

The Disciple's Life

By Pastor Bill Clem

What kind of disciples are we making at Mars Hill Church? Effective meeting leaders? Savvy budget planners? Maybe even diligent Bible studiers? If our ministry worked exactly as it should, what would the lives of our people look like?

Kind of a sobering question, isn't it? Jesus commanded his disciples to make disciples:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).

In essence, when everything Jesus had done on earth "worked," he left behind disciple-making disciples.

As we move into an accelerated stage of multiplying ministries throughout the distributed world of Mars Hill Church, it is more critical than ever that we keep our focus on Jesus' command to make disciples. Otherwise we will find ourselves developing systems and programs to manage crowds, when at our very core we desire to be a people transformed by Jesus calling our city to worship Jesus.

Some of the Mars Hill pastors, including myself, have spent the past few months trying to craft a clear picture of what it looks like to live as the kind of disciple Jesus speaks of. In developing this description, we were committed to three non-negotiables:

- 1. Jesus must be at the center.** Disciple means "learner" or "follower." A disciple gets his identity not by the learning or the following but by who they are learning from or following. Our identity is a transformed identity in Jesus Christ.
- 2. The description must be biblical.** We worked at trying to group the many commands and instructions of scripture into holistic expressions rather than a checklist of do's and don'ts.
- 3. The description must be relational.** The disciple's life needs to be grounded in relationships rather than in impersonal behaviors or simply performance goals.

How can we come up with a description of a disciple's life that applies across an entire church—a church with many services, campuses, age groups, and life stages? This is the challenge: to create a common target that we can aim for whether we're gathered as a whole, in a community cluster, in a specific ministry, or even with our immediate families.

Discipleship should transcend demographics and influence not only our individual lives, but also the manner in which we live as a church. Discipleship should affect everything from our church programming to our personal behavior. First and foremost, however, discipleship should start with Jesus—our identity in him and expressing that identity towards others.

That is the first of four areas where we challenge the people of Mars Hill Church to grow. We've identified these areas of pursuit as the sum of a disciple's life:

- As our **gospel identity** we acknowledge our “nothingness” without Christ—and our wholeness and uniqueness in Christ. We do this through prayer, confessing our sins, repentance, and listening to God through his Word, the Bible.
- With regard to **gospel worship**, we need to face the idols in our lives—things that challenge our very acceptance of Jesus as God—and realize that when we exalt God as his worshippers, we have positioned ourselves in the most dignifying of positions as humanly possible. We do this through accepting God's love, obeying him, and choosing his will above our own.
- In **gospel community** we must realize the balance between gifted serving and loving connection, in which some have the freedom to share their brokenness and others accept their responsibilities as the body of Christ. We do this through taking the time to meet with each other, risking our hearts with one another, and living lives of humble honesty.
- And finally, in **gospel mission** we realize that we serve a “sent” and “sending” God, who invites us to join him on mission, living out the gospel and bringing a redemptive presence to our culture. We do this by caring for non-Christians in practical ways and speaking the truth of the gospel in love.

In describing a disciple's life, we cannot emphasize enough the order of multiplication. This truly happens best when “like reproduces like,” meaning churches reproduce churches, campuses reproduce campuses, community groups reproduce community groups, and disciples reproduce disciples. Jesus did not leave behind a disciple-making program; he left behind disciple-making disciples.

It is our hope that Mars Hill will make disciples through the transformed and transforming lives of its Christ-following disciples. As ministry leaders start to use the description of a disciple's life to evaluate the rhythms of our programming, to challenge people to establish their own disciplines of followership, and to call for a deeper understanding of who we are in Christ, as expressed in worship, fellowship, and mission, we invite you to join a movement of disciple-making.