
Fwd: mission:world News - Church Revitalization and Discipleship Part Two

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Fri, Aug 7, 2026 at 5:30 PM

Here is part 2! :)

From: BMA Missions <info@bmamissions.org>

Subject: mission:world News - Church Revitalization and Discipleship Part Two

Date: July 19, 2022 at 6:01:18 AM CDT

mission:world

N E W S

Church Revitalization and Discipleship at South City Church: Part Two

By Heidi Sorrells



This is the second article in a two-part series.

Through continued prayer, bible study, researching different books, and attending several cohorts and trainings (including the Multiplication Workshop through the Missions office), South City leadership decided to begin to change gears. To prepare the congregation, they started a four-month sermon series called *Multiply*, which covered what the Bible says about the way the early church modeled Jesus' command to make disciples who disciple. The series emphasized the truth that every single believer has the responsibility, once they accept Christ, to make him known. Then South City introduced and began a

triad discipleship model that is simple enough for anyone to do. In a triad (groups of three), individuals study the Word through the SOAP Bible study method, ask each other questions to be transparent and held accountable, and own their role to find others to disciple by praying for someone they know who is lost.

Another step South City took to move toward a healthy, reproducible discipleship culture was to move the service start time an hour earlier and begin something called EQUIP. EQUIP takes place after service for an hour and is for those that want to learn how to be disciples who make disciples. Part of the problem with Western church culture is that people really don't know how to make disciples and need to be patiently taught how and given a space to practice. Drew says, "We released mandating EQUIP, and gave everyone the option. If you want to go deeper and learn, then come. As leaders, we have to be ok with those who take the opportunity and with those who don't. Just because they don't now doesn't mean they always won't." Even if some walked away, and some have, Drew says you have to "lead with a beautiful challenge to still love them with the grace and goodness of God, and to realize that ultimately they have to make their own decision about being a disciple maker." Not everyone is going to be on board and you keep a humility and an awareness that nothing you do is going to be perfect. Drew verbalizes it this way: "Anything we do is going to have our own fingerprints on it, even in the smallest ways, and that will dumb it down. Move forward with what God has given you to do through his vision for the church, not status quo and an attendance-based measurement of success. You can't disciple people in one hour a week from the pulpit. We have to give away discipleship to the people and show them how to do it. We want to see a movement of the Spirit alone, not just go for an idea the church can get on board with."

I couldn't leave the interview without asking what some of you might be thinking: "Were there fears you or the other pastors or elders faced in undertaking such a big step in revitalization?" Drew answered very honestly, "There's always fear of failure, but we knew the Lord was calling us toward this and it seemed to make sense. We also decided at the beginning that we were going to try not to put a lot of stress on ourselves. We realized that we could not mandate discipleship. Jesus said if you want to follow me, YOU (individually), must pick up your cross and follow me. It's an intentional choice on each individual's part to be a disciple who discipled, and this requires an individual sacrifice, commitment, and obedience. We knew some would come with us, and some wouldn't. We purposed together to encourage those who didn't want to come along, but we weren't going to belittle or strong arm them. We'd be obedient and let the Lord draw and convict hearts. We realized that we'd been trying to force it before, with First Principles, so we surrendered trying to be in control."

Drew went on to say, "We haven't had a ton of push back and I attribute that to prayer; moving forward as a team; allowing questions; admitting we didn't have it all together and saying we didn't know every step of the plan yet, but that we had to be obedient to the Lord. The comments that have been negative have

been the ones that challenge the status quo. We changed our service time and some didn't like that, but our thought process was to give our best time to disciple makers versus church attenders. Both matter, but our call to obedience is to show people how to be disciples who are all making disciples." Drew explains where he is growing through all this. "I'm learning patience and to stay close to Jesus. On the days I'm closest to Jesus I'm less concerned about things and have relief and peace." He says the Lord has really been teaching him that he "doesn't have a choice." He has to get close to Jesus every day. This kind of discipleship lifestyle, both living it and leading in it, takes total submission!

Drew credits courage and strength coming from a multitude of counsel, and is grateful for a unified team of pastors and elders that have prayed and cried and sought God together. "We don't move forward unless we're in agreement," he says. And it's not just a team within the church that's required to lead in change. Drew refers to some older men who have poured into him over the last few years, and he emphasizes how important this is for a pastor leading in revitalization of any kind. Titus says, "Older men, speak life into younger men . . ." Drew is resolute about mentoring. "This has to happen! There's a beautiful submission in putting yourself under the teaching and mentoring of others." Immediately he mentions Jerry Kidd as someone who has continually been a voice of encouragement and support in his life. Bill Wellons has also been an important mentor for Drew during certain seasons. Larry Barker, a leader in BMA Missions and a cohost of the Healthy Church Podcast, is another influential mentor in Drew's life.

All this change is one thing, but is this new system effective and reproducible? Less than a year in, South City has 30-35 triads going with people inside the church and outside the church. Some of these triads are students meeting with other students. Some of these triads have lost people attending. South City has been intentional to teach people how to have a triad, but they have not organized triads for them. Drew says, "We asked them to pray about who and when. We just emphasized the need, showed our people how, and set a biblical expectation that each person step out in biblical obedience to be a disciple maker." And I should note, Drew and the other pastors and elders are in triads too. Mindi Stewart, a partner and leader at South City, says, "Triads are really what we should be doing anyway." Jeff Franks, a former BMA missionary to Ukraine and an elder at South City says, "Over the past year our pastors, by introducing triads, have led us to form closer, more intensely personal relationships, wherein our goal is to make and become self-initiating, reproducing, disciples of Jesus. We could never do that in a Sunday service alone, become those that make discipling others a day-to-day lifestyle!"

Drew sees further confirmation that the vision is catching on when he hears people using the verbiage they've been teaching around disciple making. Bro. Jerry Kidd says this about how discipleship has changed at South City over the last year or so: "It's become a whole lot more personal. People have been trained to practice and have more confidence. I really believe we are training up a church that will truly be disciplers, not just in name, but in practice." As a

church member there myself, and student director, I've noticed that some who weren't on board at first began to see that something was happening and began to hear testimony from those learning to be disciples who disciple; and it ignited something in them. Could it be that disciple-making movements can be contagious?

So where is South City headed? In another year Drew hopes that the people of South City see themselves as missionaries in a real way that has nothing to do with Drew as pastor, or even a building to meet in. "Our city changes because of the ministry of people and how they lead others to discipleship." Drew would like to hear about more discipleship happening in kitchens, workplaces, coffee shops, schools, and parks. He would like to see "God's people owning and running with the mission of Jesus." He dreams of churches planted all over Central Arkansas in five years, wherever God opens doors and gives them opportunities. And he'd like to continue to EQUIP church members and leaders through biblical trainings and cohorts. Bro. Jerry says about the future, "There's no question - this will change our community!" Drew is happy to share anything they are learning at South City with other pastors or leaders. He can be reached at dcline@southcity.org. For more information about free discipleship resources or other resources on revitalization, reach out to heidi@bmaam.com.

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