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POSTCARDS FROM CORINTH SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

BY JIM SYLVESTER

This is the Users Guide for personal discipleship. While The Compass provides content for one-on-one discipleship, Postcards addresses the practice, philosophy, and difficult issues that are a part of discipleship. Here, for example, is a partial list of the topics covered:

Habitual Sin, Authority Issues, Christian Counseling, Fasting, Theological Conflicts, Coaching Through Trials, Challenging to Conferences, Confronting Sin, Ministering Cross-Culturally, The Role of Faith, Difficulties in Sharing the Ministry of the Spirit, Selection, Conflict Resolution, Why Does Leadership Matter, Conducting Basic Follow-up... Postcards contains 47 articles on all critical issues of discipleship.

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Spiritual Multiplication

SPIRITUAL ADDITION VS. SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

Spiritual addition in ministry is when someone wins other people to Christ, but does not disciple, train, and deepen those converts to go out and do likewise. While we will review the biblical basis for spiritual multiplication, for now let it suffice to state that in Matthew 28:18-20, we are commanded to go and make disciples, not simply converts.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20).

If you led a thousand people to Christ every year for 36 years (taking each one through basic follow up), how many people would you have reached with the gospel? Answer: 36,000. However, if you led three people to Christ, disciplined them, and trained each one to reach three other people, and everyone that was disciplined in turn reached three other people each year, then when we multiply the process out over 36 years the number of disciples becomes 1,048,576. That’s exponential growth. That’s spiritual multiplication.

This seems to be what the Lord had in mind in the Great Commission, as it makes the completion of the task feasible as it’s doubtful that Jesus expected His disciples to keep up a case load of one thousand disciples a year.

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT FOR SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

We have already alluded to the precedence of the Great Commission in the book of Matthew, but there is other biblical support for this model. What follows is a brief survey.

Colossians 1:28 states, “We proclaim Him and admonish every man, and teach every man that we may present every man complete in Christ.” That’s every man, complete in Christ. The goal is not conversion but completion, or as Matthew 28:19 states it, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Not just some of what Jesus had commanded, but all. And in Ephesians, we read:



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“To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:12-16).

These passages underscore that it is God’s will that all who come to faith should grow into maturity in Christ and become full in the true knowledge of Him, fulfilling God’s desire for their character and their ministry. In verse 12, it mentions that the saints are to be equipped “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” We are to do this “until we all (there is that word again!) attain to the unity of the faith.”

Again, mere conversion is not what God prescribes.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The emphasis in this verse is on multiplication. Notice the connection between the teacher, his students, and his students’ students. There is a long-range view to discipleship versus a terminal one.

Teaching does not simply start with a teacher and end with his students. It is to go on to the students’ students, their students and so on. The idea of one generation teaching the next is explicit here in the text. It supports the view of spiritual multiplication as opposed to mere spiritual addition.


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“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16).

This idea of connection is explicit in this text. Look at the language the Holy Spirit has Paul employ: “the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies.” This runs counter to the more modern, Western view of rugged individualism wherein we have lone rangers doing ministry while others are on the sidelines watching. A ministry of addition leads to this kind of mentality.

If one person is doing all the evangelism, or all the discipleship, and there isn’t any plan for delegation, we’re swimming against the tide of the New Testament. God intends there to be spiritual multiplication in our ministries.

OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT

There is also an emphasis upon spiritual multiplication in the Old Testament. Look at Exodus 18. In this passage, Jethro confronts Moses for trying to lead Israel single-handedly, teaching the Law and implementing its particulars on his own.

First, Jethro displays his concerns for Moses:

“What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening? You shall surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone” (Exodus 18:14, 18).

The indictment of “doing it alone” has a sting to it, and it’s obvious that Moses ought to delegate. But, before we get to the solution, notice it says not only that Moses the leader will be worn out if he doesn’t change his ways, but, also, the “people who are with [him].” What does this mean?

Can we surmise that it is wearisome to those around us when we don’t include them in the work of God’s kingdom? Is it because a leader is hoarding the task and has marginalized those around him? This makes for some very interesting conjecture.

Second, Jethro outlines his solution to Moses:

“Now, listen to me: I shall give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people

able men who fear God, men of truth . . . and you shall place these over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens” (Exodus 18:19-23).



Again we see delegation and multiplication—leaders who in turn teach leaders, who in turn teach leaders, and so on. This strongly supports the notion that spiritual multiplication is biblically prescribed for us as the way in which God intends His kingdom to function. This is something we see in both the Old and New Testaments.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AND EXCELLING IN SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

We first looked at a comparison between spiritual addition and spiritual multiplication. We then briefly explored the biblical precedence for spiritual multiplication. Now, we want to examine some ways that we can excel in the task of spiritual multiplication. While there are many ways to go about this, I will give you my top eight suggestions.

TIP 1—LEADERS START AND STAY FOCUSED WITH THE END IN MIND.

Stephen Covey in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* popularized the notion that effectiveness is linked to viewing a worthy goal before one begins working on the task. Certainly spiritual multiplication is a worthy goal. When a leader works toward that end, a view of it must be in her mind at all times as she pursues it.

A great suggestion is made by Sherm Brand of Here's Life America, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, to help us in this arena. He encourages leaders to have a vision to multiply out to four generations. He bases this on 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Brand advises this: “If a leader begins to strive toward that goal [of four generations, beginning with himself as Timothy and his leader as Paul], it will serve to keep him on track and will help him to know if he is truly building multiplying disciples. If he is not eventually multiplying to four generations, he knows that he is weak in some aspect of building disciples. Once he does reach to four generations...his goal then becomes to help his people reach to four generations and so on. Again, we start small, but always think big. It will take time to see four generations develop but that is the best visible measure of how well we are building disciples.”

So, we start by focusing upon the end in mind: spiritual multiplication. We are not simply thinking of our discipleship, or even their disciples, but a step further. We communicate with the expectation that what we teach will be handed down a line or chain of disciples. This informs what and how we disciple.

TIP2—LEADERS SEEK TO BE SERVANTS.


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One of the more significant paradigms a leader needs to embrace is the concept of servanthood, not only to be obedient to the Lord, but to be effective in spiritual multiplication.

Leaders need to see that their disciples have been entrusted to them. We are to help them live fruitful lives, and serve them toward this end, never selfishly seeking the expanse of our own ministry.

TIP 3—LEADERS THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THE CONTENT THEY ARE EXPOSING TO THEIR DISCIPLES.

There are whole libraries on the subject of spiritual growth. It would be presumptuous to think that a few paragraphs could do justice to this topic. So, let’s look at the outline found in Ephesians:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The “menu” has five major headings:

Training: “Equipping the saints” (v. 12).

Doctrine: “Unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13).

Character: “Mature man, the fullness of Christ” (v. 13).

Team Effectiveness Skills: Relational effectiveness, communication skills, team building skills, personality and temperament awareness. “Speaking the truth in love, fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies” (vv. 15-16).

Unique Contribution: “The proper working of each individual part” (v. 16).

Select material or experiences that balance the above to ensure a balance of growth in your disciples.

The other major category under the heading of content is assessment—selecting material and experiences based on the needs of your disciples. This is in contradistinction to a simple, generic formula given out to each member of the group. You should have a unique development plan for each of your disciples.

This leads to a third category of content—monitoring multiplication. This means that the leader is not only thinking about the content in his group, but the content in his disciples' groups and even his disciples' disciples' groups. This accountability is crucial to ensure that multiplication is happening beyond a generation or two.



TIP 4—LEADERS KNOW CONTENT ISN'T THE ONLY FOCUS.

Leaders know that if they only focus on the content of what is being imparted (teaching, experiences, training, etc.), the process of spiritual multiplication will abort or be immature.

So much of discipleship and spiritual multiplication is dependent upon relationships. There needs to be an atmosphere of grace, time to just hang out together, and opportunities for the leader to model the Christian life—not just talk about it.

TIP 5—LEADERS CONTINUE IN EVANGELISM.

In discipleship, it is easy to let evangelism slide into the background. But, it must remain front and center, because this is where the future disciples are going to come from.

This is also the whole point of the Great Commission—“go and make disciples.” Sometimes, in the effort to make disciples, unconsciously, evangelism takes a secondary role instead of discipling in the context of evangelism. Content apart from the practice of the ministry becomes seminary, not discipleship.

TIP 6—LEADERS RELY ON PRAYING TO A SOVEREIGN GOD.

Leaders instinctively know that given God's sovereign rule and reign, nothing will happen apart from Him (John 15:5). So, they are vigilant in prayer, in their planning, their teaching, their evangelism, and their selection of disciples. God is the author of it all and unless the Lord builds the multiplication chain, they labor in vain who build it (a paraphrase of Psalm 127:1).

TIP 7—LEADERS PAY HEED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTION.

We have looked at 2 Timothy 2:2 quite a bit in this chapter. It warrants another look as we consider selection (the process of deciding who to invest your life into). When Paul uses the expression “able to teach others also,” it implies that we are to make judgments as to whether or not a potential disciple is indeed “able to teach.” In other words, is the potential disciple someone who not only has the intellectual capability but the character as well?



A helpful acronym is S.T.A.F., which stands for social, teachable, available, and faithful. In the mode of selection, the leader ought to be looking for disciples who are:

- Able to relate well enough for people to follow.
- Willing to learn.
- Free enough from scheduling demands (e.g. school work, job, family).

CONCLUSION

We trust that reading this article has helped toward seeing the practical realities of spiritual multiplication over addition, has enabled biblical convictions to be strengthened, and that the tips have been helpful and stimulating to your thinking. Much more needs to be written about it—and much more still needs to be lived out regarding it.

Selection can seem partial and a leader needs to be able to address such critiques. One criticism of selection is that it feels elitist. What about those that don't fit the mold? Aren't they vital to God?" We would vehemently agree. So much so that we think it makes a case for why selection in spiritual multiplication is so very crucial.

Consider a jigsaw puzzle as an illustration to answer this critique. Let's say you are putting together a jigsaw puzzle of a farm scene. To begin, you look for the corner pieces first. When in place, the edge pieces are pursued feverishly. Then, as the puzzle box is examined, certain colored pieces are hunted for, perhaps those that make the barn. Slowly, painstakingly, the middle, more elusive pieces are brought into the picture and the puzzle is completed.

Now, does the pursuit of the corner pieces imply that the person putting the puzzle together is biased in favor of "corners"? Does he like "edges" better? Are "corners and edges" more valuable, more likable, more important? Are the "middle pieces" something to pass over, ignore, unvalued and unloved?

The answer to these rhetorical questions is obvious. But, here is the irony. It is precisely because the middle pieces are so important—that is where the main focus of one's eye will be when the puzzle is finished—that one pursues the corners and edges so earnestly. They are strategic to getting the middle pieces in place. Go after the middle pieces first, and the puzzle takes years. Start with corners and edges and it is done in a few hours.

It is because each and every student on that campus is so vital that we start to build a multiplication chain with men and women who are "S.T.A.F." These are the edges and corners.

**TIP #8—LEADERS REMEMBER TO BAKE ALL THEY DO
IN ENCOURAGEMENT**

Taking on the colossal task of spiritual multiplication brings with it challenges from within and without. There is criticism, attacks of the enemy, and loads of self-doubt. So being planted in rich, vital fellowship with other leaders is critical for encouragement.

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