

2023 | LESSON 2

# DISCIPLE-CYCLE:

## SELECTING YOUR LEADERS

### GETTING ORGANIC MOMENTUM

When we think about what it means to see a disciple-making movement take root there can be a tendency to try to roll something out as soon as possible. This is understandable since we are commanded to go and make a disciple of anyone who receives the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and becomes his follower.

However, the more subtle witness of Scripture differentiates between a follower of Jesus and those who lead others. In the Synoptic Gospels we see Jesus calling out twelve from the larger population of those who had begun to follow him. They were to be with him, to preach, to take spiritual authority over evil spirits and to heal (Matt. 10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16). Why did he do this? Was it to set up a new exclusive hierarchy of leadership? No. The real purpose behind this was to establish the foundations of the church and model the way in which he would build that church (Matt. 16:13-19; Eph. 2:19-22).





Godly leaders are needed to help facilitate a disciple-making movement. They are essential to ensure solid doctrine and orderly structuring of ministries (Eph. 4:12-13; 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 11; 4:5-6; 6:3-4; Tit. 1:5, 9). Movements, by nature, dance between the poles of individual freedom and organizational stability. Too much freedom results in error and anarchy, too much structure stifles creativity and innovation. Good leaders help to establish the balance needed.

This is why determining which leaders to select is crucial. We need assistance in maximizing discernment. To be and make disciples we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. We call our third core value of establishing a disciple-making movement a Spirit-infused process. In this mindset we not only recognize our need for the power of the Holy Spirit to be part of a disciple-making movement, we also seek his help in determining who helps us. This discernment approach happens through patient observation and focused petition.







# PATIENT OBSERVATION

As we look at Jesus, there is a purposeful pause between when he initiated his ministry to the public and expanded it through a smaller group of committed followers called apostles. Some have postulated that it was a year before he selected the apostles. This doesn't mean that these men were the only ones following him. At one juncture, Jesus had seventy-two people who were willing and ready to do Kingdom ministry (Lk. 10:1-12). Later, after his death, resurrection and ascension, there were one-hundred twenty followers waiting on the Spirit's anointing at Pentecost (Acts 1:15). The apostles were simply a band of followers who had different responsibilities, especially after the Spirit descended.

What was Jesus looking for when determining who should serve in this capacity? I think the simplest answer to this question is demonstrated commitment. This is reflected in the Gospel of John after Jesus said some strange and difficult things about following him. When Jesus saw how many people left when he challenged them to go deeper, he turned and asked the apostles if they were going to leave and Peter replied, *"Where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (Jn. 6:24-70). In other words, Peter was saying, *"We have risked everything on the belief that you are the Messiah"* (Mk. 10:28).

As you disciple people you will recognize that people will flow in and out of your life and the church based on their level of maturity or commitment. We shouldn't fret over this too much. We can see this reality even among the apostles, with the extreme example of Judas being a person who was later revealed to have a corrupted agenda (Jn. 13:1-11; 21-30). The key here is that Jesus was looking for leaders who were singularly, albeit imperfectly, committed to following him.

This can become a challenging aspect of disciple making because it is hard to pour your life into people only to have them disappoint, or in rare cases betray you. No doubt Jesus felt the sting of disappointment at some level. However, it is interesting to note that this reality never deterred him from his mission. Jesus had a resiliency about him because he had realistic expectations of people (Matt. 11:16-19). The sobering truth is that he has realistic expectations of you too because you will often fail him. Grace is therefore needed for everyone throughout the journey.



Along these same lines, another unspoken challenge is that we are more influenced by our culture than we realize when it comes to selecting leaders to help us join God in his Kingdom enterprises. It will often be a temptation to pick people who have alluring personalities or speaking gifts to lead. While we should never penalize people who are wired this way, the most important thing we need in an ongoing disciple-making movement is to find people who stick with the Lord and you through thick and thin.

This is where using the Disciple-Cycle Model helps. Looking at the four components you can ask the following questions: Do people talk about how they enjoy walking with God? Are they transparent about their struggles and show a willingness to move through them? Is there increasing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives? Do they have a passion for evangelism and missional work? Because Disciple-Cycle is about a Gospel-based approach to disciple-making, you want leaders who are continually gospel-ling themselves.

Paul echoed this approach by defining commitment as proven character and basic competence. In an often-quoted passage on disciple-making, Paul says that in order to move the movement forward Timothy (who was a leader Paul discipled) had to find people who were “faithful” and could “teach” (2 Tim. 2:2) In other passages like 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 Paul outlined qualifications for leaders that involved wide-ranging character qualifications.

You will need to make sure the people you select to help lead a disciple-making movement are growing followers of Christ. This can be defined as those who are doctrinally sound and can communicate the basics of the faith to others. The gist of this is that we are trying to avoid two mistakes: the first mistake is projecting the idea that only certain kinds of gifted people can ascend into leadership. We are not looking for almost perfect or brilliant people. We are looking for faithful people. Faithful people are the ones who keep plugging in, keep learning, and keep getting up when they fall.

The second mistake is projecting the impression that leadership is no big deal. While anyone can ascend to leadership, the person who leads must be someone of good character and essential competence. Only through observing people over a period of time and gaining spiritual discernment from that can you assess people properly and fairly.



# FOCUSED PETITION

Not only did Jesus closely observe his followers to see who was demonstrating commitment, he also spent a night in prayer before selecting the apostles. Why? There are probably several reasons, but for our discussion we could say that he was seeking the Father's perspective (Jn 5:19). Jesus modeled what an effective spiritual life looked like, which included discerning whom to pick to lead.

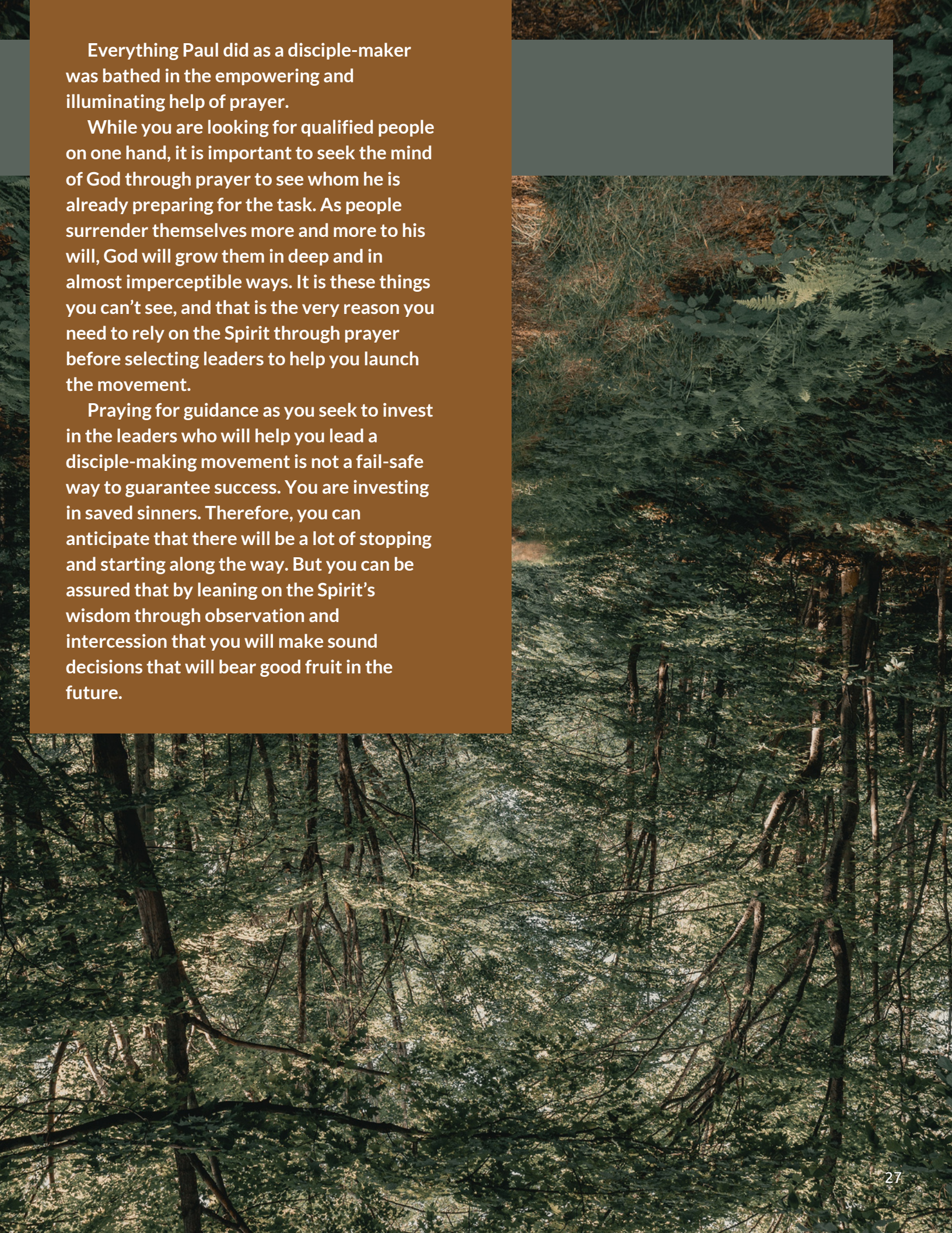
Because he was all about the Father's agenda, he sought to align all that he did with that overarching goal. He therefore received from the Father the insight he needed to pick the right men for the role. Spending time in prayer was how Jesus did this, and the disciples saw a direct correlation between the time Jesus spent in prayer and his overall effectiveness (Lk. 11:1).

It is interesting to note that none of these individuals were among the most educated in their society. Most of them were despised by the culturally and politically elite of their day. One was even a total sellout. On the surface, I am sure it seemed to many that Jesus made some mistakes by selecting these men to lead his movement.

And yet, it was these men who helped turn the world upside down (Acts 4:13; 17:6). This is why you should never limit who you think might become a leader. Those that look like natural leaders at first sometimes flameout, while those who seem to be average or normal people end up really helping you carry the load.

Paul also relied on the Spirit's assistance through prayer to do the work of making disciples. It was the foundation from which his public ministry was launched (Acts 13:1-3). It is how he also chose elders to lead the churches he helped to establish (Acts 14:23). He not only selected leaders this way, he also continued to support those he set apart to lead ministries through constant intercession on their behalf (2 Tim. 1:3). He even asked people frequently to pray for him and his increased faithfulness to God's call in his life (Phil. 1:22).





Everything Paul did as a disciple-maker was bathed in the empowering and illuminating help of prayer.

While you are looking for qualified people on one hand, it is important to seek the mind of God through prayer to see whom he is already preparing for the task. As people surrender themselves more and more to his will, God will grow them in deep and in almost imperceptible ways. It is these things you can't see, and that is the very reason you need to rely on the Spirit through prayer before selecting leaders to help you launch the movement.

Praying for guidance as you seek to invest in the leaders who will help you lead a disciple-making movement is not a fail-safe way to guarantee success. You are investing in saved sinners. Therefore, you can anticipate that there will be a lot of stopping and starting along the way. But you can be assured that by leaning on the Spirit's wisdom through observation and intercession that you will make sound decisions that will bear good fruit in the future.





## GETTING STARTED

As mentioned earlier, there is no one way to make disciples. The key is to combine biblical content with relational investment. One way a pastor can get the ball rolling is to start out simply and lead a few groups of triads. These primary groups involve investing in three people at a time and using whatever Bible Study materials you deem would be helpful. We would suggest using a primer like “The Good News Series” which was written by Walker Armstrong and is available through the Triad Church Network. It seeks to look at various aspects of the Gospel and how it connects evangelism with discipleship. There are a plethora of resources that can lend aid to the glorious process. What is important here is to ensure that it also integrates the Disciple-Cycle Model (or something similar) in order that a connection is being made between the means of how we walk with Jesus and the methods we employ in disciple-making.

Ultimately, the real litmus test for how to grow your leadership pipeline is to pinpoint when there are multiple generations in the spiritual family tree. This can give you some initial indication that you are large enough to appoint leaders to oversee multiple people who are seeing multiplication happen. Additionally, it can provide insight into who should eventually become elders, deacons, or any other important part in your church simply because you would never want someone in a leadership role that is not a disciple-maker.

As you begin to install your first generation of disciple-making leaders it is important to remember not to rapidly grow the organization. To parrot the old Paul Masson Winery advertisement which stated, “We will serve no wine before its time,” a pastor who discipless others knows that when to expand the organization is crucial. Premature structural organization will create too much of a top-down approach. You don’t want administrators. You want player-coaches who can not only lead a triad, but eventually will help you lead groups of triad facilitators as that need arises. Ongoing facilitation and coaching training will be of major help in strategically investing in people who can help you take the next step.



# QUESTIONS

**1. Why is having a multiplicity of leaders important in a disciple-making movement?**

**2. As you observe other's lives what should you be looking for when selecting people to help lead a disciple-making movement?**

**3. Have you ever selected the wrong person for a leadership role? What did you learn?**

**4. How is prayer crucial in selecting the right leaders?**

**5. How does the truth that we are all saved sinners impact your approach to selecting leaders?**