



Episode 050

Ps. Benny Ho on Disciple-Making

Ps Wilson

Hi. Welcome to wilsonlailing.com. This is our leadership podcast and our heart is to be a blessing to you. Our prayer is that this leadership podcast will help lift your leadership to the next level. Today, we're really privileged to have Pastor Benny Ho from Faith Community Church in Perth. It's a large, influential church in Perth. And Ps Benny is a very well known Bible teacher, but also, he's someone that's truly interested in making disciples. So that's what we want to talk about today. We want to talk about making disciples. Could you define for us what you view as disciple-making?

Ps Benny

One of the best definitions we have found is that which is articulated by Pastor Edmund Chan. And being part of his alliance, we have always used this as our definition, and let me read it for you. It goes like this: Disciple-making is the process of bringing people into the right relationship with God and then developing them into full maturity in Christ through intentional growth strategies that they might multiply the entire process in others also.

Ps Wilson

Wow.

Ps Benny

I like this definition very much because a few things are being brought up. Firstly, that disciple making is a process. It's not something we do overnight, but it's really a process. And in that process, we want to bring people into right relationship with God. I think that's a really wonderful starting point, bringing people into right relationship with God. How [we do this], is through intentional growth strategies. So there are specific things that we do to bring people into that right relationship with God. And then the end goal is not just another disciple.



It's another disciple maker that can multiply the entire process in others also. So I thought it was such a good definition, I can't improve on it. So we just use it in our movement.

Ps Wilson

Amen. I can imagine it's packed with so much thought that has gone into it, I suspect he probably wrote half a book on that already.

Ps Benny

Yeah, it's just incredible.

Ps Wilson

Now, can you share with us, I can understand that that definition is a wonderful concept, the whole principle involved, but why is disciple making so important to you?

Ps Benny

To me, it's so important because disciple-making is really the core business of the church. It's like our primary mission. The reason why I say that is because we're all familiar with the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19- 20, where Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and surely I'm with you always, even to the ends of the age." And in that Great Commission, there are four action verbs, and they were basically: go, baptize, make and then to teach. But out of these four action verbs, three of them are what we would call helping verbs. Only one is an imperative. So the imperative is kind of like the end result. So the other three help us to get to the end result. And it's interesting to note that the imperative verb in the Great Commission is not go, it's not teach, it's not baptize, but it's make. Which means that making disciples is the ultimate outcome. So we can go, we can teach, we can baptize, but unless and until we actually make disciples, we haven't fulfilled the Great Commission. And that's why I think it is really the core business of the Church.

Ps Wilson

I think that clarity is so crucial because just about any church that's serious about walking with God talks about the Great Commission. But yet not every church understands what the essence of it is all about.



And we can get caught up in the supporting verb, rather than the command verb, the most crucial end point- I won't say end point- but the crucial product of it all, we can sometimes miss. So what would you say to a pastor who is like, you know, there's so many pastors around the world that say, 'Well, I'm discipling my people because I'm preaching the word. I'm having Bible classes, we're having Bible discussions. Surely I am making disciples.'

Ps Benny

I think teaching Bible studies is part of that process of developing and building disciples. But if we just purely think that just by teaching the people, they are already disciples, then we may be short changing ourselves.

Because I think teaching and Bible study informs the head. But, it is more than just knowledge. I think people's values need to change. And in disciple making, we are not just wanting people to be informed, but we want them to be transformed. And so I think that teaching actually brings knowledge to the head, but it is mentoring, it is that one-on-one spending time with people that actually brings about value change in people's heart. And then if we can coach our people on top of that, then we will end up giving them the skills that they need to actually live out their Christian faith. So when all three come together, when teaching, mentoring and coaching comes together, I think that that person is truly equipped, truly disciplined- head, heart, and hands. So I think we are looking at discipleship holistically that way.

Ps Wilson

Amen. One of the ways we put it is we say we need to make sure that they know, they be, and they do.

Ps Benny

Absolutely.

Ps Wilson

And all these three are constantly interacting, helping us grow in the process.

Ps Benny

Much more holistic, I think.



Ps Wilson

And the other thing we find is that we often don't know if someone is really becoming a disciple, unless we're having that one-to-one interaction. Because a lot of people can look great at a distance. But it's when our lives and their lives are touching, and then we discover, oops, you know, there's all these major, perhaps, issues.

Ps Benny

Absolutely.

Ps Wilson

That for some reason, even though we've taught from the Bible about it, they're not living it out.

Ps Benny

I think there's a great disciple-making pastor by the name of Bill Howell. And Bill Howell actually said that the missing link in disciple-making is accountability. And it's only in that personal relationship with one another that we actually can call for accountability.

People can sit in our pews and listen to sermons, but that doesn't mean that they have applied it. And truth really does not transform life, it's truth applied. And how do we know they apply unless we actually have a relationship with them?

Ps Wilson

I'll tell a story from many years ago. I had a disciple I was discipling, mentoring him. And of course we got him to do the next guy. And I asked him how he was going? And he said, "Oh, he's good. He's eager. He's enthusiastic." And I asked him, how is he doing with his devotions? You know, that's a very crucial question. "Let's see, yeah, he seems to be struggling with it, you know, and I can't seem to make out what's going on." Then I asked him how much of the Bible is he reading to do his devotions? "Oh, he's reading several chapters each time." I said several chapters each time? Do you know if he's doing several chapters each time, he's surely not doing devotions. He's reading the Bible, but I don't think he's doing devotions. And I realized from that conversation that I made a mistake. I taught my guy, but I didn't tell him to teach the same thing. And he just went and told the guy, just do your devotions.



And without checking how he was actually doing his devotions. And that made me think back, ah, we need to inspect. Otherwise, what we thought we were teaching becomes something else over time.

Ps Benny

Yes, I think so.

Ps Wilson

It's one of those challenges. What would you say would be some of the key ingredients that will help make for a successful or effective disciple-making?

Ps Benny

I'm sure we have developed a lot of different processes in which we can bring disciple making and make it real. For us, we use something which we call the CEMR to make sure that people get Connected, people get Equipped, people get Mentored and then people are Released to make a difference in a broken world.

But if I could use a simple framework biblically, I think Acts 2: 42 would be a good one where it tells us that the early church devoted themselves to a few things. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

And when I read that verse, and if the early church would devote themselves to it, I think we should too. And if you think about the things that they devote themselves to, I could categorize it this way—we need the right content. They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching. So we need to have the right content. And our people are being taught the right things. The second thing is community. They devoted themselves to fellowship, the breaking of bread, or koinonia, which is deep, deep fellowship. Authentic, real fellowship. And this is necessary, I think, in part of our disciple making.

And the third area, which I think is the holy grail of disciple making, is that they devoted themselves to the sacrament of prayer or devotion. I think of it as consecration. It is not just, 'I have a great community to belong to, I know all the right content.'



But I'm actually allowing these things to change my life. I go on a journey of consecration as a result, and my desire is to see my life being transformed to become more and more like Jesus. So if I can have content, community, and consecration, I think it can form the basic framework in which we need to make disciples.

Ps Wilson

Wow. Consecration is probably one of the hardest.

Ps Benny

Yeah, I think it's the holy grail, the holy of holies of disciple making.

Ps Wilson

So I think it's incredible that you're aiming for this. What would you say would be some of the challenges, some of the practical challenges that people face in trying to make disciples?

Ps Benny

First of all, I think it is a very, very slow process. I think if we want to grow the church quicker, I think we just have to do stuff that will attract, do stuff that would cause people to take notice of the church and enjoy our services and enjoy the things we do.

But to build disciple making churches is such a slow process. We don't see quick results. And as a result, I find that it's not easy to keep that focus and to keep on keeping on, keep on investing until they bear fruit. So, that's one challenge that we face. It's so easy to be so tempted to just, 'Hey, you just do what the other church did, you know they did this amazing production and so many people came' -that kind of thing. But I think to try and keep the integrity of wanting to build a disciple making church, is a very slow process.

The other thing I find is that increasingly our world is busy and people are so time poor that even if we have time for them, they don't have time for us. And because of that, disciple-making becomes very challenging.



Ps Wilson

Yes.

Ps Benny

It's not something that we can do just by a Sunday service. We need our people to put in a bit more than that. And that, I think, is our challenge that we face.

Ps Wilson

Are there any ways, practically, that you guys have been doing, perhaps, to move the pendulum.

Ps Benny

What we found helpful was firstly to articulate very clearly our philosophy for making disciples so that our people know that we are committed to this. We are philosophically and clearly a church that is devoted to disciple-making. Then from there the process needs to be developed so that people know the next step that they need to take. The discipleship pathway has to be clear. After that, it is to keep innovating practices. I think the practice keeps changing because as circumstances change, as people become busier, as our demographics change, we find that we have to keep changing our practices.

Ps Wilson

And maybe even I think sometimes the young people, they get bored. I find if you take some things we talk about for 10 years and they're like switched off the moment you mentioned it. So we go, okay, we got to creatively call it something else.

Ps Benny

But one of the things I found helpful to try and address that time poor thing is to constantly be talking with our pastors and discussing with them how do we help make it easier for our people? Take for example, we decided that we're going to try and make life as easy as possible for the cell leader.



So, because they are already putting in so much [effort] to try and help us, because our cell groups are one of the primary vehicles in which we make disciples. And if our cell leaders are not inspired and motivated, then I think the whole process breaks down. So I need to find ways to make it easier for them. So I want the cell leaders also to be sure that they are receiving, they are being disciplined themselves. So our zone supervisors would look after three or four cell groups each.

We want to make it easier for them by not taking up another night of their time to mentor their cell leaders. So we actually allow that to happen on a cell night. So because our cell group still meet, most of them still meet once a week. So we say, okay.

Ps Wilson

Including your families?

Ps Benny

Yes. We try very hard not to let them go down the bi-weekly thing as long as we can. But I know that for some young families, they couldn't take it- they've gone there. But even then, we told them that for those who are meeting weekly in particular, we said that once a month, you as a zone supervisor, you need not visit the cell. But you take the night out, go meet your cell leaders and spend time with them. Then for the cell leaders, once a month, they don't lead their cell. They actually pass the cell group to the core group and then they go and meet the cell, the zone supervisor. So in that way they can have, they can experience being mentored without taking up another night. So that's one way we try to help them. So that it's not too time poor.

Another way we did was for eight weeks in a year, the church will be responsible to actually run the cell group through a video like this. So particularly in those areas that we are trying to channel the whole church towards. Take for example, for two years we were focusing on becoming missional, on reaching out to people, so I preached a message on how to be missional, and there were four steps. So for the next four weeks, I unpacked each one of those steps in the cell group through a video. So to my executive pastor interviewing me, he said, 'Okay, Pastor, last week you said that one of the first steps is to pray faithfully for some non-Christians. So why do we need to pray?'



Why is it so important?' So that's where I unpacked it. What do we pray for? I unpack it in the video. And then that video actually has built in facilitation.

Ps Wilson

Okay. So somebody can just say, okay, now let's answer this question.

Ps Benny

Correct. So the executive pastor stops halfway through the interview. And then he says, okay, I think this is a good point in which you can now break up into small groups of two or three, and then you discuss this. And then for the next 10 minutes, the clock will go. So 10 minutes later, we'll come back and then we continue. In that way, the cell leader literally for eight weeks in a year, four weeks in one term, another four weeks in another term, he need not really lead the cell, he just plays a video. And that frees him up to be able to focus on shepherding the people more than running some of these things.

Ps Wilson

That's brilliant. Something perhaps we can consider. Yeah, I know some of my leaders, potentially, they'll say, 'Oh, I'll take a holiday.'

Ps Benny

But they still have to run that meeting, you see. And on top of that, we even got our worship team to get the best worship leader, the best singers, and they record short 15 minutes, just one guitar in a sofa setting, and just do the worship for 15 minutes in different themes. And when we've done a set of maybe 30 of these, it becomes a resource that our cell leaders can just pick one of those and play it.

Ps Wilson

Oh, the worship of the cell group.

Ps Benny

So that frees up them having to worry about leading worship or playing YouTube.



Ps Wilson

That's right. That's what happens with some of our families.

Ps Benny

But with YouTube playing, you start, you stop, you start, you stop.

Ps Wilson

That's right.

Ps Benny

So we have the worship team just record it for 15 minutes. About 30, 40 of them, you park them somewhere, and they become a resource, and it frees the cell leader from having to worry about worship leading too much.

Ps Wilson

Organizing it, yeah. Wow, that's great. Now, of course, in the church, you also have different demographics. You have people of different spiritual levels. And when you're trying to... In your approach to disciple making, do you adjust it to suit their context? Like I can see you doing a lot of discipleship in small groups. So do you adjust the way you think, or is everything done quite standardly across the entire church?

Ps Benny

Certain things are standardized, like the framework we use, Connect, Equip, Mentor, Release, are quite standardized. But the next steps are all standardized in terms of the next step of say, after you first join a campus. Then from the campus, if you come to know the Lord, then you go through the basics of the Christian faith, and then from there, there are basic courses that you can actually go for. Those things are all standardized.

However, when it comes to the cell group materials, things that they do in the cell, our connect pastors, that means the pastors of the various individual groups, they actually are free to innovate. They take some of this and they tweak it to suit their demographics. So we do allow a lot of flexibility.



Ps Wilson

Okay. So now you've been talking about disciple making in these small groups, which is all one group. But you also mentioned about one-to-one. So when does your church do this one-to-one?

Ps Benny

Okay this is where, because in recognition of the fact that there's so much going on in the church and there's so much going on in people's life, we actually set as a very simple goal for the one-to-one that all of our leaders, that means from cell leader upwards, they should experience being mentored. But that's the only goal we set with the hope that once we have experience being mentored, we will want to mentor others. So we do not enforce the cell leader to have to find someone as part of the goal. But we just want them to experience it, and once they experience it, we believe that they will want to pass it down. Because we see mentoring as primarily in the context of leadership development. So with that then, once the cell leader has experienced it, we can then challenge him to, if you really want to multiply yourself, and to be able to raise the next level of leaders, you must be prepared now to take someone. Look for your A's and B's in the group and spend time with them. Those are likely to become your future leaders.

Ps Wilson

And do you find this sort of thing happening to some reasonable extent?

Ps Benny

Yeah we do see them actually making the effort to find people because they really want to multiply their cell or else they have so many people to look after and it becomes untenable.

Ps Wilson

Okay.



Ps Benny

So what we also do is to ask the cell leader, because I do recognize that for some cell leaders, especially those who are raising young children, they will find it quite difficult, quite challenging to have to now take up another role of mentoring someone in the cell. So we tell them that at least, can you let your zone supervisor, recommend to your zone supervisor, some A's or B's in your group that has a potential to be developed. Once these names are given to the zone supervisor, if we find that the cell leader really cannot do that, we would actually escalate it to the next level. And we encourage a zone supervisor to actually go two levels down and mentor these people. Because they are the answer to all of your problems. Because then the cell can multiply. And then when the cell can multiply, new leaders are raised, then the whole system will operate well.

Ps Wilson

You know, I can really see that you have been problem solving the challenges.

Ps Benny

Oh yeah, it has been like that for such a long time we had to find ways of dealing with it.

Ps Wilson

Yeah, we appreciate that. We've also had our challenges trying to solve them. It's been interesting to hear the solutions that you've come up with, so that's been really helpful for us to ponder and think about.

Ps Benny

You know, it's still a work in progress.

Ps Wilson

But I'm so glad to see and hear that for you and your leadership, you're really serious about making disciples. That you are really intentionally doing your utmost to facilitate, to nurture, and you've been investing so much to make this happen, and I think it's a tremendous achievement. And also, I believe, an encouragement to many other churches, because I do know that the whole idea of disciple-making is increasing in Christendom.



There's a lot of talk, but I also know there are a lot of pastors who say, 'Yes, I know I should do it, and all these things. You've even given me the plan.' But then, getting down and doing it is one of the most challenging things.

Ps Benny

Absolutely.

Ps Wilson

Especially in churches that are already existing in a certain mould. And then to implement this sort of thing is a huge challenge.

Ps Benny

I think everything is going to boil down to all of us as senior pastors holding that passion and for all of our leaders to recognize that we are the delivery system. So we can have great processes, wonderful philosophy and all that, but ultimately we are the delivery system. So if it doesn't happen in us, it doesn't happen. And it's such a challenge.

Ps Wilson

Praise the Lord, I think by the grace of God, we'll get much of this happening more and more.

Ps Benny

Amen.

Ps Wilson

Well, thank you once again, Pastor Benny. Thank you for your sharing. It's been a joy. It's been wonderful to hear your honest assessment of where the challenges are, where the church is at. But really you know, above all, it's an encouragement to all of us.

Ps Benny

Thank you.

Ps Wilson

Thank you so much. God bless all of you. Praise the Lord. Thank you so much.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. What insights in the interview stood out to you about disciple-making? Why?
2. Which aspect in this topic challenges you to be or to be a better disciple-maker? Why?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. What disciple-making insights would you wish to implement? What are some specific steps you can take to make it happen.
2. Consider how your disciple-making process can be reproducible so that your mentee can continue the multiplication. Can you write out the process?





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