

TIM HAWKINS

disciples
who will last

Disciples Who Will Last
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Thanks heaps...

To Jesus Christ. Without you, not only would there be no book, but I would have no life. You have taken me to The Father, and filled me with your Spirit. Without you, I can do nothing.

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To some very special people who helped me finish this book. A number of friends from St. Paul's Castle Hill took the time to read through my manuscript – and came back to me with all sorts of helpful suggestions. This book is so much better because of you! So thank you to:

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To the students and leaders at *Crossfire* in sunny downtown Castle Hill. Thank you for allowing me to take you on the exciting journey of having your life turned around by Jesus. I love hanging out with you guys and I know God will use you to change this world.

I have taken great care to give due credit to the number of individuals who have impacted my life and ministry. After over three decades in ministry, it is possible that I have inadvertently included material which has not been properly acknowledged. If this has happened, please contact the publisher so that this can be rectified in future editions.

I want to include everyone!

I want everyone to feel that they are included in this book. This can be a little difficult with the limitations of the English language. Historically, the male pronouns “he”, “his”, “him”, (and their derivations) have been used to include people of both genders.

However, not everyone feels included these days by following this tradition. I have avoided the perfectly correct, but cumbersome alternative of always delineating “he/she”, “him/her” etc. To try and include everyone, I have opted for the grammatically incorrect, but inclusive “they”, “their”, “them” etc. I hope that you feel included, and that you do not cringe too much with the damage I have done to the English language!

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The Vision for Discipling

SECTION

1

Chapter 1

Why building disciples matters!

Okay – you’ve picked up this book – you’ve started to read. You’re a busy person – you’ve got plenty to do – and everyone knows you don’t need **yet another** church programme to implement! But something within you is telling you that building *disciples who will last* **really matters!**

The question that has been most asked of me over the thirty years I have spent in full-time local-church youth ministry is this: “*How do you turn new believers into lasting disciples?*”

Let’s look at some of the reasons as to **why** this is such a crucial issue!

1. It deals with the “back door” problem

Fred, the new fired-up youth pastor, was running some great outreach programmes at his church. Cutting-edge stuff. Reaching out into his community and attracting kids with some outrageous activities. The rest of the church looked on with pride as they saw the marvellous things that their youth ministry was pioneering. The front door of the youth group had been flung open wide – and lots of new kids were flocking in. Attendance was up; involvement was up; enthusiasm was up. This was a sure sign of God’s revival!

George and Joe were two of those new kids. They were in Year 10 at the local high school. They had never shown much interest in Christianity before. In fact, they had wandered along to the church youth group a few years ago, and their behaviour was so bad that they had been politely asked to leave! But things were different now. Fred was a scintillating youth pastor – the youth programmes were upbeat and cutting edge – and George and Joe were happy to commit themselves every week.

Six months later, George and Joe were nowhere to be seen. They just stopped coming. No real reason. No big disasters. They liked Fred; they liked the programme; they seemed to be making friends. But for some reason, they just stopped coming. They hadn't migrated to the large church down the road, and they hadn't given up on Christianity to sacrifice live chickens at midnight to Satan. They just stopped coming. Still agreeing with everything they had learnt about Jesus. But no longer keen enough to keep at it. The big revival that was sparked through Fred's fired-up programme now seems just a distant memory. It was fun while it lasted, but the truth of the matter is – it simply didn't last.

Fred might have done lots of good things with his emphasis on outreach. But at this stage, he has not been able to produce *disciples who will last*. Sound familiar?

Sometimes new people stay for two weeks or two years, but we all know the problem. We might have lots of new converts walking in through the front door, but in so many churches, there is a constant trickle leaving via the back door. Sometimes we're just not sure what to do to help new believers become life-long disciples.

2. It reflects the heart of Jesus

This book is not just about “closing the back door so we can increase attendance numbers at our church or youth group”! There are far bigger issues at stake here. Is there a way that we can share the very heart of Jesus when he says:

John 6:39 *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”*

Imagine we could have that as our goal as well – that we would “lose none of all that God has given us”! Wouldn’t it be great if our hearts and souls could be poured into achieving this mighty aim? Building *disciples who will last* is not just about increasing attendance numbers – it is about taking Christ-like care of those who have said “yes” to Jesus, that we might not *lose* one of them! Building disciples who will last is very much about caring deeply for every precious soul whom God has placed in our care.

You know how keen Jesus is to make sure that no one gets lost!

Luke 15:4-7 *“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

If it's worth risking your life to save your lost sheep and bring them back to the fold, then it's also worth risking your life to look after them to make sure that they don't go wandering off again! By growing *disciples who will last*, we are aiming to make sure that *no-one gets lost along the way!*

3. It grows believers to maturity

When we come to Christ, we are like little babies.¹ But God doesn't want us to merely "drink from the baby's spiritual bottle" for the rest of our lives. He has a plan for each one of us. God wants us all to grow to be *just like Jesus*. That's certainly the goal that I am striving to achieve for myself – that I will become *less and less* like the sinful man I used to be, and *more and more* like the sinless Jesus whom I follow. When we throw our weight into developing *disciples who will last*, we are aiming to achieve for each person **the exact same thing** that God wants to achieve for them. (*Does this sound like a ministry worth pouring effort into?*)

When Jesus ministers to people, he always has an end result in mind. We looked at this verse a moment ago. But notice how it **finishes**:

John 6:39 *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, **but raise them up at the last day.**”*

And the reason that Jesus does not want to lose one disciple? His goal for every believer is that he will “*raise them up at the last day*”. He emphasises this in the very next verse:

1. 1 Peter 2:2

John 6:40 *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Jesus wants to achieve the Father’s will – that everyone who trusts in God’s Son **shall have eternal life**. That is, they will stick it out to the end. Jesus is not just focusing on “a decision for one day” – but he is emphasising “perseverance for eternity”. That is also meant to be our emphasis in producing disciples who will last. We want to be able to say with Paul:

Philippians 1:6 *“that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

That is God’s aim for every disciple. Paul knows this, which is why he works so hard to achieve it.

Colossians 1:28-29 *“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”*

What is it that Paul is labouring at – struggling with all his energy to achieve? To “*present everyone perfect [or complete] in Christ*”. The Bible’s aim is that every believer keeps becoming mature in Christ – to be less like our sinful selves, and more like the master whom we serve.

Training *disciples who will last* achieves this!

4. It's God's strategy to grow his church

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he talks about this same maturity as achieving “*the fullness of Christ*”:

Ephesians 4:13 “*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”

And why does this maturity in Christ matter so much?

Ephesians 4:14 “*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*”

So what will be the result of not being shaken by wrong teaching, but remaining firm in Christ's word?

Ephesians 4:15-16 “*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*”

Here's discipleship in a nutshell. **It is God's plan to grow his church!** Let's follow through again God's plan for growth that Paul has just outlined in Ephesians Chapter 4:

- a) *We aim to grow every disciple to become mature in Christ (v 13)...*
- b) *So that we will not be shaken – but hold true to the teachings of Christ (v 14)...*
- c) *So that we will grow in truth and love to be more like Jesus (v 15)...*
- d) *And that way the whole of the church grows! (v 16)*

So growing *disciples who will last* is not just about making our individual church programmes better, or even just looking after each individual Christian. **One of the reasons we aim to grow *disciples who will last* is that it is God's strategy to grow his church!**

5. It's God's plan to win the world!

What is the one command that Jesus has left for us to achieve here on planet earth?

Matthew 28:18-19 “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations ...**’ ”

To make disciples. Where? **In all nations!** God's plan for his church has the **whole world** in mind. God doesn't just want a little bit here, and a little bit there! He has a vision to bring the **whole world** to be disciples of his Son, Jesus.

And the reason that God has placed Jesus as Lord over his entire creation?

Philippians 2:9-11 “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

God wants **every knee** to bow before Jesus. He wants **every tongue** to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Ultimately we know this will be true. Everyone who has ever lived **will** one day bow their knee before Jesus – either reluctantly on the last day as they face the consequences of God's

judgment – or joyfully – anytime they hear the message of Jesus and become a Christian.

God has a plan for this universe – and it’s to bring all things to be subject to Jesus.

Ephesians 1:9-10 “*And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*”

Okay – we get the picture. But here’s the big question: What **method** has God put in place to make disciples of all nations?

Sometimes I like to think that God’s method should be to fill enough stadiums in the world with huge audiences where great preachers will bring in the kingdom of God one stadium at a time! **But you know that’s not the plan!** Jesus equipped his first followers with the power of the Holy Spirit so that **they** might be the messengers who took the gospel to the nations of this world!

Acts 1:8 “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

We continue that apostolic pattern! We get to reach out to others with the message of Jesus, grow them as faithful disciples, and then equip them to **go and make more disciples...** who will make more disciples... who will in turn make more disciples! The kingdom of God does not grow

one stadium at a time; the kingdom of God grows **one life at a time**.

When we invest time and effort into a believer to help them be a faithful disciple, and instil in them a vision that they will go out and make yet more disciples, who will make even more disciples – then we are helping to achieve the mission that Jesus has set before us – that we will make *disciples of all nations*.

This book is all about how to turn new believers into lasting disciples. I have been a full-time local-church youth pastor for over thirty years. My experience is with young people. The stories I will tell all come from the strange world of youth ministry. The methods we have used have all been targeted at young people. **But the biblical principles will apply to any age group.** So whoever you are ministering to – whatever age group you work with – whatever situation you find yourself in – my prayer is that together we will discover effective ways of taking new believers on a path of discipleship that will end up changing the world for Jesus!

Can you think of anything that would be more satisfying and rewarding than that?

6. Before we go on – a warning!

When it comes to following up new believers, I suspect that the Christian church often falls into one of two errors:

- a) *Not being faithful with new believers and “allowing” them to slip through the cracks.*
- b) *Thinking that if we can come up with the world’s perfect follow-up programme, then **no-one** will ever slip through the cracks!*

A lot of this book will be directed towards “Attitude (a)” – that is, practical ways to make sure that we don’t lose new believers by neglect. But just before we move on, can I alert you to the danger of “Attitude (b)”. You need to know this up front – **there is no sure-fire follow-up programme that guarantees no-one will ever walk away!** It is not within our power to ensure that every new believer stays on track. That is God’s domain. We need to be faithful in everything we do – but ultimately it is God who causes people to grow.

As Paul explains to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 3:6 “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”

One of the things that has kept me sane through the decades of disciple-making among young people is the parable that Jesus told about the man who sowed seed in four different types of soil. Do you remember it? (*You can look up the entire parable – and its meaning – in Mark 4 v 2-20*) The four different soils produce four different results. But here’s the thing to keep in mind: **a plant starts to grow in three of the four scenarios – but in only one survives to the end.** The seed that was planted in the rocky soil – it sprang up quickly, but did not survive because its roots were shallow. The seed that was planted in the thorny soil certainly grows – along with the weeds that eventually choke and kill it. To the sower it would have initially looked as if he was having a 75% success rate (3 out of the 4 start growing), but in the end he would have to conclude that he only had a 25% success rate (only the seed in the good soil keeps growing and produces fruit).

I don’t think Jesus told this story to give us a mathematical

formula for following-up new believers. But I think part of the power of this parable is to encourage us when, despite our best efforts, new believers do fall away and do not continue their journey to become world-changing disciples.

One of the sad things about working with young people over many years is seeing kids who **look** like they are responding to the message of Jesus – where you see some **initial** growth – but who do not last through to the end and who never start producing fruit. There is nothing that can describe the heart-break when this happens, and many of you will have experienced this first hand. The parable of the sower at least prepares us for the possibility that it might happen. But if any new believers do fall away, I want to be assured that it wasn't because **we didn't do our job**. I want to know that we made **every effort we could** to keep them growing. If a new believer does fall away despite our best efforts, then with reluctance we accept that they themselves chose not to continue.

But is discipling others **really** the best way to achieve effective ministry? Let's check out what Jesus did!