

## **The Goal Is Making Disciples Who Love God**

### **By Bob Young**

I preached it in a recent sermon; I say it again. The goal is not numerical growth. The goal is not multiplication. The goal is not baptisms.

The growth of the local church is a result of church health. A healthy, mature church does what healthy, mature churches do. The growth of the local church must not be forced or artificial. When the goal is defined as multiplication, growth, or outreach – too often unhealthy dynamics and processes are inserted to stimulate artificial growth. The goal of a healthy church is to make disciples who make more disciples. Making genuine, authentic disciples will result in growth, church planting, multiplication.

The goal is making disciples who are lovers of God and doers of his word. The goal is making disciples who are fully committed to God's eternal purpose—making disciples who make more disciples. As more and more disciples are formed and developed in a loving, caring atmosphere of "God-lovers," God gives the increase.

Increasingly clear to me is the truth that church growth is not the goal – it is the by-product. It is the serendipity. The goal is forming healthy disciples who are shaped in a life-giving, life-sustaining fellowship of believers. Yes, I want to make as many healthy disciples as possible, but baptisms easily become notches on our evangelism gun. How many of those baptized continue? Sunday night as I spoke to a prayer and praise group that is centered in Chile, one of the prayers was focused on those who have begun and have then walked away! That experience is far too common in the churches. Baptizing a person does not make them a disciple. Jesus said that making disciples is baptizing them and continuing to teach and mature them.

What is the process in the local church for building community and spiritual growth? Where are disciples making more disciples? And where are the second and third and fourth generation disciples? How are new disciples prepared for the journey?

I worked with a church that by God's grace and power almost tripled in a dozen years. I have described that time in my life to several people in these words: "We did not know what we were doing, but we were having a great time doing it!" At that time in my ministry, I did not understand what I understand today. We were doing it naturally! Teaching the gospel, baptizing people, maturing people. Building community, encouraging spiritual growth, helping new Christians reach out and bring friends and family to Jesus – and God gave the increase! We were thrilled to be on a discipleship journey with Jesus, and we easily and gladly shared with others.

I see God's plan and wisdom, and Jesus' teachings, in action again and again in Latin America. I pray that the U.S. church can grasp the vision, be convinced of God's eternal purpose to bring everyone under the Lordship of Jesus. I pray that the church will rethink its focus. Making healthy disciples who will make more disciples is God's plan for completing the Great Commission.