

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Principles of Discipleship

Christ commands us to make disciples, and faithful Christians have focused on doing so ever since he gave the Commission. What, though, is a disciple? And, what is discipleship?

The Greek word for disciple is used 269 times in the Gospels and Acts. Generally it refers to a person who has received Jesus Christ as Savior. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Thus, a disciple is a genuine Christian.

“Discipleship is the intense concentration of attention on a person or small group of people for the purpose of spiritual growth and leadership development.”

Specifically, however, it is also used of a person who is growing in obedience to Christ, so that the likeness of Christ is being developed in him or her (John 8:31).

The process of helping people become disciples is called *discipleship*. It is the intense concentration of attention on a person or small group of people for the purpose of spiritual growth and leadership development. The following principles are essential to understand if we hope to faithfully make disciples.

First, discipleship involves investing in the lives of future generations. When Jesus gathered his band of twelve disciples, he started a chain of multiplication. He discipled Andrew who reached his brother Peter who reached some 3,000 people on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41). Barnabas discipled Saul (Paul) and John Mark. Priscilla and Aquila discipled Apollos, and Paul discipled Timothy, Titus, and others.

Second, discipleship involves training a few to reach the many. The purpose of discipleship is not selfish. Rather it is to train a few people who will ultimately take the Gospel of Salvation to countless others. Disciples are to be witness to Christ's work (Acts 1:8), to go preaching the word (Acts 8:4-14), and to plant churches in all ethnic groups (Acts 8:26-40).

Third, discipleship involves a lifestyle which must be developed. Those who are discipled are to develop a lifestyle whereby they teach what they know to others (2 Timothy 2:2), which is a process that never ends (“what you have heard from me entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”).

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Discipleship involves seeing potential in others.

Leadership was transferred from Barnabas to Paul.

Fourth, discipleship involves seeing potential in others. A good example is Barnabas who was the first to see potential in the person of Saul (eventually Paul, Acts 9:27). After Saul's conversion, it was Barnabas who encouraged the disciples at Damascus to accept him.

Fifth, discipleship involves selecting people to disciple. When Barnabas was faced with a challenging ministry in Antioch, he immediately "left for Tarsus to look for Saul" (Acts 11:25).

Sixth, discipleship involves sharing ministry with others. After Barnabas found Saul, "he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers" (Acts 11:26). Serving together is the primary way to train disciples. It is the method used by Jesus, Barnabas, and eventually Paul.

Seventh, discipleship involves a change in leadership. This is often the most difficult aspect of discipleship, i.e., letting our disciples lead us. This is seen in the way the names of Barnabas and Paul are placed in the various passages where they are mentioned together. In all places, up through their calling in Acts 13:1-3, the name of Barnabas is always listed before that of Saul (Paul). However, in Acts 13:42-43 the names are switched with Paul's placed before that of Barnabas'. Most likely this is an indication that Paul assumed the leadership role. It is worth noting that Barnabas apparently accepted this with no regrets.

Eighth, discipleship involves letting disciples go. Eventually, Barnabas and Paul went their separate ways in ministry (Acts 15:36-40, which may not be as bad as some have thought, as ministry was multiplied.

Getting Started

As you observe the people around you, whom do you think has potential? People who give evidence of potential are usually self-starters who are already committed. They often appear ordinary, but are caring and eager to help.

Have you asked them to help you in ministry? Discipleship takes place predominately in the doing of ministry together, not in a class. Conversations before, during, and after serving together are the times with disciples are most teachable.

When was the last time you met with him or her? It takes time to build a trusting relationship to disciple others. Regular times together are important.

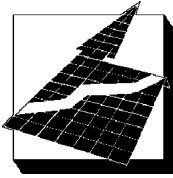
So, who are you discipling?

If no one, when are you going to get started?



Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn. For more ideas see *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Baker Books, 2013).

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Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership

The Christian world has been rocked by the number of prominent leaders, in both church and parachurch organizations, who have been compromised by moral, ethical, and theological failures. This pace-setting volume addresses this alarming problem and offers Christian leaders valuable guidance in dealing with the inherent risks of their work.

Dr. McIntosh and Rima's book, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction*, offers interesting insights on why leaders fail. The authors suggest that successful leaders, like everyone else, are deeply influenced by childhood events and experiences. These experiences provide the motivation for their work and success as adults, but paradoxically, can have a negative impact on their personal and professional lives. The *dark side* emerges when the personal dysfunctions inherent in human life are allowed to remain unaddressed.

This provocative volume unpacks the paradox that the very personal traits that drive individuals to succeed have an accompanying shadow side with potential to destroy a person once he or she is in a leadership position. The book helps readers recognize their dark side and take specific steps to overcome and prevent being blind-sided by it.

Using biblical and current examples, the authors describe the characteristics of leaders and the problems that are most likely to develop.

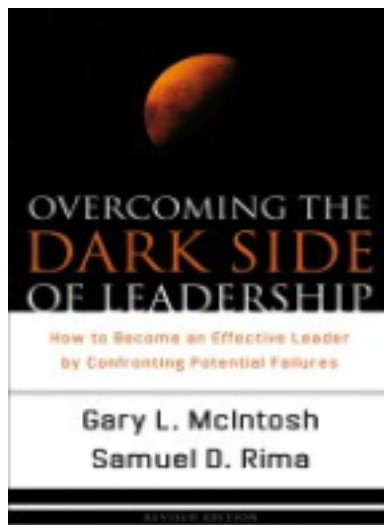
Each chapter concludes with summaries of key points, plus follow-through projects. A testing questionnaire helps readers gain self-understanding. In the concluding chapters, McIntosh and Rima offer a series of steps for leaders to consider so they can overcome their dark side and learn to harness its creative powers.

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