

MOVEMENTS OF MULTIPLICATION

Things I am learning about movements of multiplication in Latin America;

A humble offering to my friends at the Global Youth Initiative 2005

By Mark Edwards — Servant Leader - Sonlife Latin America

San Isidro, Costa Rica Central America

After 10 plus years of working and ministering in Latin America, I am more convinced than ever that in order to create, stimulate and sustain a movement of multiplication we must be committed to making disciples. I state this as a premise statement that may seem to be a no brainer, but I have been observing that on our continent (the Americas) we have slowly been moving away from disciple making and not toward it. The catch phrase for years now has been that we are to produce “*true Christ followers.*” I am not sure I am willing to venture a guess at all what people mean when they use this phrase. I feel sometimes that it has taken on a life of its own. Those of you living on other continents may not be experiencing the impact of this as we are here in Latin America. I am not sure who made this phrase popular, but my guess would be the excellent ministry of Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, IL. It is a ministry which God has used greatly all over the world in this area of challenging the church to make Christ followers.

The problem I have observed with this phrase and the fruit that it is now reaping in Latin America is that I do not find the phrase to go far enough. Truly, we do not read in the Great or Everyday Commission that we are to go into all the world and make true Christ followers. The mandate from our Savior and Master goes further than that and is clearly that we are to “***Make Disciples***”. I believe in the mind of Jesus there was a difference in a Christ follower and a Christ disciple. And just settling for Christ followers is not enough. Until that person has made the transition to being a Christ disciple our work is not done. This is the theme of this paper and what I have been learning about movements of multiplication here in Latin America.

Thesis: Lasting Movements of Multiplication **cannot** be created, stimulated and sustained by making *Christ followers*, but only by making *Christ disciples*.

I call as my first witness to this fact Jesus; Himself. Many times in His earthly ministry Jesus had multitudes of *followers*. (Matthew 4:25; 8:1; 13:2; 19:2; etc.) These were people who believed that He was the Messiah and were following Him. Without a doubt this is the first step in being a true disciple. The first call of Jesus to His own disciples was to “*Come and See — Follow Me.*” But Jesus did not stop there. It is my contention that had he stopped there in only making followers, we would not be here discussing this

theme today. Instead, Jesus continually challenged those following Him to take the next step and become a disciple.

I would like to cite Luke 14:25-35 as a proof text to this point. In verse 25 it says that “*large crowds were following Jesus*” and He turned to them and challenged them to take the next step while warning them not to do it hastily or with little thought. Jesus knew this was a big commitment.

Jesus says, “*To be my disciple you will have to do three things: You will have to hate something, carry something and give up something.*” These three things describe the transition from being a Christ follower to being a Christ disciple.

Verse 26. “*If anyone comes to me and does not **hate** his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.*”

The words that Jesus uses here are not for the faint of heart. I believe Jesus is saying you must love God so much that to the world it looks like you hate even yourself in comparison to your love for the Father. Our God is a jealous God (Nahum 1:2) and He will share first place with no one and not only that, He does not even want to see second place in the picture. He is to be loved and valued above all. There is no second place, He alone is to be our consuming thought and the possessor of all of our affections and love.

I find way too often in my own life how hard it is to guard my affections. I believe the Great Commandment is in this verse. To love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my strength, with all my soul. In other words, to love God with my all. It is a daily call to love God more than everything else I hold dear, even my own life.

Verse 27: “*And anyone who does not **carry his cross** and follow me cannot be my disciple.*”

If we are to be true disciples we must also carry our cross and not use it as an excuse to **not** obey God. I have been learning that my cross is the things that have happened in my past that I **cannot** change. There are many things in my life, i.e.: habit patterns, attitudes, life style things, that I can change. These are not my cross. My cross is the things I **cannot** change. Like things people have said to me, done to me or things I have done to myself that I can not go back and change. They are the result of my own poor choices and sin and the result of the sin of others. As a disciple of Jesus I must daily pick up this cross and obey Him. He is the Master, not me. My friend Jerry introduced me to a new

friend this year. His name is Tony Melendez and he is Nicaraguan. He is about my age, height and weight. The biggest difference physically between Tony and myself is that Tony was born without any arms. His mother was given some kind of medicine during her pregnancy in Nicaragua that caused Tony to be born without arms. This is the cross Tony will bear his whole life. Yet, Tony has chosen not to let the fact that he has no arms keep him from being a true disciple of Jesus. He has learned to play the guitar with his feet and God is using him in amazing ways around the world as he tells of the joy he has as an armless disciple of Jesus helping others raise their hands to the heavens in worship of our God. This year Tony has spoken into my life and encouraged me anew to take up my cross and not use it as an excuse for not being obedient to my Master.

Verse 33: *“In the same way, any of you who does not **give up everything** he has cannot be my disciple.”*

If we are to be true disciples we must give up everything. When I was 17 years old and being discipled by Dann, he gave me a book called *“The Cost of Discipleship”* by Juan Ortiz, to read. A story that Juan shares in his book marked my life as a 17 year old. I will give you the reader’s digest version as I remember it.

There once lived a man who was a collector of pearls. On one occasion the man ran across another man with an incredible pearl, one much bigger and brilliant than any he had ever seen before. In fact it had no comparison. The pearl was stunning. The man asked him how much he wanted for the pearl. The owner replied, *“How much do you have.”* But the man insisted, *“How much do you want for it?”* The conversation ensued until the man finally replied, *“I have \$100,000.”* The owner of the pearls said, *“I will take all \$100,000.”* The man looked at him and said, *“You are crazy!”* and he went on his way. After several days of not being able to sleep the man returned with his check book to purchase the pearl, and as he got ready to take the pearl he said, *“I can’t wait to drive home with my new pearl.”* To which the owner of the pearl said, *“O, you have a car do you, it will cost you that as well.”* *“WHAT you mean you want the \$100,000 and my car now?”* *“I told you it would cost you all you had.”*

Each evening the man was unable to sleep and each day he returned always putting his foot in his mouth as he left mentioning something else he had. Finally he had given everything he owned to the man in exchange for the pearl. As he laid down the check for \$100,000, the deed to his house, his car, his stocks, and his pearl collection, he said, *“You have all that I have, now may I have the pearl, so I can show it to my wife and kids who think I am crazy to exchange all of this for this pearl?”* *“O, you have a wife and children? They are mine as well. You will sign them over to me, they will be mine.”*

Whatever I tell them to do they will have to do.” The man responded, *“You are crazy, you cannot have my family. I would never sell my family into slavery for a pearl.”* And with that he stormed out only to return several weeks later with everything and a letter giving the man control over his family. With tears in his eyes he took the pearl; only to hear the following, *“O, I forgot one thing. If you want the pearl it will also cost you your very own life. You will have to become my slave as well.”* The man finally gave it all away for the pearl.

And Jesus said, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* — Matthew 13:45

As the man turned to leave the former owner of the pearl said, *“Wait, please take these things of mine that you brought. Remember this is my house now, my car, my money. When I tell you to give some to this person or that you must do it. Remember it is mine now and not yours. You will now be the steward of all my things.”* The man left that day with most everything he had brought in to the shop. But something had changed. He was no longer **the owner** but **the steward**. May God help us steward wisely the things He has so generously put under our charge.

I call as my second witness the people of Israel. As I look into the Old Testament I see this same issue. The call in Deuteronomy 6 is for parents to make disciples of their children. I cannot think of a better description of making a disciple and not just followers.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.” — Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Yet, the leaders of Israel forgot this command and within one generation had left the things of God. The first generation produced disciples, the second only followers and the third generation walked away. Here is the record of the days of Joshua.

“The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.”

Judges 2:7 -11

I believe Joshua and the leaders of Israel were true disciples, yet they failed to reproduce true disciples and thus there arose a generation that knew neither the Lord nor all that He had done.

I call as my third witness the relatively modern history of mankind. I call to witness Europe, once a stronghold for the gospel, where missionary and true disciples were sent out into all the world. Movements of multiplication unparalleled like that of the Moravians. Yet, I believe they slipped into the same mistake as many generations before them and they became consumed with making Christ followers and not Christ disciples. Thus, within the course of a few generations the sons and daughters of those who began great movements for God do not even believe God exists.

It is becoming an increased passion of mine to not let that happen on the continent of the Americas. Yet I see it happening before my very eyes. Each time I visit the United States, I am increasingly aware of the fact that I discover less true disciples and more and more followers of Christ; people who are willing to have *Jesus as part of their life* but not willing to let Jesus *be all of their life*.

To me, our mandate as partners in GYI is clear and I have given my life to it: ***Make Disciples***. To create, stimulate and sustain movements of multiplication I believe, we must do the following three things:

1) ***We must model***. We must first of all be true disciples who live Jesus in front of a growing follower population in our world. We must model lives sold out for God. We must love God more than family and life itself. We must be willing to take up our cross and obey God, and not use our cross as an excuse to not follow Jesus. We must freely give everything we have to God and stop viewing ourselves as owners but as stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to us.

2) ***We must reproduce Christ disciples and not just Christ followers***. We must not be satisfied with only helping people find Jesus. We must take them further and challenge them to make the transition to being a disciple of Jesus. If we fall short here we will not

have a lasting movement but a fleeting fad. We must reproduce after our own kind. We cannot expect followers to reproduce disciples. They cannot. A follower can only reproduce a follower. We true disciples of Jesus must arise and not become lazy or get sucked into the trends of our day. ***We must reproduce disciples!***

3) ***We must be challenging those in our sphere of influence to make disciples.*** We cannot let them be satisfied with reproducing only more Christ followers, as good as that is. If we fail at this in short order, the Americas will follow suit with Europe and in a generation our grandchildren will not know our God or the things which He has done. We must not be content to sit idly by and enjoy only the fruit of a movement of the Spirit of God in the Americas and a tremendous amount of followers coming to Jesus. We must also challenge the leaders around us to not be satisfied with only reproducing followers. The generations to come are dependent on us to be faithful and obedient to the command of Jesus to **MAKE DISCIPLES.**

Arise my friend, do not grow weary in well doing for in due season you shall reap a plentiful harvest if you do not give up. Do not get sucked into popular "*followership*" but stir up the passion within for *discipleship*, Jesus style. May God be gracious to us and allow us to see movements of multiplication of disciples for His glory and the advancement of His Kingdom. Amen.