



# Evangelism **OR** Discipleship

Can they effectively work together?

BY

**Bill Hull  
& Bobby Harrington**

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A Discipleship.org Resource

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# *Evangelism or Discipleship*

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*Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?*

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# Introduction

## A Commission and Our Perspective

*The simple program of Christ for winning the whole world is to make each person He touches magnetic enough with love to draw others.*

—Frank Laubach<sup>1</sup>

Over the years of doing and leading ministry in the local church, we both agree that the church's most difficult problem is not growth or the revolving door as some might say. But rather, the church's deepest challenge lies in convincing its citizens that who they are and what they do outside of church services is the real work of God. Some have called it "being in the world," or "being on mission."

We think there is wide agreement among church leaders that getting people to do what they should *out there* is more difficult than getting them to gather *in here*. For that reason, far too many leaders and churches have dropped the expectation that the common Christian will actually reap any kind of harvest in their normal lives.

After all, such an amorphous ideal is impossible to control, difficult to count and may not make the church bigger or more prominent.

The title of this eBook sets up a competition of sorts between evangelism and discipleship. Indeed, some people think about the two as competitors or at odds with each other. But is it possible that discipleship and evangelism are not in competition? Could it be that they are like brothers from the same father? They keep turning up at each other's parties and special events. People speak of them in the same sentences and name academic courses after them. They're often at the crux of a question during a panel discussion or study: "What is the relationship of evangelism to discipleship?" Or the more provocative inquiry, "What comes first, evangelism or discipleship—can you have one without the other?"

They might seem in conflict with each other because they share a certain likeness. Maybe we feel the need to focus on, or emphasize, one over the other.

Yet, clearly when you have only one and not both, things do not go well. Evangelism without discipleship tends to be short-lived, focused on packaging, presenting, counting and impressing. Conversion becomes the finish line; all is well, and any further duties are optional.

I (Bobby) grew up as a non-Christian, and I still have lots of non-believing friends. One of my biggest regrets is Gayle, one of our best friends. My wife and I led her to Christ. She seemed so excited and on fire at first. But then it was like she had enough; it required too much of her. And honestly, we could have done better in what we taught her back then. It was as if Gayle made a deal with God; her eternal insurance was purchased. Despite our efforts, she never really got that conversion was about trusting and following Jesus for life. I'm sure you've had a Gayle in your own life.

On the flip side, discipleship without evangelism creates the very unhealthy condition of sterility in followers of Christ. Christians who do not evangelize are not fulfilled in their lives, and they take on a certain intramural pettiness. When people are educated beyond their level of obedience, they become religious schizophrenics, experts on what they are not experiencing.

Both discipleship and evangelism are needed. Could it be that evangelism is the front end of discipleship, and maturing those who believe is the back end? When one or the other is lacking, Christians and their churches suffer. More importantly, what Jesus told us to do suffers.

Words matter. So before we go any further, we should define what we mean by evangelism and discipleship.

## **Evangelism**

To some degree, evangelism and discipleship are invented words, coined to describe important functions. Evangelism is rooted in the Greek word *euaggelion*, meaning good news. Historically, “to evangelize,” meant to announce the Good News. Now, we use evangelism as a catchall term for the entire field of study, research and the process of spreading the gospel.

We can’t hope to thoroughly explore the present state of evangelism in this eBook, but we can identify three observations that may be helpful in describing evangelism in the Western Hemisphere.

1. Universally, evangelical Christians agree that evangelism must be done. And while most of us would never admit it, there is also near universal agreement that you can be a good Christian and not evangelize. We say this with confidence.



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Consider the recent statistic that less than a quarter of church-going Protestants engage in telling others about Christ in a way that helps the person listening make an informed decision.<sup>2</sup>

2. We have no real consistent expectation that the common believer will reproduce him or herself and teach others in direct response to Christ's command to make disciples. We need to ask the church's teachers and members, "What is your reason for not obeying our Lord's commission to make disciples?"
3. Over the last 50 years, various kinds of aggressive evangelism have not yielded the hoped-for crop of new believers who could have penetrated all domains of society—the domains meant to transform the culture. This has nothing to do with how many have decided to follow Jesus, but rather how many have been taught that they are expected to penetrate their sphere of influence. Evangelicals have been successful in other areas—crusades, public forums, television and new media. These efforts, while an adrenaline rush for Christians, have not touched the national character, especially in the church. The church has lost ground, increasingly living on the margins. And the general public thinks of evangelism as simply bothering people. The good news is that the church is desperate to find a better way, which could be that reaching people is more private than public, and is personal and rooted in relationships. It could be that the solution is hand to hand, person by person, found in the common ordinary situations of life.

## **Discipleship**

Like evangelism, the word “discipleship” is not in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> By adding “ship” to it, discipleship literally means “the state of learning” or “following a teacher.” Some people like to refer to it as apprenticeship, which we think is a good description.<sup>4</sup> At its roots, Christian discipleship means to follow and learn from Jesus. In Matt. 28:18-20, disciple making is described as a “core mandate” (which we take as a synonym for discipleship).

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (NIV).

We suggest a definition for discipleship (and disciple making) based on Matt. 28:18-20 and Jesus’ example: “Discipleship as trusting God’s presence as we intentionally enter into the lives of others to guide them to trust and follow Jesus and obey all his teachings.”<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the church has reduced discipleship to a program rather than a life of following Christ and learning from Him, as He modeled for His disciples. That programmatic approach has created a negative perception of discipleship in many who have “tried” some curriculum or program that didn’t help them. But as an introductory matter, we offer some observations about the state of discipleship.

1. Discipleship as a movement needs to fully emerge from its own self-constructed ghetto. *Measuring spiritual maturity by cognitive achievement or Bible knowledge rather than fruitfulness created*

*the ghetto*. For those serious and intentional about their faith, the ghetto became a safe haven. Discipleship is often head-centered, focusing on Bible education. The common person who isn't committed to in-depth Bible study tends to shy away from it.

2. The discipleship movement is often in crisis due to the disconnection between discipleship and reproduction. A movement based on the idea that it will reproduce and doesn't will languish. The "teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded" part of the Great Commission didn't create reproduction because it fell into the same dark hole of low expectations—the same expectations that often sink evangelism. Instead, we need to figure out how to cast vision for high expectations of multiplication
3. Next to reproduction, the most difficult part of discipleship is life-on-life accountability, which is absolutely necessary and very prone to abuse. We tend to be either too controlling or too slack, as though follow-through doesn't matter. People need encouragement, support and often a firm hand to help them keep their commitments to God. Legalism and control don't work, but as leaders we do need to find ways to counteract a strong strain of libertarianism in the church when it comes to personal accountability. This is ground zero—where the battle is often fought.

The commission to make disciples is at the very heart of where evangelism and discipleship meet. Jesus issued the Great Commission to give His followers both a reason (to save the world) and a plan (to find and make more disciples).

## **Our Perspective:**

*Evangelism and discipleship are not two things; they are one.* Jesus has commanded us to “make disciples.” Two subordinate phrases describe how we accomplish the Great Commission.<sup>6</sup> The first part of making disciples is the process of a person “coming to trust in and follow Jesus.” The Bible sees that process being confirmed in baptism. The second part of making disciples is “teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded.” We commonly think of this second part as discipleship, a lifelong journey of learning from Jesus how to live one’s life as though Jesus were living it.

Jesus’ Matthew 28 commandment included the expectation of reproduction, that new disciples would become well-taught disciples who would in turn embrace the mission and make other new disciples. Anything less is to sabotage the master plan. Evangelism is simply a form of pre-conversion discipleship. The two—evangelism and discipleship—are the front and back of the same coin, if you will. When we engage in this disciple-making process, Jesus tells us that He will be present with us—to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

## **The Question:**

Thirty years after graduation from seminary, I (Bill) was asked to address the faculty and student body at my alma mater. I began with a question, “*After thirty years of ministry, I still wonder why the church insists on trying to reach the world without making disciples?*”

That question strikes at the heart of this discipleship-evangelism matter. The church continues to struggle with a disconnected mission. Disciples have a mission, and the mission is to reach people. Evangelism necessitates disciples who have matured to the point of

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reproduction. Discipleship includes evangelism, and evangelism is a part of discipleship.

# CHAPTER 1

## Jesus Is the Gospel

As we mentioned earlier, the root word for “evangelism” is *eu-angelion*. It is also the root word for “the gospel.” *Euangelion* simply means, “good news.” In a sense, evangelism is “*good news-ing people*,” telling them about Jesus, who is Himself, the “Good News.” Following this logic, evangelism and the gospel point us to Jesus.

A proper understanding of *Jesus as the gospel* helps us connect evangelism and conversion to discipleship. The way we present the gospel often causes a separation between evangelism and discipleship. It is easy for us to start at the cross and ask for a decision, while skipping the life, the teaching, the resurrection and current reign of King Jesus, to say nothing of His teaching on what it means to be a disciple. Some actually think that a gospel of the cross is all that is necessary for evangelism.

Granted, just explaining what Jesus did on the cross and asking for a response or decision is a simpler approach. But it leaves the impression with too many people that conversion is the finish line, not the starting line. In this chapter, we want to suggest a fuller gospel presentation and an invitation to a fuller, covenant-making response that will link evangelism and discipleship. Let’s take a brief look at

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how this coupling works, using three passages from the Gospel of Mark.

Lets start with the concept of the gospel. What is it and what does it mean to present the gospel to others? A brief look at the Gospel of Mark indicates that the gospel is much more than just the cross.

Mark begins his Gospel by saying that the gospel is summed up in Jesus, as everything about Him is the gospel:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”  
(Mark 1:1, ESV).

The whole book of Mark is about Jesus, who in His person is the gospel. Evangelism, Mark shows us, is a proclamation of the kingdom of God and the invitation to repent and *believe in the gospel*.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).

When Jesus makes this invitation, He has yet to die for the sins of people, but He still invites them to believe in *the gospel*. Here, the gospel is about Jesus, His kingdom and the need for repentance.

Then Mark tells us that *the gospel* includes the call to make radical decisions of obedience. We cannot be true disciples unless we are willing to lose our life *for the gospel*:

“Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:34-35, NIV).

The gospel, as Jesus teaches us here, is unconditional loyalty to Him. As humanity's true king, he deserves full surrender and loyalty.

So evangelism, as Scripture shows, is the invitation of the *gospel* to come to Jesus for both salvation and discipleship. Both parts are integral. Again, Mark (and the rest of the New Testament) teaches us that evangelism is an invitation to come to Jesus by faith for a relationship grounded in a willingness to surrender all to be a disciple.

The coupling of these teachings is the whole gospel. At the same time, we want to fully acknowledge that there is a core gospel focused on His grace through the cross. We want to emphasize both.

Over the last 10 years, I (Bill) was fortunate to spend a lot of time with Dallas Willard before he died. It was Dallas who first pointed out to me that one of the reasons why we have a discipleship problem today is because of the way we often present the gospel. Too often, we teach and share a transactional gospel that does not explicitly necessitate obedience to Jesus and a life of being formed into His image. So moving into a more holistic linking of evangelism and discipleship starts with a broader understanding of the gospel.

## **The Storyline of the Bible**

The storyline of the Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity and God's long promised kingdom, as outlined in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>7</sup> Below, we've summarized the key movements of that story.<sup>8</sup>



## Jesus Is the Gospel

- **CREATION:** God is holy and loving; He created us for Himself in paradise.
- **FALL:** We rebelled against God, under Satan's influence. We are now all separated from Him, gravitating to sin in thought, word and deed; yet God graciously promised Abraham that He would bless the world through him. Abraham believed God and became the father of the nation of Israel and God's promises, including a future kingdom that would never end.
- **REDEMPTION:** God sent Jesus into the world to establish His kingdom as the Messiah of Israel and our King. This incarnational move fulfilled the promise to Abraham and the prophecies in the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus took the penalty for our sin on the cross, rose from the dead, and defeated Satan. He is The Way we restore our relationship to God and enter the kingdom. Jesus ascended to heaven, where He now reigns. He is the Savior, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- **RESTORATION:** Jesus redeems those who turn from their sin (repent), trust and follow Him, and obey all of His teachings (by faith). They enter His kingdom now. He will come back to judge the living and the dead and will take His obedient children into His eternal kingdom, the renewed created order or paradise of God.

This summary illustrates the broad story line for the gospel. All of God's promises for humanity are fulfilled in Jesus. Within the story of the Bible and the kingdom is the gospel—His life, victory over sin and death for the sake of humanity through the cross, and kingdom reign.

## **The Heart of the Gospel**

Let's look at the core gospel of Jesus' cross. Our eternal destiny depends on whether or not we are saved by God through Jesus in His cross—in His death, burial, and resurrection. 1 Cor.15: 1-6 shows us that this focus is the key or foundational item of our faith:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received ... ” (ESV).

Paul's language is clear—your faith in Jesus and His work on the cross is the basis of your standing with God. You are saved through it, and there is nothing more important! The passage goes on to summarize the core gospel:

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the 12. Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (ESV).

Here, the gospel focuses on Jesus Christ's death for our sin. But even this gospel is not just His death—it includes His burial and resurrection—and *how they are in accordance with the broader story of Scripture*. Jesus is God's son, and He conquered sin and death. He is now the reigning king of humanity, and His kingdom will be fully consummated when He returns.

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This focus offers the broader picture assumed throughout the Bible and in Paul's letters to the church in Rome (Rom. 3:24-25) and Ephesus: "... by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8, ESV).<sup>9</sup> John 3:16 also sums it up: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (ESV).

This core gospel is fundamental to Jesus, but He is more than just His cross. He came to proclaim a kingdom and invite us into salvation and discipleship.

Please note this truth: *This gospel of Jesus requires discipleship*. Jesus does not just want a transaction where He takes away our sin—He wants to take away our sin and transform our lives. He doesn't just want to give us life in eternity; He wants to give us a new life in this world. The invitation is salvation and life under His kingship, where we are transformed. It is a response for now and for eternity. As leaders, we must teach this whole gospel.

As those seeking true discipleship in His kingdom, we must surrender to King Jesus. To fully surrender, we need help. God leads us to Jesus and promises to be present by His Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). But we also need people to enter into our lives to help us make the decision to commit our lives to trust and follow Jesus—and to help us obey all of His teachings.

### **Evangelism and a Covenant Commitment**

We think the concept of a covenant commitment is also important in this discussion and in the linkage of evangelism and discipleship. Covenants are a big deal in the Bible. A covenant is a special relationship where parties formally commit themselves to each

other. It is not a transaction, but a deeply meaningful relationship. A covenant is an agreement where God invites us, leads us and freely binds Himself to us. We respond, as His gracious Spirit leads, and commit ourselves to Him. King Jesus calls to us to complete trust and surrender.

Think of the Israelites and the covenant God called them into in the desert at Mount Sinai (Deut. 5:1 ff). God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt by His mercy and grace and committed Himself to them. But in this relationship, He made it clear that He expected the people to walk with and follow Him. He expected them to fully obey Him and carefully follow His commands (Deut. 28:1-2). Covenants are like that—they are not just transactions where we make a deal with vague promises to somehow follow up on it. In the Bible, God graciously offers covenants, but He calls for a covenant response, a whole life commitment to His covenant offers.

Think of a wedding ceremony covenant. It is a good, everyday analogy. Both of us have performed many wedding ceremonies. According to tradition, we ask the man if he will “take this woman to be his wife, promising before God, his family, and friends that he will stay with her in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, so long as they both shall live.” Then we turn and ask the woman the same thing. In this pledge, the marriage ceremony becomes a covenant, an agreement between two parties, where they pledge themselves to each other. It is not a transaction. It is two people entering into a deeply personal commitment to one another. Covenants, like wedding ceremonies, involve commitment, confession and physical expression.

Just like with a wedding ceremony, dedication to Jesus is a deeply personal commitment. God is the initiator: He sent His son for us and woos us by His Spirit. He promises forgiveness, His presence,

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and life in His kingdom. We respond with faith, which is to be a deep, lifelong commitment to “trust, follow, and obey.” Once we enter into the covenant relationship, our lives will never be the same.

We see evangelism as that part of discipleship where people are invited to enter into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to Matt. 28:18-20, a person makes the decision to trust and follow Jesus (confirmed in baptism) and also commits to obey all of His teachings (true discipleship). This is an invitation to a covenant relationship.

As these examples in Scripture show us, God is the true power source in the covenant. Through Jesus, He promises that we receive forgiveness of all sins, the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit, life in His kingdom *now*, and eternal life in His heavenly kingdom forever. We enter into this *new covenant* by turning to Him from sin (repentance), confessing with our mouths our faith in Jesus, and then by making our faith commitment to Him concrete in baptism.

How do we help people place their faith in Jesus? We recommend a covenant commitment to Jesus as our Savior and King (Lord) in the following fashion. We see this surrender as having three key essentials that are practiced in community:

1. **Commitment.** A person will consciously *make the decision to repent* of his sins and turn to God through Jesus (Acts 26:20).
2. **Confession.** A person will *express out loud the confession of his heart* that Jesus is King (Lord) and call on His name (Rom. 10:9-10, Acts 22:16, Acts 16:30-33).
3. **Physical expression.** A person *will be baptized* as a concrete and covenant expression of her decision to trust and follow Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 2:38).

Throughout Scripture, these three elements closely tie together as the way to dedicate yourself to Jesus in a covenant relationship.<sup>10</sup> That relationship with Him is based on God's grace, is by faith, and inherently it lead us to discipleship.

Our friend Jeff Vanderstelt has a great way of describing how we are changed by transferring our alligiance in baptism The covenant relationship confers a new identity on us. We now live out our identity, grounded in our attachment to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Father makes us family - and He calls us to love one another as brothers and sisters. God the Son came to us as a servant - and he calls us to join him by serving the least of these, those who are in need. And God the Spirit provided the power for the Son's mission in the world - and He now empowers our mission in the world as we proclaim Jesus in word and deed. Who we are—redeemed children of King Jesus—determines what He calls us to do. We are to live out our new covenant identity (Romans 6: 2-7).

### **Think Disciples, Not Steeples**

This gospel and this covenant commitment will ensure that evangelism more naturally leads to discipleship. The process takes us beyond a focus on decisions to a focus on entering into covenant relationships. We do not just think about converts, but about developing Christlike people. We don't just focus on the cross, but on faithful living in light of all that King Jesus teaches.

We like to tell people to “focus on disciples, not steeples.” When you think of your community, your city, and your country and are describing the church, it's probably natural to think in terms of steeples. For example, a denominational leader will tell you how many churches his denomination has in a state or the nation. We've all

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heard the stat that 20 percent of people in America go to church at least once a month. A national leader will say that only 4 percent of the population belongs to a church. Metrics like these are legitimate, but of only secondary importance.

We prefer to think of how many true disciples are present in any community, city or nation. I (Bill) recall Richard Halverson, former chaplain of the U.S. Senate, answering a question about his church's location. At the time, he was pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Halverson said that although his congregation owned a building at a certain address, his congregation was scattered through the tri-state area (Washington, D.C., and the nearby areas of Maryland and Virginia) with members nestled in homes, community centers, places of commerce and office buildings. He went on to say that the church had people everywhere; they had infiltrated the entire community.

### **Activated Disciples**

For a more visual illustration, think of this “infiltration” as individual lights, each one representing the daily location of a disciple in a particular city. These disciples are present in virtually every domain of the culture.

This reality eliminates what so many in the church consider a problem. The church spends so much time and money marketing its services to the unchurched population hoping to break down barriers that would motivate seekers to visit a church-sponsored event. The irony, of course, is that we are already where we need to be, right next to those who need Christ. Our best strategy is to activate the already present disciples to show the love of Christ and make more disciples in the society. When we activate disciples, we find

that the categories, church and state, secular and the sacred, are not true barriers; they all have less power in natural relationships. The church is confused about their real work. Many disciples are inactivated lights. Their light is off or just flickering now and then.

The nature of spirituality as Jesus taught it is that we are the lights of the world that will shine if we don't snuff them out (Matt. 5:14-16). The real work of the church is to activate those lights through discipleship and unleash them for good works in Christ's name and for evangelism.

Presenting a full gospel that calls for a total life commitment to Jesus and inviting people to a full covenant response will help us reunite evangelism and discipleship. Jesus is the gospel. We respond to His cross and His person with our whole lives. He wants to save us and remake us in His image. When Jesus is remaking us we become activated lights, outposts of His kingdom within our personhood and within our lives, every day, everywhere.

We like to tell people, *the church is for discipleship, and discipleship is for the world*. That means the church works to develop mature and healthy disciples who then reach others in daily life. Christlike people are the point, the primary strategy for reaching others and fulfilling the Great Commission. The Great Commission is the natural extension of why Jesus came. He came because the world needed saving, and that divine purpose as the focus puts all its supporting activity in perspective.

In the next two chapters, we're exploring two other implications of the tie between evangelism and discipleship. Two Scripture passages speak most plainly about activating the fullness of disciple making:



## Jesus Is the Gospel

- The call to make disciples in Matt. 28:18-20
- The preparation of saints to be activated in Eph. 4:12-16

## CHAPTER 2

# The Call to Make Disciples in Matthew 28:18-20

**A**n occupational hazard for you, the informed reader, is to scan or skip this section because you know what it says. While that may be somewhat true, we would be so encouraged by your careful attention. In this chapter, we're asking three critical questions of this seminal passage.

We begin with the two verses before it:

“Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him—but some of them doubted!” (Matt. 28: 16-17, NLT).

### **1. Why did they show up?**

The 11 disciples were afraid. They had failed Him. Yet they were *His* disciples, not anyone else's. The resurrection had convinced them to stick with Jesus. They knew what was ahead. Jesus had already told

them they would be hated and would die like He did. But they would also be raised like Him. So when He appeared to them once more, they worshiped Him. Still, doubt nagged at them. *Was this real, were they imagining this, were they being tricked?*

If a skeptic paid attention to this one simple fact about the disciples, it would erase any doubt about the reason for the creation of the church and the existence of the New Testament. The idea that these very ordinary men would have invented such a story and arranged for themselves to be killed is ludicrous. Belief and sacrifice didn't come naturally for these 11 men; they don't come easily to any of us.

Every Sunday, millions of disciples sit in services praying, thinking, worshiping and yes, doubting the whole thing. Asking the same questions as the 11 on that mountain. "Is this real, is God really interested, is He really here, and am I willing to go and do what He is telling me?" *The good news is that doubt is integral to faith.* It reinforces our faith; without strong doubt, faith cannot be strong. Worshiping while doubting is normal—and even essential.

Jesus knew their inner struggle; it was nothing new to Him. He, being fully human, had known many of the same struggles when He faced crucifixion. As leaders, we should expect people in our churches to have doubts about what we are teaching them, especially when it involves changing their schedules, their use of money and their professional and family lives. To rethink how you are going to live and then take risks that threaten any sense of normal security is daunting. Like the 11 disciples, you must have evidence and a source of authority to answer such a call. If your teaching on the implications of Christ's call to make disciples doesn't produce some fear, then you're not teaching what Jesus taught.

## **2. What is our authority?**

Now, let's look at the first part of this watershed passage:

“Jesus came and told His disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18, NLT).

The authority is for the specific purpose of making disciples. Have you considered that “all authority in heaven and earth” is focused on one thing? If Jesus' words are to be believed, all authority God has made is certainly resident in one person and will now be channeled in His effort to rescue the world. This is all the authority needed to make disciples, and making disciples is the one thing Jesus has authorized His people to do. When a disciple wonders how much spiritual authority he has, the answer is “all of it.”

When the religious authorities asked Peter and John this question, Peter answered, “Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10, NLT).<sup>11</sup>

These unlettered men with calloused hands and uncultured accents were challenging the elite of Israel. They had seen more conversions in a few hours than the entire religious system of Israel had produced in years. They knew where their authority came from and acted on it boldly and courageously. Peter and John's fear didn't disappear, but it was overpowered by courage.

Isn't this the message needed by the vast majority of North American Church members who sit passively in the pews? The one thing the church has been commanded to do and has been given the authority to do is make disciples. And if we do, that same energy will make evangelism necessary. In a very short time, people realized

that Peter's goal was more than to convince people to believe and be baptized. It was to enroll them into a new community of fellow believers where they would live and learn from one another.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. What is involved in making disciples?**

The final verse of this passage helps us understand the “how” of making disciples.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NLT).

We can all pretty much agree that a disciple of Jesus is one who trusts and follows Him and obeys all of His teachings. I (Bill) like to describe a disciple as “someone whose intention is to follow Jesus and to learn from Him how to live his life as though Jesus were living it.” A disciple has believed in the fullest sense of the first-century use of belief. The primary property of faith is action. No less of an advocate for the necessity and adequacy of faith for salvation, Martin Luther once said of true biblical faith, “While others are debating whether faith produces works, real faith has already ran out into the streets and is at work.” To believe in Jesus is to follow Him, and that is what makes a disciple. An accurate statement—and it also would mark only the beginning of the journey.

The disciple-making process begins long before actual conversion. Looking at the Gospels and how people came to true faith, we see that conversion is a process as often as it is an event.<sup>13</sup> Think about Peter. We sometimes like to ask, “When was Peter truly converted?” Looking at his life with this question in mind helps us to see the process involved in true conversion. Jesus discipled Peter

long before Peter really understood the core elements of the gospel and the cross. Consider these questions:

Was Peter converted when he first started following Jesus in Matt. 4:18? Or was it when he was called to be one of the 12 in Luke 6? What about when he denied that Jesus even needed to die on the cross in Mark 8:32? Was it after Peter fell and then repented in Luke 22:32, or when Jesus breathed on him and said, “receive the Holy Spirit” in John 20:22? Was it on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2? These tricky questions help us to realize what is often involved in the crooked, messy journey of discipleship.

We see the same process with Thomas, and James and John. Coming to a belief in Christ can take time. Eventually when the moment comes, we experience a realization, a definitive insight or a prayer that brings together the pieces.

Disciple making begins before we’re converted to Christ, when in a special way we are already under God’s care. Discussions with Christians, the acts of kindness toward us, our observations and even our conflicts play a role in choosing to follow Jesus. Prior to our initial decision to follow Christ (what many call conversion), all of the meaningful contact with those seeking God is part of the disciple-making process.

## **Going Public**

At the dawn of the Christian era, water baptism was the official beginning for those who wanted to declare their faith. The baptismal formula “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” has largely remained the practice of the church. In the majority of cultures outside of the Western Hemisphere, baptism still marks a

clear difference in how others see you, especially in countries dominated by other religions.

I (Bobby) have a relationship with Joe Shulam in Israel and his story is a classic example. As a young Israeli, Joe was warned by his Jewish parents that if he decided to follow Jesus as the Messiah, they would cut him off. Joe wrestled with the decision for some time and then made his decision. As soon as his parents heard of his baptism, they cut him off. He was forced to enter into adulthood and live for many years estranged from his parents (years later, they too decided to follow Jesus as their Messiah). For Joe, like so many, baptism was the dividing line between his old life and the new.

In the United States, believer baptisms are done in churches, swimming pools and the ocean. Most of these ceremonies are relationally benign, rarely raising an eyebrow. And they are cultural artifacts. People in general, and this would be true of most church members, do not expect getting wet to make much of a difference in one's life.

Matthew 28 asks us to think in terms of what we're being baptized into. It seems important to say that that baptism places us into a community that finds its genesis in the Triune God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are given a unity with others in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). It is a community based on truth, trust and grace that aspires to practice in community what their God does. This "belonging" is one of the most inviting parts of what it means to be a follower of Christ, because you join Christ and His community. The human division of the Christ community is flawed, sometimes outright ugly and embarrassing, but its potential for good is better than any other experience on earth. When someone is baptized, it is with the hope that she can live this reality and have a blessed life in Christ because she is in community.

The process we call “making disciples” includes evangelism and is done by disciples to make other disciples. That process includes just about everything we do in relation to people around us. Some elements of the process are planned; some we learn from our training. But as a whole, most are unplanned and are manifested in our character. Disciple making includes what we are like when we react to the unplanned big curriculum of life as it comes at us day and night without warning.

### **All the Nations**

Here comes the part of making disciples that requires grit and patience. The disciple making Jesus calls us to should lead us to reproduce. The goal is not just neighbors, friends and work associates. Most of the people we are to reach, we will never meet. Jesus said that when the gospel was preached to all the nations, then the end would come.<sup>14</sup> We feel obligated to say that the original word for “nations” is where we derive the English word “ethnic.” Jesus is referring to *all* people groups rather than nations, which of course have changed boundaries, leaders, governments and names in the last two millennia.

The U.S. church has done a good job of foreign missions. Much of the medical and educational infrastructure of the most needy people on earth depends greatly on the efforts and goodwill of the American church. The missional efforts of Americans continue to grow, and some of the funding is now coming from other sources than the church.<sup>15</sup> It’s encouraging to see the major philanthropic efforts from wealth created in the free enterprise system. While many of these efforts are not in the name of Christ, they certainly represent the Spirit of Christ and His care for others. God is using



them to answer the prayers of so many, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This is the positive residual of the church in post-Christian America.

The argument against the church is that it has done a good job, but not the one Jesus commanded. By neglecting its core mission of making disciples of its members, the church has only tapped a small part of its potential resources. Instead of an all-hands-on-deck effort to reach the world, the church has labored with a small, stripped-down crew. Given the low percentage of involvement, we commend the church for its impact. But to think of what has been accomplished as a “success” would be like describing standing in ankle-deep water as a flood of God’s blessing.

Why then has the level of involvement been so meager in light of the overall potential?

## **What Are We Missing?**

### *Discipleship*

“Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you” (Matt. 28:20, NLT).

The process of what we call discipleship is to be modeled after Jesus’ example with His own disciples. While this would seem obvious, unfortunately the contemporary church has greatly neglected it. Jesus entered into relationship with His men and trained them on the job. Over the course of His ministry on earth, the disciples observed Him and questioned Him; He shocked them, scandalized them, scared them, explained His teaching to them, and then asked them to try it out for themselves. They were connected to Him through

His belief in them, the authority of His call, the power of His life and His clear focus on His mission to seek and save (Luke 19:10).

Because He knew them well, He was able to teach them deeply. That familiarity is easy to miss in the scriptures, but in the first few days Jesus spent with Peter, Nathaniel, John, Andrew and Philip, He revealed He knew their hearts and motivations. He even gave them nicknames (John 1:35-51). Jesus gave His disciples what so many ministry leaders today are not willing to give—significant chunks of time. Some theologians estimate that He spent 90 percent of His time with the 12 men. A very private life in a way, but how He disciplined had a very public impact. Many effective leaders spend large amounts of time alone or with a few others. Remember Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; He mentioned His followers more than 40 times. He knew he was entrusting the mission to them. In that prayer, He asked His father to take care of them (John 17:1-26). Because He considered them the key to His mission to redeem and restore the world, He made His most important time investment in His disciples

We're not throwing a blanket over all ministry leaders and saying they don't invest in others. But we will say that the leaders who do are in the minority and that most of the time their intentions are scattered. Jesus told us what the curriculum would be—not just any curriculum, not just any fashionable trend, but something simple, yet difficult. In fact, He said it would be so difficult that many would choose not to follow it. At its core, His curriculum would require every leader to do what He did: to lead, to be an example, to risk failure and to go against the grain of easy, fast success. It would be to “teach them to obey.” It would be personal, relational, slow, discouraging, ordinary and unnoticed by many. This is particularly true

in our time. When you drop off the grid to engage in this kind of work, you don't exist in the public eye.

### *Accountability*

We have much teaching about what is right and wrong. You'll find no shortage of teaching on moral behavior, and on doing important work around the world. In fact, you can find an avalanche of books, videos, conferences and social media pundits that remind us of what we should and should not do. But precious few committed pastors and leaders are teaching us how to become what is needed to carry out the Great Commission. The great omission in the Great Commission is the absence of accountability. The words of Dallas Willard come to mind:

“Ministers pay far too much attention to people who do not come to services. Those people should generally be given exactly that disregard by the pastor that they give to Christ. The Christian leader has something much more important to do than pursue the godless. *The leader's task is to equip saints until they are like Christ, and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job.*”<sup>16</sup>

If someone is anxious about the mission to seek and save those in need of Christ, the most important decision to navigate that anxiety comes from the pastor. What are his plans for the people of his congregation? That decision will determine what he does with his gifts, his time and his heart. The first accountability lies with the minister, pastor or leader. In Matt. 28:19-20, Jesus says that if you want Him to bless your effort—and stay with you to the end of it—then your effort must center on teaching people to obey everything He commanded.

In the church, we often talk about accountability more than we practice it because accountability and the commitment it requires can be unpleasant. In our (Bill and Bobby) most candid moments, we admit that the most important relationships in our lives have included some quarreling. No good relationship is conflict-free. This is true in our prayers, and in our discussions with spouses and close associates. Without some degree of frustration and disagreement, we can't truly know and care about another person. We know that getting close to someone requires the risk of getting hurt and disappointed. Quite naturally, for those seeking to live trouble-free lives, accountability becomes something to be avoided.

When we work accountability into our lives, we begin to cultivate order and effectiveness. That is, until someone breaks rank or doesn't show up or threatens group morale. Accountability is very comforting to a leader until someone who has agreed to it decides they don't want to do whatever they have agreed to do. The simple truth is that if someone isn't following through on a commitment, he is either unwilling or unable. If he is unwilling, it is a spiritual issue; if unable, often it is a time management issue. Both can be painful and messy. That's why many leaders choose to insulate themselves from the process.

But when it comes to making disciples, to seeking and saving those who need God, accountability is the necessary missing piece. It must be done. And God has promised to stick with us until the job is done.

“And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NLT).

## The Call to Make Disciples in Matthew 28:18-20

The promise is for those who are committed to this process. You can't count on this promise if you're wandering and meandering through life. In the next chapter, we'll look at Paul's understanding of how the church is called to practice Jesus' commission to discipleship and evangelism.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Activation of the Saints (Ephesians 4:12-16)

**D**id the Apostle Paul know what Jesus taught in the Great Commission? Not only was he aware of it, he also was driven by it. Paul had visited various apostles in Jerusalem on two occasions (Gal. 1:16-2:7). Stories about Jesus were commonplace among church leaders. In fact, we have evidence that Matthew may have penned his Gospel around the same time Paul was writing his letter to the disciples at Rome. The most compelling argument for Paul's awareness of Jesus' commission to make disciples is that Jesus personally taught Paul.

Paul claimed, "I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12, NLT).

And when Paul instructed his protégé Timothy, he told him to teach faithful people, who in turn would teach even more people (2 Tim. 2:2). He saw Timothy's role in the Ephesian church to be instruction leading to reproduction. This was the same impulse of the Holy Spirit who drove the mission to the world.

## The Activation of the Saints (Ephesians 4:12-16)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NLT).

The Spirit of God was pushing out the borders of the church when Antioch became the new sending center from which Paul began his missionary journeys. By the time Paul settled down for three years in Ephesus, he had developed a well-defined orthodoxy (beliefs) and orthopraxis (practice). You could even call Ephesus the disciple-making church.

Acts 19 describes three primary characteristics of a disciple-making church that produce the very things Jesus commanded:

**First, Paul built relationships with the people.** He went fishing for men in the local synagogue, which lasted three months until that was no longer fruitful, and then he moved into a lecture hall of Tyrannus. Scholars estimate that they met more than 700 times in the two-year period. Paul’s teaching the congregation, such as it was, led to widespread evangelism in the city. Many believed, and great works of power were in evidence.

**Second, Paul’s work was teaching the Word.** These discussions, debates and lectures went on daily. The church of Ephesus was more than a congregation; many students and disciples also were present. Scholars have calculated that during this period more than 35 named disciples of Paul from other regions found their way to Ephesus.

**Third was the reproduction of disciples.** Which means that the church of Ephesus did more than talk about the gospel

among themselves in holy huddles. They sent out teams to surrounding regions. Timothy was there; he witnessed and benefited from it. The six other churches named in Revelation 2 and 3 also were started during this period. With some confidence, we could say that of the first-century churches we know about, Ephesus was the most fully developed. For that reason, we rely on Paul's more highly developed theology found in his letter to the Ephesians, especially his teaching on the heart of the leader's task and his practical responsibility (Eph. 4:11-16). If you want to know how to develop a church that seeks and saves, this is it.

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (NLT).

This text abounds with core principles that when practiced can be revolutionary.



## The Activation of the Saints (Ephesians 4:12-16)

- **Gifted leaders are responsible to equip people for their work.** The gifted leaders referenced in the text are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. All of these roles are needed to match the diversity of gifts that God has given His people. The saints need the apostles' impulse to press forward; the courage and clarity of the prophet; the desire to tell the story of the evangelist; the care and attention of the pastor; and the principles and knowledge of the teacher. "Equip" is a comprehensive word. It means to mend a frayed net, to reset a broken bone, to prepare for athletic competition. We like to describe it as "coaching." Multi-dimensional gifted leaders are needed to prepare a diverse group of people.
- We like to hear and tell stories of churches that have made the transition to "every member being a minister." Our friend, Jim Putman, has one of the best stories around, with more than 6,000 people in a small Northern Idaho city attending church and participating in small groups every week. Around half the people who attend church services were not Christians before they joined, and now they commonly all see themselves as ministers of Christ. With a staff of around 90 people, more than 80 came from the secular world and rose up as effective ministers within the church before joining the staff. They were loggers, businessmen, policemen, and mill workers. They were equipped or "coached" as disciples and then as "disciple makers," and now they are transforming a community.
- **God's people are the saints. This includes all members.** Sinners are also saints. Being called a sinner is a compliment. It means that God believes we can confess our sins and take up the life of a saint. The punctuation in verse 12 makes it clear that the gifted leaders' role is to prepare God's people.

Notice that there is no comma after “people.” Paul says that it is God’s people who are responsible to do God’s work.

The ordinary common believer—not the clergy or religious professional (often the one gifted to train)—is at the center of this instruction. And by Eph. 4:16, it’s obvious that everyone—every person—is to be included in the process, no exceptions.

A good motto for a church is, “Every member in ministry in at least one thing.”

- **The first step is for the church to be built up.** God does expect us to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. When Paul says that the first step for the church is to be built up, he doesn’t mean for it to wait to reach out. What he does mean is that the equipping process must be effective. If it isn’t, and the church begins seeking and saving others without the proper foundation, the church will collapse like a house of cards. Bringing new people into a dysfunctional environment is disastrous.
- **This equipping continues until the saints individually and corporately meet the standard of Christlikeness.** The standard for stopping the equipping process is “until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NLT). Equipping the saints never ceases. There are always issues in a saint’s life that need strengthening, sins needing to be confessed and lessons to be learned. But this passage provides some general goals that tell us when we are solid and have a good foundation.
- **Equipping addresses the problems of immaturity, disunity, instability, deception, inactivity, shallowness, addiction to desire and lack of focus.** The clear goal is to

## The Activation of the Saints (Ephesians 4:12-16)

avoid much of the negative aspects of immaturity. The text says, “We will no longer be immature like children” (Eph. 4:14, NLT). The fruit of immaturity has destroyed many a congregation or ministry. The list of problems in this verse speaks for itself, and we don’t just wish these issues away. They must be worked out over time under the supervision of fellow saints and leaders. In many ways, this is a core part of discipleship. It is fair to say that the above list of pathologies not only distracts, but also destroys. These hurts and wounds take up a lot of time and energy. They are the kinds of problems we can avoid, or at least minimize, by a commitment to developing people in Christ as a first priority.

- **Equipping leads to finding our place in the body and making our contribution. Everyone is called to participate and thrive in a healthy and loving environment.** Instead of being willing victims of the contemporary culture, the mature church bases their cause and relationship on truth. The church is called to speak the truth to the world in love. Sadly, some of us have failed at this point. The idea for optimum use of our gifts and abilities is done in humility to fit into and serve the team. While it seems trite to talk about teamwork, this is more than Pollyannaish idealism. It can be a reality. We do have a problem, don’t we? The conventional pattern set deeply into the Western church culture has created a bottleneck of sorts. The entire system is plugged up with a cleric-run and -controlled church. The following example may help you better understand what we’re talking about here.

## **Nupedia and Wikipedia**

You may have never heard of Nupedia. In 2000, Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger believed they could revolutionize the way people accessed knowledge. Their idea was to develop a new online encyclopedia. You might remember the door-to-door salespersons peddling *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, the best-selling, least-read books of all time. Wales and Sanger's idea was to gather knowledge from the best and the brightest—professors, historians and researchers. These experts would write articles and after careful editing, the material would be uploaded to a site. After three years, they pulled the plug on the project. The work had been tedious; much of it stuck in the editing phase and locked in ideological conflict. They wound up posting only 24 articles.

In desperation, Wales and Sanger thought they could correct the problem by developing a feeder system for Nupedia by allowing ordinary men and women to voluntarily submit articles. They would enlist people who were passionate and willing to write without pay. The first year, they posted 20,000 articles. Today, more than 20 million articles live on Wikipedia, the most accessible encyclopedia on earth. We are sure you already get the point. The church operates like Nupedia, but it is designed to work like Wikipedia. When only accredited, trained clergy are allowed to carry out real ministry, you get a bottleneck.

The plan Paul presented to the Ephesians depended on two things. First, the leaders must equip the ordinary saints to do ministry. Second, each saint must participate. For this to happen, the leaders must give up their fear of losing control, and the saints must face the fear of embarrassment or failure. A powerful plan for the church today.

Also, we must find a new way to measure leadership success. Instead of how well leaders publicly perform, we need to shift our metric to how well the saints are doing ministry. This is a dotted line rather than a bright red one that separated clergy and saint. All clergy are saints, they have families, they live in neighborhoods and they have the same opportunities as their parishioners. They are, in effect, player-coaches.

### **A Lesson From John Wesley.**

Many agree that a five-foot-two-inch Anglican clergyman named John Wesley saved England from a second civil war. Throughout 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, The Methodist movement transformed the British working class from a bubbling cauldron of resentment into a positive force for moral good. Methodism enabled a large number of England's lower classes to cope with the social and spiritual chaos of the industrial revolution. Wesley's Methodist Societies, Class Meetings and Bands created a spiritual movement that became one of the greatest demonstrations of discipleship-evangelism in the history of the church. Everything we identify today as earmarks of revival or awakenings—including holiness, a focus on the poor and a sense of mission—was clearly evident in Wesley's work.

### **Wesley and Pastoral Training**

In Wesley's day, as in ours, the function of ministry within a congregation was vested in the professional clergyman. He was paid and trained to minister, to do the work of a religious professional. Even though Martin Luther had proclaimed the priesthood of all believers, the idea never took hold. It's remarkable to us that even though this grand doctrine has progressed, it is still not practiced in any re-

markable or effective way in the Western church. One of the most important differences in Wesley's approach was his take on pastoral training:

“The primary function of spiritual /educational leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally.”<sup>17</sup>

This was the leader's main task, and he was evaluated by it. The pastor was measured by how well he trained and deployed the saints in their official positions. “There were dozens of official positions—stewards, class-leaders, band leaders, exhorters, trustees, sick-visitors, helpers, preachers, booksellers—so that the ministry was parceled out to the entire body of believers, not just the chosen elite.”<sup>18</sup>

What if spiritual leaders in churches and other ministries became experts in equipping others and considered the rewards inherent in it enough to satisfy their longings for significance? If you think about it, the idea is revolutionary—and a long-term project. It would require many brave souls to function that way for long enough and, frankly, to be numerically successful enough, to gain the attention of the church.

## **The Path Forward**

We think disciples, not steeples. We want to raise up the non-active saints in every domain of society. One might think there is a silver bullet or a new idea that would accomplish such a task. But the secret is well known and comes from a very old line in the life of Jesus. He told His disciples, “You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ *But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest*” (John 4:35, NLT, emphasis ours).

## The Activation of the Saints (Ephesians 4:12-16)

Jesus was saying, “Look at what you already have in front of you.” If you simply take a look at what you already have, the strategy is simple. Identify those who are already in community with the people they are called to reach and equip them to be there. That is what the church is for; this is the work church leaders have been called to do. Jesus called us to make disciples. These disciples will reproduce and figure out how to multiply it all, and the gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth. And then the end will come. That is the plan, and the church is the centerpiece, the place where disciples are made. If you understand the concept, then you understand the statement.

That is why we say that the church is for discipleship, and discipleship is for the world. The church is for training the saints. Once they are equipped, they become healthy disciples who will penetrate every segment of society with both the words and the works of the gospel. They will both seek and save.

So we come back to our core perspective. Evangelism and discipleship are tied together; one leads to the other. In evangelism, we lead people to be disciples. In discipleship, we lead people back to evangelism and disciple making. Our gospel is holistic, and it calls for a covenant-making commitment, where people become disciples and disciples become points of light that illuminate the society and point people to the gospel as the hope of the world. The church’s mission is to make, empower and release an increasing number of disciples.

For us, the question isn’t whether it will work. We know it will. God has promised that. The question is, will we do it? Will we lead our churches to do it? Will we fully embrace the revolution that will change the world?

# Endnotes

1. Frank Laubach, *Man of Prayer* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Laubach Literacy International, 1990), page 154.
2. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2012/08/13/churchgoers-believe-in-sharing-faith-most-never-do/>. This research is the most positive among most of what is available.
3. We are on a little stronger ground with discipleship because both “disciple” and “making disciples” are in the Bible.
4. Gordon Smith of Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, promotes an understanding along these lines in his book, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation* (InterVarsity: Downer’s Grove, Ill., 2001). See also, Robert Stein, “Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Spring, 1998, pp 6-17.
5. Bill Hull uses a different, but related definition: “Discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it.” For the sake of collaboration, he has agreed to this definition in this work and in the ministry of discipleship.org. As a co-writer with Bill, Bobby cannot emphasize enough the value found in Bill Hull’s extensive work on these matters. Please go to BillHull.com to see more information.
6. The participles in vv. 19–20 are subordinate to the command “make disciples” and explain how disciples are made: by



“baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these involves the initiation into discipleship, and the second focuses on the lifelong task of sanctification or obedience. See Craig Bloomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 431.

7. We commend the broad outline of Scot McKnight’s, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).
8. Bill Hull describes this slightly differently in *Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, 2010), p. 44. For the sake of collaboration in this work (and in the ministry of discipleship.org), he was willing to use this summary.
9. Robert Picirilli does a great job of showing how the emphasis that we are saved “by grace through faith” and discipleship coalesce. *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* (Nashville: Randall House, 2013).
10. Gordon Smith of Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, promotes an understanding along these lines in his book, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation* (InterVarsity: Downer’s Grove, Ill., 2001).
11. Acts 10,11 New Living Translation
12. Acts Chapters 2-5 makes it clear that the Apostles understood what was required to make disciples. It included many of the ongoing practices mentioned in Acts 2:42-47.
13. Conversion is a process. The Engel scale is a map of the types of mini-conversions that happen as a person travels to the point of committing his or her life to Jesus. The scale is

discussed in James F. Engel and Wilbert H. Norton's, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1975).

14. Matthew 24:14 And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come. New Living Translation.
15. Bill Gates, "Three Myths on the World's Poor: Bill and Melinda Gates call foreign aid a phenomenal investment that's transforming the world". See the *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2014 online at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/three-myths-on-the-world8217s-poor-1390006085>
16. See Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), p xi.
17. <http://beamezion.org/resources/leadership/ConnectingEmpoweringLeadership.pdf>
18. D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting, A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 138.

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# 10 DISCIPLESHIP AFFIRMATIONS

## *of* Discipleship.org

1. We believe Jesus Christ is central to life and the Bible – He is supreme and worthy of all devotion, worship, and emulation. We affirm the Nicene Creed and its statements about Jesus and the Trinity (Colossians 1:15-20).
2. We define a disciple as someone who is *following* Jesus, *being changed* by Jesus, and is *committed to* the mission of Jesus (Matthew 4:19). This is only possible by the Holy Spirit, and it is for God's glory.
3. We define discipleship and disciple making as helping people to trust and follow Jesus (Matthew 28:18–20).
4. We believe disciple making is the core mission of the local church (Colossians 1: 28-29).
5. We believe the Bible is the authoritative, reliable and final guide for discipleship and life (2 Timothy 3:16-4:2).
6. We believe Jesus' method of disciple making is the wisest and best method to follow today (Luke 6:40).
7. We believe our love for one another is the most important sign of true discipleship (John 13:34-35).
8. We believe discipleship includes serving the poor, striving for holiness and living with accountability in the local church (1 Corinthians 5: 1-13).
9. We believe true discipleship and love compel us to join Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
10. We believe our obedience to the Great Commission will result in the expansion of God's Kingdom, the betterment of humanity, and God's exaltation and pleasure (Luke 19:11-27).

## [Free Discipleship.org Resources](#)

Free eBooks available for [download here](#).

- *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman and Bobby Harrington with Josh Patrick
- *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* by Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington
- *Stay the Course: Seven Essential Practices for Disciple Making Churches* by Brandon Guindon
- *Discipleship that Fits* by Bobby Harrington and Alex Absolom
- *Discipleship is the Core Mission of the Church* by Bobby Harrington
- *The Discipleship Gospel Primer* by Bill Hull and Ben Sobels
- *Invest in a Few* by Craig Etheredge
- *Beyond Accountability* by Nate Larkin
- *Becoming a Disciple Maker* by Bobby Harrington and Greg Wiens
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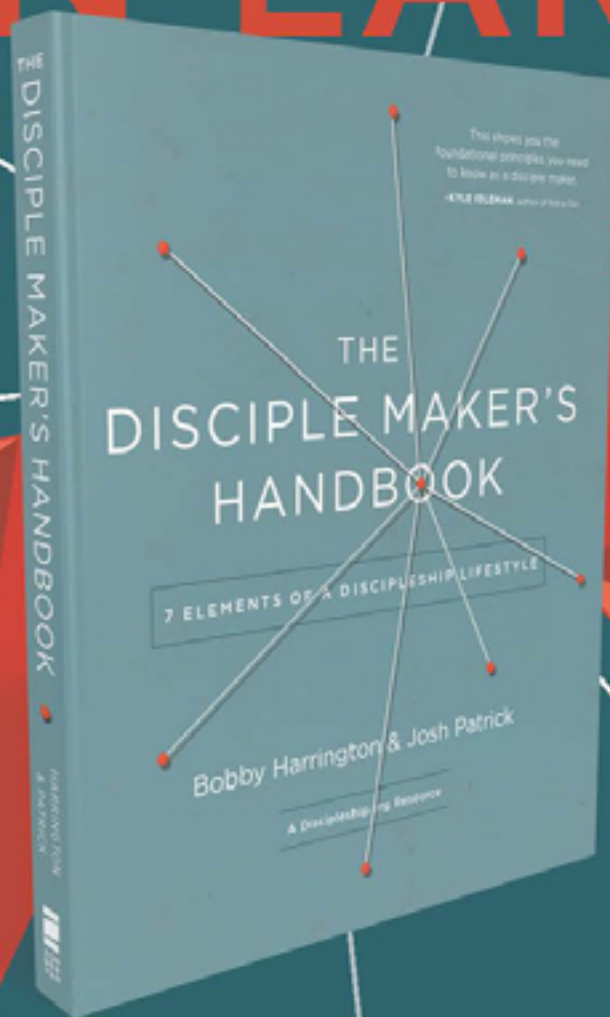
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