

How Does the Set Free Movement Disciple Deeply?



One of the nine strategies of the Free Methodist Church is to disciple deeply.¹ Discipleship is the engine of both the church and mission.² But what is discipleship?

In brief discipleship includes two broad subjects: learning and relating. A disciple is a person who loves Jesus and is formed and informed by the Holy Spirit through activities such as studying scripture, passionately praying, worshiping, and serving (John 8:31-32). A disciple is on mission with God and has purpose and power (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 2 Peter 1:3-8). What begins with repentance leads to a transformed life (Mark 8:34-38), with obedience and holiness as key characteristics of being transformed (John 15:7-10, Galatians 5:22). Discipleship changes and shapes the core of the individual. The result is that values and behavior reflect the inner change (Romans 12:2).³

But discipleship is not a solitary endeavor.⁴ It is not a thing in and of itself.

Discipleship, community, and service are integrally related and a means to an end, with the end being *“a community of God’s people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world. In other words, the church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission. When the church is in mission it is the true church.”*⁵

The people of God, the church, are not just a weekly gathering of likeminded people struggling through life.⁶ The people of God are a powerful force for good in the world. **Individuals transformed together become transformers of society.**⁷ The person of Jesus is the center of both the formation of community and the resulting action.

¹ <http://fmcusa.org/uniquelyfm/>

² Mike Breen, “Why the Missional Movement will Fail”, *Verge Network*, Sept. 14, 2011

http://www.vergenetwork.org/2011/09/14/mike-breen-why-the-missional-movement-will-fail/?mc_cid=90b594f322&mc_eid=5393bec309 (accessed June 29, 2014).

³ John Wesley, Sermons 21 and 22 in Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, ed., *John Wesley on the The Sermon on the Mount – The Standard Sermons in Modern English Vol. II*, 21-33 (Nashville:

Abingdon Press, 2002), Sermon 22 in Kinghorn, *Vol. II*, 21-33, 66.

⁴ Bishop David Kendall in Kevin W. Mannoia and Don Thosen, eds. *The Holiness Manifesto*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 69.

⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 82.

⁶ <http://fmcusa.org/uniquelyfm/disciplingandserving/>

⁷ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern*, 8.

Discipleship to Jesus is the most enduring source of social change and hope the world has ever experienced.⁸ Jim Martin, of International Justice Mission, articulates this:

“The work of justice is some of the most fertile ground for discipleship that we’ve ever experienced. The places of violent oppression and abuse that may seem utterly God-forsaken are in fact the places where we have most deeply experienced the presence and power of God. The call to the work of justice is therefore not God sending his church out to a place where God cannot be found. Rather, God is inviting us into the place where he is already at work ... beckoning us to experience his profound love for us and for the vulnerable of this world. The call to fight against injustice is therefore the call to intimacy with God and to deep discipleship.”⁹

Justice is the work of the community.¹⁰ Holiness is a way of life with a receptive side – our being – and an active side – our doing. God imparts his holiness, gives the Spirit to direct us, and we respond in action.¹¹ Discipleship is vitally needed. The end result mentioned above, being a community on journey together towards shalom, is the heart of the Set Free Movement’s philosophy.

Does Set Free disciple others deeply?

⁸ John Perkins and Charles Marsh *Welcoming Justice: God’s Movement Toward Beloved Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009) Kindle Electronic Edition, Locations 369-371.

⁹ Jim Martin, *The Just Church: Becoming a Risk-Taking, Justice-Seeking, Disciple-Making Congregation* (Chicago:Tyndale House, 2012), Locations 234-241.

¹⁰ Bethany Hoang, *Deepening the Soul for Justice* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 24-25.

¹¹ SPU *Holiness*, (School of Theology, 2010), 9.

Organizations don’t disciple others – people disciple people. **Set Free leaders work to foster a culture of spiritual care and formation with the ultimate goal of teams being a transforming presence in society.**

For teams to be a transforming presence, each member must be earnestly pursuing God and holiness, living out the scriptures obediently, centered on Jesus, formed and informed by the Holy Spirit. In other words, members are called, invited, and encouraged to be disciples.

The Set Free Movement discipled with a small “d”, not a big “D”. Big “D” Discipleship is intensive spiritual formation with regular encouragement and accountability. Small “d” discipleship is woven into all aspects of life, including mentoring and serving, teaching scripture and theology, encouraging and caring for others with the goal that those involved would grow spiritually.

This form of discipleship regularly happens in the Set Free Movement. We focus on HOW, not just WHAT. The process for community engagement and character formation is paramount. A Christ-centered community formed and informed by the Spirit, on mission with God, will naturally have values and actions that reflect the discipleship oriented process. To this end, our teams create opportunities for worship, learning, and prayer to happen while simultaneously working to heal broken relationships, communities, and systems.

Some of our teams more actively pursue this discipleship approach than others, but all are invited to lean into this. There is a call to do more than just end modern slavery – **the real goals are transformation and shalom.**