

# Disciple-Making Priority 1: Less Reaching and More Making

A comprehensive guide to revitalizing discipleship in churches by shifting focus from event-based outreach to relationship-driven disciple-making, following Jesus's model of intentional investment in people's lives.

# Disciple-Making: 5 Moves to Bring it Back



## LESS Accumulating People

Moving away from simply counting attendance and gathering crowds without deeper connection.



## MORE Deploying

Actively sending equipped disciples into their spheres of influence to multiply impact.



## LESS Trying to Measure Up

Moving beyond self-reliance and performance-based ministry approaches.



## MORE Spirit Reliance

Embracing dependence on the Holy Spirit's power and guidance in all aspects of discipleship.



## LESS Counting Attendance

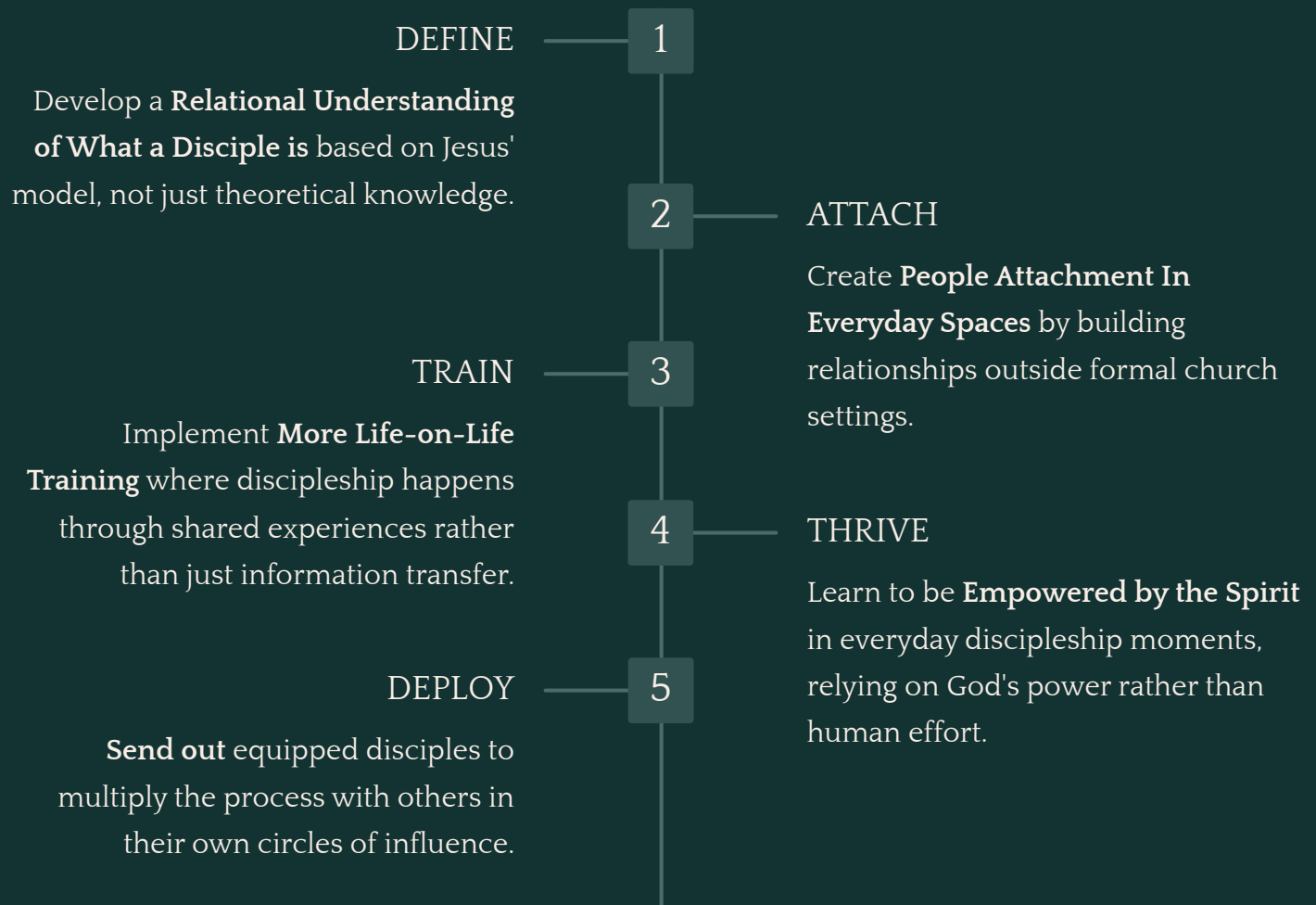
Shifting away from defining success by numbers at programs and events.



## MORE Connecting With People

Prioritizing authentic relationships that foster genuine spiritual growth.

# Disciple-Making: 5 Moves to Bring it Back



This process-oriented approach to discipleship moves us from merely defining concepts to actively deploying disciples who make other disciples. Each step builds on the previous one, creating a sustainable cycle of spiritual multiplication rather than mere addition.

# The Problem with Outreach Programs

## Resource Intensive

Outreach programs often require significant time, energy, and financial resources that could be invested in deeper disciple-making relationships.

## Professional-Dependent

Programs typically rely on pastoral staff or a few gifted leaders, preventing the church body from developing their own discipleship muscles.

## Temporary Impact

The "sugar high" effect of programs provides immediate gratification but rarely produces lasting spiritual transformation or multiplication.

## Limited Biblical Basis

Jesus and the apostles modeled relationship-based disciple-making rather than program-centered outreach methodologies.

While programs can serve a purpose, they should never replace the primary biblical model of investing in relationships. Jesus didn't host elaborate events to attract crowds - He focused on deep investment in disciples who would transform the world through relationship.

# The Sugar Problem in Evangelism

"Programs are like sugar. They're tasty, even addictive. However, it takes away a desire for more healthy food. Though it provides a quick burst of energy, over time it makes you flabby, and a steady diet will kill you. A strict diet of evangelistic programs produces malnourished evangelism."

This powerful metaphor from 9Marks ministry highlights how our reliance on programmatic outreach actually weakens the church's evangelistic muscles over time. Just as a sugar-dependent diet creates unhealthy physical patterns, program-dependent evangelism creates unhealthy spiritual patterns.

The temporary "high" of successful events can mask the reality that few lasting disciple-making relationships are being formed. We count the crowds but miss the deeper metrics of transformation and multiplication that Jesus prioritized.

Program addiction leads to spiritual lethargy where church members begin to believe that evangelism is something that happens at special events rather than through their everyday relationships. This effectively sidelines the majority of believers from fulfilling their disciple-making calling.

## Program Dependency Warning Signs

- Members invite people to events rather than into relationships/homes
- Evangelism budget goes primarily to events and the building rather than equipping
- Success is measured by attendance/tithe/baptisms rather than disciple multiplication
- Most members can't articulate how they personally make disciples



# Problem #1: Professional Dependency

Outreach Programs are typically run by a professional (pastor or even one or two gifted leaders) and the church at large gains very little Spiritual Strength from their participation.

This creates a dangerous pattern where:

- The congregation becomes spectators rather than participants in the Great Commission
- Disciple-making skills remain underdeveloped in most church members
- Spiritual growth is stunted as members aren't actively engaged in ministry
- The church becomes dependent on professional leadership for growth
- Multiplication is limited by staff capacity rather than unleashed through the entire body



When we professionalize disciple-making, we unintentionally communicate that ordinary Christians aren't qualified for this essential work.

The professional dependency model contradicts the priesthood of all believers and creates a spiritual caste system where "real ministry" is performed by the clergy while the congregation merely supports their efforts. This is fundamentally at odds with the biblical vision of every member ministry.

# The Role of Ministers in Disciple Multiplication

"[the minister] He should teach the people how to extend the knowledge of the truth. While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel of those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put ministers in the place of God." EGW



The biblical role of ministers is not to be the primary disciple-makers but to be disciple-maker makers – equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). This requires a fundamental shift from doing ministry *for* people to developing ministry *through* people.

When ministers see their primary role as developing others rather than performing ministry tasks, the church's disciple-making capacity multiplies exponentially rather than being limited by staff capacity.

# Disciple-Making: The Church's Lifeblood

"It is in doing Christ's work that the church has the promise of His presence. Go teach (greek means make disciples) all nations, He said; 'and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' To take His yoke is one of the first conditions of receiving His power. The very life of the church depends upon her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord's commission. To neglect this work is surely to invite spiritual feebleness and decay. Where there is no active labor for others, love wanes, and faith grows dim."

DA 825.2

This powerful statement reveals that disciple-making isn't just one ministry among many - it's the very lifeblood of the church. When we neglect this central commission, we don't just miss growth opportunities; we actively invite spiritual decline.

The promise of Christ's presence is directly tied to our obedience to His commission. This suggests that churches experiencing a lack of spiritual power should examine their commitment to disciple-making rather than seeking quick fixes or new programs.



# Problem #2: The Resource Drain

Church and even church school programs take enormous amounts of time and energy away from the commission of Jesus to go and make disciples, and for most this leaves almost no reserve energy to engage in the relational process of disciple-making.

The reality is that church members have limited time, energy, and attention. When we fill their schedules with internal programs, meetings, and activities, we unintentionally divert resources away from mission.

## The Busyness Trap

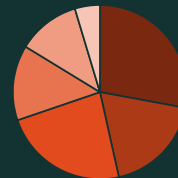
Many churches fall into the trap of equating busyness with spiritual vitality. Members run from one church activity to another, serving faithfully but having little time left for intentional disciple-making relationships outside the church walls.

To revitalize disciple-making, we must ruthlessly evaluate every church activity through the lens of its contribution to genuine disciple multiplication. Programs that primarily serve existing members without equipping them for disciple-making may need to be pruned to create space for missional living.



### The Resource Problem

When church activities consume most of members' discretionary time, intentional disciple-making gets squeezed out.



Internal Meetings

Program Preparation

Worship Services

Committee Work

Special Events

Disciple-Making

# Problem #3: Missing Biblical Methodology

Where are the biblical methodologies laid out for putting on programs in the scriptures?

This provocative question forces us to confront an uncomfortable truth: many of our church outreach programs have little direct biblical precedent. While Jesus and the apostles certainly taught large crowds at times, their primary method of kingdom expansion was through intentional relationships and life-on-life discipleship.

When we examine the Gospels and Acts, we see a pattern of:

- Jesus investing deeply in a small group of disciples
- The apostles making disciples in households and communities
- Believers sharing faith through natural relationships
- New disciples quickly becoming disciple-makers themselves

1

## Jesus' Method

Jesus primarily made disciples through shared life experiences, not programs or events. He invested deeply in a few who would multiply.

2

## Apostolic Pattern

The apostles expanded the church through relational networks, households, and person-to-person discipleship, not elaborate outreach strategies.

3

## Early Church Growth

The explosive growth of the early church happened through ordinary believers making disciples in their everyday contexts.

"The way of Jesus cannot be improved upon."

This doesn't mean all programs are wrong, but it does suggest that our primary investments should align with the biblical pattern of relational disciple-making rather than event-based outreach. Programs might supplement this work, but they cannot replace the core methodology Jesus established.

# Jesus' Model for Disciple-Making

## How Jesus Lived

Jesus modeled authentic spiritual practices in the presence of His disciples. His life was the primary curriculum.

## Relational Investment

Jesus built deep relationships with His disciples, sharing life experiences and creating contexts for transformation.

## Intentional Training

Jesus provided instruction, demonstration, guided practice, and feedback in real-world ministry settings.

## Multiplication Vision

Jesus prepared disciples to become disciple-makers themselves, creating a sustainable multiplication movement.

Jesus' approach to disciple-making stands in stark contrast to many of our contemporary methods. He didn't rely on programs, events, or even a centralized building. Instead, He created a relational environment where disciples could observe His life, participate in His ministry, receive personalized coaching, and gradually take on greater responsibility.

This model was inherently multiplicative rather than merely additive. By deeply investing in a relatively small group of disciples who would then make more disciples, Jesus established a pattern that could reach the entire world without depending on elaborate systems or professional clergy.

# Jesus Modeled the Path for His Disciples

"The Saviour knew the character of the men whom He had chosen; all their weaknesses and errors were open before Him; He knew the perils through which they must pass, the responsibility that would rest upon them; and His heart yearned over these chosen ones. Alone upon a mountain near the Sea of Galilee He spent the entire night in prayer for them, while they were sleeping at the foot of the mountain."

DA pg 111

Jesus didn't just tell His disciples what to do - He showed them through His own life example. He modeled

# Self-Denial: Essential to True Discipleship

"No one can practice real benevolence without practicing genuine self-denial. Self-denial and the cross lie directly in the path of every Christian who is truly following Christ. Jesus says: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"

Testimonies for the Church, Volume 2, page 682

This powerful statement reminds us that authentic discipleship cannot be separated from self-denial. In our comfort-oriented culture, this essential aspect of following Jesus is often minimized or overlooked entirely.

Self-denial isn't an optional advanced practice for super-Christians - it's foundational to genuine discipleship. Jesus Himself modeled this through His incarnation, ministry, and ultimately His sacrifice on the cross.

## What Self-Denial Involves:

- Surrendering personal comfort for others' needs
- Sacrificing time and resources for kingdom purposes
- Submitting personal preferences to God's priorities
- Setting aside rights to serve others

Churches that want to revitalize disciple-making must recover this counter-cultural emphasis on self-denial. We cannot offer a sanitized, comfort-oriented version of following Jesus and expect to produce disciples who transform their world. True discipleship always involves the cross.

### Self-Denial in Disciple-Making

Making disciples requires significant self-denial as we invest time, open our lives, serve sacrificially, and prioritize others' growth above personal convenience.

When we embrace self-denial in our disciple-making efforts, we not only follow Jesus' example but also model for those we disciple what authentic Christian living looks like.

# The Ultimate Price of Discipleship

"Will every soul consider the fact that Christian discipleship includes self-denial, self-sacrifice, even to the laying down of life itself, if need be, for the sake of Him who has given His life for the life of the world?"

Counsels on Stewardship 288

## Comfortable Christianity

Our culture often promotes a version of faith that costs little and demands minimal sacrifice. This "Christianity Lite" may attract numbers but fails to produce disciples willing to pay the price for kingdom advance.

## Costly Discipleship

Jesus never disguised the cost of following Him. He explicitly called disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him regardless of the personal cost.

## Complete Surrender

True discipleship involves placing everything at Jesus' disposal—time, resources, relationships, ambitions, and even life itself—recognizing that He gave everything for us.

This sobering reminder challenges superficial approaches to discipleship that emphasize benefits while minimizing costs. Jesus never used bait-and-switch tactics to attract followers. He was transparent about the sacrifices involved in genuine discipleship.

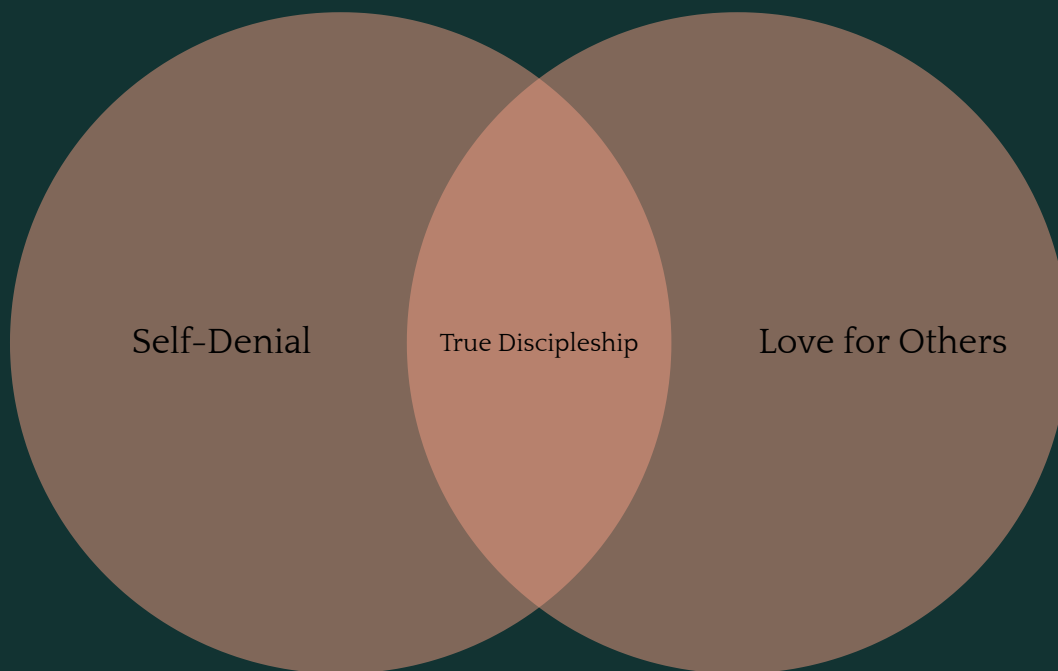
As we make disciples, we must recover this emphasis on counting the cost. When people understand from the beginning that following Jesus involves genuine sacrifice, they're prepared for the challenges of discipleship rather than being surprised and disillusioned when difficulties arise.



# Love: The Evidence of True Discipleship

"This love is the evidence of their discipleship. 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,' said Jesus, 'if ye have love one to another.' When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart."

DA 678.1

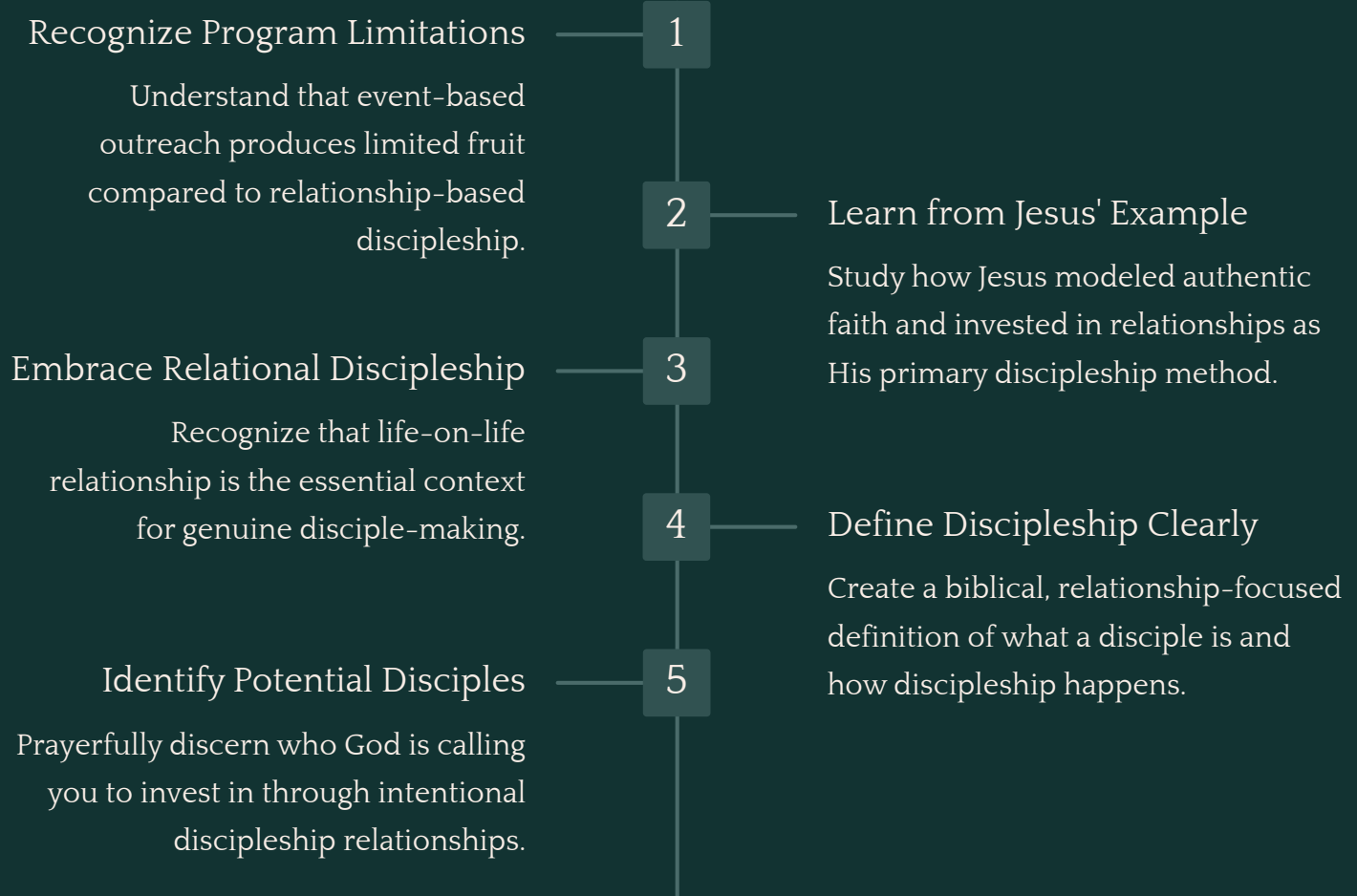


This profound passage reveals that love isn't just a nice addition to discipleship – it's the primary evidence that genuine discipleship is taking place. When Jesus wanted to give the world a way to identify His true followers, He didn't point to theological knowledge, religious practices, or even supernatural gifts. He pointed to love.

This supernatural love that binds disciples together witnesses to the world that something divine is happening in the community of believers. It demonstrates that God's transforming power is real and active, capable of overcoming the natural human tendency toward selfishness.

For our disciple-making efforts to bear authentic fruit, we must focus on cultivating communities where this kind of sacrificial love is both taught and demonstrated. This means creating contexts where believers learn to serve one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, and prefer one another in love.

# The Disciple-Making Journey Overview



The journey of revitalizing disciple-making begins with recognizing where we've strayed from the biblical model. Many churches have unwittingly substituted program-based outreach for relationship-based discipleship, producing diminishing returns despite increasing effort.

By returning to Jesus' example, we discover that effective discipleship happens primarily through intentional relationships where life is shared, faith is modeled, and transformation occurs naturally through consistent exposure to authentic Christian living.

This journey requires us to clearly define what a disciple is based on Jesus' example rather than cultural assumptions. With this foundation established, we can identify specific individuals in whom to invest, following Jesus' pattern of focusing deeply on a few for maximum long-term impact.

# The Great Commission: Making Disciples

Matt 28:19

| "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples..."

The central command of the Great Commission is not to "go," "baptize," or "teach" - though these are important. The main verb is "make disciples." Everything else supports this primary mission.

The Greek term "mathēteusate" means to make disciples or apprentices - people who follow, learn from, and become like their teacher. This goes far beyond conversion or church attendance to encompass complete life transformation.

Jesus' final command wasn't to build churches, create programs, or even win converts. It was specifically to make disciples - followers who would embody His teaching and continue His mission.

1

## False Assumptions

Many churches assume disciples are automatically made through church attendance, Bible study participation, or doctrinal knowledge acquisition.

2

## Biblical Reality

True discipleship requires intentional relationship, life modeling, guided practice, and spiritual accountability - just as Jesus demonstrated.



The implications for our churches are significant. If making disciples is our primary commission, then all church activities should be evaluated based on their contribution to this goal. Programs, services, and activities that don't contribute to making disciples may need to be reconsidered or restructured to align with our core mission.

# Multiplication Through Disciple-Making



These images illustrate the powerful principle of multiplication through disciple-making. When disciples make disciples who make disciples, the impact grows exponentially rather than linearly.

1

Discipler

One person  
committed to making  
disciples who make  
disciples

3

Disciples

Each discipler  
investing deeply in  
just a few people

2...

Investment

Intentional  
relationship and  
training over time

59,049

Potential Impact

If each disciple makes  
3 more disciples every  
2 years for 10 years

This multiplication approach stands in stark contrast to addition-based growth strategies that rely on attracting more people to events or services. While addition can produce initial growth, multiplication ultimately reaches far more people through the exponential power of disciples making disciples.

The key is ensuring that discipleship includes not just spiritual formation but also equipping disciples to disciple others - creating a self-replicating movement rather than a dependent relationship.



# Finding People of Peace

## People of Peace

A critical question for disciple-makers is: "Who are People of Peace for you?" This concept comes from Jesus' instructions in Luke 10, where He sent disciples to find those who would receive them and their message.

People of Peace are individuals who:

- Welcome you and your spiritual influence
- Are open to spiritual conversations
- Respond positively to your servant leadership
- Take initiative in the relationship
- Reciprocate by engaging and inviting connection

These individuals represent open doors for discipleship investment. Rather than trying to force relationships with resistant people, Jesus taught His followers to focus on those who showed receptivity.

"People of peace receive the blessings I offer and take them to heart. They engage in conversations and take the initiative to interact, not just wait for me to start. They also reciprocate in conversation and invitation to connect. They appreciate the servant leadership I bring to the relationship."



### ✓ Identifying People of Peace

Look for those who respond positively to your spiritual influence, ask questions, and seem hungry for more connection.

Finding your People of Peace involves prayerful discernment. Ask God to show you those in whom you should invest deeply. Not everyone will be receptive, and that's okay - Jesus instructed His disciples to move on when they encountered rejection rather than trying to force relationships.

# The Person of Peace Model

1. They accept your Blessing with joy and show true appreciation.

2. They Respond with openness and time for your mentorship

3. They have become invested in the relationship and you are no longer the only one initiating time together.

## Who are People of Peace?

"And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you." Luke 10:6



They Accept Your Blessing



They Respond to Your Blessing and Your leadership



You Are Not the Only One Initiating Time Together



(Relationship Seems Inevitable)

This visual captures the Person of Peace concept illustrated in Luke 10. Jesus instructed His disciples to look for those who would welcome them, feed them, and receive their message. These hospitable receivers became gateways to wider ministry in each community.

The Person of Peace approach shifts our evangelism strategy from trying to reach everyone to focusing on those who show receptivity. This isn't about exclusivity, but about strategic investment where the soil is most fertile.

### Biblical Examples of People of Peace

- Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15)
- The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34)
- Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10)
- The Samaritan woman (John 4)

### Key Characteristics

- Receptive to spiritual conversations
- Possibly connected to a network of relationships
- Respected within their community
- Open to new spiritual insights

### Your Response

- Invest deeply in these relationships
- Disciple with an eye toward helping them see their influence potential
- Equip them to reach their own relationships
- Allow them to contextualize the message

This approach recognizes that God is already at work preparing hearts, and our task is to discern where that preparation is happening rather than trying to force results where there's resistance.



# Characteristics of People of Peace

## Definition Example of Persons of Peace

People of peace receive the blessings I offer and take them to heart. They engage in conversations and take the initiative to interact, not just wait for me to start. They also reciprocate in conversation and invitation to connect. They appreciate the servant leadership I bring to the relationship.

A Person of Peace isn't necessarily someone who already shares your faith. Rather, they're someone open to spiritual influence and relationship. In the Gospels, many People of Peace were those society had marginalized or overlooked, yet they became gateways to entire communities.

The key is receptivity - not necessarily to a religious message initially, but to genuine relationship and the spiritual benefits you bring to their life.

### Welcoming

They receive you and your presence in their life with openness rather than resistance.

### Responsive

They engage with spiritual conversations and insights rather than dismissing them.

### Initiating

They take steps to deepen the relationship rather than waiting passively.

### Reciprocating

They return invitations and engage in mutual exchange rather than one-sided receiving.

Finding your People of Peace often requires being attentive to divine appointments and unexpected opportunities. Prayer is essential, asking God to lead you to those whose hearts are prepared for deeper spiritual investment.

# Intimate Disciples: Quality Over Quantity

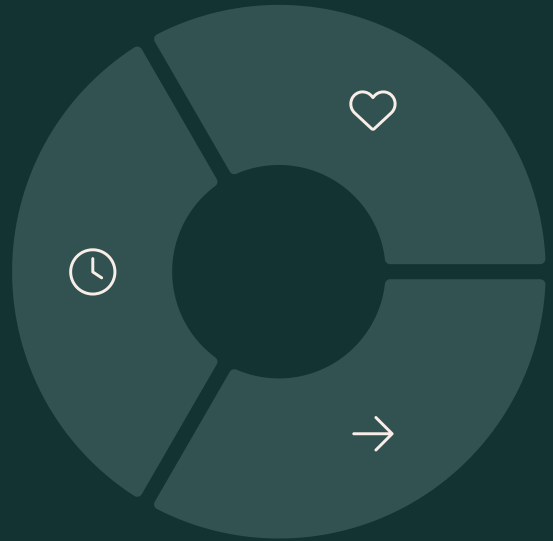
## These are Intimate Disciples

While the concept of People of Peace helps us identify those who are open to relationship, we must recognize that intimate discipleship relationships require significant investment. Jesus modeled this by focusing deeply on twelve disciples, with particular attention to three (Peter, James, and John).

## How Many Should I Have?

Likely not more than 3, but if you are a couple then you may have other couples. For example, two or three families may be your people of peace.

This principle of focused investment reflects Jesus' own practice. While He ministered to crowds, His deepest investment was in a small group of disciples with whom He shared life intimately.



### Time Constraints

Genuine discipleship requires significant time investment. More relationships means less depth per relationship.



### Emotional Capacity

Deep discipling relationships involve emotional investment and spiritual burden-bearing.



### Multiplication Focus

The goal is not endless personal disciples but disciples who make disciples themselves.

By focusing deeply on a few, we create the conditions for genuine transformation that leads to multiplication. This "less is more" approach may seem counter-intuitive in a culture obsessed with numbers, but it reflects Jesus' own strategy for changing the world through deeply transformed disciples who would make more disciples.

# Stewardship of Discipleship Investment

"To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability...For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Matt 25:15 and 29

This parable provides profound insight for disciple-making. Just as the master in the story distributed resources according to each servant's ability to manage them, God entrusts us with discipleship relationships according to our capacity to steward them well.

The principle is clear: those who faithfully invest in what they've been given will be entrusted with more. Those who fail to invest what they have will ultimately lose even that.

This applies directly to disciple-making. When we faithfully invest in the few disciples God has given us, our capacity for impact grows. But if we neglect these relationships, our disciple-making influence diminishes.

This stewardship approach to discipleship prevents us from overextending ourselves while maximizing long-term impact. By focusing on quality investment in a few rather than superficial connection with many, we create the conditions for sustainable multiplication.

- Start Small

Begin with one or two disciples that you can invest in deeply.

- Invest Faithfully

Pour yourself into these relationships with consistency and intentionality.

- Equip for Multiplication

Train your disciples to make disciples themselves rather than creating dependency.

- Expand Gradually

As your capacity grows through experience, gradually increase your direct disciples.

# Defining a Disciple Based on Jesus' Model



Respond to  
Call

Shared Life

Spiritual  
Growth

Practice  
Ministry

Make Disciples

How do you define a disciple based on the relational practices of Jesus? This question cuts to the heart of our discipleship efforts. Too often, our implicit definition of a disciple revolves around knowledge acquisition, behavior modification, or church participation rather than the transformational relationship Jesus modeled.

When we examine Jesus' approach, we see that a disciple is:

## A Follower

Someone who has responded to Jesus' call to "follow me" - making a decisive commitment to walk in His ways rather than their own.

## A Learner

Someone who learns from Jesus not just through formal teaching but through shared life experiences where faith is observed and absorbed.

## A Practitioner

Someone who puts Jesus' teachings into practice, not just accumulating knowledge but living differently as a result.

## A Reproducer

Someone who makes other disciples, continuing the multiplication process that Jesus initiated with the Twelve.

This relational definition moves us beyond simplistic metrics like attendance or knowledge to focus on the transformational journey of becoming like Jesus and participating in His mission.

# Creating Your Church's Disciple Definition

This question deserves thoughtful consideration by every church leadership team. Your definition of a disciple shapes everything in your ministry – from how you structure programs to how you measure success.

A strong definition should be:

- **Biblical** – rooted in Jesus' example and teaching
- **Relational** – emphasizing transformation through relationship rather than just information
- **Clear** – simple enough for everyone to understand and remember
- **Comprehensive** – addressing heart, head, and hands
- **Multiplicative** – including the expectation of making more disciples

## Sample Definition

A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being transformed by Jesus, and joining His mission to make disciples who love God and others sacrificially in everyday life.

Take time to craft a definition that captures Jesus' relational approach to discipleship. Then evaluate all your church activities against this definition, asking whether they contribute to making disciples as you've defined them.

### Discuss

Gather your leadership team to study Jesus' disciple-making approach and discuss the essential elements of discipleship.

### Define

Craft a clear, compelling definition of what a disciple is based on your biblical study.

### Deploy

Communicate this definition consistently and align all ministry activities to support this vision of discipleship.

Your definition becomes the North Star for your church's disciple-making efforts, providing clarity and focus for the entire congregation.