

Disciple-making Skills Without Mindset Shifts Won't Produce Lasting Fruit

By CYNTHIA ANDERSON

Simon Sinek, motivational speaker and thought leader, is famous for coining the phrase “Start with why.” Indeed, our why is extremely important as we seek to expand God’s kingdom across the globe. Motivation comes before processes and methods. Agreed? As I look at Scripture, however, I see Jesus starting not with why, but with who. Who He is and who we are.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and you will bear much fruit, Jesus said in John 15. He starts with identity. Who we are. He then tells us what to do. Finally, He shares a promised outcome. John 15:5 is perhaps one of the most important verses in the Bible for any missionary, church-planter, disciple-maker, or DMM/CPM practitioner to regularly reflect on.

We want to see greater fruit. We long for multiplication. It begins with who.

Start with Identity before Activity

A few weeks ago, I was reviewing some online training material created by another organization. I have a lot of respect for this group. They have done a great job of catalyzing many new movements and training people to multiply disciples. As I watched their videos, I deeply appreciated many things about their training content. I recognized numerous principles that I’ve also used to train disciple-makers.

One thing was notably missing, however. The who. They challenged people with the need to plant Gospel seeds and gather new people into groups. They talked about training leaders. But they started with the *why* and *what* and completely skipped the issue of *who*.

“Hmm.” I thought to myself. “If people don’t first know who they are, I’m not sure how fruitful this will be.”

It is common to skip the *who* and jump straight to the *why* or the *what* of making and multiplying disciples. Jesus spoke a lot about the who. He reshaped the

identity of His followers. As they understood and began to believe who they were, and then spent time with Him, watching Him express who He was through what He did, they were transformed. Soon, they were acting like Him and doing the works of the kingdom.

Here are a few examples of times the Bible speaks to a disciple’s identity.

- **Chosen & Appointed to Be Fruitful**—*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last...* (John 15:16)
- **An Extension of Jesus**—*I am the vine, you are the branches.* (John 15:5)
- **Royal Priests**—*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.* (1 Pet. 2:9)
- **Children of God**—*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* (1 John 3:1)

When we are training people to multiply disciples, it is good to teach them new skills and to challenge them with the Great Commission. No debate there!

If we want to see lasting change and transformation, however, there are a few important steps we need to take before jumping into skills and methodology. The trainee’s thinking needs to change about who God is and who they are.

In my new book, *The Multiplier’s Mindset: Thinking Differently About Discipleship* (released September 7th on Amazon.com) the first part of the book addresses mindset shifts about God and ourselves. We start with who. Throughout the book, the thread of identity surfaces often. This is because, without significant mindset shifts about our identity, multiplication may begin, but it will not be sustained.

Change Mindsets to See Changed Behavior

Have you ever trained a group of people and seen great enthusiasm at first, but the lasting impact seems minimal? I love just-in-time training and believe it is a key to catalyzing movements. We train people in skills they need now, then send them out to practice. This is fruitful. Much missionary training is too knowledge-based and has little skill training. We need to train people not only *what* to do but show them *how* to do it.

Having said this, if we train only in skills but don't address mindset shifts, we still won't see lasting results. Why is that? It is because our actions flow out of our beliefs. If our core beliefs about discipleship remain unchanged, even with skill training, we will continually default to old behaviors.

Let me give an example to illustrate.

Imagine you are training a group of people on how to share their testimony in three minutes. They learn the skill, practice it in the classroom, and even do fairly well with it when you send them out to share with people in the community. As long as you are there as the trainer and mentor, they are obedient learners. Everyone gets excited about the initial results.

A few weeks later, however, none of them have continued to share their testimony with others. What started out looking like a blazing fire that promised to bring much fruit has dwindled to a mere ember. The core reason could be the lack of a mindset shift regarding either *openness* (the harvest is ripe), or regarding *enough* (they don't think they have the resources needed to share the Gospel). Without you there to help them, provide inspiration, and perhaps transportation costs to go out to a new location to share, they discontinue their efforts. Their core belief is that they need outside assistance to continue and that they don't have enough money, people, training, or time to do what you've trained them in.

After years of working with thousands of DMM/CPM practitioners, I've come to firmly believe that alongside of skill development (which is very important), we also must work on mindset shifts related to core multiplication values and principles in Scripture. Once our thinking becomes aligned with God's Word, actions become natural and automatic.

Let me unpack this a bit further. Return to consider the mindset I call "Open." If we believe that Tibetan Buddhists are closed to the Gospel, no matter how many skills we learn about how to have spiritual conversations, share testimony, or do Bible storying, we won't share frequently with new people. Why? We believe they are not open to hearing our message.

I see the same thing taking place in the West. We assume that people around us don't want to hear about Jesus and will resist our attempts to engage in conversation related to our walk with Christ. There may be people around us who are open and even hungry to know more about Jesus, but we do not open our mouths to share because our core belief is that they are not open. Our thinking must be realigned with God's Word and what Jesus said about the harvest being ripe. Only then, will we begin to share and share often with those around us, no matter how many skills we have learned or read about.

Keep Injecting Vision for the Transformation of Individuals and Communities

Another missing element in our efforts is the continual injection of vision into those we are training. Again, we so often focus on the what and how, but together with the who, we must continue to regularly remind people of the why. Cast a vision for what will happen one day if we are faithful to make disciples and train them to make more disciples. Talk about that dream often. Pray for it. Gossip about it. Imagine together what it will be like when it comes to pass.

My husband and I are training for a half marathon. The coach on the runner's app we use often tells us to imagine ourselves crossing the finish line. What will it look like? Will we high-five each other? Will we do a dance? Lift our hands in the air? Imagining the finish line helps us keep running today. Keeping the vision in front of us gives the courage to persevere through the tough moments on the journey to the release of a rapidly multiplying movement.

Hebrews 12:2 says, *for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame.* It was the vision of the future, of the joy before Him, that helped our Lord endure and press on through suffering. Those we disciple need help to do the same. Remind them continually of the joy that lies before them.

- What will it be like when you see Jesus, face to face? When He says to you, “Well done my good and faithful servant. You invested what I gave you. You were faithful. You obeyed my Word.”
- What will it be like when you are in heaven and you look around and there are thousands with you from the tribe and people you devoted your life to reach?
- What will it be like when one day tens of thousands of Jesus followers have joined together to pray for their nation? When instead of corruption and violence, godly men and women are honoring God and serving their communities with truth and integrity? This is why we continue to serve and to do the hard and messy work of making disciples.

Look for ways to remind people of their *why* and to cast a vision for the transformation of individuals and communities.

This issue of *Mission Frontiers* is about crisis response in fostering movements. God works through times of crisis and often releases new wine and new wineskins. When a crisis is happening in our lives or our nation, we are more open to changing our mindsets and beliefs. The crisis demands it. It forces us to consider

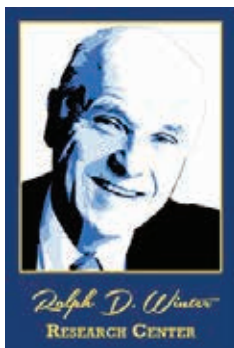
new ways of working and new ways of thinking about our work. We are forced to change and innovate.

When the crisis subsides, it is easy to shift back to old methods and means. We see this with the pandemic. Many churches were unable to meet in buildings or sanctuaries. The church became a church without walls. People met in small groups or online. A major pivot took place for many. After the pandemic, have we retained the lessons learned or continued to utilize the new wineskins? The pull to return to the old is strong within us, especially if only our methods changed but our mindsets remained the same.

Identity and beliefs must change to release and sustain movements.

Interested to consider these mindsets further? I'd love to share a copy of my new book with you. Grab a copy at www.multipliersmindset.com today, or download a free sample chapter at www.dmmfrontiermissions.com/multipliers-mindset-sample-chapter.

God has great things ahead for us as we continue to allow His Spirit to shift our thinking. Our identity in Christ comes into alignment and then our actions and outcomes will shift as well. 📖



Welcome to the Ralph D. Winter Research Center Website

By GREG H. PARSONS

The Ralph D. Winter Research Center has just launched a new website! Check it out at: rdwrc.wciu.edu. The website is specifically designed for two things:

First, we will be a source of *current missiological reflection* to serve both the newest globally interested believers, as well as mission leaders and engaged practitioners around the world.

We are working hard to find or create cutting-edge, frontier-focused reflections to advance the Gospel globally. We also are curating materials posted or published by others. We are excited to point to great resources deemed helpful for mission at the edges

