

NOT ROCKET SCIENCE—Part One

by Bob Young

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You likely know the phrase: “It is not rocket science.” This figure of speech suggests that the matter under discussion is not particularly complex. This is an article about outreach and sharing the good news (evangelism) and church growth. Let me begin with some stories.

Last month Enrique was baptized. His story is not particularly unique or unusual. He attended services at the church one Sunday. After services, he was greeted by the visiting preacher who chatted and studied with him over lunch. The visiting preacher passed the contact information on to the local preacher who continued the study during the next week. Enrique was baptized the next Sunday.

A recent mission report from Leon, Mexico told of the baptisms of two new sisters in Christ. Both were baptized after contact and study.

Two weeks ago, Jan and I witnessed four baptisms at the end of the worship assembly at the Quito North congregation in Quito, Ecuador. Later during our travels in Ecuador, we learned that one of those baptized was a sister in the flesh to a brother from Portoviejo. This brother, recently returned to Ecuador from New York City, had made a special trip to Quito to visit with his sister about the Lord. When she learned how to properly respond to the call of Jesus to discipleship, she obeyed the gospel.

Yesterday, I got an email from Suyapa, a sister in Christ from Honduras. She wrote of another new congregation in the area of Honduras where she lives—now the number of churches is 53. I know how that congregation was established because last summer I saw the powerful influence she and her husband exercise in entering a city, visiting with the residents, setting up Bible studies, and attracting people to services in a new church. This process of contacting, connecting, teaching, encouraging, and maturing has been repeated time and time again—part of the reason for the increasing number of congregations in that area of Honduras.

Last Monday, I was with the Guayaquil (Ecuador) Central church. On a Monday night when the church assembled to greet U.S. visitors, they had perhaps six or eight visitors from their community. Why visitors on a Monday night? Someone invited them! I made it a point to chat with the visitors, welcome them, learn their story, and encourage them to study with the brothers and sisters in the church.

Last Tuesday morning, we visited the Guayaquil South church. This is a new congregation in existence only a little over a year. They have about 60 in attendance; they have had 21 baptisms so far this year. They distribute literature at least two days each week. They teach the Bible to all who will listen and study. Theirs is a story that is repeated again and again in church planted in last few years—churches that are growing and prospering.

Can you discern what these true stories have in common? Can you see the thread that ties together these accounts of God's power and the growth of the church? It's not rocket science!

The contemporary church in the U.S. must get back to the simplicity of church growth. The church is not a magnet so that people are automatically drawn to the church and attached so inseparably that they never leave. Most people attracted to the church are seeking relationship—with God or with other Christians. Some people who visit the church are seeking knowledge or information. People become disciples of Christ intentionally—biblical discipleship connects heart and head and hands.

Consider the possibilities.

- Many people want to follow Jesus (heart) but do not know how to follow Jesus (head). Such people need teaching. People can only become disciples of Jesus (followers, learners, and imitators) when they know and understand him, his teachings, and his life.
- Some people know about following Jesus (head) but do not follow him wholeheartedly. These have been touched intellectually but not emotionally.
- Other people have connected desire and knowledge, but have never become active followers of Jesus (hands).

Discipleship is a process that touches all of life. Genuine biblical discipleship is integrative. The entire being is involved.

Too many North American Christians have been barely and fairly Christians (barely a Christian, fairly involved). We must accept the challenge of discipleship afresh—caring, sharing, and daring. We must connect with people through caring, be bold enough to share the gospel message of Jesus, and dare to act for Jesus when it seems the most far-fetched thing we can imagine.

How can the church answer this challenge? I will address that question in the next article.