



# Identifying and Developing Key Leaders



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Imagine this scene:

As you stroll along the footpath, you notice in the distance a massive building alight with dancing flames. You can see the black billows of smoke; you can feel the intensity of the heat; you can hear the screams of the people trapped inside. And in the adrenaline of the moment, you notice that just below you is a small bucket filled with water. As you reach to grab it, you happen to glance behind you and see a large group of firemen - some are new on the job, others are exhausted from the battle, some have even fallen asleep. And in that decisive moment, with the bucket firmly in your grip, you are faced with an important decision - which way should you chuck the bucket! (Chalke)

Because this situation seems so desperate, it would only be natural to throw the bucket at the building. After all, something has to be done and quickly. But anyone who knows about a fire such as this will tell you that the water will evaporate with little impact if tossed at the building. The reality is that many in ministry have chosen to follow this same route. Something has to be done because the situation is so desperate - so they go for the burning building alone with their bucket.

However, the person who has been ignited by the vision for multiplication will seek to enlist a group of dedicated and equipped firemen for the task. No matter how tired, how weary, or how sleepy some have become, the discipling multiplier seeks to strengthen the firemen with the knowledge, tools, skills, and fresh "splash" they need to get on with the job. The strategic bucket- thrower will know their only chance to make a difference in the burning building is to chuck the bucket at the firemen.

But if you only had one bucket and could only make one toss, who would you throw it at? I want to address this important question as it relates to biblical discipleship and the selection and development of potential "fire chiefs" who will go on to mobilise the firemen in fighting the blaze. More specifically, I want to examine two areas of discipling in connection with a movement within a nation.

First, how do you choose key leaders? This raises the issue of identification.

Second, how do you nurture them toward Christ-likeness and ministry effectiveness that will ultimately impact their culture? This raises the issue of development.

## Identifying Key leaders

Many times during my studies in the Gospels, I have asked the following-Why did Jesus choose this group of men? What did he identify about each of them that gave him the confidence they would go on to impact the world? From a study of *The Harmony of the Gospels* (Thomas, Gundry), we have come to recognise that during the early stages of Christ's ministry a group of people began to "surface." It was this group that Jesus identified as being "responsive."

So what did Jesus notice about them that had surfaced? In what ways were they responsive? And what should we be looking for as we seek to identify and disciple "key" leaders?

Robert Coleman, in his book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, addresses this specific issue concerning the selection of the Twelve. Of them, Coleman says the following: "What is more revealing about these men is that at first they do not impress us as being key men. None of them occupied prominent places in the synagogue, nor did any of them belong to the Levitical priesthood. For the most part they were common labouring men, probably having no professional training beyond the rudiments of knowledge necessary for their vocation. Perhaps a few of them came from families of some considerable means, such as the sons of Zebedee, but none of them could have been considered wealthy. They had no academic degrees in the arts and philosophies of their day. Like their Master, their formal education likely consisted only of the synagogue schools. Most of them were raised in the poor section of the country around Galilee. Apparently the only one of the Twelve who came from the more refined region of Judea was Judas Iscariot. By any standard of sophisticated culture then and now they would surely be considered a rather ragged collection of souls. One might wonder how Jesus could ever use them. They were impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, and had all the prejudices of their environment. In short, these men selected by the Lord to be his assistants represented an average cross section of society of their day. Not the kind of group one would expect to win the world for Christ." (28-29)

Coleman reminds us that it was not their exceptional knowledge, skills, gifts, position, education, or temperament that made them worthy of Jesus' selection. Certainly, we can't ignore what little they did have to offer in these areas. However, by carefully studying these men in relationship to Jesus, I believe there were three traits that "surfaced" which led to their selection. These three included a hunger and desire to know the Messiah, to understand his message, and to experience his ministry. Let me examine each within the cultural milieu of the New Testament and then apply them to our identification and choosing of key leaders within our ministries.

## Know the Messiah (John 1:19-51)

During the time of the first Century, there had been intense speculation and longing for the arrival of the Messiah. Messiah is the Hebrew word for "anointed one" (Gk. Christos) and reflected the designated means of appointing people for special tasks in the Old Testament (Ex. 29:7; Lev. 8:30; 1 Sam. 16:13; 1 Kings 19:16). Great curiosity and wide-ranging opinions surrounded the advent of the Messiah in the New Testament period. These included the Messiah being one who would bring peace and righteousness to the overthrow of the Roman occupation. Other ideas included securing prominence for the Jewish nation on the world scene, as well as being a supernatural visitant from God which reflected the Davidic line. (Milne 52)

To bring this point more into focus with our present study, John 1:19-51 highlights this issue as it relates to the disciples and Jesus. Denying he was the Messiah (John 1:20), John the Baptist made it clear to his disciples and the religious leaders of the day that the "anointed one" was indeed present, but hidden, among them (John 1:26). Andrew too made the bold assertion to Peter that they had found the Messiah (John 1:41). Even Nathanael's statement in calling Jesus the "King of Israel" bears similar implications (John 1:49). These simple points only highlight the expectation and longing for the Messiah in the first century, and in particular, among these soon-to-become leaders. Jesus certainly identified this longing in them at the outset of his ministry. Though often ignorant of spiritual matters and slow to comprehend biblical truths, they were honest men to be taken at face value. With the exception of Judas, their hearts were teachable and they were sincere in their yearning for God and his rule in their lives. Coleman states this when he writes, "The superficiality of the religious life about them had not obsessed their hope for the Messiah (John 1:41, 45, 49; 6:69). They were fed up with the hypocrisy of the ruling aristocracy. Some of them had already joined the revival movement of John the Baptist (John 1:35). These men were looking for someone to lead them in the way of salvation. Such men, pliable in the hands of the Master, could be moulded into a new image-Jesus can use anyone who wants to be used." (29)

What is the point? Simply this-Jesus identified in these disciples a hunger and thirst to know the Messiah. They were a group of men who wanted someone to lead them in the way of salvation who were teachable and willing to submit to the Authority and Lordship the Messiah Jesus) would bring.

This is perhaps the same starting point we need in identifying and choosing key leaders. Through careful observation of their lives and fervent prayer for discernment about their selection, we too need to look within our ministries for those whom God has uniquely "surfaced." They are to be men and women who desire to follow God. That means we are looking for potential leaders who are hungry and eager to be led in the way of salvation and who are

teachable and moldable under the Authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ. We should be careful to observe the lesson, that Jesus did not choose his leaders for their exceptional abilities, skills, knowledge, degrees, status, etc., but rather, he identified and chose them because of their intense longing to know the Messiah - Jesus the Christ.

### **Understand his Message (Mark 1:14-15)**

Not only did the leaders whom Jesus select want to know the Messiah, they also wanted to understand his message. Consistent with what John the Baptist had been preaching for some time, Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15) This message is central to all that Jesus did and taught. So what did he mean by the good news and the Kingdom of God? Why were these followers so intent on understanding his message? And how does that relate to identifying and choosing key leaders within our ministries? Let's begin by briefly examining his message phrase by phrase:

"The time has come." Jesus is highlighting at the outset of his ministry that God is again doing something extraordinary. It had been four hundred years since the last of God's prophets were on the scene. Now, through the initiation of John the Baptist, Jesus was making it known that the time of fulfillment was upon them. God was up to something significant once again.

"Kingdom of God is near." This phrase answers why the time had come. Dick France, in *Exploring the Christian Faith*, writes: "The Jews had always believed that their God was the king of the earth. He made it. It was his. Yet some people refused to acknowledge his lordship. So they still had look forward to the day when he would be recognised as king. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, H was against this background. It (the kingdom of God) is not a place or a group of people, but God's rule, his sovereignty, the situation where he is King and his will is done. Jesus came to bring that situation - to make God 'King.'(63)

God's rule would affect every aspect of their lives - from their relationship to God to how they understood themselves, the Romans, and the surrounding nations. God's sovereign rule meant a new life with God in control and a new identity for them as a people among the peoples of the world.

"Repent." Jesus then tells them how to be prepared for this Kingdom. They are to repent - to turn back, to change their minds, to have a change of direction - from their current way of living so they are prepared for and can rightly live under God's rule in his Kingdom.

"Believe the good news!" To believe was far more than an intellectual ascent of mental facts. It meant to have a heart and mind that were ready (prepared) to experience God's sovereign rule. It was "good news" because God was now bringing the longed for salvation that had been spoken of in the Old Testament. Jesus succinctly highlighted this good news when he read the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue (Luke 4:15-30). Consider his words in vs. 18-19, "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lords favour."

This message could be seen throughout Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing. It permeated everything he did. He was ushering in and proclaiming God's Kingdom, and his request of them was simply to get ready (repent) and experience (believe) it.

That message held great attraction for Jesus' followers. It was one they would listen to and seek to comprehend time and again. They wanted to understand his message because they wanted to be part of what God was now doing in their midst. Further, we must not forget that an important feature for them in understanding his message was not only what it meant for them personally, but also, what it meant for them corporately-for their identity as a Jewish nation. I believe Jesus identified and chose them because of their desire to understand his message and to experience it in their lives and among their people.

This too needs to be an important feature in our identification and selection of key leaders. They need to be men and women who are intensely attracted to his message. Leaders who believe in and experience the good news and desire to see the same among the peoples of their culture. They are leaders who not only have an individual understanding of God's sovereign rule for themselves, but have great expectation for what God is doing and will do in their nation. Key leaders whom we identify and disciple should be people who desire to understand his message- Jesus and his good news.

### **Experience his Ministry (Mark 3:13-19)**

With a longing to know the Messiah and understand his message, Jesus recognised in these followers an eagerness to be part of what he was doing. He saw in them a third characteristic - the desire to experience his ministry. This raises the following questions: What were the features of Jesus' ministry? What caused them to want to be part of it?

How does this relate to us in identifying and selecting key leaders?

The answer to these questions is perhaps best summarised in Mark 3:13-19. This passage highlights those whom Jesus selected and the direct reasons for doing so. In this passage, Jesus designates them apostles with a view: to be with him, to be sent out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons (and to heal every disease and sickness-Matt. 10:1). Let me outline six characteristics of this passage that are significant to our present study.

1. Jesus recognised their "calling." After an intense period of prayer (Luke 6:12), Jesus "called to him those he wanted" (v. 13). God had uniquely put his finger on these men for his service. None of them rejected this call, but came to his bidding. Certainly, God had been preparing them and planting in them a desire to serve.
2. Jesus called those whom he "wanted." By this time, there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, who were regulars in the life and ministry of Jesus. From among this throng of people, Jesus chose those he "wanted" (vs. 13). He desired their involvement with him in the work.
3. Jesus designated them "apostles." This title meant they were to be his appointed representatives and messengers. By being his apostles, they were to act and to serve as his special envoys with his authority.
4. Jesus was eager for them to be "with" him. He recognised that in order to develop his leadership team for effective ministry, he needed to have intimate and regular contact with them. He wanted to impart his life and ministry vision to these leaders.
5. Jesus "sent them to preach." One of the primary features of Jesus' ministry was to communicate the message-the good news. They were to follow his example by sharing this message with others.
6. Jesus gave them "authority to drive out demons." Dealing with sickness and disease were regular features of Jesus' ministry. He was bestowing upon them his authority to respond to the demonic and dark spiritual forces that had so blinded and held the people. They were to share in his miraculous and supernatural work of freeing people from their bondage.

These key points highlight not only the main features of Jesus' ministry, but also, what he identified in his leaders that would have caused them to want to be part of it. Donald English, in his book, *The Message of Mark*, summarises this passage and provides us with a link to application. He writes: "Mark is now getting down to the sharp focal point of what it means to be a disciple, with the apostles as a clear example. Choice, call, obedience, appointment, and

separation are all involved. The task means drawing on Christ's presence and being sent out to preach and cast out demons. The balance is not easy to keep in lively tension. Many Christians seem to spend much more time "being with Jesus" (if that is what happens in our plethora of church meetings and fellowships, committees and services), and much less in proclaiming and casting out demons. Much training for ordination also seems to concentrate on the pastoral concerns of caring for the church community. All of that is necessary, but if dominant it provides a largely inward looking perspective on church life. It can also lead to a narrowing down of our perception of the gospel as we adapt it to our needs. The missionary perspective of proclamation and casting out evil spirits forces us to test our understanding of the gospel in the setting of those who do not believe." (85)

In essence, English is saying that the reasons behind Jesus' selection of these men was not only so they might "be with him," but also, that they might "be sent from him" in touching lives. They were to test the merits of their leadership calling not on some mountain while alone with Jesus, but in the crucible of mingling with the masses while preaching and healing in his name. This is not to say time alone with him was not critical to their relationship, but it was part of the preparation for serving as a "sent one" (John 17:18; 20:21) as they sought to experience his ministry.

So what does that mean for us in carefully identifying and selecting leaders within our ministries? First, we must seek to discern through careful observation and fervent prayer those leaders whom God has uniquely called to his work of impacting their nation. Second, they should be leaders we want to be with us, 'whom God has uniquely prepared, to share in the ministry. Third, we must recognise (designate) their important role within the ministry. And fourth, they must be sent out for a wider ministry to preach and heal in Jesus' name.

Thus, we have come to the end of this first section concerning the identification of key leaders. We have sought to understand from the cultural setting of the Gospels and the direct relationship between Jesus and his followers, those characteristics which led to their selection. They included a desire to know the Messiah, understand his message, and experience his ministry. That has important implications for us who are seeking to do the same in our ministry settings around the globe. But once we have identified and selected such a group, how do we go about developing them into the kinds of leaders that are Christ-like and ministry effective; leaders that will go on to impact their cultures and the "ends of the earth?" What should be the focus of our relationship with them? These important questions will occupy the remainder of our study.



## **Developing Key Leaders**

Once we have prayerfully discerned God's heart and carefully identified key leaders, we have to consider how we might develop them toward Christ-likeness and ministry effectiveness.

Returning to our illustration, once we have strategically "chucked the bucket" on a chosen few, how are we going to help them so that they are equipped to mobilise others to join them in battling the blaze?

In order to address these issues, I have created a model that attempts to illustrate our disciplemaking efforts as it relates to leadership development. The following is an explanation of the model and its relevance for our ministries. I will begin by working from the centre of the model to the perimeter.

### **Key Leader**

This is the person we want to disciple and nurture toward Christ-likeness and ministry effectiveness; the one we want to pour our life into. We have identified and chosen them after prayerful consideration because of the issues highlighted in the first section of this paper. They are people who desire and want to know the Messiah, understand his message, and experience his ministry.

### **The Church**

Developing leaders does not happen in a vacuum-it is within the context of the church that the shaping of key leaders must take place. We have identified them as "key leaders" primarily because they have been called by God and have proven themselves as faithful servants. But this can only happen within the life and ministry of the body of Christ-the church. Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us of this critical point: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (4:11-13). We would do well to remember the significant role the church has in shaping, developing, and refining the life and maturity of a leader.

### **Holy Spirit**

Having identified our key leaders and placed them in the context of the church, we must never forget that it is only through the Holy Spirit will they be changed. We know from the New

Testament the Holy Spirit is faithfully working and enabling people to become like Christ in order that they might live and serve in his power (John 14:16-18; 16:5-16; Romans 8).

## **The Cornerstones**

Once we have identified our key leaders and properly recognised the important role of the church and the Holy Spirit in their lives, we must consider how we can help them along in their journey. This is to ask - What is our role in developing them as leaders? What has God entrusted to us as cross-cultural disciplinarians that will help move them toward becoming like Jesus?

In order to address these questions, I have placed four "cornerstones" around the perimeter of our model. I believe these four are the areas (influences) we have as disciplinarians in cultivating and developing our key leaders. Each one is critical to the disciplinarian process.

### **1. Prayer**

The first cornerstone in our disciplinarian process is prayer. This includes praying for our leaders, as well as, praying with them. And what should be the focus of our praying? First, we should be praying for and with them about their walk with God (Phil. 1:9-11). Second, we should be praying for and with them about their witness in the world (Acts 1:8). Third, we should be praying for and with them about being (and sending) workers into the harvest (Matt. 9:38).

### **2. Model**

The second cornerstone in our disciplinarian process is our model. Our model is what they will see lived out in us. The only control we have over this area is the extent of our faithfulness to live the kind of life we want them to observe and experience. It is true-"the Jesus we know is the Jesus they will get." And what do we hope they will see from our model? Alice Fryling addresses this when she writes: "When [key leaders] look into the hearts of their disciplinarians, what will they see? It is hoped, they will see a love for Jesus, a confidence in the bible, a commitment to prayer, a desire to learn and grow, and a love for other people. These characteristics are at the heart of the disciplinarian process." (105)

Ultimately, our model will reflect both life and ministry lessons for our key leaders, as well as, practical applications about dealing with the realities of leadership. These will include everything from our family relationships to dealing with conflict in ministry.

### **3. Relationship**

The third cornerstone of our discipling is our direct relationship with our key leaders. This area focuses upon intentional time spent with them in both individual and group settings. It means we are "rubbing shoulders" with them on a regular basis as Jesus modeled for us with his disciples. I often say that one of the most important ministry tools God has ever given me is my coffee mug (if you are a coffee drinker like me), because it is over coffee (intentional time) with key leaders that we can chat, share and discuss real life and real ministry issues. It is hoped that our time spent together will also be characterised by the fruit of the Spirit-love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-26).

Because we are seeking to be disciplers in another country, we must also consider the cultural connections that are needed to understand the world view, history, background, language, and contextualised faith of our leaders. This will only happen through time spent together and as

we seek to learn from them the culture and nature of leadership as expressed by the national church.

#### **4. Content**

The fourth area of our discipling of key leaders is the Content of our relationship. This content is best expressed in three areas. First, we want to communicate with them biblical knowledge helping them to understand the truth of Scripture. Second, we want to communicate with them ministry vision so they might be Great Commandment leaders (Mark 12:28-32) living Great Commission priorities (Matt. 28:18-20). Finally, we want to cultivate their skills for leadership as it relates to their church and ministry.

I believe these four areas - our prayer, our model, our relationship and our content - are the cornerstones (characteristics) of discipling and developing key leaders in our respective countries. They serve as the critical diagnostics as we pour our lives into national leaders.

Before I close, there is one final point I want to make. We must always remember the role of the church, coupled with our individual relationship, that will shape and develop key leaders. Alice Fryling notes this point: "Sometimes I feel overwhelmed when I think of trying to influence someone in this way. I wonder just who I think I am. Or I fear that I will not be up to the task. Sometimes the Dons (a person she referred to earlier in the chapter) in my life back off, and then I get discouraged. But God himself is at work. I am just one person in Don's life. I have had to learn to live with the tension of taking my influence on Don's life seriously enough to be intentional, but not so seriously that I think that Don's growth depends totally on me." (31)

We must pause to thank God for the role of the church and work of the Holy Spirit-coupled with the privilege we have-in discipling and developing key leaders in another culture.

## Conclusion

We have journeyed some distance in examining the critical issue of discipling as it relates to two areas. First, the identification of key leaders. These are men and women who desire to know the Messiah, understand his message, and experience his ministry. Second, we must develop them toward Christ-likeness and ministry effectiveness. While recognizing the role of the church and the Holy Spirit, we must seek to be intentional in our discipling efforts through four critical cornerstones-our prayer, our model, our relationship and our content. It is hoped that through each of these our key leaders will develop in becoming Great Commandment and Great Commission healthy. But it is also hoped they will go on to identify and develop others to do the same.

Let me return to the illustration that began this paper. Even now, I can still see the smoke. Even now, I can feel the heat. Even now, I can hear the screams of the people trapped inside. So why not just chuck the bucket at the building? After all, the situation is still so desperate. Why throw the bucket at the firemen, and in particular, at those who would serve as fire chiefs? Because as disciplers committed to multiplication across the globe, we know the only way to impact the building is by "splashing" a generation of leaders who will serve as well equipped and skilled firemen. And what continually compels us to be strategic bucket throwers? Simply this - the job is not finished and the fire still rages on.

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