**Developing Disciple-Makers to Sustain Your Ministry**

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In his book *The Lost Art of Disciple-Making*, Leroy Eims tells the story of a missionary named John. John spent the bulk of his years of service meeting with a few young men. Abruptly, his work was cut short when all missionaries were suddenly asked to leave the country.

A man who had once viewed John’s ministry with skepticism later marveled, “I look at what has come out of John’s life. One of the men he worked with is now a professor mightily used of God to reach and train scores of university students. Another is leading a discipling team of about forty men and women. Another is in a nearby city with a group of thirty-five growing disciples. Three others have gone to other countries as missionaries. God is blessing their work.”

Keep your eye out for men who want to make disciples. Obviously, you need to be involved with men at all levels. But can there be any doubt? The greatest return on your time will come from investing in a few “FAT” men—men who are *faithful*, *available*, and *teachable*.

The focus of a men’s ministry leader should be to make disciples of men who will in turn disciple others, and so on. This was the method of Jesus. Your ministry to men will grow in proportion to your ability to build not just disciples, but disciple makers.

**Recruit Shepherds, Not Teachers**

Possibly the most important aspect of sustaining momentum is to make sure your men really feel like somebody cares about them. Look for leaders who are eager to show men the love of Christ, not their own Biblical knowledge.

Clark Cothern draws the distinction between two types of small group leaders: one is a ‘question-asker,’ the other an ‘answer-giver.’ One a ‘group guide,’ the other a ‘know-it-all narrator.’ One is a ‘dialogue traffic cop,’ the other a ‘doctrine cop.’ Men will respond best to leaders who help them find answers to questions without giving them the answer; guide men without showing off their knowledge; and help facilitate lively discussions, rather than show up men whose theology is still developing.

At a church of 5,000 in California, the Men’s Minister, Wes Brown, experienced a quantum leap in effectiveness when he changed his leadership model from “teaching” to “shepherding.” In the beginning he recruited “teachers” to lead his small groups. Success was modest. After 11 years he had 137 men in small groups. Then he realized that what men really needed was someone who cared about them personally. He changed to a “shepherd” model and exploded to 750 men in just 4 years—a 550% increase!

**Love Your Weak Men, Disciple Your Strong**

[Zechariah 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech%2011.15-16) explains the role of a shepherd further:

*Then the LORD said to me, “Go again and play the part of a worthless shepherd.” This will illustrate how I will give this nation a shepherd who will not care for the sheep that are threatened by death, nor look after the young, nor heal the injured, nor feed the healthy*.

We can define the 4-fold role of a good shepherd by looking at the opposite of the worthless shepherd in this passage:

* He cares for the sheep that are ***young.***
* He cares for the ***injured.***
* He cares for those ***threatened by death.***
* He ***feeds the hungry***.

This passage illustrates a basic rule for discipleship: *Love your weak men, and disciple the strong.* A good shepherd goes after those that are threatened by death. This might be men who don’t know Christ, or men who are on their way to making major mistakes in their life. He creates a safe place where men with broken wings can heal—men injured by financial crisis, divorce, grief, addictions, or emotional issues. He takes care of the young—both spiritually and physically.

There will always be some men who constantly drain your emotional and spiritual energy. Good shepherds are committed to loving their weak men.

At the same time, God wants you to invest in faithful men who can disciple others. The faithful shepherd makes sure he feeds the healthy. How do you know when you should stop making an investment in a man who seems to not be going anywhere? It has to be a matter of prayerful consideration between you and God. Don’t give up on any man—always be friendly, interested, and available—but there may come a time when God wants you to invest your time and energy in other men.

There are two errors leaders can make: To kick men out of the nest too soon, and to not challenge men to get out of the nest when it’s time. “Disciple the strong” means men need to grow. If you don’t help him, he will go to another church. We’ve all heard it said or said it ourselves: “I just didn’t feel like I was being fed there.” A good shepherd will “feed” the healthy.

In addition to feeding the healthy, a good shepherd propels strong men to take their next steps. He doesn’t let men become complacent in their spiritual progress. Instead, he challenges them to step up to new opportunities, encourages them to go deeper in their faith, and urges them to serve others.

**Planning Your Sustain Strategy**

Your church already has many activities that men can be involved in. It doesn’t have to be a ‘mens-only’ activity to help men grow spiritually. [Remember the five groups of men](https://maninthemirror.org/2018/01/14/building-strong-mens-ministry-part-2-five-types-men-must-prepared-reach/) in your church and community?  If you want to sustain momentum with each type of man, someone has to get to know each man in your church well enough to know where he is on his spiritual pilgrimage and what he needs to do to take the next step.

You have to develop enough leaders that they can take a personal interest in every man. Then you need to have ministry opportunities that will help men from each category move forward. This is where the hard work comes—there are no shortcuts here.

We described these in detail previously, but here is a partial list of ways to engage men:

* Bible Studies
* Ongoing ministry projects such as mentoring teenagers
* Issue oriented men’s curriculum (family, marriage, work, etc.)
* Accountability groups
* Early morning leadership development with the pastor
* Prayer groups
* Issue oriented small group studies—divorce recovery, grief share, etc.

Obviously, overlap will occur.  Bible studies will pray.  Book studies will look up verses in the Bible.  Accountability groups will study books.  The key is to engage men in ways that relate to where they live, work, and play.

Create a variety of opportunities for men to get better acquainted with Christ, since men will be motivated to know Him in many different ways.  A restaurant with only one item on the menu will soon go out of business. The greater variety you offer, the more a man will find something that engages him where he walks.

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