

Rediscovering Disciple Making

Dale Critchley

In my freshman year of college, God pointed me toward the pastoral ministry. I argued with Him. My roommate and most of my friends weren't Christians. They knew what I believed, we respected one another, and we had lots of meaningful faith conversations as a result. Most of them had an aversion to all Christians except me. Were I to enter the pastoral ministry, I would spend most of my life surrounded by Christians and have little time for the lost. Why would God pull me out of the mission field for the rest of my life? But learning from Jonah, I knew that I could either enroll in seminary or avoid large bodies of water for the rest of my life. Four years later, I resided in St. Louis.

For the next fifteen years, I continued arguing my point with God. Understand that I loved the ministry. I loved preaching and teaching, especially teaching the catechism. But that I was doing it still made no sense. God had messed up.

Then the question arose: "How do you make disciples?" And after eleven years in the ministry, I realized that I knew how to baptize but not how to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." I knew how to teach everything Jesus commanded, but not how to follow. I knew how to make confirmands and church members, but not disciples who follow Jesus Christ.

But then I remembered my adolescent daughters, all of whom took their faith seriously and actively loved and sought the lost at every opportunity. I knew how to make disciples, but I did that by living with them and daily intentionally seeking the Kingdom of God and showing it to them. But I couldn't invite my entire congregation to live with me! How could I implement this model in a congregational setting?

After a year of study, prayer, and long conversations with several of experts, the answer formed before me, gradually growing clearer as the details came into focus: exponential mentoring. I realized that I was teaching instead of training, like trying to show someone how to play football with a textbook. But if I would train through

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intentional structured mentoring, essentially taking on a few apprentices, I could train others how to train others. Then, as those apprentices became mentors who took on more apprentices, I could extend my reach beyond just those in my immediate sphere of influence. And if that training integrated outreach to the lost throughout the process, I could train an unlimited number of mature disciple-making disciples and potentially turn the shrinking tide in the Western church. So I collected the results of my research into DiscipleQuest (disciplequest.net), a collaborative model, making the process freely available for any church to use, as is, or to modify for their context. God knew what He was doing all along. Sneaky God.

Of course, I didn't invent a new idea. The *Didache* indicates mentoring as the primary catechesis method in the Early Church. They didn't cram catechumens into a classroom, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. What would happen if the church rediscovered that? How would it change our congregations? What would happen if our members knew how to confidently share their faith and make disciples? How would that change the post-confirmation dropout rate if they transitioned directly into mentoring? How would widespread commitment to spiritual maturity change faithful attendance at worship, stewardship practice—indeed, every aspect of the life of the church? The answers become apparent almost immediately.

DiscipleQuest is a multigenerational, mentor-based spiritual growth tool. Participants are taught to teach, trained to train, and coached to coach. While the process can begin as early as sixth grade and has milestones, every participant continues as long as each draws breath. Using a plug-in structure for maximum flexibility and designed with multiple learning styles in mind, the spiritual maturity developed through DiscipleQuest resolves some of the biggest challenges facing churches today, such as the post-confirmation dropout rate, personal evangelism, worship attendance, the stewardship spectrum, biblical literacy, and more. For more information, check out <http://disciplequest.net>, watch the introductory videos there, and download the handbook. Then contact Pastor Dale Critchley (pastordale@lcmspastor.com) for help getting started. And because you're wondering, DiscipleQuest is and always will be free for anyone to use and adapt to your needs.