5 Reasons Why Disciples Need Ministry Tools More Than Sermons

The discipleship results of your ministry are not defined by content of your preaching alone. **One significant factor that impacts disciple-making is tool-making.** Unfortunately, you might not recall any seminary classes or conference breakouts on making ministry tools.

Why not? The simplest explanation is that we rely too much on teaching. As a result, we as pastors, do not become good at training and spend little time on toolmaking. In fact **the average pastor rarely pursues improved competency as a trainer. But pastors go to great lengths— attending workshops, digesting sermons, and reading books— to become better preachers.**

Think about it for a minute: *Is your church better characterized as a teaching center or a training center?* Do you consider yourself more of a bible-communicator or a people-developer? When is the last time you thought about finding or making ministry tools?

I know what you want to say— "It's both Will, why would you separate it?" Of course your intent is both to communicate well and see a disciple form as a result. But I want to separate the two so that you can double check your assumptions and expectations about how people change and grow. **Does your teaching provide the pathway toward the modeling, practicing, and evaluating of new life skills?** Are you really helping people develop new life competencies in the way of Jesus? Or are you just preaching?

One proof that you are good at training is the presence of ministry tools. What tools have you given to people lately through one of your sermon series? **When was the last time you brainstormed with your team about a new ministry tool to create?** If you have small group leaders in the church, what ministry tools have you provided for them in the last year?

What's the bottom line? **If you are not adding ministry tools to the lives of your people, you are not close to maximizing a disciple-making culture.** You are probably not equipping people that much.

Before explaining why, let's define what we mean by a tool. One definition reads:

> Tool: *A handheld device that aids in accomplishing a task.* The basic definition brings to mind a hammer or screwdriver that you hold in your hand. The definition may expand if a tool doesn't have to be literally handheld. Another definition reads: *a device or implement used to carry out a particular function.*

The term "device" broadens the range for disciple-making purposes. **For example, the model prayer of Jesus was a device to train the disciples how to pray.** Jesus used questions, metaphors and parables as devices or tools of disciple-making that weren't "handheld" per se.

So what are examples of ministry tools? Here are five:

- *A church does a sermon on praying and provides a prayer journal (ministry tool) as people walk out the door.*
- *A pastor preaches on missional living and creates a table tent (ministry tool- a triangle-shaped brochure that stands in the middle of the dinner table) for family conversations designed to encourage the application of being better neighbors for the sake of the gospel.*
- *A team codifies a definition (ministry tool) of what kind of disciple their church is designed to produce and then creates a self-assessment (ministry tool) to use in small groups.*
- *A pastor uses a 4-question, gospel fluency matrix (ministry tool) –drawable on a napkin–to help the congregation apply the gospel to the daily fluctuations of sinful emotions and actions.*
- *A bible study leader passes out a business card (ministry tool) with a daily bible reading schedule and three applications questions to ask for every passage of scripture.*

This is a short list that begins to illustrate the endless possibilities of ministry tools. Keep in mind that I didn't even reference the internet or digital devices that really explode the possibilities ministry tool-making.

Now that we have defined and illustrated what a ministry tool or device is, let's get to the heart of the post. **Why do disciples need ministry tools more than sermons? Why should we not rely on preaching alone if we are to train people to follow Jesus?** Here are five compelling reasons:

#1 - A ministry tool signifies importance. A tool highlights the greater importance of the idea thus setting it up for application and helping stand out among the competing messages in every area of life. When a tool is introduced in the flow of communication, the idea behind the tool will trump every other idea. The tool immediately indicates the value of repeatability as well.

#2 - A ministry tool activates learning. A tool utilizes a part of human brain that is activated by a concrete object to hold and use, or an audio device to return to like a question or repeatable story. Again this sets up an important step toward application. It engages visual and kinesthetic learners.

#3 - A ministry tool guides application. This is the main idea. The tool itself provides a "how to" that can be practiced, repeated and eventually mastered. It shows the way and validates when action has been taken or not. The device clarifies a step of implementation. In a way, a tool gently brings accountability to the table–every time I see the tool, I know whether or not I have used it.

#4 - A ministry tool creates energy. A tool helps people feel excited about ideas. It helps people win. And by the way, may pastors can unintentionally create a sense of failure for their people. As people listen to sermons year after year, they oftentimes feel like they aren't growing like they should. A tool can reverse that dynamic. It's focuses application, so they can

do it. And that gives pastors the opportunity to celebrate their new skill development. Then, even more energy is created!

#5 - A ministry tool reproduces training. A tool makes every person a trainer not just the pastor or preacher. As a leader, it's not important what you can do; it's important what you can duplicate. If you make a tool, it can outlast you and be passed from disciple to disciple to disciple until Jesus returns again.

This last principle has changed by personal conviction that I must spend time to make tools. In fact my two most important books (tools themselves) are [Church Unique](#) an [God Dreams](#) each of which cover how to create a master tool for church leadership, the [Vision Frame](#) and the [Horizon Storyline](#), respectively.

I would love to hear from you. **What is your favorite ministry tool?** What ministry tools have you created recently?

A final illustration of one of my favorites is a how-to PDF and video on [creating a family tree.](#) This tool comes **from a short sermon series at Clear Creek Community Church**, my home church. To help people gain perspective and apply the gospel to the brokenness of extended family dynamics, they encouraged everyone to practice [writing out their family diagram.](#)

> [Read more from Will](#).

Would you like to learn more about the ministry tools? [Connect with an Auxano Navigator and start a conversation with our team](#).