



MAKING DISCIPLES LIFE-ON-LIFE

WALKING WITH NON-CHRISTIANS IN THEIR GOSPEL SEARCH

RANDY POPE



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Life on Life Ministries

A Ministry of Perimeter Church

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that you are reading this booklet tells me you have an interest in “discipleship.” I am delighted that you have chosen to check out what has become known as “Life on Life Discipleship.” I truly believe that what is explained in this brief booklet will greatly benefit your efforts to both make and train followers of Christ.

The term “discipleship” is not found in Scripture. However, the word “disciple” is often used. It simply means “follower.” The word “discipleship” has now become an often-used word among Christians – but is used in different ways by different Christians. I personally think it is best used to describe anything God uses to help someone either become a follower of Christ or to grow as a follower. Whether or not this is its best use, this is the way I will use it throughout this booklet.

Most of us would probably agree that it is every believer’s responsibility to be as faithful and effective as possible in both making and training disciples. The question for many of us is, “How do I go about doing this?”

There is a companion booklet to this one which addresses the practice of “training” disciples. It is titled, *Training Disciples Life-on-Life*, and is subtitled, “Walking with Christians in their gospel journey.” In this booklet we will address the “making” of disciples, which is entitled, *Making Disciples Life-on-Life*, and is subtitled, “Walking with non-Christians in their gospel search.” If you are interested in what we believe is the full scope of discipleship, both making and training, I encourage you to read through both booklets.

Over five decades ago, as a fourteen-year-old new Christian, I was invited to be part of a small group of fellow students who would meet together weekly. I had no idea what the young adult leader meant when he invited us to take a journey with him in

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what he called “discipleship.” But over the next two years, I learned not only how to grow in maturity as a Christian, but also how to lead non-Christians into a relationship with Jesus.

Years later, after planting a church and pastoring it for over 42 years, I believe it is safe to say that Perimeter Church throughout most of those years has been best known for its life transforming ministry of discipleship. And it is equally accurate to say that “discipleship” has been the single greatest passion of my personal ministry.

At the time of this writing, I am now beginning my 54th consecutive year of what I call, “laboring in the lives” of a small group of men. Over these years, I have watched countless men mature in their faith and become better equipped for daily life and ministry, then going on to do the same with others. During each of these years, I have personally been blessed, even as an insecure introvert, to lead many people to Christ through life on life relationships.

Most of you do not know me personally, but if you did, you would quickly discover that I am very average when it comes to intellect and natural abilities. I truly believe that if you were to get to know me well, you would become convinced that if I could become effective at discipleship, then you can as well. As you read, it will become apparent that the tools presented are designed for anyone’s use, even those of us who are not naturally extroverts and abundantly gifted. In fact, I am reminded and encouraged by Paul’s word to the church in Corinth when he said, *“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

And let me say a word to pastors who are reading this. Regarding our church’s ministry of discipleship, I can say with

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integrity that this is not a one church phenomenon. For the past dozen years or so, we have coached hundreds of churches both nationally and globally. These churches are extremely diverse regarding size, denomination affiliation and theological backgrounds. These churches have the same story to tell as Perimeter. And many of their stories far surpass our own story.

I am personally still learning more each year about both making and training disciples. With the realization that I am still a learner, I would love to share with each of you some of my life learnings. But before I conclude this introduction, I need to close with two personal concerns:

1) That you might mistakenly hear me say that I believe I (or any of the men and women who are part of our Life on Life staff) think we have it all correct, perfectly put together. Nothing could be further from the truth. As you have already heard in this introduction, "discipleship" covers anything and everything we do that truly helps people become followers of Christ and/or advance in their journey of following. We do believe there are certain often neglected biblical principles that make discipleship more effective. Please know we are simply sharing our insights regarding these principles for your consideration.

2) That you might mistakenly hear me say that our model for discipleship is THE model that everyone needs to use. We know that God works through these same principles in many differing expressions. And beyond the principles that Life on Life espouses, there are many different approaches to discipleship that God is richly blessing every day.

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So I hope you find what I share in these booklets to be helpful and know that they are intended to be “first steps.” You can learn more about these and other subjects related to discipleship at lifeonlife.org.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE MAKER AND CAN ANYONE BE ONE?

In the introduction, I mentioned that I use the word “discipleship” to describe any means of taking a person from unbelief to spiritual maturity. It is not uncommon for me to be at a conference on “discipleship” and never hear any presentation that addresses leading lost people to Christ – a very important aspect of discipleship. It is for this reason that I like to make a distinction between “making” and “training” disciples. Hopefully, by doing so, both will get equal attention.

I also noted that the word “disciple” means “follower”. So whenever a believer is used by God to lead a non-follower of Jesus to become a true follower, that believer has functioned as a “disciple maker”.

Sometimes leading someone to Christ takes many months, perhaps even years. Yet at other times, it may take only a short period of time – maybe even less than an hour. Usually the person who quickly becomes a Christian does so because he or she has already been “prepared”, having already embraced many beliefs of the Christian faith. Often they only lack the bending of their knees – submitting to the lordship of Christ, thus becoming His follower.

Those, on the other hand, who are “unprepared” usually need much more time to investigate what we call “the gospel”. But regardless of how long it takes, the end result is the same – a new follower of Jesus, a real disciple. And such a follower will be known to be so by their fruit. As Jesus said, “You shall know them by their fruit” (Matthew 7:16).

I would assume that some of you hearing me define a “disciple maker” are saying to yourself, “I could never do that!” Well, I said

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the very same thing. And after my first attempt to do so, I was fully convinced (and with plenty of evidence)! It was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life. I assumed that, as an introvert, the likelihood of me being a disciple maker was very low. And after that experience, I told the Lord these very words, "I'll never do that again!"

But for many years now, I've had the privilege to lead a lot of people to Christ. So what accounts for such a change?

Primarily three things:

- 1) a different mindset,
- 2) a simple and effective strategy, and
- 3) a set of biblically sound and culturally relevant tools.

In the following chapters, I will elaborate on these three difference makers. But for now, trust God's Word. Jesus made it very clear, "Follow Me and you will become fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). So you too can become a disciple maker! And when you do, you will never regret it.

CHAPTER 2

WHY ARE SO FEW CHRISTIANS DISCIPLE MAKERS?

In the previous chapter, I suggested three reasons that contributed to my moving from a “want to be” disciple maker to becoming routinely engaged in disciple making. The first of those three reasons had to do with a change of mindset.

First, I had to believe that I could become a disciple maker regardless of my self-perception. If someone asked me to give adjectives to describe a “soul winner” or an “evangelist”, I would choose words like “bold”, “extroverted”, “confident”, “scholarly”, and perhaps even “obnoxious”. And these words, perhaps with the occasional exception of “obnoxious,” did not describe me. So my view of myself told me that I could never make disciples.

But then I encountered the text I mentioned at the end of the last chapter, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). I had to admit that Jesus made this promise for all His followers, not just a select number.

I was then introduced to a helpful definition of being a fisher of men – “sharing Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results up to Him.” This sounded possible to me. And the absence of having to have “success” in my encounter, was extremely freeing. I also found great encouragement in Jesus’ promise, concluding His commission to make disciples, that “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:19-20).

As my mindset was gradually changing, I was encouraged to see disciple making as a life or death issue – thus not an option, but a necessity. When I say “life or death”, I’m talking about seeing people outside of faith in Jesus as facing eternal death – and not merely seeing people as such, but embracing the reality that

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those of us who have the answer to life, must get the good news of Jesus to as many of these people as possible. Such a mindset causes unlikely disciple makers like me to be willing to step out in faith. Having already been challenged by a spiritual mentor to “attempt something so great for God that it’s doomed to failure unless God be in it”, helped make me willing to give it another try. And one thing is for sure, I was convinced that such would be naturally doomed for me.

But don’t think for a minute that such a life or death mindset alone is sufficient to get most of us to become disciple makers. “Disciple makers to be” must secondly be convinced that they have a simple and effective strategy (a plan) to do so.

WHAT KIND OF STRATEGY IS NEEDED?

The word “strategy” is commonly used today in sports, business and in nearly every pursuit of excellence. “Strategy” is defined as “a plan, method or series of maneuvers for obtaining a specific goal or result.” The need for such is no exception in disciple making. Without an effective strategy, disciple making quickly becomes a dream of one’s past. It is not uncommon for Christians to long to obey their Master’s great commission, yet become discouraged and eventually surrender – only because of the absence of an effective strategy.

Years ago, as a young pastor, I quickly realized that neither I, nor the people of our church, had an effective strategy. It seemed to me that whatever strategy we chose had to be simple. To be simple meant that it had to be easily trained and easily repeatable until it could become second nature.

Over time, three words emerged which describe a strategy that has proven to be both simple and extremely effective. Very quickly our church embraced these three words and they soon became common language among our people. These three words are “greet”, “befriend” and “invite”, commonly referred to as “GBI”. This three-step strategy has now not only made disciple making easy for me, but also for thousands of others. Let me explain what is meant by these three words.

1) *Greet*

This first step of our strategy could not be simpler. When training Christians in how to greet, all I need to do is to model how I do it. Here it is: “Hi, my name is Randy.” I told you it was simple. The

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only thing I need to do is to make sure they use their name and not mine!

By “greeting”, I mean simply looking for opportunities to introduce myself to those I don’t know which hopefully will lead to a future relationship. Obviously, this step is unnecessary with those we already know.

I think you will agree that this is certainly simple. But don’t be deceived. Of the three words describing this proposed strategy, this is the most difficult for introverts like me. For us, this is where our mindset discussion becomes important. We can do it, but it’s not natural to commonly engage with people we don’t know – unless we consider what’s at stake in not being a faithful disciple maker. And once accomplished, I always feel the process is in motion, becoming much more natural from this point forward.

2) *Befriend*

The next step is to “befriend”. By this, I simply mean to “be-friend-ly”. If a new acquaintance, this will probably mean asking questions which show interest in getting to know that person. “How are you doing?” “Where do you live?” “Are you single or married?”, etc. People love having others show interest in them. In fact, many are starving for such.

The time needed between steps two and three can be a very short period or perhaps an extremely long time. It all depends on the uniqueness of each individual situation. In fact, I will use the final chapter to address how one knows when it’s time to move to the third step.

3) *Invite*

This final piece of our strategy is to “invite”. At the right time, we need to offer an invitation to see if they would like to investigate

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what we know as the gospel – the good news. Over the years, I have discovered that there are at least three excellent options to use to help people investigate Christianity. Some disciples focus more on one than the others, which is fine. But having a good tool always ready for each of these three is extremely valuable.

The three options which I have found most useful can be summarized by these words: “read”, “attend” and “meet”. Let me briefly describe each.

1) *Read*

First, the word “read”. I think it is important for every disciple maker to have a “go to” piece of literature to offer to those interested in investigating. Of course, such an offering has got to be energizing, interesting, and short. And I can’t emphasize the word “short” enough.

Years ago I wrote a book designed for this very purpose. It is titled *The Answer*. It is subtitled “Putting an end to the search for life satisfaction”. In a very brief period, a disciple maker can be equipped on what to say to most effectively invite a friend to read. In our church alone, our people have used well over 50,000 copies of this book with non-Christians and find it to be effective in stirring an interest to investigate further. This book is just one example of many options one could use as their go to literature to invite interested non-followers to read.

2) *Attend*

The word “attend” is the second option to investigate. It is used to describe an enjoyable offering to invite one’s unbelieving friends to attend as their guests. This is any gathering where they can be attractively exposed to God’s Word and God’s people. This could be a home group or a church event – and in some churches even

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the weekly worship service.

At our church, we offer a five-week event twice a year called “Investigative Forum” (IF). Our church people are encouraged to bring their non-believing friends to hear answers to the most challenging questions regarding the Christian faith. At the end of each session, guests can have anonymous questions they have asked by text or email shown on a screen. Or, they also have the option to raise their hand and ask a question publicly. Regardless of the form of the event chosen, as long as it exposes seekers to God’s Word and God’s people (and ideally for multiple weeks), having such an event to invite friends to is extremely important.

3) *Meet*

The third investigative offering is to “meet”. By this, I mean meeting one on one to discuss the gospel and to address the questions that they, as non-believers, are asking. This approach initially feels beyond most of our abilities. However, with equipping in the use of tools well designed for this very purpose, the task becomes much simpler and doable than one would think.

The primary tool that I and our church uses is called “Life Issues” booklets. These four booklets are designed to use in consecutive weeks. Each addresses one of the four most important and often asked questions regarding the Christian faith. Each also includes sections of John’s gospel with discussion questions in the margins designed to make simple the understanding of the gospel.

So, once disciple makers have the right mindset and an effective strategy, now they only lack the right tools. And I can say with deep conviction that to be effective, every disciple maker must be equipped with culturally relevant and biblically grounded tools. In the next two chapters, I will introduce you to what I mean by “culturally relevant” and “biblically grounded” tools.

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But first, allow me to encourage you who are pastors to make sure your church has excellent options to make it easy for your people to invite non followers to “read”, “attend” and “meet”. Then it’s just a matter of equipping them to use the tools you provide. If you need any help in doing so, Life on Life is available to help in any way possible.

WHAT KIND OF TOOLS ARE NEEDED?

Imagine having aspirations to build a piece of furniture. After becoming persuaded that you could do so (a big step seeing that you have no natural talent for or experience in doing so), you set out to begin.

With your mind set on beginning, you are given an outstanding plan (strategy) for constructing the furniture. The wood and other raw materials needed are all secured. As you enter the workshop to begin construction, you immediately find yourself hopeless, unable and unwilling to begin the project. Why? Because of one missing necessity – the appropriate tools (and the equipping to use them).

This is the story of countless “hoped to have been” disciple makers. They embrace the right mindset, and workable strategy but then come to a sudden halt only because they are without the tools needed.

It would be too time consuming to walk through the global story of effective disciple making tools used in history past. But I could easily build a case that most of those effective tools of the past are now culturally irrelevant. I could also make a convincing argument that there is an obvious need for new tools today (to replace some of the old ones) – tools that are both biblically sound and culturally relevant.

Before I moved to Atlanta in the 1970s, the tools I had learned to use were suitable for where I was living in the deep south. I was accustomed to sharing the gospel with Bible believing, Jesus agreeing, religious non-believers. In Atlanta I found secular, humanistic, non-Bible believing people who questioned the deity of

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Jesus. I was like the old T.V. deputy sheriff many remember named "Barney Fife". He had one bullet that he carried in his shirt pocket. When that bullet was shot, he was left with nothing. Similarly, in Atlanta, once I went through the Gospel with a non-believer, I had shot my bullet and was rendered helpless. I knew I had to find new tools.

I quickly realized that those in our new church would never step forward to make disciples without the training of tools sufficient to the task. So I began to develop tools which, first, I would feel confident using and secondly, they would embrace. I also concluded that we needed four different kinds of tools:

1) Introductory Tools

In our final chapter I will address the question, "When is it time to invite a non-Christian into a spiritual discussion or to investigate Christianity?" But for now, most would agree that it is after greeting and befriending. But when the right time does come to do so, many Christians are left without a next step. This is where "Introductory Tools" become so valuable.

Let me illustrate. I routinely ask the men that I am training as disciples to invite a non-Christian friend to join us to have lunch. I ask them, if possible, to find the most pagan, antagonistic friend they know. They typically do so by telling these friends they would like for them to meet the man who is their life coach. (And to even be up front and disclose that I am also a preacher!)

On one occasion, a member of my group invited a man who met the description I had suggested to a tee. In fact, my friend said to me, "You will regret meeting with this man." Only moments after a surface level greeting, this man put out his hand so as to silence me and said, "Listen, let's get this straight right now. I'm a Baptist, so I'm O.K. with God. Are we good now?" He might as well have

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said, "Shut up. I don't want to hear you talk to me about God." Typically, I would never move forward in spiritual conversations against one's desire, but in this case I made an exception. Knowing I had a perfect tool for this occasion, I felt comfortable asking him one question: "Would you allow me to show you one simple diagram and if you are still uninterested, I will not say another word about spiritual things?"

No sooner than I had completed the diagram, he asked me, "So you don't mind meeting with me for four weeks to help me understand this better? I can't tell you how much I would appreciate this." I looked over at his friend who looked dumbfounded.

As I was driving home, my discipleship group member from lunch called me. He was crying. When I asked what was wrong he answered, "The fiancé of my friend (with whom we had just met) just called me and said, 'What just happened? My fiancé called me and is excited about meeting with a preacher for four weeks to talk about God?'"

My response to my friend was only to ask: "Did you see me say or do anything impressive when showing him that diagram?" His response was insightful. He said, "No. Anybody could have done what you did!"

What my friend saw and heard was a simple introductory tool that I most often use. I knew the effectiveness of having the right tool and assumed even this disinterested man might decide otherwise after its use. And I could tell this same kind of story over and over. This is one of a handful of tools I have found effective – each to be used in differing situations.

And oh, by the way, at the end of four weeks this man became a follower of Christ and is a faithful church member.

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2) *Primary Tools*

I am of the persuasion that every disciple maker needs to have one “go to” primary tool – one they can master. For me that tool is a set of short booklets called “Life Issues” booklets. There are four booklets, ideally used, one a week. Each book has two sections – first, a brief answer to one of the most important and often asked questions regarding the Christian faith and secondly, five chapters of the gospel of John with questions placed periodically in the margin to stimulate understanding in one’s reading. Disciple makers are trained in how to walk through these four booklets in a brief, but impactful way. In the next chapter you will see what makes the use of these booklets so impactful.

3) *Support Tools*

I love to think of every Christian having an invisible tool belt placed on them at salvation - ready to be filled as quickly as possible with disciple making tools. I refer to support tools as specialty tools to use as needed. For instance, it’s important to have a tool when talking to Jewish people, one for very close friends or family members, one for moral, religious non-Christians who are convinced their lifestyle and beliefs secure salvation for them, as well as those coming from non-Christian religions. There are also a few tools designed to be used with any non-believer. I love to have six or seven support tools in my tool belt at all times.

4) *Follow-Up Tools*

So what do you do next, when by God’s grace, you lead someone to faith in Jesus? Once again, many disciple makers miss a great opportunity, simply from not having an appropriate tool. The weeks following a new profession of trust in Jesus are extremely important. This is a time to ground the new convert in the teaching

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of God's Word regarding assurance of salvation, the fruit indicating a true salvation, etc. It is often this time that it becomes obvious that the presumed new salvation is not even valid, leaving them with a need to know what to do in that case.

The follow-up tool that I and many others are finding most helpful is called "Next Step" booklets. These four booklets are formatted virtually the same as the "Life Issue" booklets. The difference is that the questions now deal with answering four of the most important questions for a new believer to be able to answer. And instead of the gospel of John, each of these booklets have two chapters of Romans 1-8, with related questions in the margins.

As these tools were developed and refined year after year, we discovered that their relevance and effectiveness was based upon numerous characteristics they shared. Over time we identified about a dozen such characteristics. Time will permit me to share only four. But these four, in my opinion, stand out as the four most critical for effective disciple making tools.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD WE LOOK FOR IN TOOLS WE CHOOSE?

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how over the years of using our tools, we discovered that their relevance and effectiveness, in great part, was based upon a number of essential characteristics. Here are the four most important tools, in my opinion, that account for any disciple making tools being both relevant and effective.

- 1) Tools which are designed with the belief that God does the converting, using His tool, the Bible.
- 2) Tools which utilize multiple appointment conversations, rather than single appointment presentations.
- 3) Tools which create an attractive forum to address the questions that non-Christians are asking.
- 4) Tools which respect the two greatest desires of interested seekers: brevity and privacy.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the first, and most important tool, and cover the last three in Chapter 6.

The first thing I look for to describe the primary tool I want in my tool belt is the first characteristic. I want to make sure that tools are designed with the belief that God does the converting, using His tool, the Bible. Let me explain what I mean.

Scripture teaches that man is "dead in his trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). What can a dead man do to make himself alive? Nothing! According to Romans 3:10-12, mankind, because of his sin, has lost his ability to seek God. This means it is the work of God, not man,

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that brings about a person's salvation. Now the question is, how does God bring about this work of salvation?

He does so by using His holy Word. As we read in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." In II Timothy 3:15, Paul explains that it was "the sacred writings" which gave Timothy "the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

So the Bible seems clear that God opens hearts and does so using His Word. Perhaps to help us grasp God's use of His Word, it would be beneficial to think of God's Word being likened, first, to a knife, and secondly, to a hook on a fishing lure. To illustrate God's Word as a knife, allow me to use a fictitious story and then close illustrating God's Word as a fishing hook using a true story.

Imagine me hating one of you and desirous of killing you (just an analogy!). I approach you from behind in the dark of the night. I throw you down and pin you to the ground announcing to you my intention to kill you. You scream out in fear, pleading with me to release you. I reach into my jacket and pull out a foot-long dagger. As I lift the knife to plunge it into your chest, and high enough for you to see it, you let out a sign of relief. In doing so you say, "Thank God!" I ask, "For what?" You respond by saying, "I thought for sure you were going to shoot me – which of course would kill me. But I don't believe knives can hurt people. In fact, feel free to stab me. But please hurry up, I need to get home for dinner!"

So if I am an effective murderer, what would I do? Would I drop the knife in frustration and announce to you I will return at a future time with a gun? Of course not. I know better. I would go ahead and stab you. I have often heard disciple makers say they came to an impasse when sharing Christ with a non-believer. When I ask about the obstacle, I hear, "Because they don't believe the Bible is God's Word."

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Why should we care if they believe the Bible is God's Word? You see, we know that God's Word is "sharper than any two-edged sword." We know that it cuts and kills the power of the sinful nature. We know that God uses His Word to transform unbelieving hearts!

When I meet with those interested in investigating Christianity, I essentially say, "Let's meet for several weeks. I'm going to ask you to do a weekly assignment. I want you to take this dagger (5 chapters of John each week) and stab yourself daily. I'll meet with you weekly and stab you with a big sword (explaining a portion of the Gospel Story using His Word). And hopefully, you'll die – and then come to life as a new creation." (II Cor. 5:17). Now of course I don't tip my hand and use those words, but you get the point.

In Matthew 4, Jesus likens His followers to fishermen. Our success as fishermen depends on having the right "tackle." The best lures land the most fish. God's most effective lure is two-hooked. The first and most effective hook is constant exposure to God's Word. The second hook is constant exposure to God's people. God delights in using His Word and His people in the process of seeing people move from unbelief to belief. Let me give you an example of the effectiveness of this "fishing hook."

One day I received a call from a friend named Jim who lived in another state. When I answered the phone, Jim's voice sounded urgent. He was concerned because he had just gotten off the phone with a former business partner. His former partner, John, had called to tell Jim that he was about to take his life.

As we talked, Jim explained that he and John had parted paths some time before. John had moved to Atlanta and started a business that was in direct competition with Jim's company. Unfortunately, John's new business venture failed. He and his wife were on the brink of divorce and his life was out of control.

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Jim told me that John was in his Atlanta home with a pistol, about to take his own life. Before he ended it all, he wanted to make things right with his old partner. Jim assured John that as bad as things seemed, taking his own life was not the answer.

In a last-minute effort to dissuade John from pulling the trigger, Jim asked him for a favor. "Would you please call a friend of mine named Randy, who's there in Atlanta, and talk with him?"

John agreed. Jim's parting words to me were, "Randy, John could be dead now for all I know. But if he calls you, please get with him as soon as possible." I assured Jim that if John called, I would promptly meet with him.

Within minutes the phone rang; it was John. He didn't mention that he was considering suicide but did say he had been going through some personal struggles and that Jim had urged him to call. I agreed to meet with him at his home.

Jim had given me detailed information about John, so I had an idea of the best way to deal with him. John was a very bright man, about my age, who had made a lot of money in his industry. His home certainly reflected that success.

Throughout their relationship, Jim had tried to get John to pursue spiritual truth, but John was uninterested. Jim had been a longtime friend with noted theologian and apologist Francis Schaeffer. As a Christmas gift one year, Jim gave John and his wife an all-expense paid trip to Switzerland, which included a day to meet with Schaeffer. John returned home from his trip and told Jim, "I like that old man. I think I was able to help him."

It was obvious to me that John was not going to be an easy person to talk to about the gospel. As I sat down with John and his wife, I asked him if he knew I was a pastor. He said "no" and expressed that he had little interest in spiritual things. I knew immediately I had just the right tool. I was certain it would be my

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best hope to get him exposed to God's Word – the only hope of changing his heart.

I asked him if I could show him a brief diagram, to which he agreed. Then I talked to him about investigating Jesus. Amazingly, he said he was interested. I explained that we would focus on four questions over a four-week period.

"First, how can Christians believe the Bible is God's Word?" John shook his head, letting me know he did not believe that.

"Second, how can Christians believe that all people, including moral and religious people outside of Christianity, deserve eternal punishment?" Once again, the same look of disbelief.

"Third, how can Christians believe that, of all the world's religious leaders, Jesus is the only way to God?" Well, when I said that, John was immediately animated and clearly had some strong opinions. In fact, I never even revealed the fourth question because of what happened next. He slapped the table and said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! You will never convince me of that one." He pointed to a stack of books and said, "Those books on the coffee table are about Eastern religions. I've traveled the world looking at religions. No one will ever convince me that Jesus is the only way to God. I'll debate that one with you right now."

I said, "No, that's week three." I thought I would use curiosity, if nothing else, to keep him from ending his life!

The next week when I arrived, his first question was, "Can we discuss that question about Jesus tonight?"

"No, that's week three."

Now you need to remember the primary tool I am using is Scripture; I've got him reading five chapters of the book of John every week. My condition upon meeting with him was that he would read a little bit every day – not all at once. (Remember the dagger.)

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John kept asking about “that Jesus question,” but I told him he’d have to wait until the third week. When the third meeting finally came, John was particularly interested. I gave him four reasons (found in booklet three) that explain why I believe Jesus is who He claimed to be. Then I said, “Okay, John, it’s your shot.”

There was a prolonged silence after which he said, “I can’t explain it.”

“What?” I asked.

“I don’t know why, but I believe Jesus is the Son of God.”

He then looked over to his wife, who had been listening all along, and asked, “What about you?” “Me, too,” she answered.

That night all three of us knelt by their couch, and they experienced the ceremony of inviting Christ into their lives.

Time would indeed confirm that they had a new love relationship with Christ and they both ended up joining our church. They eventually moved back to their original hometown, where John went back into partnership with Jim. The last I heard, they were members of the same church where Jim serves as an elder.

Why did John and his wife come to faith? Because God did the converting, using His best tool, the Bible. I was glad I had a tool that focused primarily on God’s Word which I could rely on to accomplish the desired outcome.

Now you hopefully understand the secret to effective disciple making – constant exposure to God’s Word and God’s people. When you find a tool that incorporates both, you have found a powerful tool.

But there are other important characteristics you want to look for as you select your tools. In the next chapter, I will discuss three additional ones.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD WE LOOK FOR IN TOOLS WE CHOOSE? (CONTINUED)

In the fourth chapter, I described the drastic contrast I observed in religious thinking and beliefs between those I observed in my small, southern hometown and those I saw when I moved to Atlanta. And those changes don't compare in magnitude to the changes that have taken place over the last half century across the entire country and world. So it should not be surprising that one's approach then and now in disciple making would have to change as well – especially as it relates to tools.

In years past, our culture was still greatly influenced by a somewhat biblical world view. People were familiar with the major tenets of the Christian faith, with majorities professing adherence to them. Questions such as "Who was Jesus?" and "Is The Bible God's Word?" would get totally different answers then than fifty years later.

Thus, the second characteristic of effective tools describes one such critically needed change – "Tools which utilized multiple appointment conversations rather than single appointment presentations." Fifty years ago most people merely needed a gracious reminder of the gospel message and an invitation to embrace it. That "one bullet" approach, as in our Barney Fife comparison, would leave us today without a second bullet.

Today, many people are needing and wanting answers to primary questions regarding the Christian faith. This requires multiple conversations, which point to the need for our third characteristic – "tools which create an attractive forum to address the questions that non-Christians are asking."

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And what are those questions? In my experience, after meeting with people of all ages, a large number of them being secularistic, humanists who do not embrace the Christian faith, they want the answers to the biggest four questions – three of which I alluded to in the last chapter:

- 1) How can Christians believe the Bible is God’s Word without error?
- 2) How can Christians believe that all people, including good, moral, religious people outside of Christianity, deserve to be separated from God for all eternity?
- 3) How can Christians believe that Jesus is the one and only way to God?

If they find merit in our answers to these three questions, they will want to know the answer to question four:

- 4) What does Jesus say is required to have eternal life?

Of course, there are other important questions they want answers to (which we need to get prepared to answer), but these are by far the most important ones for most.

This takes us to the final characteristic needing to be addressed – the importance of having “tools which respect the two greatest desires of interested seekers: brevity and privacy.” These are certainly the two desires I would have. I wouldn’t want to have to go to a library and research hours on end, reading book after book. I would want brevity.

For this reason, I have found that for most people, reading “Cliff Notes” sized booklets (also known as “Spark Notes”) is more desirable than reading lengthy books. Knowing how much I enjoyed

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using such booklets in college, I decided to address each of the primary questions with six or less pages – enough to give the reader the essence of the answer. Later discussions could take us into deeper aspects of the question.

I also would hate to have someone preaching at me and telling me everything I needed to know. Therefore, knowing how much I value privacy, I had to assume others would as well. And that has been overwhelmingly confirmed by those with whom I meet. They would much rather be able to take brief data in written form into their home or office and read the answers to these questions. But they do appreciate having someone they can meet with to push back or ask further questions they may have.

Brevity and privacy go a long way in creating an appropriate forum to address the questions that seekers are asking.

We now come to our final chapter. In it I will address the very practical question I am so often asked: “How do you know when it’s time to invite a non-Christian into a spiritual discussion or to investigate Christianity?”

WHEN IS IT TIME TO INVITE A NON-CHRISTIAN INTO A SPIRITUAL DISCUSSION OR TO INVESTIGATE CHRISTIANITY?

To answer the question, “When is it time to invite a non-Christian into a spiritual discussion or to investigate Christianity?”, let me describe an analogous situation.

Imagine that you are at one end of a very large hotel lobby and you see an acquaintance walking across the other end of the lobby. You call out his name and he stops and turns around to see who called. When he sees it’s you, you motion your hand to indicate to hold up so you could speak to him.

Consider what you would think if, when he saw you moving toward him, he began walking briskly away from you. And what would you assume if, when you sped up your walk, he sped up equally as fast? The answer is obvious. He doesn’t want to speak to you.

This is very similar to what some Christians do in their attempt to start a spiritual conversation. We notice them easing away from us and we begin to go even faster. There is no lack today of non-Christians who are moving away from well-meaning Christians or avoiding them all together.

One day I was at the gym when I got such a call from across the room. It was a member of our church whom I knew, but not well. Unlike my previous story, when I saw him walking toward me, I moved toward him to meet him halfway. When we got a reasonable speaking distance apart, I stopped – but he didn’t. Instead he took a couple more steps until his face was in a place uncomfortably close to mine. Without pointing out his insensitivity, I merely

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gradually stepped back to give some separation. I bet you can predict what happened next. You got it. He gradually took a step to the previous uncomfortable distance. After a couple of inconspicuous gradual steps back and observing his continuous reclaiming of a “too sociable” distance, I decided to make a game out of the situation. I gradually kept stepping back to see where this would end.

I eventually had my back pinned to the wall behind me. We had moved a good four to five yards. When it ended, I was thrilled to be finished with our conversation. And as I departed, I said to myself that I would avoid that man every time I saw him in the future.

Once again, this is what non-Christians do with us as Christians when we get “too close” for their comfort. By this I mean, they begin to avoid us if they are not desirous to talk about spiritual things.

So how do we know if they would have interest? Let’s go back to our analogy. I suggest when you think it “might be” time to have such a discussion, test the waters. While still too far apart to carry on a meaningful discussion (figuratively speaking), begin with a non-threatening comment regarding spiritual things and listen to their response and watch their body language. If they (in a sense) take a step back, the last thing I would do is to take a step forward. In fact, I would immediately change the conversation (take my own step backward). My hope would be that they would perhaps decide it was still safe to talk with me in the future. At that point I would continue to pray for them and ask God to create another opportunity when perhaps they would have more interest.

If they, on the other hand, take a step toward me, then I would continue in our discussion assuming an interest to talk further about spiritual things.

Perhaps you are hearing me say this and are thinking, “Didn’t you violate your own advice with the man whom you shared the

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diagram over lunch, while with your friend from your discipleship group?”

My answer to your question is “Yes”. In this case, I took a gamble knowing we were going to be together for quite a while having lunch and that I had assured him that any spiritual conversation would end at his say, as soon as I finished the diagram. In a sense, I felt I had nothing to lose regarding a future opportunity.

I share all of this as a general principle. I would encourage anyone to seek God’s leading in any and all situations knowing that there can always be “exceptions to the rule”.

In this booklet I have given you a brief overview of some principles for making disciples. There are additional resources available on our website, lifeonlife.org. Visit vimeo.com/lolmd/jesus to watch a brief animation explaining Life on Life. In the next booklet, I will introduce some principles for the second step in the process of making and training disciples, “Walking with Christians in their gospel journey.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy Pope is the founding pastor of Perimeter Church in Johns Creek, Georgia. After 42 years of leading Perimeter Church, in September 2019, he moved into the role of full-time Assistant Pastor of Perimeter Church and President of Life on Life Ministries. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama with a major in math and Reformed Theological Seminary.

Since its start in 1977, Perimeter and its church plants have started more than 40 churches in the Atlanta area. In addition to churches planted both nationally and internationally, Perimeter is a founding partner of Unite!, a group of over 120 churches from different denominations working together to bring Kingdom transformation to the city of Atlanta.

His personal passion and commitment is to make and train disciples of Christ. He founded Life on Life Ministries, an organization committed to establishing life-on-life missional discipleship in churches worldwide. In addition to training church leaders throughout the world, he has been a guest lecturer at numerous universities and graduate schools. He has written books specifically for pastors and leaders, *The Intentional Church* and *Insourcing*. He has also written a book for singles, *Finding Your Million Dollar Mate*. He has developed resources used around the world that include: *The Journey*, a gospel centered resource for discipleship and *Express Your Faith*, a relational way to help others investigate Christ. He has also developed resources for those exploring Christianity that include *Life Issues* and *Next Steps* booklets. For other resources and works from Randy Pope, visit LifeonLife.org.

Randy and Carol have four grown children and fifteen grandchildren.

ABOUT LIFE ON LIFE

Pastors around the world have shared with us that there is a leadership and influence gap between their church and the community in which they live. There are not enough leaders for the ministries of the church, much less to be salt and light in the community.

At Perimeter Church, life-on-life discipleship is the way that we are developing spiritual maturity in the lives of our people. For years, Perimeter was recognized for growth and innovation, but we realized that there was something missing – taking people to a level of maturity in their faith.

The church realized that life-on-life discipleship had been at the core of our leadership development, but it was not the culture of the church. It was not a movement. As we began to apply the principles of Jesus' model of discipleship to shape the culture of discipleship in the church, we saw a new level of spiritual depth develop amongst our people.

Life on Life Ministries was founded out of Perimeter to help other churches follow Jesus' model of discipleship and to begin broader movements of discipleship in cities and nations around the world through the local church.

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The term “discipleship” is not found in Scripture. However, the word “disciple” is often used. It simply means “follower.” Though the word “discipleship” means different things among Christians, at Life on Life, we see discipleship as a process with two distinct focuses: the “making” and the “training” of disciples. Discipleship is anything that helps someone follow Jesus, whether that is moving them from unbelief to belief and/or belief to maturity.

It is not uncommon to be at a conference on “discipleship” and never hear any presentation that addresses leading lost people to Christ – a very important aspect of discipleship. Hopefully, by highlighting the “making,” both will get equal attention. In this brief booklet, Randy Pope gives insights from years of personal disciple making experience to show that anyone can be a disciple maker in our culture today.



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