

# CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR DISCIPLESHIP

In the Story, we watch as Jesus makes disciples, turning fishermen into fishers of men. Then before he ascends into heaven, he gives them the mission to also make disciples who obey his commands. And then over and over in Acts we see how they accomplished that mission. They did basically what Jesus did with his disciples. They proclaimed the good news about Jesus and established communities of believers to live this new life together as family.

Discipleship wasn't merely a Sunday school class to attend or curriculum to be discussed or a smorgasbord of programs offered by a church. Those structures may teach *what* Jesus commanded, but alone they don't create an environment where people learn to *obey* what Jesus commanded. A gospel-centered community on Jesus' mission must be the context for discipleship.

The mission of our *Missional* Communities is to make disciples. But as leaders, we can no more force people to grow as disciples than a farmer can force a plant to grow. "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1 Cor 3:7) Much like a farmer, we get to create an environment that supports growth.

**Discipleship is the holistic care of a small group of people who are consistently experiencing Jesus' life and teaching together in a healthy discipling environment where they are learning to submit every area of life to the Lordship of Jesus.**

## 10 Necessary Qualities of a Healthy Discipling Environment

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So what kind of environment did Jesus create to develop his disciples?

**Empowered by the Holy Spirit** *John 14:15-20, 16:7-15, 1 Cor. 2:10-14, Romans 8:5-14, Galatians 5:16-26, Acts*

Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts and transform lives. Therefore, he is the primary discipler and equipper of people. He teaches, reminds, convicts, helps, leads, reveals, counsels.

The Holy Spirit's job is to make us like Jesus and to help us accomplish the works we've been created to do. The Holy Spirit calls us, equips us, and sends us out to bear fruit through his power.

"Making disciples" must be done in submission to and in partnership with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the primary discipler and equipper of people. We can do nothing apart from him (John 15:5).

*What would it look like to disciple in submission to and in partnership with the Holy Spirit?*

**Gospel-saturated** *Romans 8:28-29; Galatians 2:14; Matthew 15:1-20, 20:20-28; Luke 6:1-11, 8:1-15*

*The gospel must permeate the discipling environment.* It is ultimately the answer to every problem and the motivation to submit every area of life to the Lordship of Jesus. Or in other words, it's the motivation to apply the gospel to every area of life.

As we are amazed by God, his wisdom, power, glory, grace, and goodness revealed through his Story and especially in Jesus, we find our security, significance, approval, joy and satisfaction in him rather than anything else.

As the gospel seeps into every crack and crevice of our lives, we walk more and more in submission to Jesus, for our good and his glory.

We often see Jesus help the disciples reflect and apply truth based on experience. In the course of everyday events and conversations, he showed them how being a part of his kingdom gives a new perspective on *everything*. The truth of the gospel when connected to experience is much more likely to be remembered and applied.

*Can the people in my Missional Community apply the gospel to their own lives? Each other's lives? Do our casual conversations often go to the gospel?*

## **Community Influenced** *Matthew 8:23-27, 9:9-13, 9:35-38; Luke 22:14-23, 22:39-46*

The disciples learned an extraordinary amount from watching and listening to Jesus. We can assume they also learned a great deal from their interaction with each other, as they traveled, lived, and ministered together in close community.

The role of a Missional Community leader or DNA leader is important as a primary discipler, but much learning, modeling, and sharpening takes place between others in the group, as they serve together and experience life together. (i.e. example of a healthy family or successful sports team).

The accountability that can and should take place, as a group of individuals live open and transparent lives before each other, is also critical to the discipleship process. Without a high level of accountability, most people are likely to keep significant areas of their lives hidden and in sin. A group of trusted friends is usually the only safe place where sin can be confessed and healed.

*Do the people in your MC see themselves as disciplers, even if they aren't considered leaders?*

## **Missional, Serving Others** *Matthew 8:1-3, 8:14-17, 10:5-8; Luke 9:10-17, 18:35-43*

Jesus placed a high value on service and evangelism to those who were not yet his followers, especially to those in great need. Jesus was consistently exposing the disciples to different kinds of people, in different kinds of places, with different kinds of needs. Many of these people were physically, relationally, emotionally, or spiritually needy. He often placed the disciples in situations where they could learn to love and serve "the least of these" by watching him or by serving alongside him.

Character qualities like love, compassion, servanthood, sacrifice, and generosity are more likely to be integrated into a person's life, as they enter into the lives of others and frequently demonstrate the above qualities in the context of those relationships. Spiritual growth is often more significant, when people serve outside the church family and serve people who are desperately needy. (It's very important for these things to be practiced frequently, so that they become part of a person's lifestyle, rather than a project that they participate in a few times a year.)

*Can compassion, generosity, sacrifice, etc. be "taught into" the life of a believer? How does it happen?*

## **Holistic** *Matthew 5:1-12, 6:1-4, 6:19-34; Luke 5:5-11, 6:37-42*

It's obvious from the teaching and experiences Jesus had with the disciples that he was committed to developing them holistically, concerned with helping them bring their whole lives under the will of the Father and offering their whole lives as worship to the Father.

Discipleship needs to involve caring for the whole life of a person. Every area of a person's life needs the gospel, not just the "spiritual" areas like Bible study, prayer, etc. A person's time, job, money, relationships, body, etc. must all be shaped from a gospel perspective.

*What kind of care needs to be given to help each person in your missional community and DNA apply the gospel to their whole lives, rather than just the "spiritual" areas?*

## **Frequent and long-term** *Matthew 4:18-23, 9:35-38; Luke 8:1, 8:22*

It took Jesus 3 years of investment in the disciples, before they were ready to minister and lead on their own. During those 3 years, they spent an incredible number of hours together.

Discipleship is not fast. It takes a lot of time, commitment, and sacrifice. A discipler must be with his or her disciples frequently and must care for them over the long-term.

*Is it possible to truly disciple someone with the 2-4 hours a week that are spent together in most discipling relationships? How much time do you think it should take?*

## **Experiential** *Matthew 9:9-13, 9:18-33; Luke 8:26-56, 17:11-14*

Most of the time Jesus spent with his disciples was in an experiential learning environment. They were living together, traveling together, eating meals together, ministering to the needs of people together, etc. Very little of their time spent together seems to be in what we would consider a formal learning environment.

People learn much more when they **do** something than when they just **hear** something. For this reason, we need to help people experience life lived in line with the gospel (Gal 2:14). We need to live closely with them outside of church gatherings, engaging in life, relationships, and ministry together.

*How can your MC live and experience more together in a given week or month?*

## **Individually Tailored** *Matthew 14:28-31, 16:15-19, 26:36-38; Luke 9:28, 22:31-34*

Though we see Jesus spending a great deal of time with the disciples as a group, we also see him speaking specifically into the lives of individual disciples at different times and in different ways.

In addition to the need for the group dynamic, discipleship must have a personal nature as well, because each person in a group has different needs, problems, passions, and spiritual gifts. Each person must be viewed

individually, in the same way that parents view the development of each of their children individually. We need the leading of the Holy Spirit to identify needs and see effective ways to meet those needs.

*How can you make sure that you are giving regular and personal care to each member of your group based on their needs and personality?*

## **Modeled** *Matthew 8, 9, 14:13-21; Luke 5:12-13, 13:10-17, 14:1-6*

Though, at times, Jesus taught the disciples in more formal settings, it was his consistent example of love, servanthood, sacrifice, generosity, encouragement, worship, etc. that probably had the greatest impact on the lives of the disciples, as they watched Jesus' life.

Disciples need to see most of what is expected of them lived out in the day-to-day example of their discipler. If a person can not see a model of what they should be doing, it will be difficult for them to do it well or to do it consistently themselves.

*How can you model as much of a Christ-like lifestyle as possible for those you are discipling?*

## **Expectation of Multiplication** *Matthew 4:19, 10, 28:19-20; Luke 10:1-3, 10:17-20*

It was Jesus' strategy from the beginning that his disciples would be the foundation for the church and the foundation for the multiplication of followers of Jesus around the world.

As disciples teach others to obey all of Jesus' commands, that includes his command to make disciples. Part of being a disciple of Jesus is making disciples of Jesus. This goal of multiplication, with "disciplee" becoming discipler, should be the stated and expected from the beginning. Though every person is not a gifted leader, every person is spiritually gifted and called to be a discipler as part of some form of gospel-centered community on mission.

*How can you give the vision to those you are discipling to become disciplers in the next 1-3 years?*