Discipleship in Church Planting:
Some Guidelines to Move Us Forward



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Smashwords Edition

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To the Great Disciple-Maker

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Introduction

Evangelism is the tip of the Great Commission iceberg. The commission for missionaries to make disciples of all nations begins with calling others to repentance and faith in Jesus. But, it does not end there. This commission also involves teaching these new Kingdom citizens to obey all of Jesus' commands (Matt 28:20).

This brief book offers some guidelines to assist you in the activity beyond the tip of the iceberg. While church planters recognize the importance of healthy disciples, churches, and leaders, oftentimes, they do not know where to begin. And when they do begin, many times they do not have the guidelines in place to direct their labors. If biblical church planting is evangelism that results in new churches, then what takes place after that initial group of Kingdom citizens begins following Jesus?

This book helps establish a model of discipleship for the new church consisting of new Kingdom citizens. The reality is that this book is not designed to be either exhaustive or extensive regarding the topic of discipleship. Rather, I want to provide you with some tools to get started. And since some of you are well past the starting-line, you may find this book completely irrelevant to your labors.

This book is for use among church planting teams. Download additional copies for others with whom you are working. Portions of this book come from a series of blog posts that I wrote at www.jdpayne.org and my book *Discovering Church Planting*. Most of the posts remain unedited and in their original form. They have been compiled here in a workbook fashion.

Following each of the chapters, you will find a series of questions and space for your thoughts. Take time to work through each of these questions with your team. It is my hope and prayer that such a collaborative effort will better prepare you for your labors in the field. May the Lord use this content to stimulate your thinking, guide your conversations, and influence your church planting practices as you make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to follow our Lord.

While I have written other books, this is my first attempt at publishing an e-book. What you are getting here is a raw product, without professional editorial work to make my sandpaper grammar all nice and silky-smooth. But the price is write and I do right real good. :)

If you find this book to be of value to you and your ministry, please encourage others to obtain a copy. My desire is for this work to remain free to all. However, I would like to ask that in return for this small gift that you—and anyone else who downloads a copy—would subscribe to my blog at the address above and tell at least three other people about this resource.

While I take full responsibility for the content of this work, I must offer a great word of appreciation to my secretary, Amber Walsh, who assisted me with numerous format and design matters.

Chapter 1
Set the Example

The Matthean account of the Great Commission commands us to make disciples, baptize, and teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. While I have often stated that church planting is evangelism that results in new churches, I want to begin this work by addressing the aspect of the Great Commission that follows conversion.

I am surprised at the dearth of practical materials available to assist missionaries in the early days of teaching the new believers (I wonder if this is because many of us in the West plant churches primarily with long-time Kingdom Citizens, rather than with new Kingdom Citizens, just in from the harvest field.). Knowing of this lack of resources, some of you need to develop practical materials for church planters working with new believers. And once developed, you need to spread the word about their availability. I hope this book will help in the meantime.

Set the Example in Right Belief and Right Action

Unfortunately, in much of North American Christianity, discipleship is mostly defined in terms of providing new believers with only Bible knowledge. The Scriptures, however, reveal a different picture of the elements involved in discipleship training. Clearly, right doctrine must be communicated, but there is more to the Great Commission than orthodoxy (right belief). Orthopraxy (right practice) is a must.

On numerous occasions, the apostle Paul called the new churches to obedience in Christ. He

also pointed to his life (belief and practice) as a model for the new churches to follow. Though the apostle was quick to note he had not obtained his heavenly reward (Philippians 3:12-16) and was still with sin (Romans 7:14-25), he had no problem teaching new believers that they should imitate his ways in both orthodoxy AND orthopraxy:

> "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." (Philippians 3:17, ESV)
>
> "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV)
>
> "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate." (2 Thessalonians 3:6-9, ESV)

Paul also exhorted other church planters who worked with him to establish a healthy example for the new churches in Ephesus and on Crete. He wrote:

> "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12, ESV)
>
> "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of

> good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us." (Titus 2:7-8, ESV)

Contemporary church planters must make certain they are leading lifestyles that can be reproduced by new believers. Today's missionaries would do well to remember the example set by the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, and impart both the gospel AND their very lives to others (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Chapter 1 - Questions to Consider:

1.) Are you teaching both right doctrine and right practice? Are you teaching Bible truths and teaching others to obey? If not, why not?

2.) How much of your "teaching them" is based on imitation?

3.) Are you able to tell the new believers to imitate you as your imitate Christ? Why or why not?

4.) Is your "teaching them" primarily a lecture model, imparting knowledge with the expectation that they will follow through and apply it? If so, does this work well in your context? If not, why not?

5.) In your context, what is the best way to set an example before the new believers?

Chapter 2
Keep It Simple

Church planters must work diligently to keep the discipleship process simple, such is the biblical way. Keeping it simple means teaching biblical depth. The same apostle who practiced teaching the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:27) was the same individual who desired the Word of God to spread rapidly and with honor (2 Thessalonians 3:1), and also planted churches rapidly. Contemporary church planters must not forget this aspect of Paul's ministry. It can be rapid and it can be healthy.

An irony in the Kingdom is that the deep teachings of the faith are not mysteries that only a few scholarly individuals know, but rather are simple enough to be grasped by every Spirit-filled believer and passed on to others. An amazing aspect of our Lord's grace is He condescends to His people so that we can understand His truths.

It is amazing that the great truths of the faith can be communicated by highly literate people to other highly literate people. And they can be communicated by the illiterate to other illiterate people. And when such truths are understood and applied to life, both groups are able to grow in their sanctification.

While we in the West spend a great deal of time writing blogs, articles, and books about the faith once for all delivered to the saints (myself included), may we never believe that the doctrines of the Scriptures are so complicated that only a few super-spiritual people can understand and communicate them to others. Remember, Jesus rejoiced in the fact that the Father did not make His revelation known to the wise, but the "children" (Luke 10:21). In my

ministry on several occasions, I have been more impressed by the spiritual maturity, biblical knowledge, and depth of questions asked by some of the members of the churches where I've served, than with some of the excellent articulation of polysyllabic theological jargon that I have read and heard from outstanding scholars.

May we understand the truth that God has chosen the foolish of the world to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). If such is the case, then we should not be surprised that the religious leaders of the day were amazed by the character and teaching of the unschooled apostles (Acts 4:13).

Even Peter seemed to have confidence in his readers' ability to understand the truths of Paul's "hard" writings and avoid being "carried away" and losing their "stability" (2 Peter 3:15-18, ESV). If Peter could have such confidence in new believers, we can as well. For we know that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV). Therefore, church planters should not assume that just because it is THE book of Romans that these new believers are not able to understand such deep spiritual truths.

Here is a reality to ponder as we think about keeping the discipleship process simple: How old in the faith were the new churches to whom Paul wrote his letters? Or consider this matter: Can the whole council of God be communicated to new believers and elders be raised up from those believers in as few as three years, such as in Ephesus (and even in less time in other areas)?

In no way am I advocating that the Scriptures prescribe to us a timeline for church

planting and leadership development processes. Also, I am not stating that our strategies today must be based on three years. However, we must be honest and say that Paul was able to experience such a work of the Spirit even in polytheistic-temple to Artemis-Gentile-pagan-demon-possessed-Ephesus (see Acts 19; 20:17-38). Can such missionary practice happen again, and be healthy? Unfortunately, most of us today believe such is an impossibility.

We must communicate the depths of the Scriptures in simple ways that people in their contexts can understand and apply to their lives.

> **Keeping it Simple #1**: The deep truths of the Scriptures are simple truths able to be grasped by Spirit-filled new believers.
>
> **Keeping it Simple #2:** The great mysteries that God has chosen to reveal to us are able to be understood and applied to life by the literate and the illiterate alike.
>
> **Keeping it Simple #3**: High expectations for healthy disciples requires teaching the commands of Jesus and holding people accountable for obedience.
>
> **Keeping it Simple #4**: It is not necessary to use complex discipleship and leadership development models and complex preaching and teaching methods to see the Spirit work to bring about great maturity in Christ.
>
> **Keeping it Simple #5**: Complex models and methods are not highly reproducible by new believers and new churches and are not likely to help facilitate the

multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches.

Keeping it Simple #6: Great pastors of great churches are not always highly educated according to the standards of their societies.

Keeping it Simple #7: Simple is not the same as watering down the truths of the Scriptures. Simple is biblical!

Chapter 2 - Questions to Consider:

1) How complex are your methods for discipleship training, preaching and teaching, and leading in the ministry? Is your example an example that new believers can follow to grow in the Scriptures, and use to preach and teach the Scriptures to others?

2) Do you "SEE" the potential in the new believers while you are teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded?

3) Are you teaching the whole council of God to the new churches you are serving? If not, why not? If yes, are you keeping it simple? If not, why not?

4) Do you look on the fields of lostness in your area and "SEE" new believers to come from those fields? Most church planters do. But, do you look on the same fields of lostness and "SEE" pastors for new churches to come? If not, why not?

5) What is the biblical description of a fruit-bearing disciple of Jesus? Are those requirements the same requirements to be a fruit-bearing disciple of Jesus in your context? If not, why not?

6) What is the biblical description of a pastor/elder? Are those requirements the same requirements to be a pastor/elder in your context? If not, why not?

Chapter 3
Begin at the Individual Level

There is a real temptation for church planters to concentrate their efforts on discipleship at the corporate level first, assuming growth in Christ will trickle down to the individual level. While sanctification does happen at the corporate level, it is not healthy to see this area as the primary means by which people are to grow in the faith. Church planters should not put all of their eggs into this one basket. In fact, I would add, that church planters should keep this basket small and use larger baskets at the individual and small group levels. One of the reasons we focus so much energy at the corporate level to see maturation in Christ is because that was the model most of us have experienced throughout our lives.

Remember, we imitate what is modeled before us.

The temptation to focus on the corporate level, at the sacrifice to the individual level, must be overcome. Though it is not glamorous to spend more time with a few individuals as opposed to a crowd, it is necessary for healthy church growth. Church planters who attempt to begin their work by trying to disciple a crowd of people are likely to end up with a church consisting of many nominal levels of commitment. The Kingdom Ethic, however, demands that the church consist of a membership that is sold-out to the Lord.

Since the most basic unit of the local church is the individual, church planters should begin the discipleship process at the individual level. Here are a few reasons for this practice:

First, this way best follows the pattern established by Jesus. Though he taught the crowds, he spent more time pouring His life into a few disciples.

Second, it is easier to reproduce a disciple rather than a corporate worship gathering. Since one of the primary responsibilities of church planters is the multiplication of disciples, we need to be working to assist believers in spreading the good news in their circles of influence.

Third, it is difficult to establish maturity at the corporate level and expect it to be transferred to the individual level, if a healthy understanding of discipleship does not already exist at the individual level. Instill the proper DNA in the individual level, then the small group level, and finally the corporate level, rather than in reverse order.

Just a reminder! Throughout this book, the new church is understood to be a new group of followers of Jesus. It is easier to follow these guidelines when you begin your work with them in mind, not after the church is planted with a great deal of structure in place.

Chapter 3 - Questions to Consider:

1) Is your primary paradigm of discipleship for your people done through a large group meeting? Why? How well is it working to grow them in obedience to Christ? If it is working well, how do you determine that it is working well?

2) How much of your discipleship process is focused on the individual learning spiritual disciplines, etc.? Do you feel that enough energy is being put into this level? If not, what needs to change and how will it change?

3) Are you experiencing pressure to begin corporate level discipleship activities much too early in the church planting process? If so, what needs to change so that more time can be spent on the individual (and maybe small group) level? How will you make this change?

4) Have you read Robert Coleman's classic *The Master Plan of Evangelism*? If not, buy it, read it, apply it–BEFORE you begin your work as a missionary. If you have read it, have you applied the principles to your church planting labors? If not, why not?

Chapter 4
Teach Obedience

Teaching obedience does not require complex paradigms, diagrams, and charts. It does not require advanced degrees. It does require us to know our people, to know ourselves, to know how to communicate effectively to new believers, and to know how to hold them accountable.

The purposes of God stated in the Scriptures are understandable to those who come to faith in him. Rich and poor, academic and unschooled, literates and illiterates are all capable of growing as disciples by obeying Christ's commands in the Bible. In Matthew's account of the Great Commission, we read, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20, ESV). Moving beyond the point of conversion, the Church is to teach others to obey Jesus.

If we are making disciples (followers of Jesus), but failing to teach them how to obey Jesus, can we call ourselves Great Commission Christians?

Here is a method, for example, for us to ponder: I have heard of some church planters who wait for new believers to be faithful in obeying the first lesson they teach them before teaching them a second lesson. There is much to commend in this simple methodology—it communicates high expectations to the disciples, it allows for the church planters to model obedience, it allows for the new believers to dialogue with the missionaries over the issue, and it is faithful to the essence of the Scriptures.

Another value to this obedience-oriented paradigm of discipleship training is that it avoids the

western notion that teachers are to provide people only with biblical knowledge, tell them to apply it to their lives, and then move on to the next lesson, whether or not the people are faithful with the truth they receive.

In most of the small groups and churches that I have been a part of over the years, seldom have I ever had anyone ask me, "So, J.D., tell me how you applied last week's Bible study (or sermon) to your life, marriage, job, and family before we move on to the next lesson."

Obedience-oriented discipleship is something for us to consider. If church planters do not expect their people to mature in obedience, they will not plant healthy churches. Some may say that such churches "love" the Lord with their minds but fail to love him with their hearts, souls, and strengths. But if such is the case, can we truly say that such churches love the Lord at all?

Effective church planters will work to disciple others by teaching them how to obey the knowledge they receive from the Scriptures. Orthodoxy (right belief) must be accompanied by orthopraxy (right practice). It is not possible to have lasting and fruit-bearing orthopraxy apart from biblical orthodoxy; and such orthodoxy robbed of orthopraxy is not orthodoxy. Church planters must teach doctrine to new believers and hold them accountable for it. New believers are to be both hearers and doers of the Word of God (James 1:22). Church planters must teach new churches the significance of obedience by modeling it before them and teaching them to hold each other accountable.

Chapter 4 - Questions to Consider:

1) Are you simply imparting knowledge to people with little application? If so, why? What needs to change? And how will it change?

2) What are the present methods you have in place for holding others accountable in applying the truths you teach (individual accountability groups, community groups, Sunday School classes, etc.)? How well are these methods working in your area?

3) The example of obedience-oriented discipleship was listed as an example. You know your context the best. What works best in your context? Are there things that you can do to make some improvements in better equipping others to build up the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12)? Do any of your discipleship methods involve an obedience-oriented method? If not, why not?

Chapter 5

Teach Healthy Disciplines as Soon as Possible

I once watched a television program about a particular bird that was raised in captivity and never knew its mother. The scientists who nurtured the animal did all they could to imitate the mother bird, even using bird puppets to feed it. When the time came to reintroduce the creature to the wild, many artificial means were required for the transition. The bird required a proper model to follow regarding survival and could not have successfully returned to the wild without the scientists' great efforts and interventions.

Similarly, church planters have the responsibility of nurturing new believers and modeling for them lives of obedient Christians. They are also responsible for instilling survival techniques in the form of healthy spiritual disciplines within the new believers and churches as well.

Charles Brock, president of Church Growth International, served for over twenty years as a church planter in the Philippines. While working with new believers, he developed a discipleship training booklet entitled I Have Been Born Again, What Next? The value of this resource is that over eleven weeks it is studied in community with other new believers and leads them on a journey of developing spiritual disciplines in their lives. At the conclusion of this study, the church planters challenge group members to ask themselves if they believe the Spirit is leading them to become a church in their community. The topics addressed in this simple resource include:

A New Nature
A New Power: the Holy Spirit
A New Guide: the Bible
A New Privilege: Prayer
A New Hope
New Relationships
A New Understanding of Baptism
A New Family: The Church
A New Reminder: The Lord's Supper
A New Opportunity: Tithing
New Responsibilities

In addition to these topics, I would include teachings related to spiritual warfare and fasting. The discipleship process is a lifelong journey that begins with spiritual birth. There are many things that can be taught to new believers, and missionaries will need to make adjustments according to their contexts and convictions. But, for now, I think this list is a good place to begin.

Chapter 5 - Questions to Consider:

1) What is your strategy for teaching healthy disciplines to new believers? If you do not have such a plan, why not?

2) After looking over the suggested beginning points mentioned in this chapter, are there others you believe need to be taught to new believers as soon as possible?

3) Can you describe your process of leading a group of new believers from their conversions to challenging them with the question, "Is the Spirit leading you as a group to be a local expression of the Body of Christ (i.e., church) in this city (town, village, etc.)?" If you do not have such a strategy, why not?

Chapter 6

Return Them to the Field Immediately

Since the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit, it is no wonder that whenever someone comes to faith in Christ, he or she generally has a great amount of zeal to share this new good news with others. There are examples of this occurrence in the Scriptures. Andrew found Simon and brought him to Jesus (John 1:40-42). Philip located Nathanael and shared the Messiah with him (John 1:45). The Samaritan woman returned to her village with the news of the Savior (John 4:28-29). On several occasions, I have either witnessed or heard of new believers sharing their faith with family and friends soon after their conversions. It is very important that church planters realize that new believers need to be encouraged to share their faith with others immediately.

As soon as I have the privilege of seeing someone come to faith in Jesus, I ask him or her, "Who do you know who needs to hear this message of good news?" Upon finding out the name of a person, I challenge the new kingdom citizen to share this message with that person within the following twenty-four hours. I then say that I'll be praying for them both and promise to follow up later in the week.

Church planters must hold others accountable for evangelism. The longer new believers are not involved in personal evangelism, the easier it is for them to remain in disobedience in this area of their lives. If church planters begin with the expectation that a disciple is an intentional witness, then they are teaching new believers the significance of obedience to the Great Commission from the beginning.

Chapter 6 - Questions to Consider:

1) Do you have concerns with returning new believers to the field immediately following their conversions? If so, why?

2) Read Mark 5:1-20 of Jesus healing the man of Legion. Are you surprised that even when the man begged Jesus to let him get in the boat and go with Him that Jesus refused, sending him back to the Decapolis region as a witness? Did Jesus do a foolish thing by sending this man back to his people as a testimony to God's grace (after all, the man was a new believer and had been possessed by many demons for a long time)? What are your thoughts on Jesus' actions? What can you learn from Jesus' example to apply to your ministry to new believers and their witnessing?

About the Author:

J. D. Payne has served for several years as a missionary with the North American Mission Board and as an Associate Professor of Church Planting and Evangelism with The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also pastored churches and served with church planting teams in the United States. Over the years he has written numerous articles, reviews, and books. He often speaks for church events, mission agencies, and conferences. He and his wife, Sarah, have three children and live in Louisville, Kentucky.

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