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## Joshua Nations

# Lesson 7. Developing Culturally Relevant Disciple Making Strategy

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## I. INTRODUCTION: GATHERING INFORMATION

### A. Understanding the Mission Field:

1. Before engaging a community with the Gospel, it's important to understand who they are, their needs, culture, and barriers to the Gospel. Gathering information about a community provides insights that help shape evangelism, discipleship, and church-planting strategies.
2. **Jesus' Example:** Jesus was deeply aware of the cultural and spiritual contexts of the people He ministered to. He connected with people by meeting their needs, understanding their cultural norms, and speaking directly to their struggles (John 4:7-26, Mark 2:16-17). In the same way, understanding the community helps us connect with people where they are and present the Gospel in ways that are clear, relevant, and transformative.

1.

### B. The Goal of Community Information Gathering:

1. **Strategic Engagement:** By gathering information, you can identify the key needs, cultural dynamics, and spiritual beliefs of a community. This helps tailor outreach and discipleship strategies that are relevant and impactful.
2. **Identifying Barriers and Opportunities:** Learning about the community also helps identify potential barriers to the Gospel, as well as opportunities for building relationships, meeting felt needs, and sharing God's story in culturally appropriate ways.

## II. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY

### A. Paul's Adaptability in Evangelism:

1. **Becoming All Things to All People:** Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 demonstrates his commitment to adapting to different cultural contexts for the sake of the Gospel. He "became all things to all people" so that by all possible

means, he might save some. This principle of cultural adaptability is key to effective disciple-making.

2. **Observing the Culture:** In Acts 17:16-34, Paul carefully observed the culture of Athens before engaging the people with the Gospel. He acknowledged their religious practices and used them as a bridge to introduce Jesus. This example shows the importance of observing and learning about the beliefs, values, and practices of a community before presenting the Gospel.

## **B. Jesus' Compassion for the Crowds:**

1. **Meeting Felt Needs:** Jesus often met the physical and emotional needs of people before addressing their spiritual needs (Matthew 9:35-36). He had compassion on the crowds because they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Understanding the needs of a community allows you to approach them with the same compassion, meeting tangible needs and creating openness to the Gospel.

## **III. PRACTICAL METHODS FOR GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMUNITY**

There are various methods for gathering information, ranging from simple observation to conducting in-depth surveys and interviews. Below are some practical ways to learn about the community in a way that informs effective ministry.

### **A. Observation**

1. **Observe People's Daily Lives:** Spend time walking or driving through the community. Observe where people gather, how they interact, and what activities or routines are central to the community. Pay attention to places of worship, markets, schools, community centers, and recreational areas.
2. **Look for Signs of Spiritual Need:** As you observe, look for evidence of spiritual need or openness. Are there signs of brokenness, such as substance abuse, crime, or family disintegration? Conversely, are there signs of spiritual hunger, such as a high interest in religious discussions, community prayer meetings, or spiritual events?
3. **Identify Cultural Symbols:** Pay attention to cultural symbols like flags, murals, monuments, or religious symbols that reveal the community's values, beliefs, and history.

## **B. Prayer Walks:**

1. **What is a Prayer Walk?:** A prayer walk is a strategic way to pray while observing the community. It involves walking through the community and praying for the people, homes, and institutions you pass.
2. **Practical Application:** Organize regular prayer walks with your team or small group. Encourage participants to observe as they pray, noting any significant details or spiritual impressions they sense.

## **C. Community Mapping:**

1. **What is Community Mapping?:** Community mapping involves creating a physical or digital map of the community, marking key locations, resources, and people of influence. It helps visualize the community's layout, resources, and potential areas of ministry.
2. **How to Map:**
  - Begin by drawing or using a printed map of the area. Mark key locations like schools, hospitals, places of worship, community centers, and markets.
  - Add notes about influential people, high-traffic areas, and specific locations where spiritual conversations have already occurred.

**D. Identifying Spiritual Strongholds:** Use the map to mark areas where there are known spiritual strongholds, such as places of idol worship, occult practices, or areas associated with addiction or crime. This helps in targeted prayer and spiritual warfare.

## **E. Identifying Gatekeepers:**

1. **Who Are Gatekeepers?:** Gatekeepers are individuals who hold influence within the community, such as local leaders, business owners, religious figures, or community organizers. They can either help or hinder access to the community.
2. **How to Engage Gatekeepers:** Build relationships with gatekeepers by seeking to understand their role, listening to their concerns, and offering to partner in serving the community. Often, these relationships open doors for broader ministry opportunities.

## **F. Conducting Community Surveys and Interviews**

1. **Why Use Surveys and Interviews?**

- Surveys and interviews allow for more in-depth understanding of the community's demographics, needs, beliefs, and barriers to the Gospel. They help gather both qualitative and quantitative data that can inform strategic planning and outreach.

## 2. **How to Conduct Surveys:**

- **Create Simple, Clear Questions:** Develop a set of questions that cover basic demographic information (age, gender, occupation), spiritual beliefs, felt needs, and openness to spiritual discussions. Ensure the questions are culturally appropriate and easy to understand.

## 3. **Survey Methods:**

- **Door-to-Door Surveys:** Visit homes in the community and conduct short surveys, asking people about their needs, beliefs, and thoughts about spiritual matters.
- **Street Interviews:** Engage people in public areas like markets or parks. These informal conversations can provide insights into the community's general attitudes and beliefs.

## 4. **Sample Questions (Tailor questions to be personable based on your context):**

- "What should others know about life here?"
- "What are some of the challenges in this community?"
- "Is there anything this community needs that isn't being provided?"

5. **Practical Tips:** When conducting surveys, always approach people with respect and sensitivity. Be prepared to offer prayer or assistance based on what you learn during the conversation.

# IV. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY

## A. **Relational Engagement:**

1. **The Role of Relationships:** Gathering information is not just about data; it's about building relationships. Personal connections open the doors for deeper conversations, spiritual insights, and more accurate understanding of the community.

2. **Start with Natural Connections:** Begin by connecting with people in everyday settings—coffee shops, markets, playgrounds, or community events. Ask questions about their lives, families, and concerns. Be genuinely interested in getting to know them.
3. **Focus on Listening:** In every conversation, prioritize listening over talking. This builds trust and shows that you care about the person, not just the information they provide.

**B. Identify Persons of Peace:** As you build relationships, look for individuals who are open, welcoming, and interested in spiritual discussions. These “persons of peace” can act as bridges to the rest of the community, helping you gather more information and expand your ministry.

## **V. ENGAGING COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

### **A. Meet with Local Leaders:**

1. **Purpose:** Engaging with local leaders—such as government officials, school principals, business owners, or pastors—provides insights into the community’s needs, power dynamics, and existing initiatives. These leaders can offer valuable information that shapes your approach to outreach and discipling.
2. **How to Approach Leaders:** Request meetings with local leaders to introduce yourself, share your desire to serve the community, and learn from their perspective. Ask them about the biggest needs in the community, the existing resources, and how you can partner in addressing those needs.

**B. Building Partnerships:** In addition to gathering information, seek opportunities to partner with existing organizations or initiatives that are already working to improve the community. This builds credibility and trust while also creating more opportunities for ministry.

### **C. Engage Faith-Based Organizations:**

1. **Local Churches and Ministries:** (If possible) Connect with existing churches and ministries in the community to understand their focus areas, challenges, and opportunities. These groups often have a wealth of information about the community’s spiritual climate, needs, and barriers to the Gospel.
2. **Community Programs and NGOs:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community programs often have insights into the socio-economic needs of

the community. Learning from their work can help you address practical needs as part of your disciple-making strategy.

## **VI. ANALYZING AND USING COMMUNITY INFORMATION**

Once you have gathered information about the community, it's time to analyze and apply what you've learned to your disciple-making strategy.

### **A. Identifying Spiritual Needs and Open Doors**

1. **Recognizing Open Doors:** Look for patterns in the information that reveal spiritual openness. For example, if many people express interest in finding peace, this could be an open door to share about Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
  - **Tailoring the Message:** Use what you've learned to tailor your Gospel presentation to the specific beliefs and needs of the community. For instance, if the community values family highly, emphasize how the Gospel can bring healing and restoration to family relationships.

### **B. Addressing Felt Needs**

1. **Meeting Practical Needs:** If you identify significant felt needs, consider how you can meet them in a way that opens doors for the Gospel. This might include starting a feeding program, offering tutoring for children, or providing medical assistance.
  - **Examples of Needs-Based Ministry:**
    - If addiction is a major issue, consider partnering with or starting a recovery program.
    - If the community has many children outside at certain times of the day, consider starting a sports program.
    - If unemployment is a challenge, consider offering job skills training.
    - Is the community lacking a bakery or other business that you might be able to provide?

### **C. Identifying Barriers and Challenges**

1. **Recognizing Cultural Barriers:** Some cultural beliefs or practices may hinder openness to the Gospel. For example, a community may have deep-rooted beliefs in ancestral worship or fatalism, making it challenging to present the concept of sin and redemption.

**D. Overcoming Spiritual Strongholds:** Use spiritual warfare prayer to address any identified spiritual strongholds, asking God to break the power of darkness and open hearts to His message.

## **VII. EVALUATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MULTIPLICATION**

- A. **Finding Receptive Groups:** Look for clusters of people or “houses of peace” where the Gospel can spread naturally. For example, a workplace or social center might be particularly open to spiritual discussions, providing a good context for starting a small group.
- B. **Starting Small Groups:** Based on the information gathered, identify where and with whom to start small discovery groups, disciple-making groups, or 3/3 groups that can multiply within the community.

## **VIII. PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY**

- A. **Weekly Outreach Plans:** Create weekly plans for outreach activities. Assign roles such as organizing events, inviting people, or leading prayers.
- B. **Community Event Participation:** Attend local events to understand more about the people. This might include town festivals, markets, or even school events.
- C. **Debrief Sessions:** After community activities, hold a debrief session to discuss what was learned, what worked well, and what could be improved.

## **IX. TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- A. **Be Present:** Consistently showing up in the community builds trust.
- B. **Be a Learner:** Ask more questions than you answer. Show that you are genuinely interested in understanding the community.

## **X. CONCLUSION: TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES THROUGH UNDERSTANDING**

Gathering information about the community is an essential step in making disciples who make disciples. It helps ensure that your efforts are culturally relevant, strategically targeted, and sensitive to the unique challenges and opportunities of the context. By following the example of Jesus and the apostles, who deeply understood the people they were ministering to, you can see lives and communities transformed as the Gospel takes root in hearts and spreads to others.

*This lesson was provided by Joshua Nations ([JoshuaNations.org](http://JoshuaNations.org)).*