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Where Do I Find More Disciplers For My Men?

By Dr. Gary Yagel

What pastor has not asked himself this question? What ruling elder has not wished he had more time to spend with the men under his care? What church leader hasn't recognized the truth that if the church could better disciple its men, everyone—wives, children, the church, the community, the culture—would benefit?

Most of us have seen first-hand the benefits of one-on-one discipleship. I saw a brother that God allowed me to lead to Christ go off to Penn State and grow enormously through his involvement with the Navigators. My wife, also, was disciplined by the Navigators during her time at Virginia Tech. The power of the multiplication model of discipleship is undeniable. In Dawson Trotman's booklet, *Born to Reproduce*, he points out that if a Christian led someone to faith every 6 months and trained that new Christian to do the same, the whole world would be evangelized in 15 ½ years!

This mentoring/multiplication methodology was formative in my early thinking about discipleship. To "disciple" someone was synonymous with "mentoring" them, and I saw the power of the multiplication principle proved by the effectiveness of the Navigator ministry around the world. I began to see this mentor/multiplication methodology as normative for the church. After all didn't Jesus "disciple" the twelve and then expect them to "disciple" younger believers? Doesn't 2 Timothy 2:2 teach this multiplication principle, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also?"

I set out as a church planter with the goal of discipling my elders expecting them to turn around and disciple those under their care. Despite having great elders, this approach totally failed. I did meet with my elders one-on-one, but they were not "disciplers" as I was using the term. In subsequent years I have worked with hundreds of PCA churches (in my role as men's ministry coach) and though there may be exceptions, I have yet to see the mentor/multiplication model that works so well in the Navigators, work in the local church.

Perhaps this model is the normative model of discipleship for the church and we are just not working it properly or not committed enough to it, or both. But, could it be that we need to rethink what the normative biblical model is for discipleship?

What was Jesus' discipleship methodology? Certainly he mentored the twelve. But there is no record that he had lunch with just Peter on Monday, with just James on Tuesday, or just John on Wednesday. His discipleship methodology was to call his disciples to be a part of a band of brothers. The book of Acts does not reveal a record of church growth in which each of the twelve chose two or three men to "disciple" for awhile, who then each disciplined another few men. Paul did have his Timothy; certainly mentoring is appropriate and wise. But the evidence does not support the premise that a mentoring/multiplication model was the normative method for "making disciples" as we are commanded to do in Matthew 28.

It must also be pointed out that 2 Timothy 2:2 "and that which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will be able to teach others

also” does not support the mentoring/multiplication method of discipleship as normative either. This verse is not talking about Paul’s one-on-one time discipling Timothy (a PRIVATE matter)—but about insuring that sound teaching continue in the church at a time when the New Testament had not yet been completed. Paul’s focus is his PUBLIC TEACHING, “*that which you’ve heard from me **in the presence of many witnesses***—not his PRIVATE DISCIPLESHIP meetings with Timothy. Paul wants the content of his teaching, i.e. the gospel, passed on “*to reliable men who are able to **teach** (not disciple) others.*”

If the normative process for discipleship is not the mentoring/multiplication model, what is? Paul reveals it to us in his letter to the Ephesians, his letter that is most focused on the normative life of the church.

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (4:15-16).

The normative biblical discipleship process by which the members of the body grow into Christ is to get each member connected in Christ’s body so that they are **speaking the truth to one another in love**.

There are three vital parts to this normative discipleship process. First the group dynamics must promote the **speaking of every** person. The group for connection may, on some occasions be large, where the teaching elder uses his gifts to proclaim the Word; but there must also be a small enough connection that each member participates. The emphasis in this text on *every member* connection cannot be denied. Thus, what is in view is a small group connection (band of brothers or sisters) or a Jonathan and David type of relationship.

Second, the topic of discussion is **truth**. The meeting agenda is applying the **truth** of Scripture to everyday life. That is what Jesus said disciples do... “*teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:20). A further aspect of **speaking the truth** is being transparent, honest with one another. Such below-the-surface connection requires the growth of trust within the group.

The third component is the developing of a bond of **love**. Undergirding the honest application of Scripture to each person’s life is a growing love for one another. It is in the context of this real connection that the numerous one-another commands of Scripture are best lived out: encourage one another, stir one another up to love and good deeds, admonish one another, confess your sins to one another, etc.

The normative process for making disciples is to getting members regularly connected below the surface to discuss the application of Scripture to their everyday lives, being connected to the body through a genuine bond of love. Now it is clear why the Navigator’s mentoring/multiplication method is so powerful. It does exactly what Eph. 4:15-16 says builds up the body! It gets men with men or women with women connected in a bond of love to regularly discuss how Scripture applies to life. That is what makes the mentoring/multiplication method of discipleship so powerful. So, we must praise God for those who are called to mentor and turn them loose in the body to use their gifts!

But Eph. 4:15-16 does not imply that the connections in the body that build it up are older Christian/younger Christian or that groups are expected as groups to multiply. The goal of church leadership is not to find enough “disciplers” to mentor each man or woman in the body.

It is to get each member of the body connected to the other members where they are regularly ***“speaking the truth to one another in love.”***

In men’s ministry we are finding this understanding of the discipleship process to be enormously freeing. Instead of trying to find enough “disciplers” for all the men, more and more churches are challenging their men to forge bonds of brotherhood for encouragement and strength with a Christian friend or two and giving them the tools to help them. The result is that the men are “discipling each other.” What is ironic is that right now in the PCA hundreds of older Christian men who would never respond to a request to be a “discipler” are connecting with younger men in these “Forging Bonds of Brotherhood” groups, where real discipleship is happening. (To find out about these tools look for *Forging Bonds of Brotherhood* at the PCA bookstore or email me gyagel@forgingbonds.org.)

Where do I find more disciplers for my men? Could it be that they are right under our noses in our congregations and that our goal must be getting all our men regularly connecting below the surface with some other brothers? Could it be that the normative discipleship process is not Bill discipling Fred, but Christ, himself, continuing to disciple his people—through his body?