

Disciple-making: Towards Refocusing the Church during COVID-19

COVID-19 is an opportunity like a freight train in the sense that it is so big we may not even see it because we are too close to it. COVID has weakened the church, forcing us to ask, “since there is so much we **can’t** do during COVID, what is the core we **must** do” Initially the scramble was to on-line streaming and pastoral care, both valuable and necessary while finding our bearings in a confusing, divisive environment.

Then what?

If COVID restrictions continue to wreak havoc, the core question is increasingly pressed on us: “Given there are many things we *cannot* do during this pandemic, what is the one thing that we *must* do?” Hopefully, we will wake up tomorrow and COVID will have been a bad dream. At the other end of the spectrum, it may be COVID restrictions are extended as the church, disoriented and off step, loses more ground. Though we don’t know which scenario lies ahead we know one thing: Jesus calls us to disciple-making and many of the ways we’ve responded to his call in the past, whether highly effective or not, are not available to us in the ways they have been.

What do we do when a freight train comes at us? We pivot. Our mission hasn’t changed but how we make disciples may. Here’s how I’ve sought to pivot.

Restrictions allow us to gather in very small groups. These groups can meet in three ways: socially distanced, by internet, or as families already living together. These small groups can be trained to function as small churches and can reproduce themselves more easily than large churches. Heads of households can be trained, as can home group and ministry group leaders.

The training method must be simple and easy to transfer. Disciple-making groups can meet anytime convenient and practical for two or more people. Here’s the process:

1. RECONNECT (Look back)

- What one thing are you thankful for (or rejoicing in) today?
- What challenge are you experiencing?

2. REVIEW (applies the 2nd time onwards)

- Can someone summarize the story from last time and share how God spoke to us?
- How did it go with your "I will ..." statement from last week?
- Did you share what you learned with someone? How did the person respond?

3. READ (Look up to the Lord)

- Invite someone to read the new scripture passage. Ask someone else to read it in a different translation.

4. RETELL

- Can someone retell the story in their own words?
- Is there anything more to add?

5. RESPOND

- What does this passage tell us about God, or about Jesus?
- What does this passage tell us about people, or about ourselves?
- What is God drawing you to pay attention to? How is God speaking to you? Is there an attitude/behaviour to change? A promise to lay hold of? Something specific He wants you to do?

6. REACT (Look forward to fruitfulness)

- How can you put your learning into action? (I suggest using a notebook, take a few moments to write your responses.)
- "I will ..."

(It may be the Lord is inviting you as a group to respond to a need. If so, write together a "We will..." statement.)

7. REPEAT

- Who could benefit from what the Lord is teaching you?
- How will you share what you learned?

Pray for one another...

Notice six core functions of the church that are included in this simple process:

Pastoral care: 1. Reconnect and pray for one another

Self-evaluation: 2. Review "Am I applying what the Lord is speaking to me?"

Bible engagement: 3. Read, 4. Retell, 5. Respond. The Word of God is central, the Holy Spirit is the teacher as we share what God is drawing our attention to.

Growing as a Disciple: 6. React to what God is speaking to your heart with the practical application God suggests to you. Write it down and tell others what you've written.

Disciple-making: 7. Repeat what the Lord is teaching you to someone in the orbit of your relationships. That person could be a believer, a seeker or someone who hasn't yet

identified the questions which lead to eternal life in Christ. Everyone has the potential of taking a baby step or a larger step towards being/becoming a disciple of Christ.

Prayer: ideally each person prays for at least one other person present. Prayer seeks the Lord for grace in the personal challenge shared by that person and empowerment for “I will” statements and the person we’re asking the Lord to enable us to bless.

Carol and I use this process in a virtual group meeting biweekly and in a socially distanced group which meets in our home. Carol or I facilitate only twice, then invite a participant to facilitate twice. Soon there are enough experienced facilitators comfortable to follow the pattern in a new small group. We are seeing strawberry runners. We never quite know where they will go but, in good soil, confident they will grow, multiply, and bear fruit.

Questions will arise. I’m happy to talk: MurrayMoerman@gmail.com. In the meantime have a look at www.murraymoerman.com/2mission/disciple/7questions.asp.

In time, by God’s grace, the Covid-19 freight train will fade-to-grey. But whatever may happen we can be ready and fully engaged in advancing Jesus’ core calling to us all: “Go and make disciples of all peoples ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Murray and Carol Moerman
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