

Discipleship Making, Doing Church & Technology

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Moody's call for a return to discipleship making, and particularly to the idea of disciples-making disciples is a somewhat unique and refreshing clarion call in this age of a church gone technological.¹ This familiar call seems to emerge as a culture makes changes and advancements with knowledge and technology.²

Danger is ubiquitous in every era God's people have existed, and it is a perpetual spiritual battle until Jesus returns (Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Th. 5:4-11). We must not be ignorant of his schemes that would harm God's people and get us off track from the focus of being an authentic disciple of Jesus (2 Cor. 2:11), and making disciples (Mt. 28:18-20). Even secularist have sounded an alarm in advance to the devastating effects of technology upon humanity.³ This writer sees significant dangers with the challenges of our era of technology. Consider the following:

First, the danger of a multi-sites system through the use of technology may detach the pastor from his flock in a meaningful connection. A church hierarchy, contrary to the simple congregational system of the New Testament church,⁴ obviously leads to an elaboration and complexity that does not serve God's people well. The building of a closed system emerges—a mega-church mentality that cultivates pride and excludes brethren from brethren in the Kingdom.

Second, there *cannot* be exemplary influence upon another person until you are in close proximity. Quoting Spurgeon ("In other things, familiarity breeds contempt, but in the things of God, familiarity breeds adoration."), Moody makes an important subtle point this writer

¹ Christopher Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples: A Practical Theology of the Church* (Franklin, Tennessee: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2021), p. 13-16.

² Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1964).

³ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987)

⁴ Milton Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1000-06.

gleamed.⁵ In an authentic connection with a mature disciple of Jesus (a spiritual leader), an endearment is cultivated, similar to what Jesus' disciples experienced with Him, but so opposite is true in the world as observed and often quoted by Lenin, "Familiarity breeds contempt."⁶

Third, the dumbing down of God's people with technology to the point that their brains are trained to be entertained (not taught) and the rational brain becomes under-developed. This has been well established by Postman, Bloom and subsequent research.⁷

This writer would like to offer some perspectives that may be helpful in facing this dilemma with technology in the 21st century.

First, connection with technology may be prodigious, but theologically speaking, the connection between God's people with technology is consecrated time ("where two or three of you are gathered in my name, there I am in your midst"). Technology is the medium; the Spirit is the current that works through the medium. If God spoke through the mouth of a donkey (Num. 22:28-30), He can speak through a church service broadcast utilizing Facebook or YouTube, or through virtual meetings, or virtual counseling sessions. If it is in the Spirit, the Spirit trumps technology.

Second, for many disciples with serious problems such as avoidant personality disorder, paranoia, agoraphobia, technology provides an excellent bridge to connect these individuals with the body, perhaps unlike any era in history. The technology gives them access to the church and with someone who would disciple them. And as was touted many decades ago, "high tech cultivates the need for high touch." Many now have access to a church that they would have

⁵ Moody, 161-71.

⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Tale of Melibee*, first utilized in English in the 1300s.

⁷ Lisa K. Strohmman, Melissa J. Westendorf, *Unplug: Raising Kids in a Technology Addicted World* (Lulu Publishing Services, 2015).

never attended in person, but as trust is developed, they find themselves in the midst of the greatest people on the earth—the church.

Third, this writer encourages a “therapeutic discipleship” that could readily be utilized through virtual connection. Fifty-percent of this writer’s sessions with disciples is through a virtual medium, which has proven to be quite useful and effective in the developing of disciples’ lives. One can experience close connection to someone through a virtual medium. It initiates a pro-activity with the disciple, and cultivates trust, albeit through the medium of the technology.

Fourth, the church must disciple parents to properly utilize technology with respect to raising their children. It starts with the parents providing an example of self-control and setting guidelines for their children. Moody’s emphasis on family discipleship is critical for a healthy church.⁸

The emphasis on the idea of being a disciple-making disciple upon conversion sets the tone from the beginning of a young disciple’s life.⁹ This is an emphasis that will challenge the disciple to be what he must be in this world with no equivocation: salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13), light of the world (Mt. 5:14-16), fisher of men (Mt. 4:19), ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21), teaching the substance of the faith to everyone.

The question is not if the two approaches can coexist; they must exist. Since technology is here to stay, and the church will never cease to exist (Mt. 16:18), the church must utilize wisdom on the use of technology to advance the gospel and make disciples. The best anecdote to this overwhelming barrage of technology is a high view of church that has at its core discipleship.¹⁰ Discipleship is the substance; technology is only a means.

⁸ Moody, 67-83.

⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 21-31.