
The Three Critical Elements of Effective Disciplemaking

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I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

(1 Corinthians 4:14-17 ESV)

We know that when Jesus made disciples, it produced the missional movement. When Jesus did discipleship, it led to the world being changed.

When the early Church made disciples, generation after generation after generation were reached and kept on reaching others without budgets, without buildings, without resources, and certainly without popularity.

Incredible things were happening. We know that when Jesus did discipleship, the model was the rabbi with the disciple. The rabbi wasn't just about teaching them

information, but they wanted to imitate their life. They wanted to be who the rabbi was.

And as such, there was a blessing which went out which was, "May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi. Your life so closely connected that they would see the imprint of their following God on that person's life too."

We know as was shared earlier, that most of Jesus's time was spent, of those three years, scholars are saying 18 months were spent investing in the disciples. And it's a mind-blowing challenge to us all, because how do we do that? We're not rabbis.

And what I believe Paul is wanting us to understand is an image that helps the Corinthian church then and us now understand what discipleship looks like.

And it's the difference between the pedagogues and the parent, the father. The pedagogue was like a nanny. But

they weren't just a babysitter, their role was to teach the basics -- how to write, how to read, what to learn, the basic functions of life.

But when that child came of age they would stand at the shoulder of their parent to discover their role in society. They would learn, they'd be apprenticed with their parent on how to function, and how to be, and how to live.

And so when Paul is urging the Corinthian church to imitate him, he's saying, "Yeah, there's lots of information you can get out there, and that's wonderful. But you need a father. You need to stand up my shoulder because you can't be what you can't see."

And as a result he's sending Timothy, not a perfect example, but a living example of what it means to understand and illustrate all this stuff of following Jesus in their everyday lives.

We know the church from Corinth were kind of crazy in their own various ways. What did it mean to love Jesus? How did you treat the opposite sex? They needed a living example. How did they handle money? They needed a living example. What was important?

They needed a living example. What was valuable? They needed a living example. They had information but they needed one to imitate. They needed someone to imitate.

So, we can summarize what discipleship looks like, just as a memorable tool, in these three ways. Yes, it's about information. The teaching's important, isn't it? That we grow up knowing the basics.

But it's also about imitation and then innovation. Jesus said to his disciples, "You'll do greater things than me." I don't know about you but I look at that verse and I feel like intimidated. And then secondly, I think, "Oh no, maybe the humble thing is not to want that." But what's humble about disobeying what Jesus has promised you?

The challenge for us is this, so often we do the information thing because we want people to know the power of God's word. We want them to know how amazing Jesus is. We want them to know the cross. And then we send people out to innovate, to do more than we did.

But you can't be what you can't see. They don't know necessarily how to contextualize it, and so we find, yeah, we get discipleship. And we believe in discipleship-making, but how many of us have seen it last one generation? A wonderful work that went so far. And I believe we need to look afresh at the imitation piece.

Let me give an example. I was a foster child. I grew up in foster care from days old until I was six. Please don't feel sorry for me, it's wonderful. Wonderful woman, gift from Jesus to me. Revealed the Father's heart in so many ways. But it's temporary. I learned lots of things I needed to

know. But I needed a father. I needed to stand at someone's shoulder.

You see, I'm Nigerian background, I'm a Nigerian Londoner. You can tell from the voice, I'm not quite from around here. Love it, though. And the problem was I didn't even know I looked like him [my father]. We reconciled at the end of his life, led him to the Lord, God did wonderful things, other story.

But in the meantime growing up, I didn't know what I looked like. I didn't know what it meant to be a Nigerian woman in our society. I didn't know that I was from a line of kings. I didn't understand my heritage. And because I didn't know whose I was, I didn't know who I was. Because I didn't know who I was, I didn't know how to be. I didn't know how to function.

I needed to stand at somebody's shoulder to see. Because I couldn't be what I couldn't see. I needed an illustration.

And I would encourage us leaders, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, will we allow someone to have access to our lives so that they can see from our lives what it means to share our faith? See from our lives how you spend money. See from our lives what marriage looks like. See from our lives what it means to raise kids. See from our lives how to heal the sick. See from our lives what it means to cast out demons. See from our lives how to plan and take risks and be radical for Jesus.

Will our lives show that and illustrate or will we keep them from a distance and look good on a stage? When I'm on stage, you don't know how many spots I have on my face. When I'm on stage, you don't know how much makeup is on my face because you're far away. And if you ARE close enough to see, well, my husband wants a word with you!

But it's a completely different thing, isn't it, from afar. We all look great from afar. We look wonderful from afar. But that doesn't disciple. It gives a wonderful illustration,

maybe an inspiration, but it does not give imitation. It doesn't give imitation. Will we let people imitate our lives? And it's a horrible thought, isn't it? Because I don't know about you, but do I want everybody to see my life? Do I have a life worthy imitating? The question comes back at me.

And you know what encourages me as I think of Paul, I think of Paul who says, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." And I think of a man who has a brain the size of all our planets, but a past which is a mess, who was a murderer, who went through houses getting rid of men, women, and children and getting them killed because they love Jesus." And he says, "Imitate me as I imitate Him. I'm sending my son who stood at my shoulder so you can see this way of life."

I believe God is calling us to rise up and be parents. You know, when we think of the Celtic Church, they had abbots and abbesses because they reflected the Abba. And they led entire communities, revealing to them in

life and way what it meant to love God, what it meant to live for God, what it meant to be with God.

There's a fatherless generation. I'm telling you from experience, it's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable when you don't know who you are or whose you are or how to be. But what we have in our hands, what we have in this opportunity, it is an opportunity, is to lead in such a way that people will stand at our shoulder and realize the greatness and the goodness and the glory of our God.

No, we're not perfect examples you and I, but we can be living ones. We haven't got it all together. There may be things we don't want anyone to know about, and maybe we need the accountability, frankly, to deal with some stuff. But it is time to be the living example.

So information, yes, it's incredibly important because we need to know how to be. Imitation, we need to stand at their shoulder, but innovation Jesus said they did greater. And so we see the early church, Jerusalem,

Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth, we see incredible healings, extraordinary miracles, it says in Acts.

Wonderful things. And you know I reflected on this, and I was thinking as a parent what I think of my girls compared to if I'm teaching somebody. When I'm teaching someone, I want them to do well.

I've got two girls. Tia is six. She wants to be a paleontologist. I didn't even know what one was when I was six. I didn't know what one was when she told me. So I just kind of wrote it down, little Wikipedia led me into what I needed to know. Zoe is my five-year-old and she's going to be president, just so you know. But she's not going to be a president before she's been a ballerina and a doctor. That's the plan. And I hear these crazy dreams, and I love these crazy dreams, because they're my children.

You don't want them just to go as far as you. You want them to go way beyond. You want the ceiling on your life to be their floor they stand on. You want so much more

for them, so you want them to think crazy. You want them to think out of the box. You want them to discover all they were meant to be. And you will lay down your life for them to get there. You'll make way. You'll step out of the way.

You'll take all the tools, all the things you've learned, you'll make sure they have it. All the imitation they can learn from you, you'll make sure they have it. And then you give them every opportunity to go get it.

And I wonder, when we think of discipleship, and we look at Jesus, and we look at Paul, and the early church for hundreds of years, whether if we were like parents, if we chose to rise up and be parents, whether we'd see a generation changed, the nation changed, whether we do cross cultural stuff, see the world changed. Because you know what? Paul did that. Well, Jesus did that. The 12 did that. And they did see the world changed.