



Making disciples - 10 principles from Jesus.

Jon Swanson

Making disciples - 10 principles from Jesus.	1
Introduction	2
Fans and Disciples.....	2
Principle #1: People follow before they believe, or at least before they understand.	4
Principle #2 Disciples are often volunteers, but they are always invited.....	4
Principle #3: It's okay to focus on a few	5
Principle #4: The story of following isn't simple	6
Principle #5: Disciples need to be loved enough to be scolded.	6
Principle #6: Disciples need to lead to learn to follow.	7
Principle #7 Following costs.....	8
Principle #8: Disciples need to see their rabbi doing what they are being called to/are learning to do.	9
Principle #9: Even a rabbi needs a break.	9
Principle #10: Making disciples is the only hope for sustainability.	10
10 applications.....	11
Conclusion.....	11

First edition, February 2010

Jon Swanson is a husband, father, and pastor living in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He worked in higher education in Texas and Indiana and has been an associate pastor for nearly a decade. He and Nancy have been married for more than twenty-five years and have two children, Andrew and Hope. He writes regularly at <http://levite.wordpress.com> and at <http://300wordsaday.com>. Though he seldom admits it, he holds a PhD in Rhetorical Theory and Criticism from the University of Texas. Jon is ordained by the Missionary Church.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Introduction

I have a friend who is building a network of people. Rather than delegating, he wants to end up with lots of people who share his values about his field. As I talked with him, I realized that he could learn from the way Jesus did the same thing. Jesus wasn't building a structure, wasn't creating an institution. He wanted more than that.

He was working closely with a handful of guys. Just a dozen. When he graduated them, he wanted them to do with others what he had done with them.

These followers are called disciples. A disciple, for our purposes, is *a person who chooses to allow the life and teaching of someone to shape his/her own life*. People shaped by life-changing relationships.

Apprentice is one of our best words for this, a person working with a master craftsman.

This book is for people who are 1. wanting to grow a movement by making disciples, and 2. willing to consider Jesus as a model.

We're going to look at ten principles we can observe from Jesus. There are many others, but these give a start. But before we begin, we need to think more about fans and disciples.

Fans and Disciples

Jesus feeds about 15,000 people. He uses five hamburger buns and two small fish. He ends up with leftovers.

For the people present, it was amazing. They were stuffed. They were thrilled. They decided that he must be The One. They decided to make him king.

They were fans.

Jesus knew how to respond. He sent his disciples to the boat, to the lake, to the other side. And he headed for the hills. He headed for some solitude.

When it was dark and the crowd was asleep and his disciples were in the middle of the lake, he walked out to them. They got to the other side, near home.

In the morning, the crowd realized that Jesus wasn't there, that they weren't getting breakfast. They went home, too. And they found Jesus.

"When did you get here?" they said.

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that

spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” (John 6:25-9)

And then Jesus started to talk about living bread. In the next few hours, in a couple of places, he talked about manna and bread and blood. He talked about what he really came to do.

And the crowd thins out. Some say, “We knew your family. You aren’t so big.” Some say, “You are upsetting what we’ve always been taught.” Some just can’t handle the fact that he’s calling on them to do something, to believe differently, to follow him.

John says:

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:66-69)

Jesus had fans and Jesus had disciples.

- The fans were there to be entertained and fed.
- The disciples were there to become like Jesus.
- The fans were there because they loved when his worldview agreed with theirs.
- The disciples were there because they loved his worldview.
- The fans were there because other fans were there.
- The disciples were there because they had started when no one else was around.
- The fans were an audience.
- The disciples were the backstage crew.
- Fans say, “do that again.”
- Disciples say, “teach me to do that.”
- Fans say, “That’s dumb.”
- Disciples say, “They’ll probably kill us, too, but let’s go with him.”
- Fans come and go as convenient.
- Disciples live with you.

And of the two?

Disciples change the world; fans just change their rss feeds.

Principle #1: People follow before they believe, or at least before they understand.

Twelve guys signed up to follow Jesus.

Sometimes another teacher sent them. Sometimes a friend invited them. Sometimes a family member invited them. Sometimes Jesus himself invited them. We can see all four ways in a few sentences in the first chapter of John. One big story, four individual stories.

What becomes clear as we read the four stories is that the five people who followed Jesus in John 1 (Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel and someone who is not identified) didn't understand who Jesus was, what his plan was, what his power was. Over and over events happen and they ought to understand, but from where we sit, they didn't get it.

In Mark 6, there is a set of stories that can be summarized like this:

- You can do miracles. Cool.
- We can do miracles? Cool!
- You can feed 15,000? Wow!
- Wait, who is that walking on the water? Nah, couldn't be Jesus. That would take a miracle.

It is so incredibly clear that they didn't always understand. They didn't always believe. Although they were following Jesus and saw him every day and were wanting to be part of this thing he was doing, they often misunderstood.

Even at the end, even on his last day on earth, after watching all kinds of cool things including a resurrection, some of them believed, but some of them were uncertain (Matthew 28:17).

Because we think that being a disciple means understanding everything, we talk like this:

Are you a disciple?
I'm trying to be one.

What? How do you *try* to be a disciple? How do you *try* to follow? You are one. Accept it and move on.

Principle #2 Disciples are often volunteers, but they are always invited.

When we look at the original group of twelve disciples, and then when we look at the eventual replacement for Judas (Paul), we find that they all have a clearly identified tap on the shoulder. In some cases, we have stories of an individual calling as well as the twelve, as a group, being publicly picked, being clearly identified to themselves and others.

For example, Andrew and John were with John the Baptist who sent them over to Jesus. Jesus said, "what do you want" and they said, "Rabbi, where are you staying" and he said, "come and see" and they did (John 1).

They were *The Twelve*. Their calling gave them identity. It gave them status (though it turned out to be a servant status). It gave boundaries. It gave them purpose.

The twelve weren't singled out for their great valor. King David had guys who were known as David's mighty men; they were hand-picked because they were great warriors, because they had valiantly protected David (See 2 Samuel 23).

Jesus did not pick warriors. Matthew was a tax collector. Simon was an insurgent. James, Peter and John were fishermen. We have little clue about the others. Jesus didn't pick them because of what they could do for him. Likely, he picked them because he knew that he could do something with them, and they could be committed to learn from him.

There were better scholars, more religious people, richer people, people with more influence that he could have picked. And there were, likely, a lot of other volunteers. But the people he picked were going to be trusted with the future of his discipling process and so he picked people he could work with, and worked on, no matter how dumb the choices appeared.

One last note: Matthew and Paul, in particular, hadn't volunteered. Jesus recruited them. Matthew was a tax collector. Paul (recruited after the death and resurrection and beginning of the church) was a Christian killer. Both got an invite before they volunteered, rather than after they volunteered. Maybe telling people that they *are* followers is an effective strategy.

Principle #3: It's okay to focus on a few.

There are followers and there are disciples. The former may become the latter. The latter will create the former. So put your energy into the latter.

Jesus had thousands of followers. They showed up at events. They talked about what he said to other people. They looked to him for healing, for answers, for coolness. They came and went, depending on how they felt on any given day. And when things got complicated, they bailed (John 6). And they expected everything to come from him on their timetable. When it didn't come on their timetable, they figured that was his failure...not theirs.

Jesus talked to the crowds, but that drained his energy. They wanted what he didn't want to do.

The twelve were with him all the time. They didn't always understand either, (see #1), but they did stay around almost until the very end. What's clear is that although they didn't do anything with the things they heard, they remembered. They were filing it away.

Jesus focused on the small group, at times to the exclusion of the huge crowd.

- Jesus went silent at times.
- Jesus took the boys away from the big cities/conversation centers.
- He took them away from home, away from distraction, away from the critics.
- He focused on them.

And then after he came back to life and then left, they changed the world. They wrote letters that showed they understood (Peter, Paul). They wrote gospels that told these stories (John).

Principle #4: The story of following isn't simple

Not everything we are teaching is simple. Some of it takes context. Some of it takes commitment. Some of it takes sustained conversation. And those three are hard to do with 15,000 of our closest friends around.

So sometimes Jesus told stories. And then he gave the explanation of the metaphor to the smaller group. They didn't always understand either, but at least they could ask questions.

If you want an example, look at Matthew 13, the first half of the chapter. He tells a story to the crowd. My guess is that they smile and nod and think, "wow, that is profound." But then the disciples come and say, "why do you always tell stories?" My guess is that they also said, under their breath, "stories that *we* don't get."

So Jesus says,

"not everyone can understand. In fact, some people choose to not understand. They think they have everything already figured out and anything I say is an affront to them. You, on the other hand, are at least trying to understand, and I will do everything in my power (which is a lot, being God), to help you understand. In fact, after this part of the story is over, you'll look back and you'll get it."

It makes me think of my friend Chris who talks about pirates as a metaphor for business. When he talks about it, he gets the concept completely. But there have to be a lot of people who think, "pirates? that's crazy talk. Are you about wrecking everything?" And there are other people who are saying, "Pirates! I love it. Especially the sex and stealing and destruction."

The former, you write off. At least at some level. The latter, you try to corral, try to say, "It's a metaphor. You gotta build, too."

It's pretty clear that there are huge amounts of time where we don't know what Jesus and the twelve were doing. It takes significantly less than three years to read all four Gospels out loud. But apparently, what's in the Gospels is for us. What was lived in between times was for the disciples to get trained. (Which should say to us, getting people to read the Bible is a starting point to making disciples, but it isn't being a disciple.)

Principle #5: Disciples need to be loved enough to be scolded.

Peter, apparently, had a huge amount of potential. If he hadn't, Jesus would have ditched him. I would have, anyway. But Jesus was far more patient than I. Although his patience didn't always look very kind.

- Peter makes a comment. Jesus tells him to get out of his face. (Matthew 16:22-23)
- Peter recommends a building project to commemorate an appearance. Jesus ignores him. (Matthew 17:1-5)
- When Jesus (and Peter and James and John) get back to the rest of the guys, a man says that the disciples can't heal his son. Jesus does and then tells the disciples they didn't pray. (Matthew 17:14-20)
- Peter is walking on water and then falls in. Jesus tells him that he doesn't have faith. (Matthew 14:25-32)
- The disciples, including Peter argue about who is most important. Jesus tells them they are clueless and that the key is serving. (Matthew 20:20-38)

There is such a thing as being wrong. Mentors, disciple makers have to tell their disciples when they (the disciples) are wrong. There are boundaries and lines and rules and things that mark the difference between being in the tribe and out of the tribe.

But the scolding has to happen in the context of calling and love and training. It has to reinforce the principles. It has to be consistent with the principles. Only the guy walking on water can scold the guy who sinks. Only the guy who is a servant by choice gets to tell people that service is important. Only the guy who can actually heal people gets to tell the guys who didn't what they did wrong.

Criticism is what outsiders do. Scolding is what parents do. Because (in an ideal world) they love their kids and give a rip about how they turn out. Because who scolds people they don't care about?

Principle #6: Disciples need to lead to learn to follow.

The disciples were an interesting group. They sort of understood Jesus. But the fact that they only sort of understood didn't seem to be a barrier. It was the disciples who did most of the baptizing, even while Jesus was around (John 4:1-2). The disciples got sent out in pairs to do miracles and healings and preaching (Mark 6:7-13). The disciples acted as screeners and bodyguards, filtering who got to Jesus and who didn't.

And they got it wrong.

Regularly.

They ticked people off. They tried to keep mothers and children away. And Jesus had to say, "let them come." (Matthew 19:13-15) And this was after he had said, just one chapter before, "Boys? This is a child. Children matter to me. In fact, you would rather have a half-ton stone tied around your neck and be tossed into the ocean than to keep children like this one away from me." (Matthew 18:1-10)

They completely blew it. One of those twelve that got sent out was Judas. Someone, decades later, had stories about how Judas was out healing people, and then decided that it wasn't real.

In spite of their incompetence, however, Jesus made them DO something. He made them actually do the work that he was training them to do.

In order to find out what you know, the great teachers will have you teach, first her, then other people. And then come back and talk with the teacher about what happened.

To find out whether I understand, I need to say something and maybe say it wrong and then recalibrate. Because in doing, I learn. And in doing and being corrected, I learn how to teach.

And if the point of the project is to learn how to replicate, I have to replicate.

Principle #7 Following costs.

In order to follow, you have to give up a little. In order to be a disciple you have to give up a lot.

In the days of rabbis, you gave up home. You found the rabbi you wanted to follow. The rabbi accepted you as a disciple. And then you went around with the rabbi all the time. You gave up your independent identity for the sake of what you would learn, what you would become.

But everyone knew that all the rabbis weren't liked by everyone. If people ignored your rabbi, they ignored you. If people despised your rabbi, they ignored you. If people supported your rabbi, they supported you. You were stuck with, by your choice, the lot of your rabbi.

And the rabbis, the responsible ones, anyway, made sure that you didn't expect anything different. They could be brutal. But it was because they wanted people who would be identified with them, would be passing on their teaching.

All of this was true for the disciples of Jesus. He consistently talked about the abuse they would face. He talked about the abuse he would face. He made sure the twelve knew that he didn't have anyplace that he called home. But he also made sure that they knew that he cared about them.

The message was, in short, "if you follow me you have to give up everything. But you get me. (and I made everything)."

The challenge for makers of disciples is to let them know the cost and the challenge and the risk.

"People won't understand" helps immensely when people don't understand.

"People will try to hurt you" helps when people start throwing things.

"People will kill you like they killed me" actually helps, though there seems to be a presence that helps more.

Principle #8: Disciples need to see their rabbi doing what they are being called to/are learning to do.

Seth Godin says, "If religion comprises rules you follow, faith is demonstrated by the actions you take." (Tribes, 83).

When someone is teaching a way to live, people have a couple questions: "Does it work? Does this make sense lived out?"

To be more accurate, honest thoughtful people have questions.

Some people are mindless followers. Whatever someone says, they do. Right away. For the buzz. But when we are talking *disciples*, we are talking about people choosing to give up everything and take on a new way of living. And if you are taking on a new way of living, you need to know that it actually lives.

- "You are promising peace. How come you are so antsy all the time?"
- "You are saying not to be angry. Why do you holler when you say that?"
- "You are saying that you are supposed to love your wife. How come your marriage seminars take you away from home every weekend?"
- "You are saying that following this teaching will make me rich. How come Jesus died broke?"
- "You are saying that my life will be wonderful. How come the disciples kept getting put in jail and then killed?"

Jesus said to pray for those who persecute you. As he's dying, he prays for those who had killed him. There is consistency between what he said to do and what, under duress, he did.

Principle #9: Even a rabbi needs a break.

Jesus kept leaving the guys. He'd go off by himself in the morning. He'd go off by himself in the evening. He'd just head into the wilderness. Or he'd send the guys on ahead, telling them he would catch up. (At least once, catching up meant walking across the lake.)

And when he went away, he prayed.

But he's God, right? So why does he need to go off by himself?

Because he was part of God and he needed to talk to his Dad. Because he needed time that wasn't vacation, that wasn't sleeping, that wasn't crashing, it was recharging. It was time to review what he was about, time to listen, time to be refueled.

Intriguingly, it wasn't time to write stuff or to study. It was relationship time with the one person that actually understood. It was mentoring time with his mentor.

As we are involved in training, in equipping, in passing on, there still has to be time for reviewing and refreshing and being trained and equipped. We need facetime with our mentor.

It will teach our disciples that they need to come back occasionally themselves.

Principle #10: Making disciples is the only hope for sustainability.

Jesus was a tremendous story-teller. According to contemporary accounts, his presentations were captivating and had people coming back again and again. The word of mouth was to die for. With nothing other than word of mouth, people knew when he was coming, they anticipated where he was going to be. Even now, hearing those stories can effectively illustrate the same points he was making.

He used what people could see in their environments (“A farmer went out to plant”) which we can do, but then he told people to stand up who had not walked in decades. He smeared mud on a guy's eyes and when the guy washed it off, he could see. (Never mind that there may have been medical qualities in the mud, it was still holy spit.)

But at the end of the earthly appearances, the local presentations, Jesus passed the project on:

Now you do it.

Make disciples like I did. Initiate them into the group like I did. Teach them to do what I said, like I have been doing for the last three years with you. Oh, and I will be with you, make no mistake, but you are going to have to do the things I have been doing, the training process I've been taking you through.

There won't be DVDs of me. You don't get my PowerPoint deck. You are going to have to live it out.

Because otherwise it will be clear that this doesn't work, that it sounds good but it won't live.

Ultimately, effective discipling isn't about good stories. It's about using those stories to create new relationships.

A generation later, Paul tell Timothy, "You've been with me for a couple of decades. You've seen everything about me. Pass it on. And teach them to pass it on, too."

A movement will last as long as it constantly has first generation people. When it becomes maintenance, when the stories stop living, it stops.

10 applications

Having looked at what Jesus did, here are ten applications of his work.

1. Look for openness, not perfection or performance.
 2. Invite people with potential not resumes.
 3. List your few.
 4. Outline your story.
 5. Love includes discipline.
 6. Do internships.
 7. Make it expensive to follow.
 8. Live your principles.
 9. Take a break.
 10. No shortcuts.
-

Conclusion

Nancy and I were talking about the disciples. We were talking about what happened to them. Matthew and Peter and John wrote books. James got killed really quickly. Judas doesn't count. Paul wrote books, too. But the other seven?

They disappear.

As far as the official biblical record goes, they vanish, other than being called the apostles or the disciples.

There are stories, of course. Thomas goes to India, for example. But we don't hear their speeches, we don't read their books.

What happened?

I have a funny feeling that the other seven, the majority of the twelve, just went about the business of making disciples. They told their stories, they explained what they saw, they got driven out of Jerusalem. They did exactly what Jesus told them to do.

I think that we worry about attention, about publications. Those things are nice. But what matters most isn't the attention; it's ending up with disciples.