

From San Francisco to Nicaragua: My journey in disciple making movements

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Trudy: When I first joined CityTeam I worked with the recovery component, for addictions, and then with the homeless. The vision changed to where we aligned to where we believed God wanted us to be, and that was we needed to be making disciples, not just giving services to the homeless and services to those in recovery. So we changed our emphasis to make sure that we were making disciples who were making disciples, and that's how it got started in San Francisco.

We had the benefit of a very courageous man, missionary David Watson, who came and taught us and then coached us as we went along. We made lots of mistakes. In San Francisco we were just trying to reach San Francisco...and then God grabbed it...and you go through the doors that God opens. So we were influenced a lot by David Watson. Jerry Trousdale and his story also was an influence on us; we read his book and followed, and then he also was available to coach us.

It was a real struggle at the beginning; we had the mental understanding of making disciples, but it's not a process that you read a book and then you go out and do. It takes awhile to get out of the traditional evangelism style and teaching style that we had before. The process that we use is one of **discovery** and allowing people to discover--and that means our opinion stays out of it, our doctrine stays out of it--so when I was doing training, that was always an obstacle at the beginning; [I was] helping people all the time, myself as well, to get out of the teaching mode; I'm a part-time pastor, so it was one tradition (I thought) conflicting with another--I don't believe that to be true anymore; I don't think it's a conflict.

We had starts and finishes. In San Francisco we were reaching out to the homeless--by giving food boxes, serving meals--so in everything we did we started being intentional to build relationships, to focus on the relationship, to do what I call "God drops" to see if somebody was spiritually interested. So we started doing that in all of our ministries or trying to do that in all of our social ministries. It definitely got incorporated into the recovery. We became a discipleship AA, focused in recovery, so that they were being discipled and encouraged to disciple [others] themselves.

So we had built a relationship with an apartment complex--through food boxes and backpacks we had built a relationship with people in an immigration apartment complex. In that building there were Middle Easterners, Central Americans, South Americans, you name it, it was a very mixed bag of people that lived there. We started building relationships with them.

The best story is Angela. She said,
"Can I help you do this ministry in my building?"
It's like, "Of course you can!"

We built this relationship with Angela. At that point she didn't speak good English--enough to get by and also not enough so to have some conflicts on occasion over understanding--so we brought in a Spanish speaker at the same time to partner. We just invited her to discover for herself what Scripture said. She was culturally Catholic and she was excited to do that and she was excited to invite others from that building. She started a discovery group in her building, in her house...being Latino, always food and a lot of fellowship...and her group multiplied inside the complex itself and outside of the complex.

So through giving food boxes and backpacks and **being deliberate in finding out who was spiritually-minded, and wanted to do discovery**, God gave us Angela and we called her our person of peace in that building. The relationship took about a year to actually evolve into one where she trusted us. You're going to hear later about her story because she took it to Central America.

Steve: Wow. If we just sort of dropped in on that discovery group, what would've been happening typically?

Trudy: So if you walked into her apartment, the living room was not all that big--you would discover there was about twelve people there eating, talking. They were already friends before. In fact at the beginning of this one, the discovery group had one individual who kind of sat at the end of the couch facing the other way (her name was Olga) and they would invite Olga to engage in it and she would go, "No no I don't want to be part of it." She wanted to be part of the fellowship, she wanted to be part of the food; she did not want to be part of the discovery Bible study, and they just *oh ok*. And about eight weeks later Olga was fully engaged, and it was on Olga's terms. You could literally see her move a little bit each week toward the group and asking questions and being involved.

You would hear a lot of laughing, you would hear people say, I heard people say *I love the idea of being able to do what God's Word tells me to*, which was something their background didn't give them before. So they were thrilled to death to discover [it] themselves. Sometimes the discovery was small and sometimes the discovery was huge. But all of it was life-changing because it was what God would have them to do.

Steve: And you weren't leading this group.

Trudy: I never led this group. I still to this day am a coach and a mentor to Angela, but now Angela's a coach and a mentor to ten, who turn around and coach and mentor themselves down the line. No, we're very good friends. The first year was very rocky communication because she believed that my leadership was *over* her and it took about a year for her to understand that our relationship was *partners* and not one of a person of authority over another. Once that happened, things really changed

Steve: And you said that this group started some groups.

Trudy: So within the building, within a month, there was another group going; one floor above--so there was two groups going in the building within a month. Since it's an immigration building, as you find jobs--this is in downtown San Francisco--those jobs take you out of San Francisco.

Then they would take their groups, and their friends that were coming who wanted to start groups, they didn't live in that building either. So within the building, by the end of one month they had two groups going and within two months they had three groups going in the building. Then they started probably five in Daly City within three months (which is the town just south of San Francisco) which where a lot of people move to because you can't afford to live in San Francisco.

Steve: So it just followed their movements. So was Anglea following up these groups or was that your role?

Trudy: No, it was Angela's role. Angela was the person that God used to connect with them. We did not take Angela out of the picture at all. I didn't try to take over anything that were her relationships. I coached her and mentored her in keeping the groups on track as far as the DNA --not as far as what it looked like. I would get questions *what should it look like?* It didn't matter what it looks like; you can eat for 3 hours. You can not eat. That was up to them. I just turned around and coached her, which helped her improve her skills as well as help those she was in leadership over and partnership with.

Steve: Sounds like Angela was worth waiting a year for.

Trudy: Yeah, so there is the philosophy *go slow to go fast*. It was definitely was that because after Angela's vacation to Nicaragua I was running; I was having a hard time keeping up, because it did go fast.

Steve: So what happened?

Trudy: So Angela went home Christmas five and a half years ago to Nicaragua, her home country--she's a refugee--she went back to see her newest grandchild. I discovered that Angela is related to everybody in Nicaragua.

Steve: The whole nation!

Trudy: So while she was down there--and I did not tell her to do this, this was a God thing--while she was down there she shared with family members, in-laws, outlaws, and before she left--she was there for two weeks--before she left, four groups had been *well* established and those groups quickly grew. So she just told them--she was enthusiastic--she said, "You guys need to do this! You need to discover what the Bible says! I've discovered so much!" So she was God's instrument in Nicaragua while she was down there.

Steve: So four groups started and how did she follow those groups up?

Trudy: At the beginning we used a lot of [phone] calling cards--now we have ____? (we still use a lot of calling cards.) But she calls. So in the course of the five years the groups obviously multiplied down to what we think is probably fourteen generations. At this point we don't count the generations.

Steve: When you say “generation” you mean a group started a group started a group and as far as fourteen times that’s happened.

Trudy: Yes sir. And we discovered some things that didn’t work; we discovered some things that did work. We discovered the enemy. So currently we have--*God* has--300+ groups going in Nicaragua; some of them are doing church. We have trained leaders. So at this point we have Angela who has moved back to Nicaragua, well, she lives both places. Currently she’s down there, she does training down there, she works with her leaders down there...

Steve: So was that an intentional move on her part to follow up what God was doing back home?

Trudy: Yeah, we discovered we really needed somebody on the ground there, and Angela discovered, came to us one day--we had been talking about it in leadership--and she said, “I think God’s telling me to go back to Nicaragua.” So simultaneously God was working in both us and her. It was just getting very difficult to coach, mentor and do training. I was going down four times a year. So, now I don’t go down; Angela is there on the ground. She does the training. I still coach her.

Steve: So your role *right from the start* has been you’re a trainer, a coach, a mentor You’ve never led *anything* in this.

Trudy: Not with Angela’s group. Because I’m not a Spanish speaker and all of her groups were in Spanish.

Steve: So you had the advantage of not speaking the language! But it sounds like there was a mentoring role, then there was a period of time where it sounds like you were partners or a team together, fueling what God was doing in Nicaragua. Now you’ve stepped back again, and still her coach and mentor, while she develops the work.

Trudy: Yes that’s a good summation.

Steve: What have you learned through all of this in terms of finding that God-prepared person, that person of peace, but also when it appears like *here’s somebody who God has his hand on to multiply disciples, groups, churches*. So what have you learned about your role in their development?

Trudy: I think the most, and this sounds odd, but the most valuable thing that I’ve learned is that since God’s in charge, Angela is the boss--and I tell her this, and that’s how we built our partnership--Angela’s the boss when it comes to knowing her community and I don’t try to influence, to go *you should do it this way*. I may offer opinions and I **need to make sure in coaching that it’s DNA**; the hard thing is not getting my culture into her culture: it has to be deliberate, intentional, *hey keep your culture out of it. It’s OK that it looks this way*. So I’ve spent months saying, “You’re the boss,” and half the time when I said, “Angela, you’re the boss,” it was for *me* to hear it, and to keep my culture out of it, or *my* understanding out of it and trust *her* understanding; she and God have it, I don’t need to be interjecting in it.

At one point we said, "Oh don't let the groups get too big." Well, the groups down there are huge. Just helping overcome obstacles that we could help overcome or giving advice on how to overcome an obstacle, but not to say *it has to be done my way*.

Steve: I wonder though whether there's a cultural issue here. So she's the expert in her culture. But if you were a Nicaraguan but I still wonder whether you might still be hands off.

Trudy: So I say to myself even in groups in San Francisco etc, I'm old and working with San Franciscans who are young, I give the power--so I have interns and leaders in San Francisco who are Western and they're the boss--I say the same thing to them.

So my role has become...like here in Washington I'm building relationships to start groups. I'm part of a recovery DBS in Multnomah(?) and I still am engaged in building relationships and doing God drops and starting discovery groups. I am mostly a coach, a teacher, a mentor, a catalyst helping them get unstuck. There's a lot of that: it's like *we're not growing and how come?* and then looking back at the DNA and seeing where they deviated: just adding one thing, or most of the time it's going from discovery to teaching; that doesn't multiply. People get stuck. Every group I know has gotten stuck after about two years; their growth pattern has plateaued, and it's going back and looking at the DNA.

Steve: Tell us more about the DNA.

Trudy: So discovery vs teaching is the major component and it's probably the one we Westerners have the most issues with. It's *you have to understand it my way*. With partner churches, it's keeping doctrine out of it, and in some senses it's empowering them, it's *yes you can be who you want to be but don't have people rely on you*. If your reliance is on me you're only going to multiply as much as I can do. Have your reliance on Scripture so when somebody comes to you with a question, refer them back to Scripture. A lot of people say, "We believe that Scripture is all you need," and then they add stuff. Like *no, don't add stuff!* If Scripture is all you need--which is what I believe--then that's all you need! It's sufficient.

So making sure that teaching is not part of it, that discovery is, that their level of understanding is *their* level of understanding. Somebody isn't going to get everything that's in Scripture the first time, and it's not up to you, it's up to God and the Holy Spirit; it's not my job to say, "Well you missed this this this and this." We don't do that. Sometimes people do that and it's like *well you're not going to grow now because you're the teacher*.

Steve: How do you help groups and leaders get unstuck?

Trudy: It was really helpful when I had a coach at one point, David Hunt, who had been in Ethiopia (and is now back in Ethiopia) and he said, "That's OK, Trudy, this happens all the time." First off, just hearing that helped me in my heart to realize that I wasn't alone and this wasn't odd.

And then re-instilling DNA: when you're stuck going back and saying *ok where did we go off the DNA, where did we stray from the DNA?* To realize I needed to spend more time empowering leaders and not instilling myself. So most of the time it's re-instilling DNA, re-instilling discovery,

re-instilling not putting yourself in it but letting their leadership take it. So it's empowering them, it's getting back to the DNA: discovery vs teaching. Most of the time those will help them get unstuck.

But get help when you're stuck, when you see a plateau, talk to your coach, get your prayer team helping you. And realize that it's normal to get stuck. It happens to everybody.

In El Salvador they were stuck, so Carlos and I were talking to brother Mauricio, "OK tell us what's going on, show us what you're doing.

As soon as he said--both Carlos and I started smiling--soon as he said, "Well, I added some things that I thought they needed to know."

Brother Mauricio is a pastor and he's a God-fearing man and he didn't realize that by adding that, he was teaching, and no longer doing discovery, and it was no longer reproducible, so they were all relying on *him* doing it. So as soon as we started talking about the DNA again, about discovery,

"Is this part of discovery, can they discover this, or are you teaching this?"

"Well I'm teaching this," and as soon as his mouth says, "I'm teaching," he just smiled and he had gotten it. He knew the DNA; he had forgotten it, Before he hadn't heard himself say, "I'm teaching about the Scripture."

So that's a DNA issue.

Steve: So empowerment is about believing in them helping them understand they are the leader, they are responsible. But you're not divesting any form of appropriate control because this is how we're going to get the job done and you're bringing them back to sort of first principles.

Trudy: Correct. And there is no control issue other than it's God who does the convicting, it's the Scripture that does the teaching. We don't try to do God's job. Anybody and everybody can discover what God has for them.

A favorite story is a Costa Rican eight-year-old who did the first discovery series and they asked her what she would do differently from the Scripture. She said, "I'm not gonna to kick the cat." The adults in the group just couldn't resist and they asked how come, and she said, "Well, God told us to take care of them, and I shouldn't kick the cat anymore."

That's life-changing.

Steve: Yeah, especially for the cat!

But that does not mean we want to dominate you by telling you how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy, for it is by your own faith that you stand firm.

2 Corinthians 1:24 NLT

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