted. Personal discipleship shouldn't assume anything. Like every part of the yard needs to be covered equally and evenly with seed, so we must broadcast the gospel thoroughly and individually. That is the first step toward Christlikeness and the first target level of discipleship.

On a personal note, perhaps nothing is more frustrating in disciple-making than trying to help a person follow Christ when they don't truly know Christ. No one bypasses this level of the bull's-eye. Never suppose anyone's salvation; always and carefully evaluate their spiritual condition according to the standards in God's Word. Then we help those who are ready move to the second level.

Target Level Two: Edifying

Disciple-making continues here. This second circle on the target represents the next step to present every man complete in Christ. Helping others follow Christ moves from Evangelizing to **Edifying**.

The Christian life begins at regeneration when God creates new life[31] in a spiritually dead person. From the human perspective, repentance[32] and belief[33] are known as conversion, though both must be given by God. But conversion isn't the goal of the Great Commission. Christ did not call us to make converts who sit around and wait for heaven. Conversion is simply the start.

Edifying
instruct & encourage
Colossians 1:28-29
Ephesians 4:13-16

The goal of disciple-making is Christlikeness. So instruction in truth, training for obedience, and encouragement toward Christlikeness—*edifying*—is how disciple-making continues. To **edify** means to build up, to strengthen, to develop and improve. We labor not only for others to profess Christ as Lord but to walk in a manner worthy of their Lord.[34]

One of the clearest summons to edification is Ephesians 4:13-16. Every Christian ministers for the purpose of:

31. John 3:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-5

32. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25-26

33. Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29

34. Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12. This is part of the reason spiritual accountability is so important.

> building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The emphasis is on building up (vv. 12, 16), maturing (vv. 13, 15), and strengthening (v. 14). The disciple-making job isn't finished until everyone reaches "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Until God glorifies us at our death or Christ's return, there is building of the Body to do.

We *instruct* and *encourage* those in this second circle on our bull's-eye for the sake of spiritual growth. We want every believer to live the gospel. We train disciples to obey Christ, studying the life of Jesus and then following in His steps.[35] The New Testament spills over with descriptions of this ever-progressing Christian life: observing everything

35. 1 Peter 2:21

Christ commanded,[36] becoming complete/mature/perfect in Christ, [37] being conformed to the image of Christ,[38]attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,[39] and growing up in every way into Christ.[40]

One additional label for this process is sanctification, a term that describes the widening separation from sin and intensifying consecration for God that should mark disciples in this target level. It applies to all believers and remains our objective until the end of our lives. Christians are saved from the penalty of sin and sanctified from the power of sin. Therefore, making disciples requires not only evangelizing but also edifying.

On a practical note, small groups are a great place to help one another cultivate Christlikeness. They are like a sturdy crock[41] for stirring one another up to love and good works,[42] keeping everyone in the pot until all the necessary ingredients are mixed in. Then we help those who are ready to move onto the third level.

36. Matthew 28:20

37. Colossians 1:28

38. Romans 8:29

39. Ephesians 4:13

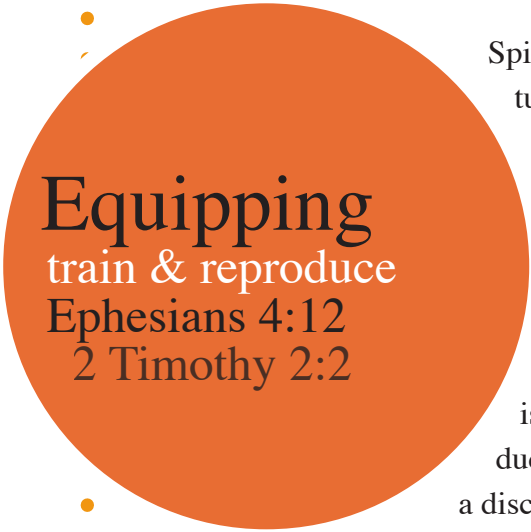
40. Ephesians 4:15

41. A "crock" is a pot, jar, or container of some kind.

42. Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25

Target Level Three:
Equipping

Disciple-making ends (and begins again) here. This center circle on the target represents the third step to present every man complete in Christ. Helping others follow Christ advances from Evangelizing to Edifying to **Equipping**.



Spiritual birth and spiritual growth toward Christlikeness mark every true disciple. One of the clearest signs of increased spiritual maturity is that the disciple is capable of reproducing, that is, making a disciple of their own. Not only is this an important sign of health, it is necessary for fulfilling the Great Commission in coming generations, as well as among all the nations.

Therefore, training—*equipping*—others to reproduce themselves is the final level of disciple-mak-

ing. To **equip** means to prepare, to train, to furnish someone with tools necessary to accomplish a task. We *train* those in this center circle on our bull's-eye, attempting to *reproduce* spiritual life. By instruction, example, delegation, and critique the discipler equips the disciple to disciple someone else.

God gives leaders to the church for this very reason: to equip the saints for the work of ministry.[43] But note that while the pastor initiates and oversees the process, the work of the ministry is done by the saints. In other words, disciples make disciples who make disciples until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.[44] Pastors/elders and Bible study/small group leaders should be the *first* disciplers, but never the *only* disciplers.

The center of the bull's-eye is the smallest circle because it typically includes the fewest number of people. In fact, this target level is aimed at the faithful, those who can be entrusted with passing on truth to others who will be able to teach others after them.[45] While we aim for everyone to end up here eventually, disciple-making requires us to focus on the few, faithful followers to reach the many in the outer circles.

43. Ephesians 4:11-12

44. Ephesians 4:13

45. 2 Timothy 2:2

In the equipping circle, we get others ready to go back out with us to the evangelizing and edifying circles. We want men to believe and declare the gospel so others will believe too. We're eager for them to obey Christ themselves then preach Christ so even more will follow. We make disciples who make their own disciples. This is spiritual reproduction. We know we've succeeded when we watch the growth of spiritual grandkids. So in this third level, disciple-making ends and begins again and the process comes full circle.

This is probably the weakest sphere for most churches, including churches with sound doctrine. Equipping certainly includes solid teaching in corporate worship services,[46] but it involves much more than that. We don't expect our children to mature by handing them a book to read; is it different for spiritual children? Disciples don't learn to take responsibility from a distance, so making disciples from the platform or sermon mp3s is only a small part of the process. Jesus modeled for us multiple stages of development with His disciples. Suffice to say for now, each stage involved more than relaying a message; it involved imparting His very life.

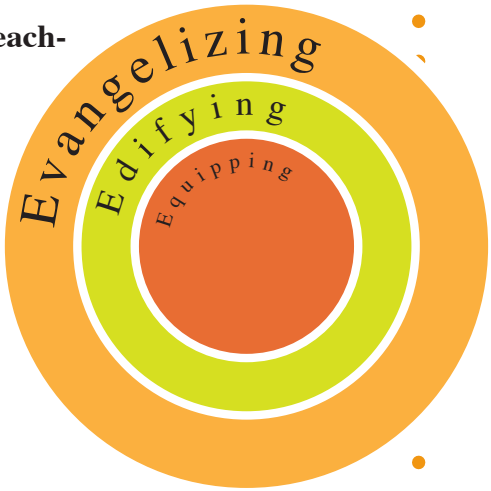
On another practical note, you can always find someone who knows less than you do. So get in the

46. In student ministries, we call it "big church" when the whole church meets for worship.

back pocket of a person who knows more than you and then pass that on to someone else. That's what it means to make disciples: following Christ and helping others to follow Him. It is every disciple's mission.

Recapping the Three Target Levels

The Great Commission sets our sights high; we are to make disciples **of all the nations**. The apostle Paul also emphasized the broad scope of his ministry, **teaching *every man* and warning *every man* in order to present *every man* complete in Christ**. Everyone falls in one of the three circles on our disciple-making bull's-eye. They are either spiritually dead and need the gospel, they have been made spiritually alive and need to grow in the gospel, or they have demonstrated faithfulness and are ready to do the work of the



gospel. But all people are located somewhere on the target.

The target may represent an entire country, a city, a local church, a particular ministry within a church, or small group within a ministry. Each sphere includes those who need salvation or sanctification and training for ministry. So here's a recap of the three target levels:

Evangelizing. In order to make disciples among the spiritually dead, we must reach out for Christ.

Edifying. To help believers obey everything, Christ commanded we must build them up in Christ.

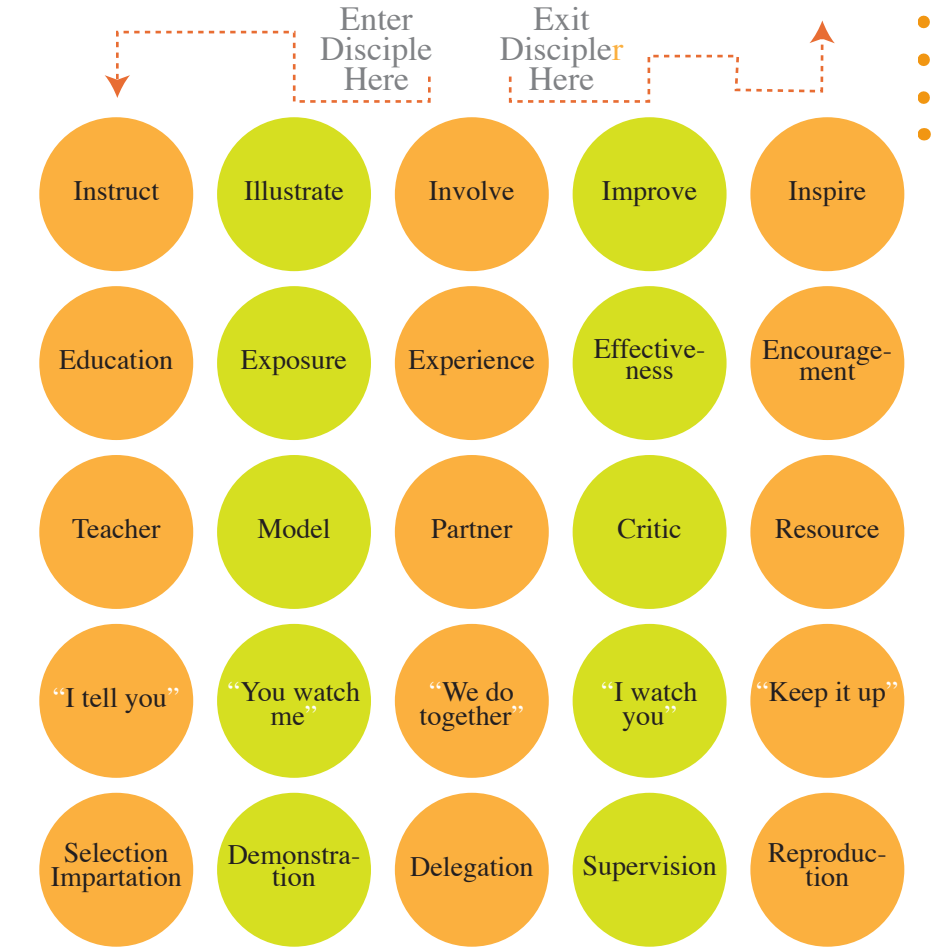
Equipping. To help the faithful become disciple-makers, we must train them up and send them out for Christ.

I believe some form of small groups best facilitates disciple-making. Though a believer can be discipled or make a disciple without being part of one, small groups provide a place for thorough and concentrated evangelism, for accountability relationships and mutual edification, as well as for quality (controlled) equipping, and an obvious place to practice the "focus on the few to reach the many" principle.

As I mentioned, Jesus is the ultimate example of a disciple maker. He not only paints the target but also demonstrates how to reach it. In the next section, we'll see the practical stages of development that help us hit the center of the disciple-making bull's-eye.



The Practical Discipleship Plan of Attack



Making disciples is job #1 for every Christian. So far we've identified the three target levels of discipleship: we **evangelize** unbelievers, we **edify** all believers, and then we aim to **equip** believers to make disciples themselves. Those are the goals of discipleship, or where we're going, but how do we get there? How do we actually make a disciple? What is the process?

Many Christians simply don't know. Even if making disciples is on the radar they have no instruction or training for it. No doubt there are other believers doing a lot of the right things but who couldn't define their approach or pass it on to someone else. That's why we need to outline a **Practical Discipleship Plan of Attack**.

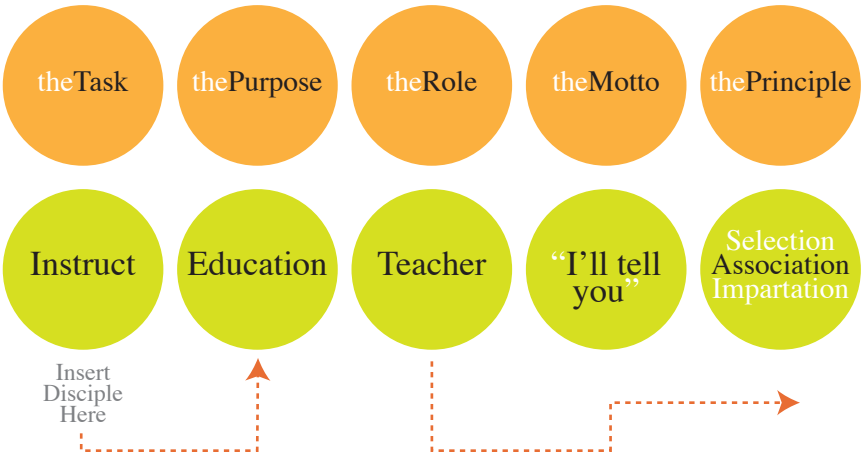
There are (at least) five stages for developing a disciple. The stages overlap; they are not entirely exclusive, but isolating each phase in our discussion should be helpful in the equipping process. Just as everyone fits somewhere on the bull's-eye, so everyone is found at some stage of development.

It is also important to say (again) that this is not new or original. I'm simply trying not to drop the baton that's been handed to me. In particular, the seed of these stages grew in the soil of *The Master Plan of*

Evangelism by Robert Coleman.[1] It is *the* classic study on discipleship and a must read. I believe every Christian should own[2] a copy and it continues to be one of the most influential books[3] I've ever read. It traces the Master Himself, Jesus, as He modeled the most effective method for making disciples.

Stage One:
Instruct

Each stage in our practical plan of attack includes the TASK, the PURPOSE, the ROLE, the MOTTO, and the PRINCIPLE (as the table below shows). In Stage One we insert a disciple into the very beginning of the process.



1. I had the privilege to hear Dr. Coleman in person when I was in high school along with my youth pastor who, not coincidentally, was my first real discipler.

2. My list of 10 can be viewed at http://www.tohuvabohu.org/2006/12/22/10-books-every-christian-should-own/

3. My list of 25 can be viewed at http://www.tohuvabohu.org/2006/10/17/the-25-most-influential-books-on-the-void/

We start the disciple-making process by proclaiming good news, specifically the gospel of Christ as revealed in Scripture. Our first *TASK* is to *instruct*, and our *PURPOSE* to *educate*. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.[4] Therefore, Christianity requires communicated truth and discipleship depends on properly understanding doctrines of theology rooted in God's Word.

4. *Romans 10:17*

We received a message from our Lord. Our responsibility is to pass that message on to another person and the next group and the following generation in such a way that they will do the same. Disciples aren't made if the baton of truth is dropped anywhere along the way.

The apostle Paul explained that all believers—those who are no longer slaves of sin—have been committed to "the standard of teaching."[5] Disciples are delivered into a form of truth, into principles and teaching that mold their lives. Christians are those shaped more by doctrine than by sin. Ideas have consequences, and what we believe regulates our behavior. Doing depends on doctrine; so it is crucial that our understanding be accurate.

5. *Romans 6:17*

Our foremost *ROLE* as disciple-makers is *teacher*; we explain and defend the truth. Jude called us to

contend for **the faith** once for all delivered to the saints.[6] "The faith" is the objective, fixed body of truth, not personal belief (since it makes no sense to say any particular person's faith was "once for all delivered to the saints"). Trustworthy servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God [7] love, protect, and pass on the truth.

The core of disciple-making includes teaching disciples to observe **all that Jesus commanded**.[8] We can't be faithful to our commission without knowing and instructing. That's why our *MOTTO* is "*I tell you*." Paul explained the process in a similar way: **what you heard** from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.[9]

Jesus modeled this lesson better than anyone. He regularly preached in front of large crowds and instructed His disciples in private. Whether by sermons or conversations, teaching was at the heart of our Lord's disciple-making plan.

Every Christian can, and must, follow His example. The teacher typically knows more than his student. Most of the time the educator is also the elder (older) person. Titus 2 describes a pattern of the older teaching the younger, and more maturity

6. *Jude 3*

7. *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

8. *Matthew 28:20*

9. *2 Timothy 2:2*

brings more responsibility to disciple. But anyone who knows more truth than someone else can and should participate. You can *always* find someone who knows (at least a little) less than you do.

This Stage incorporates a few *PRINCIPLES* from *The Master Plan of Evangelism* such as *selection* (of faithful men just as Jesus chose His disciples), *association* (being with people just as Jesus appointed disciples to be with Him),[10] and *impartation* (giving what has been received to others).

10. *Mark 3:14*

Disciples never move beyond the need for instruction. Though Stage One could be done independent of the others (resulting in delayed growth and therefore a defective plan), the other stages depend on the teaching stage for effectiveness.

Stage Two:
Illustrate

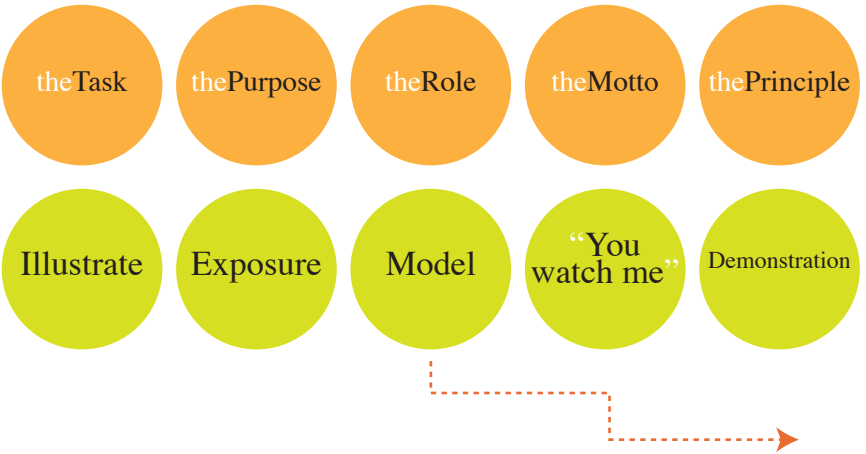
Making disciples requires instruction, but verbal communication isn't the end of the process. Now we come to Stage Two.

Teaching others the truth is crucial. So is practicing

it in front of them. Our second *TASK* is to *illustrate* or, in other words, to put instruction on display. The *PURPOSE* is *exposure* to the difficulties and delights of being a disciple. Our Lord left us an example in order for us to follow in His steps.[11] Likewise, we are to live as examples for our disciples to watch.

11. 1 Peter 2:21

A master trains his apprentice both by telling him



what to do and by showing him how to do it. We take the same hands-on, eyes-on approach. Therefore in Stage Two the *ROLE* of the disciple-maker is that of a *model*. Our *MOTTO* is "*You watch me*." At least two benefits come from disciples seeing their discipler's personal obedience. First, they see how it's done. But second, the teacher establishes credibility and underscores the believability of the

truth. Expecting others to do what we won't or don't do undermines integrity. On the other hand, living out the truth corroborates our knowledge and love of the truth. People pay attention when we practice what we preach.

This also presumes the "**life-on-life**" precept. We cannot make disciples remotely; it requires a relationship. We cannot effectively model—or watch for that matter—from faraway. Living rooms and waiting rooms supplement classrooms and worship centers. Yes, truth can be taught in a living room. Yes, some life-on-life occurs in a classroom. But this component of training looks at a discipler's lifestyle at work and play.

We must spend a quantity of quality time or else our disciples will be ill prepared. We're all busy, but Stage Two must be intentionally included at every opportunity. Dinner time isn't sufficient for diligent parenting.[12] Kids need car rides and late night conversations. Part-time shepherds put the sheep at risk. Likewise, discipleship is the product of many moments, but it is never momentary.[13]

While Christ's substitutionary atonement is the primary purpose of the incarnation, His life-on-life discipleship was part of the reason as well. God could have dropped a copy of His Word from the

12. Deuteronomy 6:7

13. Herein is the reason for every retreat we organize, why we drive 20 hours to and from the Shepherds' Conference and Preview Weekend at The Master's College, why we have small groups, and why we work to schedule life "path crossings," like running errands, drinking coffee, or scraping gum off the gym floor: ***to be together****.*

sky instead of sending His Son to earth for so long. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him [14] and to be with Him.[15] They watched Him in public and in private. They saw Him spend nights in prayer, respond to religious authorities, care for little children, teach the masses, heal the sick, and do all sorts of miracles. They observed Him when He was tired, hungry, interrupted, angry, and sorrowful. And as His crucifixion came closer He focused more personal attention on His disciples, not less.

The apostle Paul also understood the importance of being a living object lesson. He exhorted the Corinthians, "Be **imitators** of me, as I am of Christ."[16] To the Philippians he said, "keep your eyes on those who walk according to the **example**,"[17] and "practice what you have learned and received and heard and **seen** in me."[18]

This stage of discipleship is hardly flashy, not easily evaluated, and often unappreciated. But it is relevant, effective, and as we've seen, it was the Master's plan.

Just like it's not difficult to find someone who knows *less* than you do, it typically isn't hard to find someone who knows *more* than you either. For those who want to grow, listen to good teaching, and find

14. John 1:43; Matthew 9:9

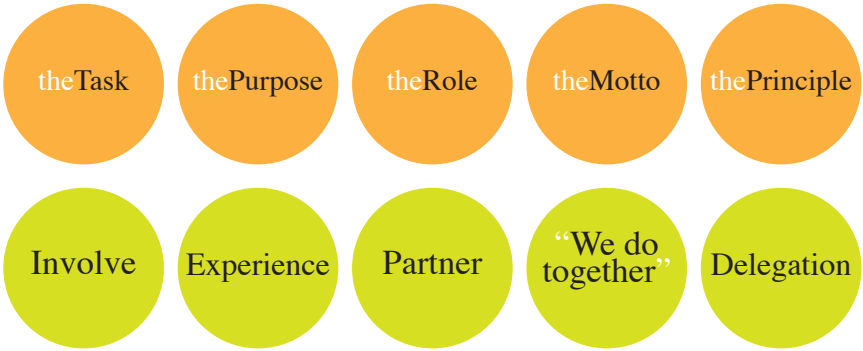
15. Mark 3:14

16. 1 Corinthians 11:1. I know some people are uncomfortable with the arrogance of asking another person to imitate us. Instead, they say, we should tell everyone just to follow Jesus. That's fine as far as it goes, but exposing our lives and letting others see we're sinners gives us an opportunity to repent and show how that works too.

17. Philippians 3:17

18. Philippians 4:9

a good follower of Christ. Get in their back pocket. Make yourself available to serve them and hang out with them as much as possible. Watch how they respond to everything. Don't isolate yourself from those who are further down the discipleship road than you.



Christ is life, not a class.[19] Examples without teaching are useless without knowing what the examples are for. Of course, instruction without personal illustration won't have the same influence. Truth must be proclaimed, believed, and practiced to make disciples.

19. By this I do not *mean the same thing as those who insist "Christ is life, not doctrine." That's bologna. I went out of my way to say discipleship depends on doctrine in Stage One. I simply mean that formal, corporate learning is only one slice of the discipleship pie, not the whole.*

Stage Three:
Involve

The practical plan of discipleship starts with instruction and includes living illustration. In Stage Three the disciple develops even further toward becoming a discipler.

Teaching biblical doctrine and demonstrating how to follow Christ is fundamental to making disciples. But that's not all we can do. Since we also want our disciple to make disciples of his or her own we must bring them in to the process. The third *TASK* of a disciple-maker is to *involve* the disciple in service and ministry for the *PURPOSE* of giving them *experience*. Explaining Scripture and being a Christian example isn't necessarily the same thing as discipling. It is possible (though not as valuable) to watch someone from a distance and listen to good teaching on the radio. I assume there are probably people watching me who have little to no relationship with me. That's okay because I can still model obedience for people I don't know. And I can certainly instruct people without ever talking to them individually.

But disciplers get involved. They open the hood, take the engine apart (or put it back together), and get four hands dirty, not just two. The *ROLE* of the disciple-maker moves beyond teacher or example, now it is *partner*. The *MOTTO* is "*We do together*." The discipler says, "I've told you about it, you've seen me do it, now we're both going to do it."

Jesus **lived with** His disciples for three years. As they matured, He increased their responsibilities. Jesus wanted His disciples to work side by side with Him as He assigned them to pass out the loaves and fishes. They listened to Him, watched Him, and worked alongside of Him. The Master's plan followed the *PRINCIPLE* of *participation* and *delegation*. In the same way, there were discipleship purposes, not just logistical advantages, when Paul took young men along on his missionary journeys, as evidenced by the responsibility he shared with them.[20]

Practically speaking, Stage Three requires a **focus on the few to reach the many**. No one has enough time to be involved and be partners with *everyone*. Jesus Himself didn't do that. He had 12 key disciples and three of them were even closer than the rest.

20. Discipleship Evangelism *utilizes the same procedure. At the start, verses and the evangelism outline must be memorized. Then there are visits where the trainer does all the talking as an example. At a certain stage, the trainer involves the trainee in the discussion. Eventually the trainee is expected to do all the talking and the trainer is just a resource. But that's an upcoming stage.*

We cannot experience growth and ministry with everyone. Besides, will we have greater influence by spending 60 minutes with one person or one minute with 60 people? How will we maximize our investment? By pouring much time and energy into a small number of disciples (maybe only one at the beginning), the earlier they'll be ready to pour into others, multiplying our ministry.



Working shoulder to shoulder exposes not only the disciples' weaknesses and shortcomings, but ours too. Sometimes we can hide certain elements of our example. But we can't work together very long before our partner realizes what we're good at and what we're not good at. It takes humility to involve someone else in our lives and in our ministry, but it is a necessary part of the development process.

Besides, it's good for them to see our deficiencies because it isn't about our perfection; it's about participation.

Stage Four:
Improve

There are always more ways for disciples to grow no matter how well instructed they are or how many examples they've observed or even if they're heavily involved in the process. That's what Stage Four is for.

By this point in the process, the disciple should be busy reaching out to others. He's been pushed out of the comfort of the nest and is learning to fly on his own. If he's normal, he will suffer through at least a few crashes. So the fourth *TASK* of a disciple-maker is to help the disciple *improve*, not only in personal obedience but in ministry. The *PURPOSE* is to increase *effectiveness*. Though no technique exists that guarantees spiritual success, the discipler can give guidance and encouragement even, and perhaps especially, when it appears the disciple flopped.

As the disciple ventures out on his own, the disci-

pler takes the *ROLE* of a constructive *critic*. This evaluation isn't for the sake of discouragement but for betterment. Maybe an evangelism presentation they gave could have been more accurate, or perhaps they could have been more gentle in a counseling conversation. Mistakes and failures are not the doom of discipleship; instead they provide platforms for development. In this stage the *MOTTO* is "*I watch you*." and then help make it better.

Again, the Master lived with His disciples, taught them, trained them, modeled for them, sent them out, and then debriefed them. For example, in Mark chapter 6 He sent them out with partners and gave them all the instruction they needed for their short term assignment. Later they returned to Jesus and spent some time apart from the crowds to tell Him all that they had done and taught.[21] This retreat provided an opportunity for rest, but no doubt they also discussed their successes, setbacks, and what they could do better next time.

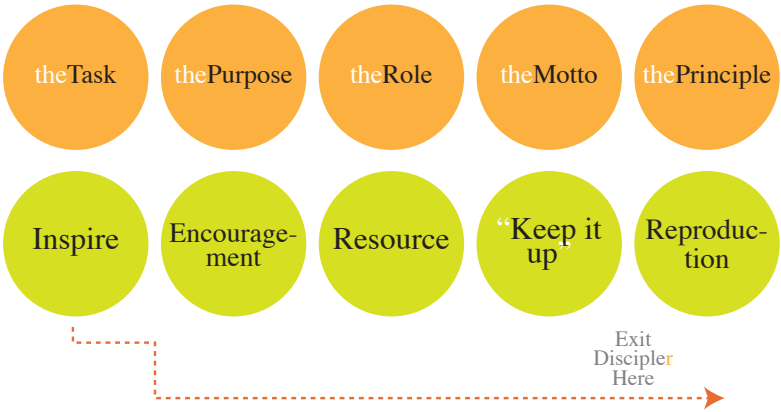
The *PRINCIPLE* is *supervision*: follow up for the sake of adjustment, correction, and encouragement. In order to make progress, disciples need to make decisions and do the work without always having their hand held. But diligent and regular review will realign and reinforce where necessary.

21. *Mark 6:30*

Maturing disciples don't always need their discipler present. But they do need faithful follow up in order to move forward to the last stage.

Stage Five:
Inspire

This is the final stage in the practical discipleship plan of attack. In Stage Five the disciple exits the process as a **discipler**.



The disciple has been taught. He's watched how it's done. He's rolled up his sleeves in the work of the ministry alongside his discipler. He's received constructive criticism to help him get better. By now the bulk of his training is complete and he's ready to be

on his own. So the fifth *TASK* of the disciple-maker is to *inspire*.[22] The *PURPOSE* is to give *encouragement*. Making disciples is hard work. Difficulties and heart heaviness are regular occurrences. Sometimes disciples need a shot in the arm.

The *ROLE* of the discipler becomes that of a *resource*. The need for constant interaction has diminished, but maybe the disciple turned discipler runs into something he hasn't encountered before. Sometimes an unusual circumstance or knotty theological question surfaces. Maybe he needs seasoned counsel, wisdom from experience, or just someone to pray for him. But he has access to advice whenever he asks. Therefore the discipler utilizes the *MOTTO* of "*Keep it up*" and is always available for assistance.

The *PRINCIPLE* is spiritual *reproduction*, much like the proper goal of parenting. Good parenting isn't about providing or doing everything for the children, and certainly not forever. It aims to train kids how to be adults, in particular, how to accept and fulfill responsibilities. That doesn't happen if dad always builds the Soap Box Derby entry or never lets his son make a decision. Mom doesn't help by always being the one to braid her daughter's hair or by constantly defending her. Kids need more care the

22. This is my least favorite "I" word of the five stages, but I think it fits, and for more than just alliteration reasons.

younger they are, and some seem to be on a slower train to maturity. But parents find out whether they were successful when their young person *leaves* the house, not by them living at home forever. Even then, however, parents provide a different kind of attention when the kids are grown and have families of their own. In a similar way, a discipler knows he's succeeded when he sees and serves spiritual grandchildren.

Jesus was gone when the disciples took the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. He was able to depart because His fully-trained disciples were like their Teacher.[23] (Of course, Jesus didn't leave His disciples without a Helper).[24] When we entrust faithful men who will be able to teach others also[25] the process continues even when we're absent.

Our goal is to see every person complete in Christ.[26] Another way to say it is, we work to see each person **independently dependent on Christ**. An *independent* person is one who looks for things that need doing and does them without someone else constantly looking over their shoulder. A mature disciple doesn't need constant supervision though every disciple remains *dependent* on Christ.

23. *Luke 6:40*

24. *John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7*

25. *2 Timothy 2:2*

26. *Colossians 1:28*

So a discipleship purpose statement might look something like this:

> We labor to help every person establish godly habits, motivated by love for Christ, that will cause them to be independently dependent on Christ for the rest of their lives, while helping others do the same.[27]

The relationship between a disciple and his discipler purposefully changes over time if discipleship is effective. But whether disciples move on to minister near or far, disciplers are always ready resources.

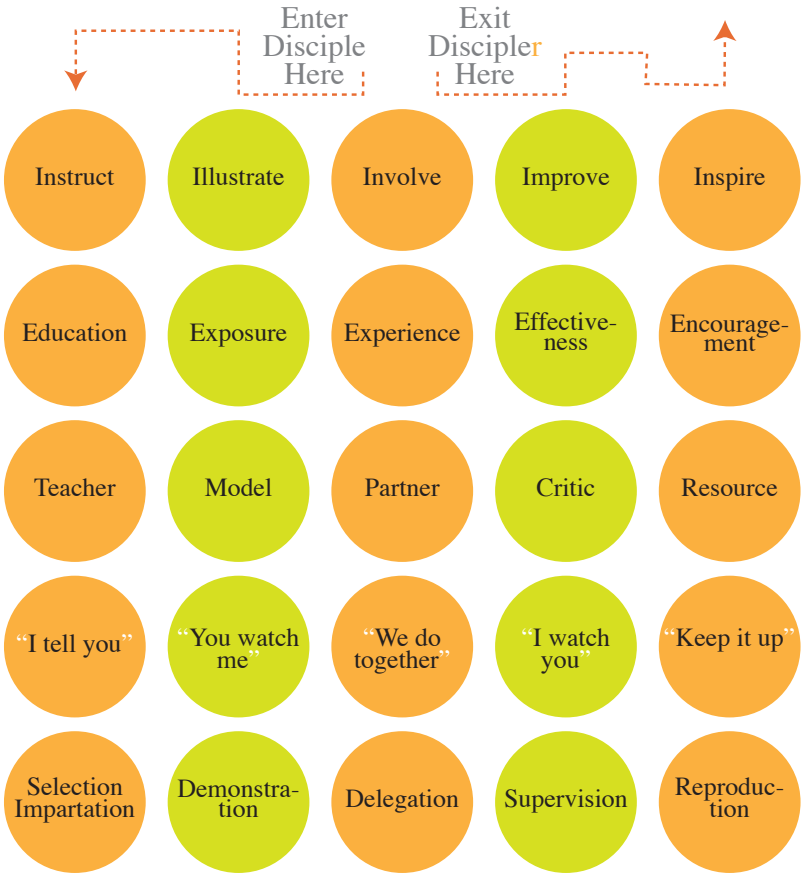
From Disciple to Discipler

The Practical Discipleship Plan of Attack aims to take in a disciple and produce a discipler. The following chart on the next page provides an overview of the whole process.

To recap: the discipler instructs his disciple in doctrine, illustrates truth in daily practice, involves the disciple in the work of the ministry, helps the disciple improve his effectiveness, and inspires the

27. We don't expect to complete this objective in student ministries, even by the time a senior graduates. But we do aim to equip students as much as possible in the six years we have them and hope they enter the next stage of life more like Christ in character and service than when we got them.

disciple when he's discouraged. These five stages of development also span the Biblical Discipleship Bull's-eye from evangelism to edification to equipping. Disciplers labor to help new converts grow in Christ and train them to make disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Maturity and multiplication are beautiful things.



As we wrap up our discussion on discipleship, here are some final thoughts on disciple-making.

We learn about discipleship from Jesus!

Jesus already walked the road ahead of us, and all we need to do is follow Him. As I mentioned before, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman traces Jesus' steps and is must read material. Jesus called disciples, lived and associated with them, taught them, modeled for them, partnered with them, delegated assignments, did follow-up, and then He left. We are here, not because Jesus filled stadiums with hundreds of thousands of people and preached great messages, but because He focused on twelve ordinary men.[28] Apparently, making disciples like Jesus is effective (not to mention biblical).

Though not complex, discipleship is not easy.

In fact, discipleship may be the toughest thing we'll ever do. It's so easy to focus on other things. It isn't always pleasant having other people look into our lives, and it's often messy when we get involved in theirs. But no matter how difficult, making disciples is clearly our Lord's commission.

Discipleship is about the people and not about the program.

The best *curriculum* cannot guarantee growth. There are no checklists to complete or shortcuts

28. Yes, this is a shameless reference to John MacArthur's book by the same name.

to maturity. Some structure (like organized small groups) may be helpful, but the best program with the wrong people won't make disciples. On the other hand, the right people with the worst program—or even no program at all—will move forward.

You are missing out if you just partake and don't participate.

I changed the person of the pronoun on purpose. If *you* come and soak and don't give, *you* won't grow like *you* should. Your joy will be half of what it could be if you're not using your spiritual giftedness and pouring back out into someone else's life.[29] There is *always* someone who knows less than you. You can encourage someone with God's Word. If you're walking in the Spirit, you're ready. Every believer has a responsibility to reach out to someone else and make a disciple.

So, what stage are you in? What will it take to get you to the next level? My prayer is that God would give every Christian a passion for discipleship, that not just the pastor or the youth staff or parents, but all of the saints would take ownership. May He give us a vision and burden for others and keep us from sitting on the sidelines. Let us commit to make disciples of all the nations until everyone is complete in Christ.

29. Besides, it would probably help you stop whining about your own life.

