



4 NECESSARY TRAITS OF AN EFFECTIVE DISCIPLE MAKER

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We've all been there: Sequestered away in some library surrounded by books, working as hard as you can on a paper that constitutes a significant part of your grade. You go the extra mile. No bare minimum for you.

Your bibliography page has more than the requisite amount of resources. The research is both informative and inspiring. When it comes time to turn the paper in, you hit send with the confidence of Stephen Curry stepping to the free throw line.

There's no way you'll get anything less than an "A."

But a week or so later you are surprised when the professor gives you a big fat "F" in red ink. Next to the grade he suggests that while your paper was academic-journal-worthy you would do well to consult the syllabus, because you had done the wrong assignment.

Stellar work is still failing work when it doesn't comply with the syllabus.

My fear is that is an accurate indictment on so many Christians and our churches. We read great books, have amazing consecutive quiet time streaks, and our music is stellar.

But this doesn't ultimately conform to the commission God has charged us with in His "syllabus"—the Bible. To be a follower of Jesus is to embrace the invitation to produce reproducing followers of Jesus Christ—to make disciples.

The life and teachings of Jesus are so explicit in this regard, there's no doubt we'll have to answer to Him when we stand in His presence.



Distilled to its essence, disciple making rests on four pillars. In order for a church leader to effectively make disciples, these four pillars must be present—and strong—in their own spiritual lives and outward leadership:

1. Relational

In the early days of ministry I made the mistake many young leaders make: rely primarily on giftedness and competencies, without seeing the importance of relationships.

This is where discipleship is distinguished from mentoring. You can mentor from afar, even while being spatially close. But to truly disciple demands a transference of life through the umbilical cord of relationships.

This was the relational model of Jesus. For three years He went on boat trips with his disciples, ate good food, and huddled together with them in upper rooms. And at his most vulnerable He took them along to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Every step of the way, Jesus lived in relationship with His followers. The lesson is hard for task-driven, achievement-oriented leaders like myself: We don't use people to accomplish tasks, we use tasks to accomplish people.

When our relational accounts show insufficient funds, our ability to lead is hindered.

2. Integrity

I love to preach, but the danger when it comes to discipleship is that it's easy to hide behind pulpits.

To truly disciple is to bring people close, and to do so is to invite those we lead into the cluttered closets of our lives. If the leader is also their own personal public relations firm, there is no hope of bringing people close.

Integrity is not perfection. Integrity, as someone once said, is simply the alignment of words with deeds. And when there are the inevitable integrity gaps, we must own them as leaders and apologize.

Many times when young leaders graduate from our resident program they'll say something along the lines of, "I never had a dad. So to have Pastor Loritts invite me into his home, and to see how he related to his wife and children—and to even witness the arguments and misunderstandings—was a blessing to me."

The first time I heard this, it stunned me, but I eventually became deeply encouraged. They knew I was human, but to see my weakness and humanity, yet lean on Christ, inspired them.

3. Doctrinal

Every discipleship strategy uses a curriculum, whether intentional or unintentional. In the last documented letter he wrote, the Apostle Paul chose to write his young son in the ministry, Timothy.

In this letter, he unveils the curriculum we are to use: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)).

As leaders who draw people in close through relationship and integrity, the Word of God must have a gravitational pull on our disciple making.



4. Experiential

The people we pour into need to be positioned to get their hands dirty in the work of the ministry under our watch.

Jesus taught and then sent out the disciples in [Matthew 10](#) to engage in ministry. Paul sent Timothy to various churches, and ultimately to Ephesus, under his care.

This is where I nurse a concern with the church of the 21st century. In our frenzy for numerical growth, I fear we're trying to create perfect environments devoid of spaces for young leaders to hone their craft.

As leaders, we must see our churches not just as hospitals, but teaching hospitals, where residents can engage in preaching and shepherding and leading, all under our oversight where we provide real-time feedback.

Or to put it crassly, if Malcolm Gladwell is right, that greatness is not so much a matter of giftedness—but hard work—how else will these young leaders get their hours?

Could it be the reason why so many churches fail is because the church planter spent time under a leader who didn't "share the ball" enough with them?