

Lecture:

Greg Ogden

Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

I first met Greg Ogden when I arrived for the first day as a student at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, in the year 2000. Greg was at that time the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller; he is now Executive Pastor of Discipleship at Christ Church of Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois. About half way through the writing of the Doctor of Ministry project I heard Greg Ogden speaking on “making disciples Jesus’ way” and immediately purchased his book entitled *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. I was overwhelmed and pleased to find in this book many ideas which I had been thinking and teaching for years, and expressed in a way that was convincing, crystal clear and very powerful. This book is a wonderful bridge between two very different worlds, the typical church we all know and the New Testament, disciple making church of which the cell church is one example. Greg Ogden received some good advice on building a discipling congregation and he shares it with us: “Take a long term view. Slow down. Do it right.”¹ This book is the first step in building that long term view and learning how to do it right.

What are the seven marks of authentic discipleship?²

Ogden reminds us that we must consider whether we are meeting the biblical standard for discipleship or practicing a superficial faith. Do we perceive laity as proactive ministers or passive recipients/spectators? Do we live a disciplined way of life, like an athlete in training, or are we one of the 80% of adults who consider themselves born again without “any specific, measurable goals related to their spiritual development.” Do we understand that Jesus is Lord of all, or believe that our faith is something only for our personal and private life? Do we understand that Jesus calls us to be a community of radical nonconformity to this world, a church without borders, or is our concept of church “an aggregate of individuals who shop like consumers to meet their needs?” Do we understand the church as an organism in whom Christ dwells or an “optional institution, unnecessary for discipleship?” Are we prayerful, Biblically informed people or not? Are we among those who share their faith with others or are we “intimidated people who shrink from personal witness?” Ogden concludes, “What is a disciple of Jesus but one who is self-initiating, reproducing and fully devoted to him? What seems unattainable is that there would be churches filled with disciples who do not have to be pushed, motivated and cajoled.”

What are the eight causes of this discipleship malaise?³

Ogden identifies eight factors that contribute to the church’s failure at disciple making:

1. Pastors are diverted from their primary calling to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

¹Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples A Few At A Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 189.

²All concepts and quotes in this section are derived from Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 24-37.

³All concepts and quotes in this section are derived from Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 40-56.

2. We have tried to make disciples through programs.
3. We have reduced the Christian life to the eternal benefits we get from Jesus rather than living as students for Jesus.
4. We have made discipleship for super-Christians, not ordinary believers.
5. Leaders have been unwilling to call people to the terms of discipleship that Jesus laid out.
6. We fail to perceive the church as a community that God is forming where participation is not optional.
7. Most churches have no clear, public pathway or sequential process toward mature discipleship.
8. Most Christians have never been personally discipled by another person who intentionally invests themselves to help someone grow to spiritual maturity.

What is involved in forming the discipleship system?

Ogden's working definition of disciple making: "Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well."⁴

For Ogden, living the biblical model of disciple making from Jesus and Paul requires investment in three foundational principles. First, we need to invest in the lives of others by shifting from an emphasis on making disciples through programs to making disciples through relationships.⁵ Second, we need to invest in multiplication by helping Christians grow to the point of maturity where they become disciples who make disciples who make disciples, resulting in multiple generations of disciples.⁶ Third, we need to invest in developing a discipleship system that helps people become like Christ. "When we (1) open our hearts in transparent trust to each other (2) around the truth of God's Word (3) in the spirit mutual accountability," Ogden writes, "we are in the Holy Spirit's hothouse of transformation."⁷

Discipleship involves progress through stages of growth in the models of Jesus and Paul.⁸ Ogden experience is that the best unit for growth in discipleship is a small group of three (triad) or four people.⁹

⁴Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 129.

⁵Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 121-135.

⁶Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 121-122, 136-152.

⁷Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 154. See pages 122, 151-174.

⁸For the five stage Jesus model, see Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 75-98. Ogden points out that Paul uses human developmental terminology such as infants, children, adolescents and parents rather than "disciples" in his model; see Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 99-117.

⁹Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 9-10, 15, 140-149. You will encounter the triad based "Life Transformation Group" by Neil Cole in Unit 6.

What is involved in forming a healthy core group of leaders?

In his workshops, Ogden likes to issue this task articulated by George Martin: “*Perhaps today’s pastor should imagine that they are going to have three more years in their parish (church) as pastor - that there will be no replacement for them when they leave. If they acted as if this were going to happen, they would put the highest priority on selecting, motivating, and training lay leader that could carry on as much as possible the mission of the parish after they left. The results of three sustained years of such an approach would be significant. Even revolutionary.*”¹⁰ This opens up the minds of people to see how the people of God can fulfill the tasks involved in the church’s ministry.¹¹

Ogden raises the challenge brought by Robert Coleman: “Better to give one year or so to one or two men who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregations just keeping the program going.”¹² Core leaders need to shift from merely operating programs to making disciples relationally through all that they do. Core leaders serve in diverse ways depending on how they are gifted, but the Great Commission demands that all leaders also serve as disciple makers.

In Conclusion

This book is the very best on making disciples in the type of church with which we are all familiar. In our next five units we will be studying churches that are very different from the typical American church, but we will see examples of the principles of discipleship described by Greg Ogden illustrated in every thriving cell church yet to be examined in this course.

¹⁰Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 70.

¹¹Ogden expands this concept in his book, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003). You will find the book description in the workshop materials folder for this week.

¹²Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 75.