

ALONGSIDER BRIEFINGS

Building disciplemaking cultures by Bill Mowry

Volume 9

Break Out of the Traffic Circle

Want to kill a disciplemaking culture in a church? You kill a culture by staying on the inner lanes of a traffic circle.

Traffic circles are being introduced in Columbus, Ohio. Big ones and small ones are emerging around the city to replace stop lights and change traffic patterns. The challenge with the larger traffic circles is that sometimes you get stuck on the inner lane and you go around-and-around, trying to maneuver to the exit ramps. Churches can be like this.

We sponsor discipleship programs, campaigns, and disciplemaking initiatives that keep people going around-and-around the inner circle of the church. People spend their Christian lives perfecting the basics — how to pray better, study the Bible better, love more, or serve with their gifts. We go around and around and miss the exit ramps. What are the exit ramps? The exit ramps move us into the world. They launch us on mission.

If we don't live on mission we will kill a disciplemaking culture. Disciples are people who naturally live on mission — loving our neighbors, starting faith conversations, serving our communities. Jesus sends us on mission.

One small incident in Jesus's ministry illustrates this principle. In Mark 5 we meet the demon possessed man — a nude dude in a rude mood! Jesus casts the demons out of the man. We next find him sitting at Jesus's feet — "clothed and in his right mind" (5:15). This amazing transformation so moves the man that he begs Jesus for the opportunity to follow him (5:18).

For some inexplicable reason, Jesus turns down the request and issues a command: "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you" (5:19). Jesus sends the man on mission.

He doesn't send him to another country, he doesn't ask him to do "stranger-evangelism," nor does he instruct him to hand out tracts. The transformed man is to simply go to his friends and tell them about God's mercy. In other words, go and love your neighbors and start faith conversations. We are to live on mission.

If people aren't living on mission, a disciplemaking culture will die. Here's how it happens. You first recruit some people to disciple. They're so excited that they recruit others to disciple. But something happens after this second generation.

SUGGESTED READING

Surprise the World!
by Michael Frost

Making Friends for Heaven's Sake
by Bill Mowry and Tyler Flynn

The Art of Neighboring
by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon

Keep Christianity Weird
by Michael Frost

Each succeeding generation will get smaller and smaller because soon you have disciplined everyone in the church that wants to be disciplined. Soon, all of the interested people vanish and you need to launch a new campaign or program. It dies at the third generation unless we're sending people out to where they live, work, play, or study. Get out of the inner circle and head for the exit ramps!

Going to the exit ramps means living like the IRS.

I = Intentionality. We must intentionally live and love unbelieving people around us. We're like the shepherd searching for the lost sheep, the woman searching for the lost coin, and the father watching for his lost son (Luke 15). Being intentional means walking across the street to meet a neighbor, introducing myself to the man or woman working next to me, or connecting with parents at a soccer game. It's always our move.

R = Relationships. We're to love our neighbors. Love means a relationship. We're not to shout at people from a distance but to live among people, knowing their joys, fears, or sorrows. Love starts with simple acts of service. Love takes time to listen. Love invites people over for dessert. We live on mission by loving our neighbors.

S = Start faith conversations. If we're in relationship with people, conversations about values, joys, and sorrow naturally happen. As we earn the rapport and trust to talk honestly about our marriages, children, and jobs, opportunities will arise to start faith conversations. We want to naturally talk about the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

A simple way to practice IRS is to encourage people to develop a circle of three — three unbelieving neighbors, family members, or co-workers in whom we are being intentional to build relationships and start faith conversations.

It's time to get out of the traffic circle and hit the exit ramps. If you want generations of disciples who make disciples, we must live on mission. This can be as simple as developing a circle of three with whom we live like the IRS. Living on mission will keep discipling fresh and multiplying.

You can order *The Ways of the Alongsider* at navpress.com.

You can contact Bill Mowry at www.alongsider.com. Check out other discipling resources and alongsider training on his website.

The Navigators Church Discipling Ministry has a proven process for creating intentional discipling cultures. You can find out more by visiting navigatorchurchministries.org.

