

5 Discipleship Principles I Live By

Hint: Anyone Can Do These

Neil Reynolds



NEILREYNOLDS.ORG

Table of Contents

Introduction: You Can't Make Disciples Unless You Make This Shift

Principle I: Be Focused

Principle II: Don't Add Anything New

Principle III: Don't Do Anything Alone Unless It's Necessary

Principle IV: Give People Access to Your Life

Principle V: Let Your Insecurities Go

Conclusion: 3 Marks of a Disciple



Introduction

You Can't Make Disciples Unless You Make THIS Shift

It's fascinating to me that two people can experience the same thing in opposite ways. For instance, one person might hear a sermon and say, "That was the best message I've ever heard," while someone else will say, "I didn't get anything out of it."

We hear this in churches all the time. Things like...

"I wouldn't be who I am without this church and I want other people to experience it."

And...

"I don't care for this church anymore. I don't get as much out of it as I used to."

For the longest time I didn't know what to do with these comments. Sometimes I would vilify the people who didn't like where things were going. Other times I'd try to please everyone. Both ended in frustration.

The eBook [*Becoming a Disciple Maker: The Pursuit of Level 5 Disciple Making*](#) is a great resource that helps put these types of comments in context. It's a simple, thorough, straightforward approach to making followers of Jesus.



Bobby Harrington and Greg Wiens describe the 5 levels of disciple making...

Level 1 – the spiritual infant | subtracting from disciple making efforts

Level 2 – the spiritual child | plateaued, neither helping nor hindering disciple making

Level 3 – the spiritual young adult | adding, supporting disciple making

Level 4 – the spiritual parent | reproducing, personally making disciples

Level 5 – the spiritual grandparent | multiplying, personally making disciple makers

*you can assess your disciple making level [HERE](#)

There's an important shift that takes place as a person progresses as a disciple maker. A spiritual child is self-centered. As they mature they develop an others centered approach.

Every growing disciple will eventually make the shift from being selfish to selfless.

The spiritual child typically says...

"The preacher's sermons aren't feeding me."

The spiritual young adult typically says...

"I'm so happy to lead my group and make disciples. We're going to baptize a new member of our group tonight!"

Every disciple has to make the shift from focusing on themselves to focusing on others or they'll be perpetually frustrated.



Every experience eventually disappoints no matter how great it is. The same is true for churches. No matter how great the preaching or worship is, eventually, we all come up short.

Those who are perpetually frustrated in churches ask: “What are you going to do for me?” And, eventually, you can’t do enough to keep them happy. Eventually, the luster wears off.

Those who find contentment in churches ask: “What can I do to help?” Regardless of a church’s shortcomings, these people find a way to make an impact on others.

They’ve made the shift to thinking about making disciples.

Making disciples is every church’s mission. It’s the only marching orders we’ve received from Jesus (Mt. 28:19-20).

A church can't function properly unless every member is making disciples.

So, find a place, plug in, and ask, “What can I do to bless someone? How can I help to make disciples?”

““ *Every growing disciple will eventually make the shift from being selfish to selfless.* ””



Principle I

Be Focused

In the gospels, Jesus spent time with many different people. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He taught crowds. He intentionally engaged with sinful people.

But through it all, he was consistently with the twelve. Within that group he really focused on Peter, James, and John. In the end, he lost Judas.

Jesus focused on 12, really focused on 3, and lost 1 along the way.

I assume I won't be able to do as well as Jesus.

That means I'm going to be discipling a small group of people most of the time. Knowing this keeps me focused.

Jesus impacted many by focusing on a few.

We'll reach many by focusing on a few.

When it comes to making disciples, start with being focused.



You'll want to focus on consistently investing in a small group of people for a long period of time. When I served in college ministry, the time span was most often four years. The time frame varies for me now.

The time may be different for you. But, the point is the same.

Be focused.

“*In less than three years he [Jesus] was able to disciple a group of men, most of whom no one else would have chosen, and taught them to DO and to BE like him in such a way that, when released, they would change the course of human history forever.*”

Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*



Principle II

Don't Add Anything New

The last thing any of us need is something else to do. We're all too busy. I'm not suggesting that you add another program to your life. I'm not suggesting that you add anything.

When Jesus said, "Go," the idea is that the disciples would be going somewhere. Jesus was saying, "As you go where you're going, make disciples."

As you do the things you do, day in and day out, use those things as a way to make disciples.

For instance, you likely eat three meals a day. Think about how you can use your meals as a way to make disciples.

Don't add anything new to your life.

Invite people into your life.

This leads in to number three...



Principle III

Don't Do Anything Alone Unless it's Necessary

I spend plenty of time alone. A chunk of that is used to prepare to teach. I also do a monthly prayer retreat which is some of the most important ministry I do. But...

I only want to be alone when I have to be.

As you go and do the things that you're already doing, think about who you can invite into those things. Or even better, think about who's already there with you!

As a general rule...

I try never to do anything alone unless it's necessary.

Some of the best discipleship times are on long car rides. Even if you're running a short errand, take someone with you. This could be valuable time spent investing in someone.

This principle built on the second principle. Now, the next one builds on this one (notice a pattern?!)...



Principle IV

Give People Access to Your Life

One of the best books on discipleship I've read is Mike Breen's book, *Building a Discipling Culture*. In the book, he mentions three ways that people learn...

1. Classroom/lecture

This is exactly what it sounds like. We all learn by having concepts passed on to us. For many churches, this is where the vast majority of the focus is: worship gatherings, classes, special events, etc.

Teaching God's word publicly is incredibly important. I spend a significant amount of time preparing to teach each week. But, this is only one of the major ways people learn.

2. Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is the process of working with someone as they teach you to do something. This is common in most skilled labor trades. For instance, you can't become a plumber without apprenticing with a plumber.

This is important because there are some things you can't learn to do by reading a book or listening to a lecture. No one can escape this. And, this is where it gets interesting.



There are some things we all need someone else to show us how to do. Making disciples is one of those things.

3. Immersion

Think about learning to speak a language. You would learn the language in a book or a classroom. Then, you would probably get a tutor (apprenticeship). But, you wouldn't be able to speak fluently until you were immersed in a culture that speaks that language.

Why do I mention these three types of learning?

Because it's the combination of apprenticeship and immersion that are so critical for learning to follow Jesus.

People learn to follow Jesus by closely watching other people as they follow Jesus.

People need access to our real lives if we're going to show them how to follow Jesus in real life.

“One thing is sure: You are somebody's disciple. You learned how to live from somebody else. There are no exceptions to this rule, for human beings are just the kind of creatures that have to learn and keep learning from others how to live.”

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*



Principle V

Let Your Insecurities Go

My guess is, insecurity keeps most people from investing in making disciples. I feel it, too. There's always this nagging feeling that I don't know enough, that I'm not quite ready. We armor up and keep people at a distance because of our insecurities.

You don't have to know everything to make disciples. In fact, you don't have to know much. You simply have to be willing to share what you know.

You don't have to be good at everything. You don't have to be good at *anything*. All you have to do is allow people to watch you closely as you follow Jesus. That's it!

The reality is, I'm a work in progress. We all are. But, I do know a few things. I try to focus on sharing those. Just share what you know. Show people what you do.

Like I mentioned in the last chapter, we all need to watch someone closely as they follow Jesus in order to learn to follow Jesus ourselves.

If we're going to make disciples, it's incredibly important that people have access to our lives...our real lives.

To do that, we've got to let our insecurities go.



Conclusion

3 Marks of a Disciple

So, maybe you're still wondering, what *exactly* does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? There are three things you can go back to if you ever find yourself asking that question.

In John's gospel, Jesus gives three clear marks of a disciple. Here they are...

1. Staying committed to God's word.

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31, ESV).

This is simple enough. One of the marks of following Jesus is being committed to God's word, the Bible. Recently, someone said to me, "No one has ever showed me how to read the Bible." I'm sure there are plenty of people who could say the same thing.

In Milton Jones' book, *Discipling: The Multiplying Ministry*, he uses a great analogy for scripture:

"A disciple's element is the Word. He must continue in the Word as a fish continues in the water. If a disciple is removed from his element, the Word, he is like a fish out of water and will die."



Milton breaks abiding in the Word down to three categories: read, contemplate, and apply. Following this pattern, here are some practical and (hopefully) helpful ways to abide in God's word.

Read

- Read the Bible regularly. My goal is always once a day, first thing, as soon as I sit down at my desk.
- Gather w/ other Christians to study
- Listen to preaching

Contemplate

- Memorize scripture
- Think about God's word regularly

“The Word is on the mind of the disciple to such a great extent that it becomes the mindset.” — Milton Jones

Apply

- Simply obeying the teachings of Jesus
- Make Jesus' teachings an integral part of your daily life

2. Loving other disciples.

“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35, NIV).

It's been en vogue at times to say things like, “I love Jesus but not the church.” I understand the sentiment because the church has grossly misrepresented Jesus at times. But, according to Jesus, you aren't a disciple if you don't love other disciples.



I've also heard things like, "My relationship with God is private. So, I don't want to interact with other Christians." This is incompatible with Jesus' mark of discipleship. According to him, loving other disciples is how people know you are a disciple.

Bottom line: You can't be a disciple in isolation.

In fact, you can't love God if you don't love other disciples (1 John 4:20).

3. Bearing fruit

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8, NIV).

The third mark of discipleship in John is bearing fruit. Essentially, fruit means evidence. An apple serves as evidence that the tree it's on is, in fact, an apple tree. "Bearing fruit" serves as proof that we're actually disciples.

Primarily, you see this fruit in two ways: living a Christ-like life and making other disciples.

Mike Breen refers to this as character and competency. In other words, being like Christ AND doing what he did.

“*If a disciple is removed from his element, the Word, he is like a fish out of water and will die.*”
Milton Jones, *Discipling: The Multiplying Ministry*

If this was helpful at all...

Please share it!

I'd love for this little eBook to help as many people as possible. ***Will you please click one of the buttons below to share it?***

Click Here to Tweet

Click Here to Share on
Facebook

