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Equipped for service 2

This tutorial introduces the fifth question in the area of *Discipleship*: 'Do they have access to defined pathways that offer Bible-based resources, practical instruction and relational discipleship to adequately equip them to serve the church locally and globally?'

Ephesians 2:10: For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

That is an encouraging verse for us to consider for our lives individually and also for those that we have the opportunity to rub shoulders with and pour our lives into, that they also are God's masterpieces and He has plans for them.

God planned good things for us long ago and that's the thing, isn't it? When our vision fails to see what can happen, we can lean on His vision, but at the same time, we're called to hope for these things and to have good strategies and to be intentional. There are situations where God does amazing things with people who the world considers of no significance and people who are, in the sense of the world, often poorly educated and marginalized people, the weak and the foolish.

In the case studies, it's exciting to share some of these things that God has done with those who are being prepared, with those of you who are being prepared for God's work. We are praying and trusting that this would be a help and an inspiration perhaps to those of you who are planning to go out to share God's Word and see a church planted in some unreached area. It's kind of cool to see that these are things that God has planned from so long ago, an eternity to play out, and it's wonderful to see this, His masterpiece.

Last time

We looked at the fourth question from the WILD outline in the area of Discipleship, which dealt with the area of people being able to exercise the gifts that God has given them so that they can develop in their service to Him and His body. In this tutorial we will discuss the fifth and last question in the WILD outline in the area of Discipleship.

Do they have access to defined pathways that offer Bible-based resources, practical instruction and relational discipleship to adequately equip them to serve the church locally and globally?

Practical instruction and relational discipleship are kind of the more tangible things that are reproducible. Do they have a good model, something that they can actually tangibly take and pass on? Do they have good material in their own hands? We have so much available when we're wanting to go and to speak or to share, there are just unlimited resources, certainly in English. Part of our role is to provide those kinds of resources for the church. If they are to one day go beyond the borders of their village or their local valley or their town, wherever it might be, to further afield, but if they're to do that, then they need to be equipped. For us to dream a little of them partnering with other churches, other efforts in their own country, and with folks like ourselves from other countries, and for those partnerships to take place all around the world, it will take intentionality. It means actually equipping folk to be able to do that properly as they move out.

Matt talks about how their dream for the church there fuels their day to day strategy among the believers in spite of the great challenges in that context:

Our dream, our passion has been that God would build His Church there, that Christ would build His Church that would be a light to a dark society. As we think of the small group of believers that we have been able to be a part of seeing come to Christ, our dream is to build them up so that they would be a viable vibrant witness to their people. And so our focus is really right now on the believers and a few of the opportunities we have with unbelievers to really build into their hearts and lives a love for Christ that would compel them out and that they would somehow figure out how to communicate this love for Christ to their family and to their friends and to their neighbors. Because of the dynamics of the cartels and the drug scene there, we are very limited where we can go and who we can interact with. Even that component pushes us more into viewing our role as supporting and assisting that small band of believers to see the Gospel penetrate and the church to grow beyond where we're at right now.

Probably in my heart, I've moved from the philosophy or the mentality that I could actually reach them to realizing that God has us there as being members of the body that's going to reach others and they are the body.

We view ourselves as assisting the believers there in any way we can through teaching, discipleship, and developing more curriculum. One of our biggest projects right now is to bring the written curriculum into an audio form so that we can get more people

listening to the Word, listening to the teaching. Those are just different ways we want to assist them and we're doing all of that inside of the context of a Spanish-Mexican church.

We're doing all of that inside of the context of a Spanish-Mexican church and discipling that church to realize that the Great Commission of reaching the world is for them and we're just there to assist them. It's multi-faceted. It's very complex, but very exciting to live in that place and see Christ start to get the hearts of His children in that community for these people.

Is there a sense of responsibility taken in the church to be informed about current trends, needs and opportunities so that members can be given valid input as they move towards new opportunities for service?

Are the ministry values, priorities and objectives of the church shared regularly with the whole body, in smaller contexts, and in discipleship relationships?

Does the church have a vital interest and sense of responsibility in seeing all members properly equipped to be effective disciple-makers, OR do they draw a false dichotomy between “full-time, professional, specialists ministries” and other “normal walks of life”?

Bill talks about how important it is to have an overall plan for training teachers, developing leaders, and seeing them become equipped and personally responsible for their roles:

Yeah, I think one of the key things is to have a strategy to actually get yourself there. People don't just naturally come to an understanding of something unless there's a plan to actually move them from not understanding it to understanding. I think early on, we saw people or teachers develop, we started out helping them understand how to present things. Then once they got good at presenting things, then we worked with them on how to actually add illustrations in and then, add application in.

Over a period of time, as they grew in their ability to present information and then to teach it, it started coming more from the heart. The last stage was actually leaving out a lot of the teachers' helps in the lessons and forcing them to actually think through why they were saying what they were saying. It was through that reflection, I believe, as they were teaching the Word of God and reflecting and as the Holy Spirit was giving them insights, that they started seeing all the connections between the different things that they had learned and studied.

Again, I just think it's important that you have a planned strategy to get there, not just assume that they're going to come to that point, but actually help develop them to get to that point.

Bill shares their encouragement in seeing the elders prioritize discipleship for God's purposes in reaching out to others:

The elders brought up early on the whole idea of how to train other people. They started realizing that this job was huge and they needed more help in just the one church there. We talked to them about bringing young men or other men that were able to be teachers and able to be trained and do the whole process. It was really hard for them because in one sense, they're just learning themselves how to do this and so to at that point to bring other men in and try train them was really difficult.

We didn't push on that a whole lot because again, we were just hoping, we were watching the elders grow, but over the last couple of years, we've really seen them turn the corner in that. Once they've been established and they realized what the Lord has been able to help them do, they're really excited about looking toward some of the young men and bringing other men on and training them. Lots of questions have come from them in this last year really of, "Can we bring this guy on, let him teach a little?" Yes! We're just always trying to encourage them in doing that.

I think on the broader perspective of not just in the village itself, but in the neighboring language groups...we've seen a huge desire because there's family in some of other villages. On their part there is a huge desire to want to see the Gospel be taken over to the different churches or to the different villages and that has resulted in other churches that have been born in the other language, not only in our language group, but in the bordering language group. We are watching them take what they know and want to transfer that to other people. And it's not just about the identity of having a church.

The drive to it has really been hope, because that's one of the things that just really drives the people where we're at. What are we hoping for? What's going to happen to us when we die? Where are we going? When they started realizing answers to that, they started getting this huge desire to see their family members understand this and so it's been a huge drive for the church to branch out to different places and see the Gospel taken over to the different areas.

John describes the challenging situation in the church today, but the comfort in knowing they have the Lord and His Word:

The amazing and the wonderful thing is that they do have almost the New Testament finished and many, many portions of the Bible so they have God's Word. They've been well grounded in God's Word and have that tremendous foundation upon which there's a real confidence that they know God, that they have a relationship with Him. Everything's there to be able to bring these sparks back to life. The area that was all jungle when we moved in there has now become quite a center and I think the government's moving in there, the lumber companies have moved in and so the whole base is becoming quite a commercial center. This is introducing challenges that they've never had before. I am really praying for them that they'll come through that well.

John's comments are sobering because in this world there are many challenges and we have an enemy who is trying to destroy the Church. As we give our lives for others and make disciples, we realize, as was mentioned earlier, that there are those who do fall away, ones who have so much potential and yet they waste it. It's a very sad thing. Churches themselves have many challenges that face them and a lot of them are minorities. As minorities, they themselves have issues with others who are coming in and maybe have more education and can take advantage of them.

As master builders, what God intends for us is to be ones who would foster an understanding of the challenges that are coming and so leave others prepared. It's true that we can't anticipate all the challenges that are going to come at them. Our responsibility is to give them God's Word and teach them, give them the whole counsel of God, and there's a lot there. That's not leaving them with little. That's leaving them with all they need.

As it says in 2 Peter 1:3, "His divine power is granted to us, all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence." We see that when we give them God's Word, they have all they need, regardless of the challenges and the difficult context.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Equipped for service

1. In about half a page, share your thoughts about anything that has particularly impacted you as you have gone through this module. Note any specific areas where your thinking has changed, or where you are still considering the implications of something you heard.