

Training Disciples to Train

Session 1: Make Disciples, Not Converts

Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org (Studies)

Source: The Making of a Disciple by Dr. Keith Philips. Published by Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981. ISBN 0-8007-1181-5. Introduction by Robert E. Coleman. Content below (except the study questions) is taken directly from the book without revisions. The order for each lesson is: quote the memory verse; read the whole Bible chapter of that verse; read the questions; read and discuss the content; then share personal prayer requests and each closing with a prayer for the other person's requests.

Step 1: Opening prayer

Step 2: Each person quotes the memory verse: [Matthew 28:19-20](#)
(See <https://biblicalmentoring.org/index.php/training-disciples-to-train-others/>)

*19 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,
20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Step 3: Read and discuss the Bible Chapter – [Matthew 28](#)

Step 4: Questions for Personal Applications and/or Group Discussions:

1. Do we understand what Jesus, our Lord, commissioned us to be and do?
2. How do converts come to the faith in Christ? Then, how do they become disciples?
3. Discuss whose responsibility is it to make converts and disciples? Discuss the implications.
4. Why is it important to follow Christ's message and method to build His Kingdom?

Step 5: *Read and discuss the Content from the book:*

Introduction from the book:

Jesus came to save a fallen race and raise up a people who would praise Him forever. In the discharge of this mission, He ministered among us as a servant, caring for the sick, healing the brokenhearted, and preaching the Gospel to the multitudes. But through it all He concentrated His attention upon the making of disciples—persons who would learn of Him and follow in His steps.

After His death and resurrection, before ascending back to heaven, He told these followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." They could understand what He meant, for He was only asking them to continue what He had practiced with them. The Great Commission is not a summons to a new course of action, but the explication of His own way of mission.

Ingenuous in its simplicity, this was the essence of Christ's plan to reach the world for God. He knew that it could not fail. For true disciples will not only grow in the likeness of their Master; in time, by His Spirit, they will reproduce His life in others.

What is also apparent, this strategy brings the thrust of Jesus' ministry within the vocation of every Christian. To be sure, not many are called to pastor a great congregation or even teach a Sunday School class, but everyone is called to participate in the making of disciples. His commission is not a special gift; it is a command, and all who believe on Christ have no option but to obey.

Yet this obligation is scarcely perceived in the church today. Not that the mandate is denied, but that most people have no idea how it relates to the daily work of their lives.

That is why this book is so welcome. It gets down to the practical aspects of discipling. Writing out of wide experience in this ministry, Dr. Keith Phillips shares principles he has learned in the plodding, painstaking process of leading persons in the way of Christ.

He builds on the premise that developing character is more important than polishing skills. "You must be God's person," he writes, "before you can do God's work." Basic to this approach is the Biblical necessity of one dying to self-centeredness, so that Christ has undisputed rule in the heart. Undergirding this commitment is an attitude of submissiveness to divine authority, a devotion reflected in strong personal discipline, outgoing love, and a sense of community.

The author goes on to detail how such growth is fostered, pointing out essential ingredients in the life of both the discipler and the disciplined. You will see that it is not an easy task. And there are no short cuts. To do this work one must have resolute determination and sacrificial compassion.

Here is where, finally, all of us must face the issue. Are we willing to pay the price? Trusting that this book will help us realize more the need, and inspire us toward a confident, purposeful involvement in our Master's work, it is a pleasure to commend it to you. - Robert E. Coleman

Chapter 1 per the author – Keith Phillips:

The first month I was in Watts I witnessed a murder.

Ronnie was a spunky little kid bursting with energy. He attended the children's Bible club I had begun a few weeks earlier in a federal housing project. He caught my attention on this particular day because he was walking barefoot across a field covered with broken glass. I could not imagine how he kept his feet from being slashed to pieces. Yet he didn't seem to have a care in the world.

Suddenly an older boy dashed up to Ronnie, stabbed him in the chest, grabbed his transistor radio and ran. Ronnie dropped to the ground.

I couldn't believe it. I broke into a cold sweat. My palms turned clammy. My heart raced as I ran toward him. I was afraid someone would ask me to help. I wanted to, but I didn't know what to do. So, I stood lost in the crowd.

The reaction of the children and teenagers who had gathered around Ronnie's body stunned me. I expected hostility and outrage, but instead they acted as if they were at a carnival. They booed when the police came and cheered when the ambulance arrived. They laughed, hollered and tried to outdo each other with stories about other killings they had seen. No one seemed to care about Ronnie. Even his own brother showed no grief.

I stood there for what seemed like an eternity. What was utterly horrifying to me had apparently been just a common event for everyone else. But this was only the beginning, the first in a series of shocks that were to break my heart for this mission field to which God had called me.

As I walked away from the field where Ronnie died, a youngster named Jimmy matter-of-factly told me, "It ain't no big thing. People get killed around here all the time. My one-year-old cousin was killed a couple months ago. He was screaming at two in the morning 'cause he was sick. His mother was real mad. She grabbed him out of bed and threw him out the window. His head broke..."

The more I listened, the more I learned.

Not one of the children I met knew his father. It didn't seem to bother them. That's just the way it was.

At first I could not believe Darrell was telling me the truth when he said he had not eaten for three days. I knew that no one went hungry in America. I thought he was trying to con me. But then I found out that his mother, an addict, spent their meager income on narcotics.

I knew twelve-year-old Teresa had a child, but was puzzled when she told me that her baby was her brother. Later I discovered it was Teresa's father who had gotten her pregnant.

There was sixteen-year-old Rhonda, a mother of two weeks, who could not put up with her baby's crying. She got high on drugs and beat her son with her fists, breaking his ribs and puncturing his lungs.

Nine-year-old Belinda lived in constant terror of sexual abuse from her uncle. Her mother did not care. Her brothers and sisters just laughed and made fun of her.

The horrendous deterioration and despair in the ghetto staggered me. It was like stepping into a different world: hunger, abuse, drugs, death, twelve-year-old mothers, illegitimate children. Nobody batted an eye. Nobody cared.

I knew that Jesus must be the answer to these great physical and spiritual needs. But I had no idea how to make the gospel relevant to the ghetto.

The only approach that occurred to me was mass evangelism. So I started children's Bible clubs in Watts. Scores of kids came. They all wanted to "accept Jesus"! And they all wanted to bring their friends. Mothers appreciated their kids "getting religion," and teenagers were anxious to know when clubs would begin for them. Within a few years 300 Christian college volunteers joined me in teaching weekly Bible studies to hundreds of children.

We organized evangelistic meetings. Many people attended—some just to see "those white folks." I would preach a simple salvation message, and invariably almost everyone would raise his hand to indicate a desire to have his sins forgiven and to be at peace with God. Meticulously we filled out decision cards and faithfully sent follow-up material to each new convert, not realizing that many of them were illiterate.

I would pray with an addict or a neglected child, say "God bless you," and then leave. Since I could not possibly shepherd all these new Christians, I reasoned that the Holy Spirit would take care of them.

Hundreds of people in the Los Angeles ghetto "accepted Christ." My friends patted me on the back and assured me that I was doing a fine job. I wanted to believe them. And for a while, I did.

But as the months blended into years, I had to admit that there was a serious problem. With all of these decisions for Christ there should have been changed lives—hundreds of them. But as hard as I looked, I could not find even one! Something had gone wrong.

Partly because of pride, partly because of ignorance, I kept hoping things would somehow right themselves. But I could not shake the gnawing feeling that everything had been in vain. There was no lasting fruit. The turnover rate in my Bible clubs was too great. Different youngsters came every week. Teenagers who had learned of Christ as children were still friendly, but they had become pimps, prostitutes or pushers. Former Bible club kids were running with street gangs. It seemed as if the gospel had not worked.

I was discouraged. I almost quit.

In desperation I went to God's Word. For the first time in my life I wanted to see what God said, rather than to prove what I already knew.

As I read Matthew 28:19,20, I received a startling revelation. Christ's commission to His Church was not to "make converts," but to "make disciples." That was it! Even though I did not understand all the implications, I knew immediately that discipleship had been the missing ingredient in my ministry.

I had hundreds of notches on my evangelistic belt, but I could not locate one maturing Christian. I had proclaimed the gospel, but I had failed to make disciples.

The more I studied the New Testament, the firmer my new conviction became. Discipleship is the only way to avoid malnourishment and weakness in the spiritual children for whom I am

responsible. It is the only method which will produce mature Christians who can reverse the physical and spiritual decay in the ghetto.

I knew God was grieved by my initial approach to the ministry. I made a commitment that from that point on I would focus every resource the Lord would give me on making disciples.

[\(pp. 11-14\)](#)

Step 6: End by sharing personal prayer requests and each person praying for the other requests.

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