

God Wants You to Multiply

My wife and I have four grown daughters. The youngest of them is 29. At our age, we aren't planning to have any more babies. But even though we're finished with the task of bringing Grady children into the world, I'm not finished reproducing. I believe every Christian is called to bear spiritual children.

Jesus called us to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19b), and this is what He was referring to when He told His followers: "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8a).

So for the past several years, I've invested most of my waking hours in discipling younger Christians. I offer them counsel and share the life lessons I've learned in ministry. We meet for coffee or meals and take trips together; we also chat using every medium available—phone, text, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Zoom. I love watching people grow spiritually.

Discipleship is not just a hobby—it's my passion. But something dramatic happened a few years ago that proved to me how serious God is about spiritual multiplication.

I was preaching at Berean Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on a Sunday morning in October 2016. After my message, I invited people to the altar who wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I also had a word of knowledge that there was a young man in the audience who struggled with an addiction.

Many people responded, but I noticed a tall guy in the middle of the group at the altar. I laid hands on his head and prayed, and then moved on to pray for the others. When I looked back, I saw that the young man was on the floor. He was trembling and speaking in tongues.

When I finished praying for everyone, Pastor Mark Moder closed the service. But this young guy was still shaking on the

floor. I sat down next to him and prayed quietly. I could tell the Holy Spirit was doing some deep work in him. He must have stayed horizontal for more than 20 minutes.

When he finally sat up and gained composure, I asked him a few questions. He told me he was 20 years old and had come to the altar because he'd been a slave to pornography. He said it was his first visit to Berean Church.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Dante Lee Grady," he replied.

"Huh? You're kidding," I said. I have never met anyone with my name.

"No, seriously!" he said with a big smile. "I was surprised to find out the preacher this morning has my name!"

Since that day, Dante Lee Grady and I have become very close. A few months later he came to my home in Georgia for a discipleship retreat with 12 other men. He then traveled with me when I preached at another church in Pennsylvania; since then he has gone with me on numerous other mission trips. One day he hopes to go with me to Africa.

Dante is on fire for God now. He began ravenously reading the study Bible I gave him, he got plugged into Berean Church and he was installed as the youth leader in 2020. In 2022 he joined the youth ministry staff of a different church in Jacksonville, Florida.

I never had a biological son—only daughters. But now I have a spiritual son who actually bears my name.

When I asked God about this unusual experience, I sensed that my encounter with Dante was a prophetic sign—not just for me but also for the body of Christ. God is reminding us that we must take the command to make disciples seriously. Our priorities must shift.

We've all read the research about the younger generation in the United States. Statistics show that many young adults have left the church or have no interest in Christianity. Yet I've also seen that when I offer to be a mentor or a spiritual father to young people between the ages of 18 and 34, they are eager to latch on.

When I offer love and encouragement to these young adults, they can't get enough. This generation isn't interested in dry religious programs, but they crave an authentic and relational connection with a mature Christian who is willing to spend time with them.

My experience with Dante Lee Grady reminds me that every Elijah should have a young Elisha following him and begging for a double portion of the Holy Spirit. And if you read that story in the Bible, you learn that Elisha surpassed his mentor. (See 2 Kings 2:1-15.) That is my heart's cry—that those I invest in will do greater things than I do.

The Process of Discipleship

My four daughters are adults now, but they each lived under our roof for 18 years, and my wife and I loved every stage of their development. Eventually they grew up, went to college and started their own careers and families. That's how life works. It would be very strange if my adult children were still living in my house, dependent on me for money and food. The same is true for us spiritually. God designed us to become mature believers.

There's nothing more tragic than a Christian who remains like a dependent infant. The apostle Peter wrote: "*Grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18a, emphasis added). Paul said: "We are to *grow up* in all aspects into Him" (Eph. 4:15b, NASB, emphasis added). Both apostles told us, "Grow up!"

That's what the process of discipleship is all about. We take

young Christians under our wings and nurture them. Our goal is to see them blossom and bear fruit. Rather than babying them, we push them to become disciple-makers. When you see them investing in others, you'll know you have raised your spiritual children well.

But even though we know every Christian is called to make disciples, many of us don't do it because we don't know how. We don't know where to start or what method to use. We have lots of books on parenting and lots of research on how children develop emotionally and physically. But we lack resources on how to take a baby Christian to spiritual adulthood.

I want to encourage you to step out in faith and start the process, even if you don't know what to expect. There are many methods of discipleship:

- You can meet with someone one on one for Bible study in your home.
- You can gather a small group of two or three disciples to study a Christian book or a certain book of the Bible.
- Since Jesus' last recorded meal with his disciples was a breakfast (see John 21:4-9), you can meet a disciple early in the morning.
- You can host weekly or monthly Zoom meetings.
- I once gathered 16 young guys for an evening discipleship lesson and ordered tacos for everyone. I have also conducted numerous three-day retreats for groups of young leaders.

In other words, discipleship isn't about a particular format. And it certainly doesn't have to happen in a church building. In the New Testament, discipleship occurred in a chariot, by a riverside, on a mountaintop, in homes, in jails, on ships and on a beach. Don't worry about the location. Just do it!

People often ask me if there's a book I recommend for discipleship. There are many good resources available (and I will share a new one with you at the end of this article). When my friend Bill McCarthy asked me what book he should use to mentor a younger man in New Hampshire, I replied: "Bill, you are the book."

Discipleship isn't a class, and it's certainly more than a book. You can use a book as a tool, of course, but your disciple needs to learn from you more than he or she needs a book.

When my first mentor, Barry, discipled me many years ago, we used a few different booklets and resources. But I don't remember most of them. What I do remember were Barry's words and prayers. I remember that he took an interest in me, spent time with me, prayed for me and took me on ministry trips. He was my book.

I learned from Barry's example. He answered my questions, and he showed me how to be a Christian. The apostle Paul said: "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, MEV). Paul was an open book, and he invited his disciples to learn from his experience. Barry did the same for me. Now I do it for the young people I disciple. You can do it, too.

7 Reasons We Don't Make Disciples

Back in 2008 I had a very scary birthday with a zero in it. I dreaded turning 50, but I knew that growing older is better than the alternative! I also decided I would spend the rest of my life investing in the next generation because I believe discipleship is at the very heart of the gospel.

God began to put young people in my life, and many of them asked me if I would mentor them. I began taking some of them on mission trips. Others began calling me for counsel or coaching. Some needed prayer to overcome habits or addictions.

The more I invested in them, the more excited I got about helping other Christians grow in their faith. In those early days I spent a lot of time investing in young men like Felipe, a Brazilian immigrant who eventually began making disciples on his own; Antione, who is now a pastor in Florida; and David, an Indian American who leads evangelistic campaigns on college campuses.

Mentoring young people is the most fulfilling thing I do. I enjoy preaching to crowds, but if I have to choose between speaking to an audience of a thousand or talking to a small group of spiritually hungry young leaders, I would choose the latter every time. That's because relational discipleship is the lost art of Jesus and the secret of New Testament ministry.

Today I believe the Holy Spirit is drawing the church back to the New Testament model. Leaders as well as churchgoers are weary of the impersonal, performance-based, people-in-the-pews approach. We are tired of the show. We haven't been called to entertain an audience—we've been commissioned to train an army.

We all know Jesus spent most of His ministry investing in a small number of followers who then invested in others. So why don't we use that approach? Here are six obvious reasons we don't do it:

We are ignorant of the Great Commission. When Jesus was about to leave this earth, He gave us our final marching orders in Matthew 28:19. He didn't say, "Go and attract crowds" or "Go and preach to multitudes" or "Go and build churches." There is certainly nothing wrong with buildings, good sermons or mass evangelism, but Jesus made it clear that our priority is relational discipleship: "Go and make disciples." If He spent three and a half years investing in a small handful of followers, why do we think we can do it a different way?

We haven't been disciplined ourselves. It's impossible to mentor someone if you haven't been mentored. Yet countless pastors have admitted to me that they never had a mentor. Bible colleges and seminaries teach theology and methodology, but ministers cannot be mass-produced on an assembly line. God's servants are handmade. They need someone they can talk to, ask questions of and watch from the front row.

We prefer programs rather than relationships. When Jesus called His disciples, He appointed them "so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14b). Jesus' first desire was for a relationship; the work of the ministry was secondary. Today we have switched priorities—our focus is on the work, and the importance of relationships is minimized or ignored.

We are impressed with size. The descendants of Noah built the Tower of Babel because they wanted to make a monument to themselves. (See Genesis 11:4.) This has always been the tendency of carnal men. We love big. We love towers and visibility because they stroke our pride.

But God came down and confused the builders of Babel (see vv. 5–9) because He wanted them to build out, not up. We prefer tall monuments to our own glory, but God wants our influence to spread in an outward direction. We prefer vertical; God prefers horizontal.

We lack patience for the process. Spending three years leading a small group seems unimpressive. There is nothing glamorous or sensational about discipleship. Yet this is exactly what Jesus did—and one of His closest disciples, Peter, ended up denying Him. (See Matthew 26:69–75.)

You may get frustrated because some of your disciples flake out or grow at a snail's pace. But you never know the impact your disciples will make in the end. After all, Peter rejoined Jesus' team after he was forgiven and restored. (See John

21:15–17.) Sometimes those who suffer the biggest failures experience the biggest comebacks. In today's church we want everything fast and easy, yet the Jesus way requires time.

Our personal brokenness prevents us from healing others. We cannot be mature in Christ if we are still bound by sinful habits. Yet many Christians today are stuck in spiritual infancy because they have not gone through the necessary process of healing so they can walk in holiness. You will never bring others to spiritual maturity if you haven't learned to overcome your own brokenness.

When children grow up, they leave their homes, get married and have their own families. This has been God's plan since He told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28b). Jesus repeated this commission to His disciples when He said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8, NASB). Real disciples make disciples. They don't just sit in church year after year like spectators.

Be a multiplier. God wants you to reproduce His life in others. Discipleship is truly the greatest adventure of the Christian life. Watching my spiritual son Dante Lee Grady become a mature follower of Christ has given me great hope for the future. Don't let the life of Jesus end with you—pass it on to the next generation.

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