

# Disciple-Making During Social Distancing



Jeremy Bohall, Tom Foley and Ruslan Maliuta, 2020



It seems like everyone is hunkered down these days. This precludes sitting in a cafe and talking over coffee or breakfast. But social distancing doesn't have to stop us from obeying Jesus in making disciples. How can we be involved in disciple making without being able to meet in person? Additionally, how can these ideas and practices be helpful to us as we move forward in disciple making post-pandemic?



**T**he three of us have years and even decades of experience with virtual disciple-making conversations online. The pandemic crisis can open our eyes to ways of disciple-making that we haven't considered seriously before.

For over two decades Tom has been having disciple-making conversations with fellow disciples. A 'disciple making conversation' (DMC) takes place when two or three disciples of Jesus make a commitment to walk together through life, pointing one another to the gospel as the Bible informs our discussion. We all need to be reminded daily that we are broken and Jesus is our only hope, this is the gospel.

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**T**he term 'fellow disciples' indicates a relationship where one disciple is no higher than another. Each disciple, no matter their age, or experience, can speak into the life of the other as the Holy Spirit uses each person in the conversation. As the Bible is our central source, the Spirit reminds us of his truth as we speak biblical truth to one another. Tom puts it this way: "I am a disciple of Jesus, not Jeremy or Ruslan. But both of these brothers speak the

gospel into my life." Yet, we must recognize that there is also vertical disciple-making where one person leads another, or leads a group. Tom illustrated: "I have been deeply blessed to watch brothers grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus as we meet together over the years. I've seen biblical wisdom and discernment emerge from brothers as the Father used our conversations." This is essential for new believers and even for those who have yet to believe and are being disciplined into belief as Jesus did with his disciples and is being practiced in so many Disciple Making Movement communities.

**M**ost of our conversations have been held via a device that allows the participants to speak across continents and time zones. It seems that this has been an effective process.

Tom says that "I've travelled to visit fellow disciples two or three times a year for two decades where we sit face to face. But in the months between, most of that disciple-making happens by video or voice conversation. I've seen that, after hundreds of these conversations, we can profitably walk together in honest, vulnerable and regular discussions. This conversation model relies on regular, vulnerable and honest discussion."

Regularity is key so as to keep up with one another's

lives. Vulnerability is essential as we truly open our

hearts and minds to the gospel as God uses one another to speak that truth. Honesty is a core value of any DMC, but one can be honest and remain shallow. Vulnerability makes honesty really work. If I open my heart and mind in a vulnerably honest manner, my fellow disciple can be better used by the Spirit of Jesus to speak biblical truth into our lives.

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One practical way to incorporate these regular conversations is by taking a walk together. Jeremy states that: "For over a year now, Tom and I have been literally walking together while we talk using an online app on our mobile phones. This practice of walking while talking has boosted our conversations. That is due to the release of endorphins that naturally occurs when we walk. But there's more to it than that. I've found that walking while talking reduces both the external and internal distractions that other contexts inherently produce (cafes, cars, homes). This is because it provides activity for the body to engage in that doesn't distract from the conversation while excluding the external distractions like other people, televisions and music." Tom agrees, "I often look up from the path I am walking in the hills and am surprised by where I am on this familiar trail, having become so engrossed in my conversation with Jeremy or Ruslan that I've lost track of the part of the forest I'm in!"





**T**om and Ruslan have been speaking as fellow disciples for over twelve years. They have conversed as each was on different continents in their travels. Ruslan tells us that more recently he went through a major transition in ministry due to burnout.

"I believe that those conversations were essential for my recovery and those talks helped my wife Anya and me discern God's guidance." Ruslan continues. "We all need someone who walks alongside us (even if it's a figure of speech), who keeps pointing us to the gospel of God, and appreciates us for who we are and not for what we do. While some of this can occur sporadically in relationships, it's much better to be intentional and plan regular conversations with someone who can join us on this journey."

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**H**ere are some practical tips:

Send a paragraph from Scripture to a friend and schedule a call. Invest time in catching up. A key feature of a regular conversation is that catching up will be more organic and flow because you already have a sense of what's happening in their life. In fact, the Scripture text could even speak to what you already think may be going on. Once you've both had a chance to ask what's happening, it's time to probe a little deeper. A key to helpful probing is prayer; praying while listening helps a ton. Now, pick up the phone and do some disciple making!



# Application Questions

What areas of my life have I yet to be truly vulnerable as well as honest with my fellow disciples?

As I think about my own personal spiritual development, what areas might I emphasize? Send your fellow disciples this commitment and ask them to urge you to be vulnerable and honest.

Who are the two or three people with whom you might walk together? Send them this article and schedule a call during social distancing.



# AUTHORS



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