



SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP EDITION: THINKING DISCIPLESHIP

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HOW DO WE ASSESS EVIDENCE OF AN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLE MAKING COMMUNITY?

An effective Christian disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ who promotes peace, proclaims the Gospel, participates with the mission of God and can invite others to become disciples.

I want to preface the above question with a few points for clarification.

- I'm tempted to consider how we identify 'successful' discipleship. I've suggested assessing evidence of effectiveness rather than success to perhaps broaden the field. Our measure of success may not necessarily capture what is effective.
- I'm also suggesting disciple making happens in community. That is, it's not necessarily an individual who is effective in discipleship but that discipleship occurs most effectively within the context of a faith community. Discipleship that relies on particular personalities may not be sustainable and may not be able to be replicated. Leaders ought to be able to cultivate a culture within a faith community that nurtures disciple-making as part of its DNA. In a culture of individualism, the privatisation of discipleship needs to be challenged. While discipleship is personal, it is not private (hidden from the world) nor autonomous (disconnected from the body of Christ).

I would like to suggest that the definition of a Christian disciple includes the following. A disciple is:

- An agent of shalom.
- A curator of the Gospel story.
- A reflective practitioner.
- Open to the transformation of the Holy Spirit 'along the way'.
- Someone who knows how to develop spiritual rhythms that include; corporate & individual prayer, reading of scripture individually and in community, rhythms of participation in God's mission.
- Someone who makes disciples.

Understanding that there are multiple contexts available for this kind of assessment, I offer a matrix below for consideration. I would like for us to consider that the future of disciple-making does not occur primarily in the framework of the institutional church as we know and understand it. We need to reconsider the model in light of the Gospels. Disciple-making is not institutional, it's on the road, something we are 'sent' to do. Therefore, I would suggest that it is not program based but organic and responsive to the environments the people who make up our faith communities find themselves in. Environments for disciple-making include the institutional church but is certainly not limited to this environment. Any disciple-making community needs a reflective process of being present and listening to their context, then being able to respond. The different contexts I have suggested below is not an exhaustive list but serves to remind us that our churches are potentially filled with disciples who are making disciples elsewhere.

Some guiding texts that help frame the practice of disciple-making for me include Luke 10:1-12, Mathew 28:16-20, John 1:35-51, Mark 1:14-20, Luke 24:13-53, Acts 10. Making disciples includes, issuing invitations, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, baptising, teaching, a cycle of formation/transformation, following Jesus. There are kiaros moments for the sent ones and those they are sent to. Disciple-making is not a static process of importing the program or transferring information. It is a dynamic journey woven into participation with the missio Dei where there are multiple conversations partners that form disciples. These include, scripture, culture, community/social groups, the Holy Spirit.

Could a matrix such as the one below be used to help frame questions with members of congregations about their effectiveness in making disciples? If so, what does an effective disciple-making community look like?

A DISCIPLE IN THIS CONTEXT:	CHURCH	PARACHURCH	NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY	FAMILY/FRIENDS	SCHOOL/UNI	WORKPLACE	SPORTING/ COMMUNITY GROUP
Promotes peace							
Cultivates an environment for proclamation of the biblical story							
Reflects on participation in the mission of Jesus							
Can proclaim the Good News about Jesus							
Is attentive and responsive to the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world							
Has a rhythm of spiritual disciplines (prayer, reading scripture, service to others)							
Makes disciples (followers of Jesus not of themselves)							
Can multiply themselves (capacity building for more disciple-makers)							