

DISCIPLE MAKING

A PODCAST WITH DR. JOHN TOLSON

Episode 8: What is Disciple-Making?

I keep saying the only way to change the country is to change people. So how do we change people? I believe God has given us a strategy to change people in our country and around the world. I'm talking about disciple-making. What is discipling? Let's look at Deuteronomy 6:1-2: "These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life."

So as Scripture lays out here, God's plan is to develop and build into the lives of future generations, whether through a church or ministry or even through a secular organization. If we don't take the basic tenets and build them into the lives of future generations, we don't get that positive impact we are looking for.

The first principle of disciple-making is that it involves building into the lives of future generations. The second one comes from the book of Acts. Let's look at Acts 15:36-40: "Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord."

So, what we have here is really the first church split. Paul went one direction because John Mark had deserted them at a crucial time in their missionary journey, but Barnabas took John Mark and didn't give up on him and continued with him. Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement," so he was an encourager to John Mark.

So, who was right and who was wrong? Was Paul just being too difficult? No. I really think in any organization or work or ministry or even in a family, you must have

someone who sees the big picture and that person in this group was the apostle Paul, who was willing to make tough decisions even when they were uncomfortable. On the other hand, you have Barnabas who always had his focus on people and their continued development. Later, Paul said “Bring John Mark back. He is now useful to us.” He had learned his lessons and he continued to develop and grow.

So, this second principle in disciple-making involves a transfer of leadership when the time is right. When the time was right, Paul brought John Mark back and he continued to make a huge impact even to this day.

The third principle of disciple-making comes from the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua 1:1 says “After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them - to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.’”

So, we see here that Moses had invested his life in a young man named Joshua so that the leadership and efforts would continue beyond his death. Think of a relay race and how essential the passing of the baton is. Relay runners practice the handoff because they know that it is pivotal in winning the race. The same goes for disciple-making. This passing off the baton from Moses to Joshua was important. Disciple-making involves carrying on the plan of God without a break in cadence.

Finally in Mark 3:13 we read: “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him.” Here Jesus started the first small group. He chose them to be with him. Jesus’ methodology to change the planet started with a handful of men whom he built into for three years. They were constantly in his presence.

Disciple-making means training a few to reach all the nations. A few years ago, you may remember the first revolution in Cuba. I was told that a reporter interviewing Mr. Castro asked him how many people it took to implement the first revolution and he said about 84. Then he asked Mr. Castro if he had another revolution to do all over again how many key people it would take. He said he could probably do it with four, but those four would have to be willing to die.

It doesn’t take a lot to impact the whole country, but it takes a core group of people who are deeply committed to Jesus and carrying out his plan of making disciples.

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