

Discipleship: Being Intentional is Crucial

You've probably seen a scenario like this at your church or a church you are familiar with:

Jeff was an up and coming professional in town. Married with three young kids, he had grown up in church and still attended almost every week with his family. His wife was involved in a women's Bible Study, and he occasionally played basketball with some men from the church.

All that was fine until he was alone one day with an attractive co-worker and felt a spark of electricity. A few weeks later he had moved in with her while he "figured things out." After a month of wavering, hemming and hawing, he made the decision he wasn't going back to his wife, his family, or the church.

Or maybe you've seen this:

Alex's wife really wanted him to attend church. He argued with her about it for a while, then finally told her he would give it a try. The first Sunday they went, one or two men shook his hand, but it was pretty easy to slip in and out without too much drama. He went back the next week, then skipped a week for an outing with the guys. Over the next several months he went fairly consistently. A few men learned his name and said "Hello" when they saw him, but it never got deeper than that. Finally, he told his wife he had tried church but that it just wasn't for him. Unfortunately, these stories will be repeated hundreds of times across the country this week. What's the common denominator?

Wait and See?

Often, it seems we read the Great Commission as if it said,

“Wait for men to come and then **see** if hanging around the church helps them to become disciples and teaches them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

But Jesus didn't say **“Wait and See.”** He said **“Go and Make.”** The Great Commission implies an intentional and proactive stance toward discipling men. This means that first of all we have to be **proactive** in our own efforts at discipleship. Going to church or our small group will not make us a growing disciple any more than hanging out at a hospital will cure cancer.

We must make the effort to pursue Christ by faith, to root out idols that are distracting us from Him, to connect with other men who can help us depend on Christ in all things, and to live an integrated life that brings glory to God through everything we do.

It takes **intentionality** and **effort** to consistently love Christ. In the same way, if our churches are to effectively disciple men, there must be a core group of men who are willing to go after other men. **We can't just wait and see, we have to go and make.** We need an intentional and sustainable plan for discipling men and a team of leaders and allies willing to implement it.

Content, Relationships, and Process

If a sincere seeker came to your church, can you name the likely steps he would take to become a mature disciple? What classes or groups might he get involved in? Where would he establish friendships or relationships? What service opportunities would he perform? And in what order would this happen?

Most importantly, would he have to initiate each of those steps on his own, or does the church have a group of men who would shepherd him through a flexible, yet defined process?

In many churches, the typical approach is to throw a lot of activities out and see who sticks. We have a leader passionate about a particular issue and willing to do the work—go for it! So we have five or twenty things going on every week in which we just hope that somehow, someday, someone will actually get connected.

But when we just throw activities at people, unchurched and introverted men will almost never get involved. If you want to reach these men, you need relationships and a plan. Many churches think of discipleship primarily in terms of **content**. If you can distribute enough biblical knowledge then you will have created a disciple who lives out his faith.

Other churches add an emphasis on **relationships** to this mix. They want people to “do life together” in such a way that faith-filled living is caught in addition to being taught. Both of these are incredibly important. You can’t be a disciple without content—you have to know the scriptures and the heart of God. You also can’t grow in isolation—we were created for relationships and to live out the Christian life in connection with others.

But we also have to add to these an effective overall **process** by which we are going to help people **learn the content and get into relationships**. Someone needs to be thinking about how to make our content as effective as possible and how to get more people into authentic relationships.

What This Could Look Like in Your Church

This is why we teach leadership teams in churches to have an All-Inclusive mindset and to gather allies to help reach other men. There ought to be 3 to 12 men in your church whose primary focus is not putting on a breakfast or retreat, but rather how they can build a process for the men in our community that helps them become passionate disciples of Jesus

Christ. This is what the No Man Left Behind Model is all about.

Here's how it works:

1. Begin by identifying the best opportunities your church has to connect with men at various points along the Wide-Deep Continuum (where a man is on his spiritual journey). On the wide side, maybe dads send their kids to your preschool or have their kids play in your soccer league. On the deep side, maybe your family mission trips have an incredible impact on everyone who participates. Identify two to eight key initiatives or ongoing ministries (depending on the size of your church and leadership team) that will happen in the next year.
2. Brainstorm how you can make these opportunities even more effective for men. How could you get more men involved? What next step could you connect them to after this? What leader do you need to talk to in order to see how to help? Which member(s) of your leadership team will interact with them and work on this effort? Who will do what by when?
3. Once you have formalized these ideas, meet monthly or bi-weekly to pray and review your efforts. Make sure at each step you are recruiting allies and casting vision about what you believe God can do through the men of your church.

You don't have to wait and see if men "stumble into" making disciples. You can follow Jesus' command to go and make disciples. Be intentional about casting vision, connecting with allies, and creating a process for men to learn how to follow Christ more closely. That's Jesus' mandate—and it's our highest calling.

David Delk is president of *Man in the Mirror*. He is the author or co-author of five books, including *The Marriage Prayer*, *The Dad in the Mirror*, and *No Man Left Behind*.