

7 Step

Mobilize and Multiply Ministry

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31, NKJV).

Regardless of your strategy or model for planting churches, at some point believers need to be mobilized so that ministry will be multiplied. The very heart of Jesus’ Great Commission is the call to “make disciples.” A believer’s experiences and understanding of what it means to be a disciple greatly impacts his or her method or approach for mobilizing and multiplying ministry.

Asking the question, “What does a disciple look and behave like?” can be a healthy exercise. One’s response to this question often depends on his understanding of church. Those who see discipleship through the eyes of a programmatic approach to church might describe a disciple as someone who attends certain worship services throughout the week, gives an offering on Sunday morning, serves on a committee, and participates in the programs of the church. On the other hand, one who sees discipleship from a relational approach (house church or small group church) might describe discipleship in terms of commitment and participation in community.

While there are many ways to describe what it means to be a disciple, Jesus extended three commands that get at the heart of what it means to be a disciple. At the same time, these commands address three basic processes that occur within the organized church following some type of public launch of ministry.

Come and See

In John 1:39 Jesus invited the first disciples to “come . . . and see.” Upon hearing this invitation, we are told that these disciples went and spent a day with Him. Planting a church builds an environment where people can come and see.

In today’s context, many of those with little or no Christian memory often begin the discipleship process prior to conversion. They make a decision to convert only after they join community and experience the church as a community. Within this context it becomes the church planter’s responsibility to create an environment where unreached people can “come and see.” There are a variety of environments that can be utilized for this type of evangelism: one’s home, a small group, a missions opportunity, a social gathering, and/or a worship service. In church planting, most leaders utilize small groups or a worship service as the consistent environment where relationships and experiences can come together.

There are three factors the church planter should be concerned with in establishing an environment that will move people toward relationship and experience. These factors are the attraction, pace, and grace factors.

- *Attraction Factor:* The attraction factor relates to creating environments that encourage ongoing participation. Regardless of what kind of environment one is creating, unreached people are most often looking for authenticity and relevance. If you can gain their trust and you meet a need, they are most likely to make the next step. A simple sermon series on real life issues dealt with in an honest way does much to creating this kind of environment.
- *Pace Factor:* Through the years, many of us who have been involved in planting churches have noticed that there is a direct correlation between the endurance of one’s commitment and the time taken to make that commitment. Creating an environment where people are not rushed or pushed to make the next step, but where they are allowed to come at their own pace, results in long-term discipleship. Jesus allowed the disciples to progress at their own pace, which for the most part appears to have taken about three years.
- *Grace Factor:* We shouldn’t expect unbelievers to act like believers before they are believers. It is human nature to long for acceptance. Creating an accepting, grace-filled environment will give many unreached people what they need to continue the journey. Jesus had no tolerance for the self-righteous. The example of how He dealt with the woman caught in the very act of adultery in John 8:1-11 is a perfect example of grace.

In this kind of environment, people tend to assimilate around a number of activities and relationships. The following examples represent natural opportunities where unreached people can “come and see.”

1. The table is an excellent place to engage people. A simple study of the life of Jesus demonstrates that the table played an important role in His relationships. Everywhere He went He sat down at a table with others and “broke bread.” On a practical level, many new churches do a good job of utilizing their hospitality ministries in moving people toward a deeper commitment. It can be something as simple as a cup of coffee and a donut before or after a worship service, a cookout for the entire church, or one-on-one meals at a local restaurant. Food has a way of breaking down barriers and is a proven means for creating intimacy in most cultures.
2. Small groups are another proven way of engaging people. Once someone decides to participate in some type of small group setting, the likelihood of them dropping out decreases significantly. Church planters must be wise in providing a variety of small group opportunities that are attractive to unreached people.
3. Ministry and task are key for moving people toward a healthy commitment. In a new church setting, there are many tasks that can be performed by non-believers. When this happens, individuals are validated and tend to move forward on their journey toward authentic discipleship.
4. Information can prove to be invaluable in the process of moving people toward discipleship. Helping unreached people understand what it means to be a disciple in simple and organic terms is essential. In addition, communicating the vision, mission, and values of the church as it relates to your commitment to making disciples is crucial. Many existing and new churches utilize some type of newcomer orientation and life development process for accomplishing this.

Follow Me

While “come and see” focuses on encouraging those who are searching, the command to “Follow Me” (found in Mark 1:17) encourages those who are deciding to become fully devoted followers of Christ. Once again, a major obstacle to following Jesus is a simple understanding of what it means to be a disciple. Most of us make it far too complicated. What does it mean to be a devoted follower of Jesus? Let me suggest four simple behaviors.

1. *Live like Jesus lived.*—While many people today are turned off to the church, few are turned off to Jesus. Teaching and preaching through the life of Jesus is a must in a new church. Texts like the “Sermon on the Mount” take on a new relevance as unreached people discern whether or not Christianity is for them. Just what does it mean to live like Jesus lived? Perhaps the best Scripture for understanding this statement is found in Philippians 2:5-8:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

The single characteristic that describes Jesus is His willingness to decrease Himself even to the extent of death. His motivation was His commitment to the will of the Father. Living like Jesus lived is a daily surrender to the character and calling of Jesus. As John the Baptist suggested, “I must decrease in order that He might increase.”

2. *Love like Jesus loved.*—The life of Jesus is told through a collection of stories and pictures we call the gospels. These stories and pictures give us a vivid accounting of how Jesus loved. His death on the cross demonstrates the extent of His Love. To love like Jesus loved can be seen clearly in His relationship with His disciples, His commitment to Mary and Martha, His devotion to His own mother, His grace demonstrated to the woman caught in the very act of adultery, His tears for Jerusalem, His friendship with “sinners,” and His forgiveness to His executioners. Loving like Jesus loved is a lifelong quest of extending His love to those around us in practical ways.

3. *Lead like Jesus led.*—Jesus is the greatest leader of all time. He spent His life with a specific mission, but in the process of fulfilling that mission He poured Himself extensively into the lives of 12 individuals, while maintaining various levels of influence over many more. In return, those into whom He poured His life multiplied themselves into the lives of many others. If one follows carefully the leadership of Jesus throughout the gospels a pattern evolves. This pattern consists of the following process:

- *He mobilized*—He invited people to enter into community with Him.
- *He modeled*—He lived His life of love in the context of this community.

- *He mentored*—He sent those in community with Him out to “do likewise.” This was most often accompanied by a time of debriefing.
- *He multiplied*—He ultimately left them in charge of His mission as He returned to the Father.

4. *Leave what Jesus left behind.*—Ultimately, a disciple leaves what Jesus left behind, which is people who live like He lived, love like He loved, and lead like He led. The true mark of a disciple is that they leave a legacy of other disciples who are represented in future generations.

The life of Jesus demonstrates what it means to make disciples from a very organic perspective. A danger we face in program discipleship is that it becomes more about what you do than what you become. When Henry Blackaby was asked about the disciplines involved in discipleship, he suggested that the problem with talking about them is we begin to focus on the disciplines when Christianity is about a relationship. This is the danger in setting up organizational processes within the church. Priority should always be placed on the process and not the procedure. Once a clear understanding of this happens, the new church can create environments and processes for facilitating a maturing relationship. An example of an organizational process developed for encouraging a growing relationship among believers within the framework of a church is the baseball diamond that Rick Warren uses to mobilize disciples at Saddleback Church.

A key question to answer is how will you encourage the development of disciples within your context? What processes will you put in place to serve their needs for development?

Go and Make Disciples

Jesus' final words to His disciples were related to multiplication. In Matthew 28:19-20, He said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Multiplying your influence as a disciple is the very essence of the Great Commission. God has chosen to use the planting of His church among every unreached people to spread this influence.

Multiplication is a mind-set, as well as a commitment. It begins with the under-

standing that we are called to be and make disciples. Therefore, multiplication must be part of the DNA that runs through the church planter and the new church. When it does, one can see multiplication at work at every level. When multiplication is part of the very fabric that drives the new church, you see the multiplication in every aspect of the church. It is reflected by believers, small groups, ministry, and churches being multiplied.

Inherent to multiplication is our understanding of church. If we see church only as a large organization with paid staff, large buildings, and extensive programming then multiplication is going to be very difficult. At best, we can expect addition. However, if we see church in a more organic form and are willing to plant it in its most transferable form then multiplication can be sure from day one.

When it comes to multiplication, it is essential that we have a biblical understanding of a number of areas:

- *Discipleship*—At the risk of sounding redundant, in order to multiply disciples we must understand the very nature of a healthy disciple. As mentioned earlier, this is one reason Henry Blackaby refused to define it in terms of disciplines. This is also the reason we choose to define discipleship in very simple organic terms such as living like Jesus lived, loving like Jesus loved, leading like Jesus led, and leaving behind what Jesus left behind.
- *Community*—When we come to Christ He invites us into community with other disciples. This community often takes the form of some type of small group ministry and structure. The challenge we face in facilitating community is setting it up in a way that encourages multiplication. This requires a high degree of trust and a willingness to relinquish control. In addition, there has to be a large amount of modeling and mentoring in order for effective multiplication to take place. Lastly, one also must be willing to let others fail in order to multiply community.
- *Leaders*—A church planter made the comment that it is our job to qualify the unqualified. The key to multiplying community and churches is multiplying leaders. From day one, this is the challenge in a church plant. Every church planter needs to be strategic in pouring his life into a handful of potential leaders. Once he has identified this group he can begin giving ministry away to them as they develop. His ultimate objective is to work himself out of a job through the multiplication of these leaders.

- *Churches*—In an environment where disciples, communities, and leaders are multiplied, church multiplication is possible. A good example of church multiplication can be found in the ministry of Ralph Moore, founding pastor of the Hope Chapel movement. Ralph has a vision for planting 500 churches and has recently planted over 150 new churches. He has structured his small group ministry around the concept of mini churches. Because his passion is developing leaders, when he sees a mini church grow under the influence of an aspiring leader, he releases it to become a church. This is a simple expression of organic church planting. It is obvious that the Hope Chapel movement has multiplication in its DNA. The multiplication of churches does not have to be complicated, but it needs to be intentional.

In conclusion, the three commands of Christ give us a biblical foundation for assimilating believers, mobilizing disciples, and multiplying the church. Jesus' command to "come and see" gives us key insight into the need for developing environments for providing a safe place for those searching to experience a dangerous gospel. His command to "follow Me" calls us to a lifestyle of discipleship that focuses on life change. And finally, His command to "go make disciples" calls us to multiply our influence at every level.

Additional resources to help "Mobilize and Multiply Ministry" can be found at www.churchplantingvillage.net.

Books for Further Reading

Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

John Ortberg, *The Life You're Always Wanted*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

Andy Stanley, *The Next Generation Leader*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2003.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.