

ALONGSIDER BRIEFINGS

Building disciplemaking cultures by Bill Mowry

Volume 8

Think generations

It started in a study lounge. When I trusted Christ as a college sophomore, I immediately sought out my friend Ed. Ed was the buddy who had faithfully shared Christ with me for over a year. I wanted Ed to hear the good news.

I walked over to the adjoining dormitory, knocked on Ed's door, and exclaimed, "I think I became a Christian. How do I know for sure?"

We talked about some assurances and then Ed asked a question that set the course for my life: "Want to meet in the study lounge tomorrow and read the Bible?"

This request led to a regular pattern of meeting in the study lounge to read and talk about the Bible. Over time, Ed taught me how to memorize scripture, practice a daily quiet time, and share my faith story. Most of all, he taught me how to walk with Jesus. I didn't realize it at the time but he was discipling me.

I began praying for someone that I could disciple. Then Todd came into my life. Todd was another friend from our freshman dorm. Through a number of divine circumstances, Todd had come to faith. I invited Todd to read the Bible with me in the study lounge.

I discovered that this was a busy study lounge. Ed regularly met with James, the local Navigator campus leader. Just as James was discipling Ed, so Ed was discipling me, and I was passing-on this life in Christ to Todd. Four generations were being disciplined in that study lounge. 2 Timothy 2:2 was at work: "What you have heard from me . . . entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Generations of disciples were being developed.

2 Timothy 2:2 is the passage widely quoted and referenced for multiplying disciples. Understanding the background of this passage makes it even more poignant!

Theologian John Stott describes the cultural mood behind 2 Timothy as "Christianity . . . trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation." The Asian churches had deserted Paul (2 Timothy 1:15), churches were quarreling over words and false doctrine (2:14), heretical talk was eating its way like gangrene into people's lives (2:16), and key leaders were now "in love with this present world"

SUGGESTED READING

Simple Church
by Thom Rainer

Disciples are Made Not Born
by Walter Henrickson

Multiply
by Francis Chan

Real-life Discipleship
by Jim Putnam.

(4:9). How could the faith be preserved? Through entrusting to faithful men [and women] who would teach others also.

Successive generations of people were needed to preserve the faith. Four generations are in this verse: Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others.

Building discipling cultures means building generations of disciples. We're not content with only the immediate generation but we see future generations through the one, two, or three people we're discipling. How can we ensure that this will happen today?

- **Think generations.** A vision for generations means seeing a succession of people through the lives of the few we're investing in. To illustrate this principle, one church has developed a discipling tree. The trunk of the tree is the core team of disciplers. The branches are the men and women they are discipling. The leaves and fruit represent this third and fourth generation of disciples. This tree is a visual reminder of one person, discipling one person, who disciplines another.
- **Practice transferability.** We will leave it to the professional teachers and theologians to impart the great doctrines of the Bible. Discipling is about passing-on the faith in personal and practical ways. To multiply, we have to think "Can someone one or two generations from now be able to do this? Are my discipling practices easily transferable?"
- **Do it with them.** Transferability does not happen from a distance but is up-close-and-personal. Want to teach someone to have a quiet time? Do it with them? Want to teach them to pray? Do it with them. Doing life with people shows them how, makes it personal, and sets an example to pass-it-on.

In building a discipling culture, we must build in the principle and practice of multiplying generations. Like Jesus, we're not content with just the current group of disciples, we're praying and working "for those who will believe in me through their word" (John 17:20).

We preserve and expand the church as we think generations, practice transferability, and do life with people. Let's trust God for ever increasing generations of people . . . for His glory!

You can order *The Ways of the Alongsider* at navpress.com.

You can contact Bill Mowry at www.alongsider.com. Check out other discipling resources and alongsider training on his website.

The Navigators Church Discipling Ministry has a proven process for creating intentional discipling cultures. You can find out more by visiting navigatorchurchministries.org.

