

**The Disciple Investing Apostle:
Paul's Ministry of Relationships**
By Rod Culbertson

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Reviewed by Yamil Acevedo

Hundreds of books have been published on the subject of disciple-making, compiling a vast collection of methods and practices that aim to mobilize the church to complete the Great Commission faithfully. As Christians navigate their choices and commit to a particular discipleship model multiple questions arise, such as, “Which and how?” Among the options, one could think of those books that have paid particular attention to Paul’s discipleship strategies investing in particular individuals (e.g., Timothy) resulting in a popularized idea of one-to-one “effectiveness.” However, the “How?” presents more complexities to grapple with, one of them being, “If Paul was committed to a one-on-one discipleship method, how was he able to plant so many churches, proclaim the gospel throughout all Asia Minor, and reach multitudes of people cross-culturally?”

Conveyed in a clear and accessible style, Rod Culbertson, Associate Professor of Practical Theology and Dean of Student Development at Reformed Theological Seminary/Charlotte, argues that Paul’s discipleship model was not reserved to particular individuals on a one-to-one basis. On the contrary, his unparalleled ministry relied on spreading the gospel through multiple relationships and individuals from different backgrounds, and by employing diverse discipleship methods (xiv). This thesis challenges the general idea that Paul established a “focused” discipleship model; and concludes with a nuanced understanding of the Apostle’s discipleship model as “a way of life” (69), constantly reaching “to introduce *everyone* to a life filled with Christ” (69).

Through fifteen concise chapters, the author surveys Paul's relationships with many individuals and the set of skills they brought to a particular context and season of the Apostle's ministry. Culbertson skillfully provides insight into these relationships and their influences on Paul and others by showing the reader faithful friends (i.e. Titus), upward mentors (i.e. Silas), spiritual leaders (i.e. Barnabas), refreshing helpers (i.e. Onesiphorus), and demonstrates their evident role as co-laborers in establishing the church and spreading the Good News. Also, each chapter has a set of questions for discussion that makes the book particularly helpful for pastors, church planters, and discipleship/multiplication leaders that are looking for a concise and stimulating conversation resource for their board or volunteer team.

However, even though the material brings a valuable perspective of Paul's discipleship model, it has areas of opportunities that could have strengthened the author's main argument. First, outside the Bible, the author uses only eleven references—most of them over twenty-years-old—which limits the missiological, theological, and historical depth needed to solidify the thesis. Second, the chapters appear to have no logical order forcing the reading to make chronological connections and transitions that may not be in agreement with the author's intention of sequence, which inevitably creates gaps. Lastly, some of the author's observations could be viewed as assumptions of Paul's methods when the biblical account is limited (e.g., Epaphras, Ch. 7). Despite these issues, the book makes a useful resource for ministry practice, enhancing our understanding of relationships and proclamation.

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