



# MISSIONROUNDTABLE

THE OCCASIONAL BULLETIN OF OMF INTERNATIONAL MISSION RESEARCH



## **Bearing Fruit That Will Last Discipleship in East Asia**

**Editorial: Biblical Discipleship in Today's Asia**  
*Walter McConnell*

**Matthew's Guide to Missional Discipleship: Towards an Integral Mission Theology in the First Gospel**  
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*Richard Cho, Jim McIntosh, and Linda McIntosh*

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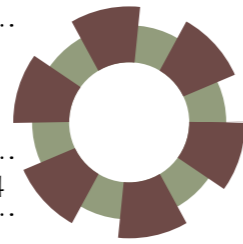
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Cover photo: Teachers and students at the J. O. Fraser Centre plant rice together.  
All photos by Richard Cho.

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# Editorial

Walter McConnell

## Biblical Discipleship in Today's Asia

Since we live in a world where discipleship programs abound, it is astonishing to hear missionaries who have responded to Jesus' call to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) report that they have never been discipled. And yet that is exactly what many say is their experience. As a result, it is not uncommon to find a missionary who bears a load of frustration and guilt as he or she considers the role of a discipler. If he was never personally discipled, how can he obey Jesus' command to make disciples? And if she does not know how to make disciples, how can she train others to do it? This all too common problem has prompted the examination of discipleship found in this issue of *Mission Round Table*.

As our understanding and practice of mission should be grounded in Scripture, we begin with two articles that examine discipleship from the point of view of Matthew's Gospel. In the first, Peter Rowan demonstrates that the whole of Matthew was written to present discipleship, not as a package of things to learn and do but as a whole-life lived in relationship with the Lord Jesus. To do this, he surveys key passages on discipleship and mission, identifies Matthew's understanding of the substance of discipleship, and concludes by summarizing some implications of what it means to live as disciples of Jesus and make disciples of Jesus.

The second article presents my reflections on what the Great Commission teaches about discipleship. Placing the final words of Jesus within the context of the Gospel as a whole makes it possible to better understand Christ's claim, command, and words of comfort as he sends his disciples into the world to make disciples.

The biblical foundations for discipleship are hollow without grounded practice. To illustrate how disciples can be formed in a community context, Richard Cho and Jim and Linda McIntosh tell us about life, learning, and practice at the J. O. Fraser Centre in northern Thailand. Highlighting the impact teaching the Bible can have on an individual, Joshua James tells of the radical change experienced by one of his students as the biblical story challenged and then replaced his perception of the relationship between God and other spiritual powers. Herbert Ale and John Wong share their experience working with a closely-knit ethnic community with whom they share the gospel and themselves, discipling others through communicating the wonders of God's story and caring for the personal needs of the people.

The story of changed lives is enhanced when we see the power of the gospel at work in others. Wat Ho Meas, an OMF missionary from Cambodia, tells how the negative impressions he had of Christianity as a boy changed as he learned more about the faith and was discipled by a series of individuals in informal and more formal settings at home, in Japan, and in Northern Ireland.

Our deliberations on discipleship come to a conclusion as we turn to hear the voices of two senior statesmen who have given much thought to the theme. Hwa Yung, retired Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, joins us in an interview in which he outlines his concern that personal holiness should be the central goal of discipleship programs. He believes

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the future of the Asian church is tied to its demonstration that the gospel of Christ can make a difference in society that can be seen theologically and in practice.

Our final paper comes from the pen of the former OMF General Director, J. Oswald Sanders, who in 1961 expressed his concern that members of the Fellowship were not gaining ample spiritual benefit from their quiet times and detailed some guidelines for personal Bible study. His directions are supplemented by a contemporary "letter to the editor" and some modern ideas about how to improve one's devotional life.

The next two issues of *Mission Round Table* will focus on the themes of partnership with the global church and identity as a person in Christ and member of human society. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration on either of these topics, please send a brief description of your ideas to the editor. Acceptable papers could consider the topic from the perspective of the Bible, theology, sociology, or philosophy, or demonstrate its practical outworking in life and ministry.

Regular readers of *Mission Round Table* will recognize that after ten years using the same format we have adopted a new look. We hope you enjoy it. OMF members will also discover a forum for more in-depth discussions on the intranet as well as some papers that we were not able to print.

*Walter McConnell*  
Editor  
International Coordinator for Mission Research,  
OMF International





**Peter Rowan** is from N. Ireland and has served with OMF for sixteen years. He is the author of *Proclaiming the Peacemaker: The Malaysian Church as an Agent for Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society* (Oxford: Regnum, 2012), and is currently OMF (UK) National Director, a role he shares with his wife, Christine.

## Matthew's Guide to Missional Discipleship: Towards an Integral Mission Theology in the First Gospel

For a number of reasons Matthew has been my favourite Gospel, and I resonate with Michael Green when he says “it is among the most influential books ever written ... It is wonderfully complete ... perhaps the most important single document in the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

In the field of Mission Studies, any work seeking to give biblical grounding to an understanding of mission has, at some point, examined what has become a classic world mission text from Matthew's Gospel: “The Great Commission” in 28:16–20. But what does it mean to “make disciples”, and how does it fit with Matthew's understanding of the church's mission?

In some parts of the worldwide church, evangelism has been more of a call for decisions rather than for disciples. The call to follow Jesus has been interpreted as a “ticket to heaven”, received in isolation from the listener's context. In other places an over-reliance on programmes leads to “discipleship” being more about cognisance and the attainment of knowledge, and less about transformation. Some of these difficulties undoubtedly emerge from an unbalanced understanding of the Great Commission, not least, for instance, when *going* and therefore geography, becomes determinative of the missionary task rather than making disciples. Solutions to deficient understandings of the missional task of the church can be found in paying greater attention to what Matthew's Gospel as a whole has to say about discipleship and mission.

This article aims to highlight the key dimensions of discipleship in Matthew, showing how these are at the heart of Matthew's integral mission theology. Our method will be to survey the key passages

on discipleship, identify the substance of discipleship in Matthew, and conclude with several summary points that have implications for how we live as disciples of Jesus and what it means to make disciples of Jesus.

### 1. Key discipleship passages

Out of 262 references to “disciple” in the New Testament, the noun *mathētēs* occurs seventy-three times in Matthew, compared to forty-six in Mark, thirty-seven in Luke, seventy-eight in John and twenty-eight in Acts, with no occurrences elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

We will look at a number of key passages including four out of the five discourses<sup>3</sup> and the “call” passages of Matt 4:18–22, 9:9–12, 11:28–30 and 28:16–20:4.

### 2. The discourse passages a. The essence of life in discipleship (Matt 5–7)

This first and longest discourse in Matthew has been called “the sermon on discipleship.”<sup>5</sup> The nine beatitudes (5:3–12) are the value system characterising the recipients of the kingdom “where real people seek to live in a counter-cultural way among others who do not share their beliefs or ethics.”<sup>6</sup>

All the “blesseds” of verses 1–12 reach their missiological climax with “you are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world” (5:13–16), which encapsulates the essence of life in discipleship and speaks explicitly of the ethical demands of life in the kingdom. “Of all the Gospels,” say Peskett and Ramachandra, “Matthew is the most elaborate in setting forth the ethical requirements of the kingdom.”<sup>7</sup>

It is only because the disciples are recipients of the kingdom that they can live the ethics of the kingdom and serve the mission of the kingdom. The order in verses 13–16 is important. “Being” comes before “doing”—the disciples are described as being salt and light, and because of that they are to live a certain way. The repeated “you” in verses 13 and 14 is emphatic, emphasising that all who claim to follow Jesus are to be salt and light and to therefore participate in the accomplishment of God's purposes in the world. This is an astonishing thing for Jesus to say to a motley group of first century Jews.

Three metaphors are used in these verses to describe the influence of disciples in the world—the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city set on a hill. The climax of the section embodies the thrust of the whole sermon where the disciples are exhorted to “shine” and live out the reality of God's kingdom which has come in Jesus Christ (v 16).

The scope and extent of this witness is international—“you are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world”—a further sign in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus' ministry and mission was always intended to open out to a worldwide mission, which is not only a matter of words but also of deeds. Carson observes that “good works” refers to “all righteousness, everything they are and do that reflects the mind and will of God.”<sup>8</sup> It is evident from the first discourse that discipleship involves at least two dimensions—the *ethical* and the *universal*.

### b. The life of mission in discipleship (Matt 10:1–11:1)

**The cost of mission**  
Matthew expands Mark's account (Mark 6:7–13) by inserting a number of other sayings of Jesus which underline the costliness and urgency of the mission task. The chapter looks beyond the initial mission to a variety of contexts in which disciples of Jesus will carry out their mission in the midst of persecution and suffering.

**First, the disciple is not above his master. Second, the disciple is to be like his master, and third, the disciple must expect to experience what his master has experienced. These verses highlight the principle of solidarity.**

### The continuity of mission

The disciples' mission is described in a similar way to Jesus' mission. Note the similarities between 4:23 and 10:7–8. They are sent out in a mission of preaching and healing. Here in chapter 10 Jesus passes on his authority of word and deed to his apostles. The personal authority of Jesus is behind and is carried through in the words and deeds of the disciples.

### The place of mission in the life of discipleship

In verse 1 the Twelve are described as “disciples”. But they are then given a new title—“apostles”. Here is a reminder to all Matthew's readers that discipleship does not only involve learning from Jesus but includes being sent by Jesus in mission.

### Disciples as Jesus' fellow-workers in mission

At the start of this discourse, Matthew distinguishes between the crowd and the disciples. In the preceding pericope—9:36–37—instead of following Mark who records Jesus teaching the crowd, Matthew records Jesus exhorting the disciples to pray for labourers. In 10:1 Jesus calls the disciples and sends them out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6), already referred to in 9:36. Mark's account of Jesus teaching the crowd and ministering directly to them is contrasted in Matthew where Jesus ministers to the crowd *through* the disciples. Matthew is immediately signalling to his readers that the keynote of this mission discourse is the disciples as Jesus' fellow-workers in the mission-harvest.

Verses 24–25 expound this keynote further. First, the disciple is not above his master. Second, the disciple is to be like his master, and third, the disciple must expect

to experience what his master has experienced. These verses highlight the principle of solidarity. Michael Wilkins observes that this principle, “is crucial to the disciples' mission: the disciples' solidarity with Jesus consists in sharing in His suffering and sharing in His authority.”<sup>9</sup>

The disciples and Jesus “stand preeminently together”.<sup>10</sup> Along with the privilege of being called by the Lord of the harvest into discipleship and mission, there also comes unavoidable rejection and suffering. The cost of discipleship is spoken of again in verses 34–39, where commitment to Jesus transcends loyalty to one's family, which in the cultural milieu of the time would have been supreme. Such commitment was a necessary prerequisite to participation in Jesus' mission. As Martin Hengel puts it,

If the disciple in following Jesus was to share the same mission and authority as Jesus himself, he likewise needed to be free for this service, unrestrictedly ready to share the total insecurity, exposure to danger, and slander which were the fate of his master.<sup>11</sup>

With the first mention of the cross in Matthew's Gospel, the nature of true discipleship is described in terms of complete obedience and self-denial in a context of mission.

If we compare Matt 10:37–38 with the parallel in Luke 14:25–27, we find that whereas in Luke Jesus is challenging the crowd to become disciples, in Matthew he is challenging the disciple to grow in discipleship. While the Lucan account includes the term *mathētēs*, Matthew replaces it with “worthy” (10:38). Wilkins observes that in speaking of the “worth” of discipleship, Jesus “is speaking

of the risk of danger as a proof of the genuineness of the professed discipleship.<sup>12</sup>

We should also note the connections between Matt 10 and Matt 16:24–28 which describe the way of discipleship in terms of taking up one’s cross and denying self. Connections between Matt 10 and Matt 16 can be seen in a number of verses: 16:24 with 10:38; 16:25 with 10:39; 16:27 with 10:32–33; 16:28 with 10:23.<sup>13</sup> Solidarity is again emphasised as the disciple seeks to follow in the path of Jesus by embracing the reality of suffering. Davies and Allison, capturing the essence of Matt 16:24–28 with its missionary implication, assert that

the disciples ... must not passively observe their Lord and what he does. They are not to be seated spectators watching from the grandstand the actions foretold in 16:21–3. Rather must they themselves enter the arena after their Lord.<sup>14</sup>

True discipleship is a call to participate in the mission of Jesus, to be in solidarity with him not only in mission but also in suffering.

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### **Mindful that they themselves have been forgiven far more than they will ever forgive, disciples are to exhibit an inexhaustible forgiveness that will confirm the genuineness of their discipleship.**

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#### **c. Life together in discipleship (Matt 18)**

**Humility in the community**  
Relationships in the kingdom should be marked by certain characteristics. Disciples are designated “little ones”<sup>15</sup> and the humility they are to exhibit is illustrated by the social insignificance and unconcern for social status of the child Jesus brings into their midst. The little child “was the very antithesis of the disciples’ interest in power and greatness.”<sup>16</sup> The little child probably came straight away to Jesus when he was called and stood there obediently as Jesus used him as an object lesson.

That in itself is what humility is all about: “coming when Jesus calls us and staying where Jesus puts us.”<sup>17</sup>

#### **Responsibility in the community**

“Little ones” is a fitting description for the disciples as it emphasises both their humility and their dependence on God as heavenly Father. In verses 5–9 Matthew stresses the importance of how disciples treat one another within the community. The receiving of a fellow disciple is the same as receiving Christ himself (cf. 10:40). For this reason, to jeopardise the faith and commitment of another disciple is a serious offence, spoken of in the gravest of terms by Jesus (7–9). These verses were understood early on in the Christian movement to also refer to parts of the body of the church. If a church member was living disobediently and affecting the church by their sinful behaviour, then that person was to be disciplined.

In the central part of the discourse (15–20), Matthew addresses some specific problems regarding offences against disciples in the community, underlining once more the importance of personal

relationships. For Matthew, a disciple has to function in community—and this entails responsibility and accountability towards one another. A sure mark of this kind of discipleship community is the presence of Christ (18:20).

#### **Forgiveness in the community**

The importance of forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus is seen in the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23–35). For Matthew, true discipleship is demonstrated in a person’s willingness to forgive others, and such willingness is connected to God’s eschatological forgiveness of him or her (18:35). Earlier in the fifth

petition of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Matt 6:12), both present and eschatological forgiveness is linked to our forgiveness of others. And this is explicitly emphasised in 6:14–15: “For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

True discipleship, according to Matt 18 is lived in the context of community. Greatness is a matter of humility, not of status or power. Relationships are to be esteemed with the worth and value that God himself gives to each disciple. The conduct of disciples is to be marked by responsibility and accountability. Mindful that they themselves have been forgiven far more than they will ever forgive, disciples are to exhibit an inexhaustible forgiveness that will confirm the genuineness of their discipleship. “Disciples”, as Hagner describes them, “are the forgiven who forgive.”<sup>18</sup>

#### **d. The life of perseverance in discipleship (Matt 25:14–46)**

Our attention here is on the final parable in chapter 25, which further develops Matthew’s concept of discipleship—this time in terms of faithfulness and perseverance. The parable of the sheep and the goats brings to a close the formal teaching of Jesus in the Gospel and again concerns the significance of the parousia—not in terms of its timing but of the need to be prepared. Verses 32–33 picture the final judgment scene where “all the nations”—a universal gathering—congregate before the throne where separation of the righteous from the wicked begins. Jesus himself is present when judgment is exercised on the basis of six criteria which denote various situations representative of the basic needs of life.<sup>19</sup> The key to the passage is verse 40 and Jesus’ words to the righteous, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

The phrase, “the least of these my brothers,” in all likelihood refers to the disciples. “Brother,” elsewhere

in Matthew, is always used with reference to the disciples (12:48–49; 28:10), while “the least of these my brothers” can be paralleled to the phrase “the little ones,” which as we saw in Matt 18:6, 10, 14, is a reference also to the disciples. Significant in this association is Matt 10:40–42, which expresses the same sentiments as Matt 25:40, in the context of the master-disciple identification. So Jesus is speaking of those actions of mercy done to disciples and is therefore identifying himself with those disciples.

Interpretation of this chapter has not always be properly understood, as Dewi Hughes points out:

The common understanding of this account of the judgement that teaches that kindness to the poor in general is the condition of our entrance into eternal life is clearly erroneous. “The least of these brothers of mine” (Matt. 25:40) can mean only the followers of Jesus. It is self-sacrificial identification with the least of Jesus’ disciples, with whom he identifies himself totally, that is proof of a desire to be with Jesus eternally.<sup>20</sup>

Again Matthew underlines the solidarity between the disciples and Jesus in the task of mission. Blomberg and Hagner both identify “the least of these brothers of mine” as disciples and emissaries of the gospel and underline the great responsibility of fellow disciples in caring for and meeting the needs of those in the service of their Master.<sup>21</sup>

According to the parables of chapter 25, in true discipleship orthopraxy is integrated with orthodoxy, and eschatology is important to our discipleship because “the promise of future judgment and deliverance makes perseverance in the present both a possibility and a necessity.”<sup>22</sup>

### **3. The Call Passages**

#### **a. The call to become a disciple (Matt 4:18–22; 9:9; 11:28–30)**

The only accounts in the First Gospel of Jesus calling individuals to follow him are found in Matt

4:18–22 and 9:9, where a number of important aspects about the nature of discipleship are emphasised.

#### **A call to radical reorientation of life**

From 4:19 and 9:9, we see Jesus taking the initiative in establishing relationships.<sup>23</sup> The authoritative nature of his call is accompanied by an immediate response from those called. Fishermen leave their nets “immediately”—a radical break from their past in order to respond wholeheartedly to Jesus. Again, this is clear from Matthew’s own call, where the words “Matthew got up” imply not just a break from “sitting” but the reorientation of his life in following Jesus. The “sovereign and absolute” call of God through the authoritative words of Jesus brings about “a complete break with old loyalties.”<sup>24</sup>

#### **A call to commitment and loyalty**

In addition to this, Matthew’s usage of the verb *akoloutheō* (“to follow”), which occurs more often in Matthew than in the other synoptics, sheds important light on the nature of discipleship. Although there are instances where the verb is used in a literal sense as in 21:9 or 9:19, 27, it is especially used in Matthew to emphasise commitment and loyalty to Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

#### **A call that extends to the margins**

A further ingredient in the call passages concerns the type of people Jesus invited to follow him, which included the scandalous invitation of a tax collector in Matt 9:9. In the following verses (10–13), Jesus underlines the fact that his compassion and mercy know no bounds—“no one is despicable enough by the standards of society to be outside of his concern and invitation.”<sup>26</sup>

In addition to those passages in which specifically named persons are invited to follow Jesus, Matt 11:28–30 is an invitation to “all” (*pantes*). These verses are unique to Matthew, and the invitation of Jesus to “come to me” is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. While Graham Stanton wishes to interpret the

passage as “comfortable words” for hard pressed disciples,<sup>27</sup> it seems best to understand Jesus’ invitation as being addressed to those who are not yet disciples.<sup>28</sup> The background to the passage has also been debated. Some have suggested Exodus 33:12–14 as the key, while others make a strong case for the Wisdom tradition of Sirach 51:23–27 as Matthew’s most probable background influence.<sup>29</sup>

The main thrust of the passage is the contrast between the way of Jesus and the way of the Pharisees. Rather than being burdened with the weight of Pharisaic observance of the law, Jesus invites all to take his “yoke”—that is, to obey the law by following his teaching which in contrast, will bring “rest for your souls.” Therefore, those who respond to the invitation enter into relationship with Jesus, take on his yoke, and are promised his rest. No Jewish teacher could make such an authoritative invitation, nor speak with the eschatological perspective of the messianic Servant-King. The easy yoke and light burden of Jesus’ invitation are not intended to diminish the commitment and cost of discipleship. As Davies-Allison point out:

This rest is not idleness but the peace and contentment and fullness of life that come with knowing and doing the truth as revealed by God’s Son, who is always with his people.<sup>30</sup>

In his unconventional choice of disciples, Jesus emphasised how the message of the kingdom transcends all barriers. The calling of Matthew in particular is paradigmatic of the gospel. Furthermore, true discipleship is lived in the context of grace, rather than on the basis of rules and regulations. Those who come to Jesus enter into relationship with him and experience the life of obedience as “rest for your souls”.

#### **b. The commission to make disciples (Matt 28:18–20)**

In these verses the Gospel reaches its climax. Otto Michel was one of the first scholars to emphasise their significance for Matthew’s Gospel as a whole:

It is sufficient to say that the whole Gospel was written under this theological premise of Matt. 28:18–20. ... In a way the conclusion goes back to the start and teaches us to understand the whole Gospel, the story of Jesus, “from behind.” Matt. 28:18–20 is the key to the understanding of the whole book.<sup>31</sup>

In surveying New Testament scholarship since the important work of Michel, Bosch concludes that “today scholars agree that the entire Gospel points to these final verses: all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from chapter 1 onward, draw together here.”<sup>32</sup> There is only space for a few of those threads to be picked up here.

**Mission as making disciples** “Go and make disciples” (v 19 cf. 4:18–22; 9:6). This is the central command in the Great Commission. Only the verb “make disciples” is imperative in these verses. In the Greek, “go” as well as “baptising” and “teaching” are participles. It must be added however, that when a participle is dependent on an imperative, the participle takes on an imperatival emphasis, so that while making disciples is the main command, “going” must have some imperative force, given that the context of mission is to “all nations.”<sup>33</sup>

**Mission as making disciples through baptising** “Into the name” (v 19 cf. 3:13–17). Making disciples involves bringing people into a relationship with, or under the lordship of the Trinity.<sup>34</sup> The church community into which followers of Jesus are embraced is supposed to be “the dynamic expression of the character of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> Upon the foundation of a triune confession can be built a life of discipleship that grasps how we are called to love, serve, worship, and make known, the one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Mission as making disciples through teaching** “Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (v 20). The notion of teaching is an

important one for Matthew and is related to the understanding of the disciples. Understanding can only come through special revelation given by God and by the effective teaching of Jesus (see 16:5, 12; 17:13). A mark of true discipleship in Matthew is that disciples are *hearers* (and ongoing learners) of Jesus’ message. While in Luke’s Gospel the apostles are seen as eyewitnesses, Luz points out that in Matthew, disciples are those who have heard and understood the teaching of Jesus, making them earwitnesses.<sup>36</sup> To “make disciples” then involves teaching what Jesus taught so that others become earwitnesses also.

The reference in 28:20 to obeying everything Jesus commanded is an implicit reference to the Sermon on the Mount, and to the two-fold command of love towards God and neighbour in Matt 22:37–39. In this way, the essence of discipleship as outlined in Matt 5–7, entails living out the ethics of Jesus in word and deed. “Following” and “understanding” in discipleship involves an “active commitment that flows into deeds.”<sup>37</sup>

Baptism is about beginnings, but mission is more than getting people started; it involves bringing people to maturity in an on-going relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From Matthew’s perspective, mission

is a much wider, deeper and longer task than has filled the sights of some of those who think that a mission blitz can carry the gospel through the world or complete the task within a specific (usually short) time. It includes bringing people to the point of putting their trust in Jesus Christ; but goes on to encompass bringing them to mature, integrated, witnessing discipleship; it includes the development of their personal holiness of character; their enfolding into the church; and their personal and corporate commitment to revealing the kingdom, fulfilling the law and embodying in their own lives and in society the righteousness of the kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. The substance of discipleship in Matthew

##### a. A call to relational integrity

One of the significant aspects of discipleship in Matthew is that of community. Hagner has commented that Matthew is a “community book” written to address the issues facing Matthew’s church.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis on the “group idea” is seen in his use of *mathētēs* which in only three out of the seventy-three occurrences in the First Gospel is in the singular. Two of these are general references to the nature of discipleship and not to individuals following Jesus (Matt 10:24, 25, 42).<sup>40</sup> Being a disciple in “splendid isolation” is a foreign notion to Matthew. His primary focus is on the disciple being in relationship.

The verb *mathēteuō* used in 28:19 is found in only three places in Matthew (with one other occurrence in the NT in Acts 14:21). In each of the three occurrences in Matthew, the relational aspect of the disciple to Jesus (or “the kingdom of heaven”) is in view.<sup>41</sup> The disciple’s relationship with Jesus is a fundamental basis for relationships with other disciples. A key implication of the baptismal statement in 28:19, is that the community of the Trinity is to be reflected in the community of believers. France observes that discipleship “must involve membership of a community (“baptised into”) and a distinctive life-style (observing all that Jesus has commanded)” but understands these as stemming from “an antecedent acceptance of Jesus himself as master.”<sup>42</sup> As Bosch puts it, “Every disciple follows the Master, but never alone; every disciple is a member of the fellowship of disciples, the body, or no disciple at all.”<sup>43</sup>

The importance of the community dimension is further seen by the fact that Matthew’s Gospel is unique among the four Gospels with its two occurrences of the word *ecclesia* (“church”) at 16:18 and 18:17. Following Peter’s confession at 16:16, Jesus goes on to say that he will build his new community upon Peter. What is given to Peter in terms of authority

at 16:19, is given to the church at 18:18. Jesus envisages his disciples continuing to live in community and he therefore provides guidelines to that end in Matt 18, described as “the foundational manifesto” for the new community.<sup>44</sup>

The relational and community dimension to discipleship has many implications for the church in mission. Christopher Wright asserts “that in the New Testament the social nature of the church is a vital and integral part of the work of God in world ... it is in itself a part of the message.”<sup>45</sup> The final verses of Matthew’s Gospel point us to an understanding of the church as being God’s mission agent in reflecting the community of the Trinity.

##### b. A call to ethical distinctiveness

Disciples are to live out the ethical implications of their commitment to Jesus in the context of relationships. The ethics of the kingdom have implications for life in both the church and the wider world and the ethical demands of the kingdom are not optional, but a distinguishing mark of the life of the new community and proof of the disciples’s allegiance to Jesus (Matt 7:21–23).

Matthew underlines the ethical dimension of discipleship under two themes—love and righteousness, both of which are demonstrated within the context of relationships.

##### Love that transcends boundaries

Jesus’ calling of a diverse group of people, including a tax collector, to follow him, was paradigmatic of the new community Jesus was forming, and of the universal love and scope of the gospel which transcends social and political boundaries. All relationships are to be governed by love. According to Matthew, love is the greatest demand of the law (22:37–40) and encapsulates the ethical aspect of the life of discipleship as seen in the Golden Rule (7:12). Scot McKnight comments that “Love for the disciple is the love of God which manifests itself through the concrete behaviour shown to others.”<sup>46</sup> Illustrations of

the universal scope of God’s love are seen throughout the Gospel:

In his choice of certain women as part of the Messiah’s heritage (1:1–17), in his prompting of the Gentile Magi to be the first worshippers of the Messiah (2:1–12), in his choice of “Galilee of the Gentiles” as the arena of the Messiah’s ministry (4:12–16) and in his generating faith in the heart of the centurion (8:5–13) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (15:21–28). God’s universal love becomes the capstone of the entire Gospel as Jesus commands the eleven to disciple all nations (28:16–20).<sup>47</sup>

##### Justice-Righteousness: faith in action

In addition to love, Matthew demonstrates the ethical dimension of discipleship through the theme of righteousness—*dikaiosynē*. Dewi Hughes points out that although “it is possible to distinguish conceptually between being righteous and doing justice ... the two concepts are essentially inseparable, so that it is impossible to be righteous without doing justice, and vice versa.”<sup>48</sup> Bosch translates *dikaiosynē* in Matthew as “justice-righteousness”,

#### Matthew underlines the ethical dimension of discipleship under two themes—love and righteousness, both of which are demonstrated within the context of relationships.

interpreting it as “faith in action, the practice of devotion.”<sup>49</sup> Experiencing and receiving the gift of justice from God leads to the obligation to practice justice in relation to others. Blomberg has observed that this combination of grace and demand is part of Matthew’s concept of discipleship (cf. 8:10–13; 9:14–27) and as such combats the “twin heresies of workless faith and works-righteousness.”<sup>50</sup> The full significance of this ethical dimension to discipleship is lost if we fail to see *dikaiosynē* in the context of grace.

Both love and righteousness point to an important aspect of discipleship for Matthew and his church. It

involved the establishing of a new people of God, committed to the ethical demands of Jesus. Matthew puts no barrier between orthodoxy and orthopraxy—both are essential marks of discipleship and for the witness of the church.

##### c. A call to integral mission

Thirty years ago Waldron Scott proposed an understanding of mission as the establishment of justice. This, he said, was the central aim of the *missio Dei*, and this should be the context within which we understand what it means to “make disciples.”<sup>51</sup> In Scott’s words:

disciple making is the special mandate given to God’s people within the context of his overall mission, and that it is the primary means for fulfilling God’s mission of rectification in both its horizontal and vertical dimensions.<sup>52</sup>

This definition of making disciples is in keeping with what we find in Matthew—that discipleship includes both horizontal and vertical dimensions, brought together in the two-fold command to love God and neighbour. Bosch agrees: “To

love one’s neighbours means to have compassion on them ... and to see that justice is done.”<sup>53</sup>

True discipleship is not expressed as “an individualistic, privatistic, otherworldly ethic.”<sup>54</sup> It is a matter of following Jesus in a life of obedience and love, so that justice is brought forth in all relationships. A theology of mission from this perspective will take seriously the role of the church’s witness as a community in and through whom the good news is proclaimed and love is demonstrated in terms of justice and reconciliation. If the church understands itself in this way, then as a community of disciples it becomes



## Doing mission is contingent upon being in community.

a pattern of corporate life and a way of relating to one another which is a rejection of, and therefore a challenge to, the social and political structures of the world. In this way the Church's very existence becomes both prophetic and evangelistic. And in doing the works of God the Church repudiates the carnal weapons of the world (violence, force, deception, propaganda, manipulative technology) and employs the only weapons which, for it, are effective: truth, justice, peaceableness, faith, prayer and the Word of God.<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion: Matthew's discipleship doubles

The phrase that brackets Paul's letter to the Romans—"obedience of faith" (1:5; 15:18; 16:26)—finds a parallel in the obedience of discipleship in the Great Commission. Properly understood, from both the immediate context of Matthew's Gospel and the wider context of NT theology, "making disciples" is a comprehensive missional endeavour, encompassing those elements commonly associated with integral mission.

What does the obedience of discipleship imply in the Matthean context? It is *relational*, as we are brought into relationship with the Trinity, and with the community of fellow-disciples; it is *ethical*, or *contextual*, in the sense expressed by Vinay Samuel when he says that the call to discipleship in the NT is "a call to follow Jesus and join a community who took a stance in a context."<sup>56</sup> And our ethical distinctiveness is to be shaped both by what it means to live in the light of the kingdom of God now come in Jesus Christ and by what Matthew has to say about *doing* the will of God in the concrete circumstances of life, such as those spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount. Both the relational and ethical dimensions mean that discipleship in Matthew is intrinsically *missional*.

That missional identity at the heart of discipleship can be demonstrated in these doubles from Matthew's Gospel:

First, it demonstrates a double priority in the call to justice-righteousness. Both of these are kingdom priorities. To hunger and thirst for righteousness "is to long for people to be made righteous through the blood of Christ and that justice will be done for the poor. One cannot be more important than the other ... because the kingdom means the reign of righteousness/justice."<sup>57</sup>

Second, it highlights the double instruction in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. It is possible that at times "we give the Great Commission too prominent a place in our Christian thinking" in the sense that we need a whole Bible perspective on mission (as with any other subject), and that we need to pay attention to all the instructions that Jesus gives. There are two major instructions found in Matthew—the Great Commandment and the Great Commission: love your neighbour and go make disciples. Are these two identical? No. In a what has become a classic passage from his *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Stott writes:<sup>58</sup>

The Great Commission neither explains, nor exhausts, nor supersedes the Great Commandment. What it does is to add to the requirement of neighbour-love and neighbour-service a new and urgent Christian dimension. If we truly love our neighbour we shall without doubt share with him the good news of Jesus. How can we possibly claim to love him if we know the gospel but keep it from him? Equally, however, if we truly love our neighbour we shall not stop with evangelism. Our neighbour is neither a soulless body that we should care for its welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from

society. God created man, who is my neighbour, a body-soul-in-community. Therefore, if we love our neighbour as God made him, we must inevitably be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body and his community.<sup>59</sup>

Third, it points in a double direction, as the dynamic life of the disciple community flows both centripetally as well as centrifugally. In the OT, Israel's participation in God's universal mission and their relationship with the surrounding nations was contingent upon their relationship with Yahweh, and in turn, upon their relation with one another. In the NT, the centripetal aspect of mission remains crucial. This has often been overshadowed by the emphasis on the *go* of Matt 28:19. However, the calling of disciples to be part of the community of Jesus is the centripetal base from which centrifugal mission takes place. Those whom Jesus has called to follow him, are called to let the gospel be seen as well as heard from their community life, so that in continuity with the people of God in the OT, they are to be "a display-people, a showcase to the world."<sup>60</sup> *Doing* mission is contingent upon *being* in community.

Although it spoils the pattern of doubles in this conclusion, it is worth adding that the church's mission in Matthew is a tripartite interplay between "*speaking* (in particular, "teaching"), *practicing* and *being*.... All three intersect in the task of "making disciples", which is still central to our mission today. Matthew shows us that disciples are formed, not only by preaching and teaching, but also through example and by engaging in the practices of God's rule."<sup>61</sup>

Fourth, it informs us we have a double vocation to be salt and light (Matt 5:13–16). "The vision of the church as a visible community of salt and light" is, for Terence Donaldson, the "one aspect of Matthew's depiction of discipleship that is of crucial importance for the church today."<sup>62</sup> Our discipleship and mission must be prophetic and

counter-cultural. In these words of Jesus we have a call "to exert a double influence," and to discern in these two metaphors "the proper relation between evangelism and social action in the total mission of Christ in the world."<sup>63</sup> These two vocations should never be placed over against each other. They are one double vocation, combining the totality of our Christian social and evangelistic responsibilities in making the reality of God's reign seen and heard from the life of the church.

Matthew gives us a wonderfully complete picture of *whole-life* discipleship which forms the basis of his integral theology of mission. ☪

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 9, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Although there are more occurrences of *mathētēs* in John's Gospel, the concept does not take on the same theological significance as it does in Matthew.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 13 has been omitted in order to prioritise those passages which deal more explicitly with issues of discipleship, although I recognise that the theme of the kingdom is important in Matthew's theology and that the call to discipleship is also a call to enter the kingdom and embrace its values.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16 is also a significant discipleship passage in the Gospel, but its importance in terms of the cross and the themes of cost and suffering are considered from within the context of Matthew 10, rather than in a separate section.

<sup>5</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Dewi Hughes, *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World in Need* (Leicester: IVP, 2008), 127.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 188.

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 140.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 145.

<sup>10</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993), 283.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, Trans. J. Greig (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 669.

<sup>14</sup> Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 681–682.

<sup>15</sup> The references in verses 5–14 to "little children", are agreed by most commentators to be references to the disciples. See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Carson, "Matthew," and Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992). Contra Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*.

<sup>16</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 517.

<sup>17</sup> Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 191.

<sup>18</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 536.

<sup>19</sup> The criteria include hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, *Power and Poverty*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 379; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 746.

<sup>22</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, lxiv.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Weder, stressing the sovereignty of God in the call to follow, comments that "This call is the indication of the nearness of God, who anticipates the human search for him and unexpectedly and uninvited enters the human life." Hans Weder, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 208.

<sup>24</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 78.

<sup>25</sup> See France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Carlisle: Eerdmans, 1989), 262–263 for a discussion on the technical, literal, and metaphorical usage of *akolouthēō* in Matthew's Gospel.

<sup>26</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 240.

<sup>27</sup> Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 376. Stanton examines the way in which Matt 11:28 is used in the "comfortable words" of Cranmer's 1549 Prayer Book; words which follow the Absolution in the *Book of Common Prayer* service of Holy Communion. He also helpfully connects 11:28–30 with 28:16–20.

<sup>28</sup> Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 288.

<sup>29</sup> See the discussion in Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 321–323. Wisdom, in Sirach 51, issues the invitation to "draw near to me" and to "put your neck under the yoke" and by so doing to find "much rest" (Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 323). It is of course possible that Matthew had both the Jewish traditions about Moses and the Wisdom tradition in mind, with the latter as his primary influence. Also evident is an echo in v 29 to Jeremiah 6:16, where Yahweh says "ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

<sup>30</sup> Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 289.

<sup>31</sup> Otto Michel, "The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel: A Contribution to the History of the Easter Message," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton (London: SPCK, 1983), 35.

<sup>32</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Carson, "Matthew," 595.

<sup>34</sup> Carson, "Matthew," 597.

<sup>35</sup> Rose Dowsett, *Thinking Clearly About the Great Commission* (Eastbourne:

Monarch, 2001), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel of Matthew," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 105.

<sup>37</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 183.

<sup>39</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, lix.

<sup>40</sup> Leon Morris, "Disciples of Jesus," in *Jesus of Nazareth – Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 115.

<sup>41</sup> See Matt 13:52; 27:57, 28:19.

<sup>42</sup> Richard T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster and Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 262.

<sup>43</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos and Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), 171.

<sup>46</sup> Scot McKnight, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove and Leicester: IVP, 1992), 540.

<sup>47</sup> McKnight, "Matthew," 539.

<sup>48</sup> Hughes, *Power and Poverty*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Waldron Scott, *Bring Forth Justice: A Contemporary Perspective on Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), xvi.

<sup>52</sup> Scott, *Bring Forth Justice*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> David J. Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbur Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 234.

<sup>54</sup> Scott, *Bring Forth Justice*, 171.

<sup>55</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1977), 71–72.

<sup>56</sup> Vinay Samuel, *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship* (Bombay: A Build Publication, 1981), 56.

<sup>57</sup> Hughes, *Power and Poverty*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> Echoes of John Stott will be clear to those familiar with his work. I have borrowed the heading "double vocation" from his comments on salt and light found in *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1986), 30.

<sup>59</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987), 263.

<sup>61</sup> Dean Fleming, *Doing and Telling* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 100.

<sup>62</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Matthew," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48.

<sup>63</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Leicester: IVP, 1978), 65.





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## Discipleship and the Great Commission

It is mission Sunday, and as one walks into the church and glances at the bulletin, the decision is nearly made to turn right around and bolt. The guest speaker is going to speak on Matthew 28:16–20, again! How many times do we need to hear about the Great Commission? What more can be said? And while many missionary speakers have progressed from demanding that everyone should “go” and have begun to remind us that some of us need to stay in order to pray and pay, and OMF and other organizations have started to speak of “six ways to reach God’s world,”<sup>1</sup> we may feel that it’s just the same old same old. Somebody is trying to motivate us to get involved in mission. And they often do it in a way that is enough to make even a veteran missionary feel guilty that they went to the wrong people group or country. Enough is enough. A moratorium should be placed on preaching about the Great Commission. Or should it?

While Matthew 28 frequently provides the text for mission sermons, there was a time when this was not so. In fact, throughout most of church history the text did not function as an apologetic for mission involvement. The Reformers certainly didn’t use it that way, as they inherited the idea that the Great Commission was given to and fulfilled by Jesus’ apostles when they took to the gospel to the world of their time.<sup>2</sup> Not until William Carey wrote *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* did anyone attempt to demonstrate that Jesus’ command to the apostles was still in effect and should still be obeyed.<sup>3</sup> But even Carey neglected to point out that the church’s participation in the *missio Dei* should not

be built upon a small group of verses.<sup>4</sup> Even the recognition that a version of the Great Commission can be found in each of the Gospels and Acts (Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:4–8), isn’t enough to support a full-orbed mission theology.<sup>5</sup> That can only spring from broad scriptural support. And my aim in this paper is nowhere near that adventurous.

In what follows, we will examine Matthew 28:16–20 to see what it adds to our theology of mission. And even though it provides only one building block from which that theology will be constructed, it is a foundation stone that provides support for the others together and gives them strength. As the text wasn’t designed to foster guilt, I won’t go there. And I promise that I will try not to give just another humdrum recitation of the passage. I will, however, make use of what I generally believe to be a dreadful method of biblical exposition. The paper will follow the old preacher’s trick of structuring an outline around a series of Cs.<sup>6</sup> We will see how the *context* of the passage in Matthew’s Gospel helps us come to grips with why the author concentrated on Christ’s *claim*, Christ’s *command*, and Christ’s words of *comfort*.

### The context of the Great Commission

One of the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics is to interpret a text in its context. Matthew’s record of Jesus’ last command is not some random jotting of an event that took place in Galilee in the first century, but his concluding words in the book he wrote to show that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who had been promised from the beginning of time. Matthew begins the book with the words,

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). He then shows that the birth of this baby who had at least four questionable women in his ancestry qualifies to be called the Messiah.<sup>7</sup> In Matthew 2, the child who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and given the name Immanuel is worshipped by the Magi as the newborn King of the Jews. In chapter 3, Jesus is baptized by John, and recognized as the Son of God when the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. In chapter 4, Satan tempts Jesus by trying to get him to prove that he was the Son of God by performing miraculous feats for personal benefit. He also promises to give him the whole world in exchange for worship. As we will see below, this temptation is put into right perspective in Matthew 28. After overcoming Satan, Jesus begins his earthly ministry and picks some of the men whom he will train to carry on his ministry after him.

That is the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel. From chapter 4 until the middle of chapter 26 Matthew develops Jesus’ earthly ministry with its special focus on his proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven, all the while preparing to tell of his death which takes place in chapter 27. In the story that Matthew tells, Jesus is the Messiah, but not the one the Jews had wanted to free them from Roman oppression. To the contrary, he is killed by the Romans at the instigation of the Jewish rulers. The story does not, however, end with Jesus’ death.

Matthew 28 begins with Mary Magdalene and another Mary rising early to visit Jesus’ grave. Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels explain that they went to anoint Jesus’ body with spices and thus prepare it for burial. Matthew does not seem to be interested in why they went, but rather in what happened when they got to the tomb. There they saw an angel sitting on the stone that had once sealed the entrance. When the angel informed them that Jesus had risen from the dead, their hearts were filled with a mixture of fear and joy. How could this happen? In amazement, they ran off to tell the disciples what they had seen and on their way bumped

into Jesus. Hearing his greeting, “They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him” (Matt 28:9). Worship is, after all, the correct response when one meets the resurrected Christ. But their worship did not remove their fear, so Jesus comforted them by adding, “Do not be afraid,” and instructed them to “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt 28:10). The women clearly obeyed Jesus’ instruction, for in v 16 we find the disciples on the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.<sup>8</sup> And when they saw him, they responded in the same way as the women: they worshipped him.

This overview of Matthew reveals the context in which Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission. He was the King. He was worshipped as king when he was a baby. He came to lead people into the Kingdom of Heaven. He was crucified as King of the Jews (Matt 27:37, 42). He rose as King over death and was worshipped by the women and his disciples who recognized him as such. The Great Commission is closely bound to the ministry of Jesus and to his resurrection and the worship of those who saw him and believed in him. The command to make disciples is thus given to people who recognize who Jesus is and worship him as Lord and King.

### Christ’s claim

Jesus’ sovereign rule is an essential part of the discipleship process. Disciples can only be made because of who he is and what he has said should be done. Notice the stupendous claim he makes for himself in Matt 28:18. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” To have “all authority” implies sovereignty over everything. Jesus claims sovereignty over heaven. Jesus claims sovereignty over the earth. And though the text doesn’t explain it at this point, the Bible declares that his sovereignty can be seen in two ways. First, he is the ruler of the physical world. As the eternal creator God, he made everything and keeps everything going. Were it not for his creative power the universe would fall apart.

Second, he is sovereign over the spiritual world. Though the Magi worshipped him as “King of the Jews” (Matt 2:1–2) and he entered Jerusalem as the King “riding on a donkey”—a form of travel Zechariah prophesied would be used by the Jew’s king (Matt 21:5; Zech 9:9)—in his discussions with Pilate Jesus admitted being the King of the Jews (Matt 27:11) and is even identified as such on the cross (Matt 27:37), yet in John’s Gospel insists, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). While Jesus came to the earth to be King, he did not set up his throne in a backward corner of the Roman Empire. Rather, he came to set up a universal spiritual kingdom in human hearts. The authority claimed by Jesus is therefore a fulfillment of Dan 7:13–14 where we read that “one like a son of man” approached the Ancient of Days and “was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”<sup>9</sup>

As Jesus’ claim to all authority extends to the whole of creation, it demolishes Satan’s assertion that he could give the world to Jesus in exchange for worship. Jesus receives authority, not over just the world but everything, because the Father, not Satan, has the right to give it. So, while the Bible portrays Satan as “the prince of this world”, “the god of this age”, and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2), he is only a prince—a ruler with limited authority—and not the real king of the cosmos. God allows Satan to control part of the world for a limited time, but the real power, the real authority is Christ. And while Satan is a dangerous enemy, he received a serious setback in the wilderness and was overwhelmed at the cross. So, even though he may be on a long leash, he remains bound. Satan is only, as Luther understood it, “God’s devil”. As in the book of Job so in the rest of history, God sets limits on what Satan can do and will not permit him to do more than that.

So Christ’s claim to all authority is the foundation upon which the Great

Commission stands. For the disciples to be able to make disciples in Jesus' name, they needed to know that he was alive, that all authority had been given to him, and that he gave them the command and the power to do what he wanted. Had they not recognized Christ's authority, they would never have gone out and "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, ESV). Only a short time before they met Jesus on the mountain, the apostles were a most enfeebled and downcast lot. Everything they had pinned their hopes upon had been nailed to the cross and brutally destroyed. Could men in this state invent the resurrection? And even if they could concoct such a story, is it conceivable that they could have preached it with conviction? Only the authority of the resurrected Christ could give them the power they needed to venture out as apostles ("sent ones") and tell others about the man who had been killed but who came back to life to give everyone the hope of having a right relationship with God. Only the authority of the living Christ could ensure that the Great Commission would be fulfilled.

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## Being a disciple of Jesus means that one must relinquish all conflicting ties and allegiances and become wholly committed to him.

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### Christ's command

But Christ did have authority. He had *all* authority. So he had the right to send out his disciples to serve as his ambassadors. We have noted that the classic mission talk on the Great Commission focuses on the word "go". This is because our English translations all say something like, "go (or "go ye") and make disciples of all nations," and "go" is used in English as a command. The problem is that, as important as "go" is in the Commission, it is neither the main verb in this sentence, nor the most important thought. In Greek, the main verb is *mathēteusanta*, an aorist active imperative translated "make disciples". It is this imperative, this command, that lets us know what the Great Commission is

really all about. How does "go" fit in then? It, along with "baptizing" and "preaching", is a participle that is used to indicate *how* the disciples are to make disciples. They are to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. We will address these below, but will first address the issue of what it means to be a disciple. For unless we know what a disciple is, we will never be able to make them.

The Gospel of Matthew is very clear that being a disciple of Jesus is different from being a disciple of Moses or of John the Baptist or of anyone else. While it maintains the relationship of a student to a teacher, it goes much deeper.<sup>10</sup> This is radical discipleship in the sense that John Stott uses the term in his book, *The Radical Disciple*—it affects a person down to the roots and results in a thoroughgoing commitment to the one who is followed.<sup>11</sup> Being a disciple of Jesus means that one must relinquish all conflicting ties and allegiances and become wholly committed to him (Matt 4:22; 8:21–23; 10:37; 12:46–50). It means living out the paradox that

dying to this world through carrying one's cross is the way to life (Matt 10:38–39; 16:24–26). It means caring for little children in their need (Matt 10:42) and sharing what Jesus has multiplied with others (Matt 14:16, 19; 15:36). Being a disciple also means that one will receive power, authority, *exousia*, to drive out spirits and heal, and to make disciples (Matt 10:1; 28:19). And most of all, it means living out the kind of righteous life that Jesus modeled and taught about during his earthly ministry.

Disciples are not, however, perfect. While they follow Jesus, learn from Jesus, and do what he teaches them to do, they also express fear (Matt 8:26; 14:26) and doubt (Matt 14:31; 28:16), become indignant (Matt 20:24; 26:8), lack faith (Matt 8:26;

17:20), hold too high a regard for their own abilities (Matt 26:35) and continually misunderstand who Jesus is. This is why they need to hear that all authority has been given to Jesus before he tells them to go and make disciples. Without their teacher and Lord's presence and direction they could never make disciples. In fact, they need him to continue building them up as disciples and to work through them so that other disciples can be made.

Since Christ's final order was to make disciples, the Great Commission cannot be completed (in its fullest sense) until the job of making disciples is done. How then do we do it? Just how do we make disciples? Before we can make disciples, we must be disciples. Notice that Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the text. His command is for disciples to make disciples. As Köstenberger and O'Brien say, "successful disciple-making ... presupposes the committed discipleship of the disciple-makers themselves."<sup>12</sup> No one else can do it. Here is where I expect some of my readers to cry out, "But I have never been discipled, how can I disciple someone else." I can only respond by saying that being discipled and being *formally* discipled in a one-to-one relationship with a mentor or being led through a ten-lesson program is not the same thing. We have already seen some of what the Bible considers to exemplify the life of discipleship. Jesus gives us some more in his final earthly statements. If we want to know whether we have been discipled and how to disciple others, we would best listen to him.

Jesus sets out three elements that are inextricably bound with discipleship and all expressed by Greek aorist participles: going, baptizing, and teaching. One can hardly think of discipleship taking place without someone "going" to find those who need to be discipled and doing it. This has led some to conclude that the word translated "go" or "going" is a "participle of attendant circumstances" that indicates Jesus simply assumed that his disciples would "go" in order to make disciples.<sup>13</sup> The phrase

would thus be translated something like, "Therefore, as you go, make disciples." While this is possible, it seems more correct to allow the participle to take the force of the main verb upon which it is dependent and translate it as an imperative.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Jesus' disciples *are* commanded to go. But simply "going" isn't enough. The Great Commission requires that we go and *make disciples*. The following two participles give us keen insight into what this should look like.

According to Jesus, baptism is an indispensable element in discipleship. Its place in his explanation of how to make disciples gives us reason to consider it the first step in discipleship.<sup>15</sup> As they were familiar with the baptism of John, the disciples would naturally have understood Jesus to refer to a baptism of repentance that brought people into a right relationship with God. This can be seen in the response to Peter's Pentecostal sermon preached not many days later. When the people asked what they should do, Peter commanded them to "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Baptism is a biblical requirement for repentant, regenerate, people. From the time of Augustine, if not before, baptism was understood to be an outward and visible sign of an internal and spiritual grace conferred by Christ. It was a public and physical reenactment of what Jesus had done personally and spiritually.

When Jesus taught his disciples to make disciples by baptizing, he added two new concepts that added to their understanding that baptism was a sign of repentance. The first is that baptism is not to be reserved for the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, but extended to the whole world—"all the nations" should become his disciples and be baptized. The extent of *panta ta ethnē* has been widely discussed. Since the term is regularly used in the Bible (particularly the Septuagint) to refer to Gentiles as distinct from Jews, some commentators have seen here an explanation for the Matthean community to begin their mission to the Gentiles and end

outreach to Jews. This interpretation surely fails due to Jesus' command at the beginning of Acts that his disciples should "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and the fact that the apostles continued to preach to both Jews and Gentiles wherever they went.

The phrase took on a whole new life after Ralph Winter's address at the 1974 Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization where he began addressing *panta ta ethnē*, not in terms of countries but of peoples, and spawned the concept of people groups.<sup>16</sup> But while it has become a popular means for mobilizing missionaries to go reach and others to adopt and pray for unreached people groups, it is not possible to define *panta ta ethnē* in such pointed terms. As one of four main words used for people in the New Testament, *ethnos* "is the most general and therefore the weakest of these terms."<sup>17</sup> As stated above, it is generally used in the Bible for the Hebrew *goyim*, the Gentiles, that is non-Jews.<sup>18</sup> To define it in very explicit terms goes against general use. To define it as narrowly as happens in some discussions of people groups would make it incomprehensible to the original disciples. In the context it seems best to take *panta ta ethnē* as referring to all Gentiles and Jews. In other words, the Great Commission extends to everyone. Everyone should be discipled.

The second idea that Jesus added to the disciples' understanding of baptism is that new disciples were to be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> This Trinitarian formula found in the context of baptism reminds us that the Father and Spirit were present at Jesus' baptism and that those who are baptized should know that allegiance to and "experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship."<sup>20</sup> That disciples are baptized "into" God's name indicates that they belong to him as his personal possession.

Jesus' command to make disciples by baptizing them gives us reason to insist that all new believers be baptized. This does not imply that there is anything magical about the rite of baptism that makes one a real believer or a better believer. Such thinking reflects pagan superstition and must be rejected. However, as a disciple is to learn and obey Jesus' commands (Matt 28:20; John 14:15), their discipleship should be marked by baptism as it signifies that they have become members of the people of God. Baptism is therefore a kind of an initiation ceremony through which new believers enter into fellowship with all of Christ's disciples. Through baptism they acknowledge that they are part of the Christian community and are recognized by that community as true members. We should therefore encourage every new believer to be baptized.

But baptizing new believers is only one part of making disciples and once it is over it should never be repeated. The next step is to teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. The extent of this command isn't immediately clear. Does it refer to the things Jesus taught during his earthly ministry? Undoubtedly so. Could it possibly refer to something more than that, say like the whole of the Bible? Since the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:9), this is extremely possible. We know for sure that the early disciples continually demonstrated how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to the coming of Jesus. We also know that Paul told the Ephesian elders that he "did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, ESV). Everything needed to be taught. Everything needed to be understood. Everything needed to be obeyed.

A friend has said that he feels that if the two words "to obey" (NIV) or "to observe" (ESV) were removed from the Great Commission, most people would not realize anything was missing. But Jesus is not so much concerned that people come to understand some facts about him, or even learn what he said, but



that they obey, observe, all that he commanded. Jesus did not come merely to be the Savior who would forgive sins and make everything right. Jesus came to be the Lord who would be obeyed. Any disciple of Christ must accept him as Savior and Lord. It is impossible that he could be one without being the other.

The disciples were to make disciples because Jesus has all authority. They were to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. In a sense we can say that they were to make disciples who would make disciples in a ceaseless chain until he returns. And even though the messengers may have been weak (and still are), it is important to understand that with respect to the gospel, the condition of the messenger does not change the validity of the message. The disciples might fail, but “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen” of God’s law would fail (Matt 5:18).

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### **Just as Jesus’ authority required that they [his disciples] obey his command to make disciples, his presence comforted them so they would be willing to go anywhere to baptize new believers and to teach them everything they needed to know and do to live as members of God’s kingdom.**

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It is the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, not the preacher (Rom 1:16). This does not mean that the preachers of the gospel are not important or that their lives and actions don’t matter. It simply affirms that the one who possesses all power will use his finite and fallen people to make disciples for himself when his word is faithfully proclaimed and to help them grow in grace.

While the disciples are required to go and make disciples, their success is not dependent upon themselves, but upon the one who has all authority, the one who also promised to be with them forever, “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). This grounds bring disciples surety that people will turn to God and believe. Even so, success should not be measured by counting heads. Jesus instructed his disciples to make disciples, not

converts. Success should only be calculated according the measure that we have been faithful to the One who called us and commanded us to go and do his work. As Paul later wrote, some plant, and some water, but God causes all the growth (1 Cor 3:6). We do not need to count how many people we have led to the Lord. We need to obey his command, and trust him for great results.

### **Christ’s comfort**

We have thus far seen that the Great Commission is based on Jesus’ claim to have all authority which he expresses by giving his disciples a new command. In this final section, we want to see that he comforts them when they are very needy. Just a few weeks earlier the disciples had stood by while Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified. As a result, they all fled, not knowing what to do with themselves. And when they heard that he had come back from the dead, they could hardly believe

it. How could a dead man be alive again? That’s why their first sight of the risen Lord filled them with an incredible mixture of fear and joy.

And instead of laying a guilt trip on them for not being more faithful, Luke and John recall that Jesus greeted them by saying, “Peace be with you,” when he met his disciples in the upper room (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). Though Matthew (along with Mark) omits any reference to the Jerusalem appearances, he records other words of comfort spoken by Jesus in Galilee. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). We should not read these words too hastily as they unify Jesus’ earthly and heavenly ministries. At the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, the angel informed Joseph that Mary would

give birth to a boy conceived by the Holy Spirit and that he should give him the name Jesus. The Evangelist then recounts that this fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that a “virgin will be with child ... and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt 1:20–23). In Matthew 28, the one who would be called Immanuel was promising to be with them forever. What could be more comforting than that?

Just as Jesus’ authority required that they obey his command to make disciples, his presence comforted them so they would be willing to go anywhere to baptize new believers and to teach them everything they needed to know and do to live as members of God’s kingdom. But not long after Jesus said he would be with them forever, a very strange thing happened. He was taken up into heaven and the disciples never saw him again on this earth. How could he say that he would always be with them and then disappear into the clouds? Though Matthew felt no compulsion to comment, John’s Gospel informs us that on the night of the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that he would ask the Father to send *allos paraklēton*, “another Counselor” or Comforter to be with them (John 14:16–27).<sup>21</sup> The Greek word, *allos*, carries the idea of another of the same kind. Thus when Jesus spoke of “another Counselor”, he meant one who was of the same kind as himself. “The implication ... is that Jesus has performed the role of a Paraclete during his earthly ministry, and after his departure he will ask the Father to send another Paraclete to perform a like ministry for his disciples.”<sup>22</sup> As Jesus explained on the night of his betrayal, his departure was essential. While Jesus was on earth in his physical body he could only be at one place at a time. But when he returned in the form of the Holy Spirit he would be with all believers at the same time no matter where they went to make disciples. This is truly a source of great comfort and joy.

But is this a word of comfort that was intended solely for the first generation of believers? Although interpreters before Carey thought so, it seems clear from the context

that the answer is “no”. Jesus told his disciples to make disciples “to the end of the age”, that is, until he returns to the earth. Since the first generation of disciples clearly would not be present until the end, each generation must obey Christ’s command to make new disciples. Disciples are to make disciples who will make more disciples. It is the job of all Christians in all ages to fulfill the Great Commission. And though some will have particular spiritual gifts of evangelism or teaching or whatever, the Commission is given to everyone who is a disciple of Christ.

But how do we do this? Just how do we make disciples? Is it a matter of taking someone through an Alpha Course or Christianity Explored or some Navigators’ material in a one-to-one or small group setting? While it may include one or more of those things, making disciples is fundamentally our recognition of the one who said he has all authority as our King, and obedience to his command by going, baptizing new believers, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus taught. To make disciples we will have to make good use of our time and relationships, believing that they are all important to Christ our Lord. As Jesus came to the world to reconcile men to himself, we too need to enter the world to “beg” (using Paul’s word in 2 Cor 5:20) that others be reconciled to God and then do whatever we can to help them along this life-long journey. As Christ’s Great Commission so clearly teaches us, the job of making disciples requires that we do not sit back and focus on our problems, but focus on Christ and his power and authority, his command to “go and make disciples,” taking firm hold of his comforting words that he will be with us until the end of the age. ☸

### **NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> The six ways are: learn, pray, go, send, welcome, and mobilize. See <http://omf.org/us/6-ways/> and <https://class.perspectives.org/psp/sixways.html> (accessed 19 August 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> J. Herbert Kane, *Understanding Christian Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 140.
- <sup>3</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792).

<sup>4</sup> Chris Wright points out that putting “all your apologetic eggs in one textual basket” is an extremely weak practice, particularly if the handle breaks and you discover that the text has been used to support ideas about mission that just aren’t there. Chris Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 34–38.

<sup>5</sup> Though he believes that it “reflects the same understanding as the rest of the Gospel,” questions about the originality of Mark’s ending prompt Bosch to locate the Great Commission in Mark 13:10. David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 69–70.

<sup>6</sup> An aspiring preacher of the passage might want to consider another potential outline for the passage: all authority, all nations, all things, and always. Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 331. Lest one thinks the “always” makes this foursome a bit artificial, the same Greek adjective is in *pasas tas hēmeras* (lit. “all the days”) as in the others.

<sup>7</sup> At least three of the women—Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth—were Gentiles and the unnamed Bathsheba was, if not a Gentile herself, the wife of the named Gentile, Uriah. While one would not expect to find such women in the Messianic line, they are in David’s line as much as they are in Jesus’. And all of them had what can only be termed an unnatural relationship with the father of the child who would be the Messiah’s ancestor. This reality would silence any talk that Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah because of Mary’s history.

<sup>8</sup> The gathering in Galilee could be a significant fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew had earlier called attention to Isaiah’s prophecy that honor would come to “Galilee of the Gentiles” where people walking in darkness would see a great light (Matt 4:15–16; Isa 9:1–2 [Heb.: 8:23–9:1]). In Matt 28, Jesus gathers his disciples in Galilee of the Gentiles (*ethnōn*) where he commands them to make disciples of the nations (*ethnē*). The land of the Gentiles thus becomes the starting point of the Gentile mission. Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, BST (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 321. A somewhat different position can be found in Peter Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16–20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 24–27.

<sup>9</sup> Note the correspondence between Matt 28 and the LXX of Dan 7. Both passages present the Messiah as having authority (*exousia*) over all the nations (*panta ta ethnē*) and reigning for all time.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch helpfully explains the differences between the relationship Jesus had with his disciples and the relationship contemporary Jewish rabbis had with theirs. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll:

Orbis, 1991), 36–39.

<sup>11</sup> John Stott, *The Radical Disciple* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Andraes J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos and Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 104.

<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, “going” is a precondition for making disciples and baptizing and teaching are the way to do it. Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16–20,” 19.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 34–35.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps we should say this is the first significant step in discipleship. It is clear from the Gospels that many people followed Jesus around as disciples who did not accept him as Messiah or the Son of God. Some who were counted as disciples fell away when the going got tough. Jesus is here giving instructions about what his disciples should do when making disciples.

<sup>16</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The Highest Priority: Cross-cultural Evangelism,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 213–225. A more developed examination of people groups can be found in Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19 (Winter 2002): 15–25. This article presents four different ways of looking at people groups: blocs of people categorized according to culture or interest (“affinity”), ethnolinguistic background, or as sociopeoples who share common interests, activities, or occupations, and unimax peoples who are said to be the maximum sized group who can be unified in a people movement.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “ἔθνος,” *TDNT*, 2:369. The other terms are *phulē* (a people united by nationality, or descent [commonly used to refer to the tribes of Israel]), *laos* (a people united politically and historically), and *glōssa* (a people united linguistically).

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt says that some 100 of the 160 times the term appears in the New Testament it refers to Gentiles as distinct from the Jews (or Christians). Schmidt, “ἔθνος,” 370.

<sup>19</sup> Though some modern scholars insist that the Trinitarian language could not have come from early church circles, the textual evidence is unanimous in its favor.

<sup>20</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 414–415.

<sup>21</sup> Notice that this promise to send the Comforter concludes with words of comfort. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

<sup>22</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 256. Paraclete is a transliteration of the Greek word translated “Counselor” in the NIV. Jesus is called the Paraclete in 1 John 2:1 (though the word is lost in the NIV; see other translations that regularly use “Advocate” here).





**Richard Cho** was born in Korea but grew up in Australia. He is married to Lisa and they have four children. They moved to Thailand with OMF in 2007 and were initially involved in church planting. In December 2013 they joined the staff at the J. O. Fraser Centre.



**Jim McIntosh and Linda McIntosh** met at Cornerstone Community, a Discipleship Centre, in their home country of Australia. They married in 1997 and have five children. After ten years of dairy farming, the whole family moved to north Thailand in 2008 to take over from Ted and Nell Hope at the J. O. Fraser Centre. They have enjoyed watching God develop the Centre from its beginning stages and seeing the number of staff and students grow.

## Discipleship at the James O. Fraser Centre

How does a dairy-farming family from Australia with little formal theological education end up establishing a discipleship-based Bible college in Northern Thailand? That is a mystifying question. Yet, God knew that they were exactly the right people for the mammoth task before them. With 150 machete-wielding tribal people, they transformed an abandoned resort overrun by the jungle into what is now known as the James O. Fraser Centre (JOFC).

### Background

For years, the Lisu Leaders from Myanmar and Thailand had wanted help from OMF to provide their young leaders with accredited theological qualifications, English language skills, and vocational training so they could send out self-supported evangelists. Ted and Nell Hope, who had been pioneer missionaries to the Lisu in Thailand since the 1950s, came out of retirement in their late 70s to help. The vision was to see Lisu and other people groups spiritually, theologically, and practically equipped to live as vibrant Christians and reach out in mission within and beyond their own people group. In 2008, the present site in Chiang Dao, North Thailand was purchased and named the James O. Fraser Centre (JOFC) after the first CIM missionary to the Lisu. But since Ted and Nell Hope were seeking to return home from the mission field, they needed someone to carry on the vision for JOFC.

Jim and Linda McIntosh had owned and run a dairy farm in Australia for ten years when God called them to move

their family of five children to Thailand. Having previously studied at Cornerstone Community, a biblical discipleship training centre in the outback of Australia, they always knew in their hearts that God wanted them to make disciples and send them out to do mission. They felt that the best way to train the students at JOFC was to combine an in-depth spiritual foundation, with quality training in functional English.

### Effective discipleship requires a limited number of students

Since discipleship is very time consuming, we have limited student numbers at JOFC to ensure we can disciple them effectively. The JOFC began in 2009 with one missionary family and eight students. Over time, as student numbers increased, God brought additional staff members to JOFC. Currently we have three missionary families, one Thai family, and a Lisu student who has completed the course on the teaching staff along with thirty-five students.

### How is JOFC different?

What makes JOFC different from many other Bible Schools within Thailand and elsewhere is the centrality of discipleship in the training program. The model of discipleship we aspire to is that of Jesus and his disciples. Although Jesus had many disciples, his focus was on the twelve with whom he lived and who he taught, not in a classroom, but as life happened. There are five essential aspects of the discipleship program at JOFC.

### 1. Community

All the staff and students at JOFC are required to live together in community. Worship, meals, social times, and accommodation are in the context of Christian community. After a few weeks living in community, there are no facades. People cannot hide and their true character is soon revealed. The goal of portraying all of life as spiritual is achieved when students and staff live side by side. Staff and senior students have the opportunity to model walking in the spirit, resolving conflicts, managing time and resources, exercising people skills, and living out their family relationships.

### 2. Mentors

As part of discipleship, students are assigned a mentor who will teach, guide, and pray with them. The mentor is a staff member or a more senior student who has been disciplined this way and is currently meeting with a mentor. This structure allows a level of accountability within the whole community and provides a relational way to approach personal character and discipline issues. The meetings take place once a week and intentionally meet in different places, such as under a shelter, in a house, at a cafe, at the market, and driving in the car. The purpose is to engage in deep spiritual conversations and prayer in many contexts in life. This then becomes a reproducible model that students can continue in their different contexts after JOFC.

### 3. Work

Whilst dependent upon the Lord's provision, the Centre aims to be semi self-sufficient in areas such as growing rice, vegetables, and other crops, engaging in building and community aid projects, and in cooking and cleaning. This work environment provides a "real life" opportunity to put into practice biblical principles being studied. Work is where a person's true character is revealed. Work also provides opportunities to develop vocational skills and develop work ethics. And as is really important in Eastern cultures, this kind of work places staff and students on the same

level. By working alongside each other, they model Jesus' servanthood and humility.

### 4. Study

After worshipping together each week-day morning, students are taught in a classroom or small group setting. All students start with the two-year discipleship and functional English program. The basics of the Christian life—such as having time alone with God and prayer—are covered in the beginning. This is important, as it helps us discover that some students are not actually Christians and

**Rice-planting week is integral to the "whole of life" discipleship vision of JOFC. It is as we get muddy and dirty, hot and tired, as our bodies ache and we don't want to do it anymore, that we see true character come out—both in the staff and the students.**

ensures that the right foundations are in place. Those who complete the initial course and have demonstrated appropriate character, a heart to serve God, and who have attained an appropriate level of English, are invited to study the two-year theological course in English.

Although some people question teaching English to the students, as the majority come from a tribal background with hardly any resources in their own language, it was felt that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages.<sup>1</sup>

### 5. Mission

Students are involved in mission activities throughout the course. We want to see people actively sharing their faith and discipling others, so we model and practice it throughout the entire time they study at JOFC. Students are sent to surrounding villages to teach and minister. We have planted a new church in a local village that enables students to be involved in weekly meetings and disciple new believers during the week. Each term break, evangelism trips are organised and senior students are sent across borders into other countries for months at a time.

### Whole of life discipleship

The concept, "whole of life" discipleship is foundational to what we do at JOFC. We believe that students will learn as much outside of the classroom as inside. Rice planting is a good example of what we mean by "whole of life" discipleship. Each year at planting time, we stop classes and all the staff and students go to the rice fields for a week of rice planting. By the end, we are more tired and sore than we have ever been in our lives. Surely

there must be a more efficient way of growing rice. A search on Google shows that, yes, machines that can speed up the process of planting rice do exist!

However, at JOFC, we wouldn't invest in such a machine even if we had the money. Rice-planting week is integral to the "whole of life" discipleship vision of JOFC. It is as we get muddy and dirty, hot and tired, as our bodies ache and we don't want to do it anymore, that we see true character come out—both in the staff and the students. It is much easier to hide your true self in the classroom behind correct theological answers, than working out on the rice fields.

We don't just send the students to do the hard manual labour while we sit at our desks preparing for our next classes. As teachers, we lead the way and set the example. The long,





**A crucial aspect for discipleship is the heart of the discipler and their commitment to discipling other people. JOFC staff need to be proactive about entering the lives of the people they are discipling. They need to get out of their own home/life/world and enter that of the students as best they can.**

monotonous hours of pulling and planting provide opportune times to chat and for students and staff to open up to each other.

At one evening worship session at the end of another tiring rice planting day, one of the teachers stood up and openly apologised, asking forgiveness from two students whom he had spoken strongly to in the rice field. He encouraged everyone to go and seek forgiveness from anyone else if they needed to. This is what “whole of life” discipleship is about—through rice planting trials, together we see our need for humility, forgiveness, and fresh starts.

**The importance of relationships and the heart of the discipler**

One could easily replicate each aspect of the discipleship program at JOFC elsewhere, by living in community, worshipping, working, and ministering together, yet still not experience true discipleship.

A crucial aspect for discipleship is the heart of the discipler and their commitment to discipling other people. JOFC staff need to be proactive about entering the lives of the people they are discipling. They need to get out of their own home/



life/world and enter that of the students as best they can. They need to build trust and care and also invite that student into their own lives and share with them.

This part of the program takes time, more time than is given to formal teaching. At JOFC, there are no “clock off” times; all of life is shared. That does not mean there is no personal time, rest time, or family time, but these important areas of life are worked out in the context of community.

Therefore, for staff at JOFC having a real, personal, and genuine relationship with the Lord that shines in every area of their life is more important than any training in evangelism, church planting, gospel sowing, leading worship, or teaching. From their love and intimacy with the Lord Jesus, will spring their ministry. In order to see the vision reached, staff must live it everyday and see it reflected in their students.

**Five years on**

JOFC has been in operation for five years now. We can see great strengths in the discipleship program and some drawbacks.

**Teachability:** Whilst God has dramatically transformed many students, there are some students who are not willing to surrender their will to the Lord. As JOFC life is in community, it does not take long to reveal students’ teachability and willingness to let the Lord change them. Sadly, some students leave of their own accord because

this environment becomes too uncomfortable. Students who have “tests” put before them are forced to choose an option that brings them to surrender or they have to leave. So far, each student who has left JOFC has done so according to their own choice, but it has been in direct relation to their own response to the Lord’s call to obedience in an area of their life.

**Language:** Ideally, discipleship would be so much easier if we all spoke the same language and had a better understanding of the student’s culture. (The main teaching is done in English and Thai, though for many their heart languages are Lisu, Lahu, Burmese, Karen, or Akha).

**Artificial context:** Some people think it is better if we keep the students in their own communities and see discipleship happen there within their own churches. However, at JOFC the vision is specifically to train tribal students to cross borders culturally, linguistically, and geographically to take the gospel to the unreached. Even though we have had to work within the context and constraints we find ourselves in, it actually is conducive to our vision.

Despite these drawbacks, we can see the fruit of the discipleship program here. There are students who give great cause for joy and praise! There is a faithful core group of students who have continued further in their theological studies and are actively involved in local churches, teaching and discipling. They have spent months at a time in other countries teaching in the three-month Lisu Bible Schools. Materials that students have studied and helped develop at JOFC have been translated and then taught to others. Students have a clearer and deeper understanding of the gospel. One Bible study that explains the gospel and teaches about having a daily relationship with God has been used to train over 1,000 Lisu in three different countries.

JOFC students are noted for their genuine Christlike character and their depth of Bible teaching. Some JOFC students are marked as people

who are ready to forsake their lives and trust the Lord in his work even without any guarantee of financial support or personal safety. Already there are a group of JOFC students who resemble New Testament disciples in that many of them aren’t well schooled and come from farming backgrounds. They don’t fit the typical “middle class intellectual” mold of graduates coming out of many Bible schools in the west. They leave transformed and passionate to see the lost saved.

One student, Boaz (pseudonym), came to JOFC with a hidden agenda to learn English so he could set up a gem stone trade from within the heart of Myanmar. Boaz soon understood the gospel clearly and the Lord took hold of him. As he was being disciplined and studying, Boaz became involved in local evangelism and missions. He made several mission trips into Myanmar and earlier this year was asked to teach in a Lisu Bible School. From the hundred plus students, Boaz prayed and chose a core group of young men that he invested himself in. Each weekend he would take them out to Shan villages and share the gospel with people who had never heard this wonderful message. At the end of the three-month course, Boaz selected ten young men and led them from village to village sharing the gospel for a whole month. On the weekends, they would visit Lisu churches to encourage them and ask them to pray for their mission. Boaz has returned to JOFC to continue theological studies and take part in local mission.

**Conclusion**

JOFC is a blessing, not just to the Tribal groups in Thailand, Myanmar, and China, but also to the OMF missionaries and short term workers who have the privilege of serving the Lord in this context. JOFC will be a blessing to the peoples of SE Asia as the gospel is taken to remote and unreached places by people who have understood the gospel, been well disciplined, and are able to pass on what they have learned. Just as in 2 Tim 2:1–2, by God’s grace

**Just as in 2 Tim 2:1–2, by God’s grace JOFC desires to see four and more generations of evangelization and discipleship taking place reflecting the key elements of community, study, personal mentoring, work, and mission, and adapt this to any context to facilitate discipleship in all areas of life, as Jesus did.**

JOFC desires to see four and more generations of evangelization and discipleship taking place, reflecting the key elements of community, study, personal mentoring, work, and mission, and adapt this to any context to facilitate discipleship in all areas of life, as Jesus did. 🌀

**NOTE**

<sup>1</sup> At its conception, JOFC was intended to provide education for Lisu from Myanmar. Their leaders requested that English be used as it would raise theological standards and open doors for vocational positions teaching English. This reasoning was acceptable to Ted and Nell Hope and made even more sense when other tribal groups were added to the picture. Thai was rejected as many students were from Myanmar and did not have good Thai, and the missionaries’ Thai was not adequate to teach in that language. Similarly, use of one tribal language would restrict students to that particular tribal group. Since the students came from different tribes, spoke various languages, and would become gateway people into the unreached people groups of Myanmar, China, and Thailand, the vision embraced students from several countries who partnered with Western churches and missionaries, using English as the common language.

The benefits of an English education are that students gain access to a wealth of theological resources that are predominately in English. Thai has very limited theological resources and almost nothing exists in the tribal languages. English also helps students interact with other



missionaries when they work cross culturally and allows graduates to teach English and thus provide themselves with a source of income while they do ministry.

The major disadvantage is the difficulty in getting the majority of the students to a level where they really benefit from the theological resources available in English. And even if they reach this level of English, the question arises whether once they leave, their English will deteriorate to a point where they won’t be able to use the resources (like many Greek and Hebrew students after they leave Bible college). Another problem is that some students are motivated to come to study English rather than be disciplined.

## Josiah James

has been serving with OMF in a Muslim-majority country in Southeast Asia since 2010. He teaches Old Testament at a rural Bible college, and Bible, mission history, and missiology at a mission training school. His wife, Abigail, is involved in evangelism. They have two young children.

## ✦ Discipling through Worldview-changing Bible Study

Discipling national believers is a key part of OMF's mobilization strategy to reach the unreached. However, in our country, mobilizers face significant challenges related to believers' worldview and spiritual bondage. What does successful discipleship require in these circumstances? How can these challenges be overcome?

### Gideon's story: "my people are in spiritual bondage"

I teach the Old Testament at a rural Bible college where students train for full-time pastoral ministry or mission. The college is about a two hour drive from the large, Muslim-majority city where my family and I live. And so when Gideon, one of my final-year students, asked me after class if he could get a ride with me to the city, I knew we'd have time for a nice long chat.

The country where we serve is strongly majority Muslim, but there are some Christian-majority pockets. Gideon comes from one of these.

As we wended our way through the rice fields, I asked Gideon to tell me more about his background: "What's the spiritual climate like in your home village?"

"My people are in spiritual bondage," Gideon replied. "They identify as Christian, and attend church, but most of their time and energy is devoted to serving the local spirits—seeking power, blessing, or protection."

"How do your local church leaders respond to this?" I inquired. "Do they help people with this spirit-enslavement problem?"

"No," replied Gideon. "They are also enslaved. In fact, the pastor of my church doubles as one of the local witchdoctors. He preaches from the Bible on Sundays, and then casts spells and curses from Monday to Saturday."

"What was it like to grow up in that spiritual environment?" I asked.

"Tense," said Gideon. "You're always worried about where the next spiritual attack might come from, and how to counter it. When I was ten, my father died. My mother suspected that my uncle was responsible—that he had cursed my father. And so this led to a huge family rift, much hatred, and lots of threats of revenge."

"Were you caught up in this?"

"Yes, I spent many years hating my uncle and dreaming of revenge," he replied.

"What about the bondage to the spirits?" I asked. "Were you caught up in that too?"

"When I arrived at Bible college four years ago, I was under their power. I feared them and obeyed them. In fact, at one point during my first year as a Bible college student, I was demon-possessed. Over and over again, I heard an evil voice telling me I should kill my fellow students."

### Spiritual bondage: a common problem

Gideon's background is not uncommon. Many students arrive at Bible college

with a history of enslavement to the powers of darkness. Some arrive with magic amulets which they have been given by their families, pastors, or witchdoctors to protect them on the journey. Demon possession on campus is not uncommon. Fear is, for some, a daily reality. Recently, two students returned from a two-month field placement where it was intended that they do evangelism. No evangelism happened because they were paralyzed by fear; not fear that the local people might reject the gospel, but rather fear of a ghost they saw the first night they arrived. One of these future pastors said he was so afraid that he cried.

My goal in teaching at this Bible college is to mobilize and equip national Christians to share the good news of forgiveness and freedom through Christ to the unreached people of the country. But clearly, these national Christians first need to know and experience this freedom themselves before they can take the good news to others. What will effective discipleship look like in their lives?

### How should we disciple the spiritually-enslaved?

In my experience, most people from a background like Gideon's (where the local religion is a syncretistic mix of Christianity and animism) have received one of two teachings about spirit-worship:

1. Some, like Gideon, are taught that it is acceptable. They are taught that they can both confess Jesus as Lord, and at the same time call upon the witchdoctor for spiritual protection and power.
2. Others are taught that spirit-worship is prohibited. These people are told by their church leaders that "Christians are not allowed to go to the witchdoctor, or make offerings to the spirits, or perform traditional crop-fertility rituals."

From what I have observed, both approaches are ineffective at freeing someone from spiritual enslavement.

Openly permitting spirit-worship certainly does not produce freedom, but neither does simply prohibiting it. Prohibiting spirit-worship does nothing to remove fear of spiritual attack, but instead simply gives rise to underground spirit-worship or spirit-worship disguised as Christian worship.<sup>1</sup>

My students don't need to be told that they *shouldn't* make offerings to the spirits or call on their help. Rather, they need to see that once they are in Christ, they *don't need to*. They need to grasp the very good news that their Lord Jesus is more powerful than the spirits that they fear, that he has already won a victory over them, and that the benefits of his victory are available now through faith.<sup>2</sup>

## In Genesis 1, Gideon discovered that God is above all other powers and authorities, including the spirits he had spent his life fearing. This was truly radical for Gideon.

Gideon's transformation illustrates this.

### Gideon's experience: deep worldview change through studying the Bible

The drive to the city continued, and so did my conversation with Gideon. We left the rice fields behind us and approached the smog and the traffic jams.

"How about now, Gideon? Do you still fear the spirits?" I asked.

"No," he said calmly. "Praise the Lord, now I am free."

"Praise the Lord!" I agreed. "Tell me, how were you freed? What happened?"

Gideon thought for a moment, and then said: "Actually, a lot of it happened in our Old Testament classes with you, sir."

"How?" I asked. "Do tell me!"

In the hour that followed, Gideon described his journey to spiritual freedom. He didn't report any

spectacular events. Rather, he described a gradual process of deep worldview change brought about through studying the Bible over a period of two years.

What did Gideon discover in our Old Testament classes? Here are three things:

### (1) Genesis 1—God is above all other powers

Gideon grew up believing in a whole raft of local spirits with varying levels of power and authority over different places and domains. If a particular spirit's power was accessed to place a curse, the cursed individual would need to call on a more powerful spirit for protection. The prevailing cosmology in

Gideon's village is actually quite similar to the prevailing cosmology at the time Genesis was written. The Babylonians, Egyptians, and Canaanites also believed in a complex system of gods that possessed *relative* power and that needed to be appeased and persuaded in order to gain protection and blessing.<sup>3</sup>

Many Old Testament scholars think that the creation account in Genesis 1 was intentionally crafted to refute these prevailing cosmologies.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, Genesis 1 is a very powerful text for someone from Gideon's background.

When Gideon studied Genesis 1, he did not encounter the complex system of spiritual entities with *relative* power that he grew up believing in. Rather he met the one true God who has *absolute* power. This one true God created all things completely unopposed and rules his creation completely unopposed. In Genesis 1, Gideon discovered that God is above all other powers and authorities, including the spirits he had spent his life fearing. This was truly radical for Gideon.



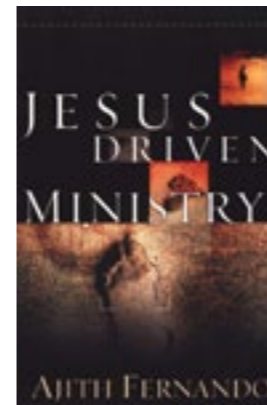
# Book Recommendations

## Discipleship

### Jesus Driven Ministry

By Ajith Fernando. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002. ISBN 1581344457.

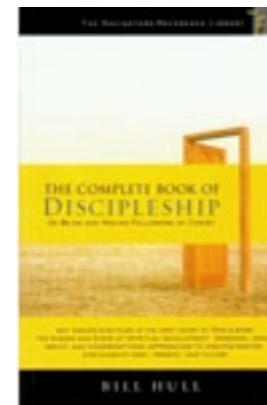
This book ignites one's desire for growth in personal discipleship and ministry. Ajith Fernando bases his writing on Jesus' model of ministry and unpacks its relevance to us as his disciples. Focusing on basics—the Spirit's empowering, God's affirmation, Word saturation, prayer, discipling younger leaders—with validation from Scripture and personal and practical life stories, the author leads his readers to a Jesus driven discipleship and ministry. Fernando's long-standing example as a follower of Christ makes this book an authentic aid for all on the journey of "Christ being formed in you". Leaders, pastors, missionaries, and ministry workers would find *Jesus Driven Ministry* a valuable resource in their own discipleship and in discipling others.



### The Complete Book of Discipleship

By Bill Hull. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006. ISBN 1576838978. Reviewed by Timothy Pang.

The title of this self-acclaimed "complete" book might leave some skeptical, others critical. However, those familiar with Hull's work as a discipler of disciplers will quickly recognize the value of this comprehensive examination of the topic. The book's central thesis is well expressed in the quote from Bonhoeffer: "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ." To show that this is true, Hull lays the biblical foundations, considers historical origins, and gives practical examples of discipleship, before marking the distinguishing features, environments, and stages of discipleship and its associated spiritual transformation and disciplines. He further surveys individual approaches to discipleship and the role of small groups, congregations, and pastors in the process. His final chapters focus on spiritual generations and the future of discipleship.



Hull's book is not an easy read, but a reference manual in which each chapter provides a unique take-home lesson with several learning points. We are here challenged, not simply to teach Christians to become disciples by obeying Jesus' words, way of ministry, and imitating his life and character, but to personally submit ourselves to those who teach us about Jesus and pass this attitude on to others. Church planters are helpfully challenged to discern how they can disciple disciple-makers. This book gives helpful insights, perspectives, and action steps towards presenting everyone fully mature, complete in Christ.

### Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament

By Richard N. Longenecker. Carlisle: Eerdmans, 1996. ISBN 0802841694. Reviewed by Peter Rowan.

Many Christians associate the theme of discipleship with the Four Gospels. However, in this excellent book edited by Richard Longenecker, the rich theme of discipleship is explored in each book of the New Testament. Although written by NT scholars, this is not a book for academics alone. Here is a highly accessible treatment on discipleship from which pastors, teachers, and all students of the Word, serious about following the Lord Jesus, will gain much benefit. Each essay identifies the key characteristics that help shape what discipleship to Jesus Christ looks like in each NT context being addressed. In doing so, the authors give us something of a potted summary of the theology of each individual book. They also help us to appreciate the contextual nature of discipleship.



For me, stand-out chapters include those on Matthew and James, with the latter giving an exposition of two discipleship issues at the forefront of James' mind throughout his letter: the discipleship of the wallet, and the discipleship of the tongue. As Gordon Fee says, this turns out to be "A useful, often thought-provoking collection of essays by careful New Testament scholars on a very timely subject."

### (2) 1 Kings 12—God won't be two-timed

In 1 Kings 12:26–31, King Jeroboam builds two golden calves and tells his subjects that they can worship God at the sites of these calves, rather than going all the way to the temple in Jerusalem. He also builds shrines in high places.

By doing this, Jeroboam initiates syncretism in Israel—a mixture of Yahweh worship and the local Canaanite worship.<sup>5</sup> Jeroboam's syncretism and the syncretism of Gideon's home village have much in common. Both combine worship of the God of the Bible with worship of local deities.

And so when we studied the Book of Kings in class, Gideon was rebuked when he discovered what happens after Jeroboam erects these calves

According to Gideon's previous worldview, different spiritual authorities compete against one another for power, and no single spirit exercises absolute authority in every realm. And so Gideon always felt vulnerable to the attack of a hostile spirit and uncertain as to whether such an attack could be countered.

But in Job 1–2, Gideon discovered in a new way that the God of the Bible is sovereign over all spiritual powers. He was astonished to see that even Satan himself could not inflict harm on Job without first getting God's permission to act.

This was very good news for Gideon. He no longer had to fear unauthorised spiritual attacks from evil spirits. God, his God, is in control of the evil spirits.

### Exposing believers to the word of God is, I believe, the very best way we can disciple and mobilize them to fully surrender to Christ, and in doing so, to hold out the good news to the lost.

and shrines: "the sin of the house of Jeroboam" causes all Israel to sin, and ultimately leads to Israel's downfall, exile, and rejection by God.<sup>6</sup>

When Gideon studied the book of Kings, he discovered that worshipping at a shrine is not merely a harmless way to gain extra blessing or protection, but rather an act of unfaithfulness to the one true God which arouses his anger. When Gideon studied Kings, he discovered that God won't be two-timed, and that religious syncretism is a spiritually fatal condition.

### (3) Job 1–2—God is in control of the evil spirits

In Job 1 and 2, Satan wants to inflict suffering on Job to prove that Job's uprightness is actually selfishly motivated. God agrees to test Job in this way, and so grants Satan permission to inflict the suffering.

### The fruit of Bible-engendered worldview change: freedom to forgive and to serve

By the time we arrived at the bus stop where I dropped Gideon off, he had finished explaining how the transformation took place in his life. He had explained that, bit by bit, he stopped believing that the spirits had power over him, he stopped fearing them, and he stopped seeking to protect himself from them by calling on the power of "good" spirits. He had also explained that, at the same time, he started entrusting his safety to the one true God who is above all those other powers, and specifically to Jesus, who demonstrated God's absolute power over the demons when he walked the earth, and who then triumphed over them on the cross.

As we approached the bus stop I said: "This is your last semester. What will you do when you leave college?" Gideon replied: "The first thing I want to do is go back to my village and offer forgiveness to my uncle and seek to restore that relationship. After that, I plan to go to another part of the country and help people there know the true freedom that is available in Jesus."

The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, living and active, penetrating, rebuking, and equipping for good works. Exposing believers to the word of God is, I believe, the very best way we can disciple and mobilize them to fully surrender to Christ, and in doing so, to hold out the good news to the lost. ☪

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Paul Hiebert's discussion of this phenomenon: Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 171–192.

<sup>2</sup> All authority truly has been given to Jesus (Matt 28:18). This includes authority over demons, powers, and authorities (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; Eph 1:21–22; 1 Pet 3:22). See further Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2000), 89–98; Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 244–248.

<sup>3</sup> V. H. Matthews, M. W. Chavalas, and J. H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 21–23.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Walton, "Creation," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 161; Matthews, et al., *Bible Background Commentary*, 21–23; G. J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament, Volume 1: The Pentateuch* (London: SPCK, 2003), 9–34.

<sup>5</sup> P. R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 256–258; Matthews, et al., *Bible Background Commentary*, 368.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Kgs 12:30; 14:9–16; 15:34; 16:2–3, 7, 19, 26, 31, 32; 2 Kgs 3:3; 9:9; 17:21–23.





**Herbert T. Ale**

and his wife Amalia, have partnered with OMF in the Philippines since 1991, and became official members in 1997, working through Serve Philippines, the home missions of the Philippine Home Council. He has served as a pastor of the Independent Baptist Church in the Island Garden City of Samal for more than five years. Herbert and Amalia have two children: Aya Mae, a pharmacy student, and Van Ray, who is in the sixth grade.



**John Wong**

and his wife Pearlyn have served as OMF missionaries since May 2011. Prior to that, John was an associate pastor of their sending church—Adam Road Presbyterian Church, Singapore.

## ✦ Discipling Ethnic Believers

### Introduction

Discipling others starts when we understand that God has placed into our hearts his grace and that living out the Great Commission is a life-long challenge. The task of making disciples can only be realized through the central teaching of Christ to love God and love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:30). The giver of the Great Commission has structured the task of making disciples around the quality of our message and the eminence of our good deeds. Nobody can exercise this task without being filled with God’s love. Though public show and performance is highly valued in some religions, we should not be tempted to perform better works, but to demonstrate God’s love through loving others. This paper highlights Christ’s model of discipleship to show that love is the underlying ingredient to fulfill the task, and as such, is essential in the development of discipleship efforts and strategies. We will thus consider some discipleship approaches that our team practices to lovingly meet the needs of people with whom we work. While one may be able to create engaging and logical discipleship material, without God’s love being on display it is of limited value.

### A case story of a religious leader

Ced comes from a traditional background. He is committed to his religious beliefs and yet follows the traditional practices of his ancestors regarding belief in the spiritual world. He reconciles these understandings by believing that God has placed spirits in the world to cause discomfort or bring good luck to people. For instance, people

in his village believe sickness is caused by spirits and that people who are ill must visit a shaman in order to find out what they should do to placate the spirits so they can be healed.

These ideas were challenged when some especially devout followers of his religion from outside the village came to teach the people to follow a more pure form of the faith. This new teaching stringently opposes biblical Christianity and has thus become a barrier to the gospel. The introduction of these ideas has highlighted the key position of Christian Scripture in providing authority for the faith. The nature and power of Scripture is thus a topic that needs to be addressed by disciplers in a truly wise and loving way.

### Discipling through God’s Word

God’s Word has power. As relationships develop in the community, we start telling God’s story, beginning with creation. Everyone loves stories and becomes excited about the possibility of hearing more. Stories present a picture of what happened to humanity in relation to sin and death. Stories also prepare the minds of the hearers so that they can see why Jesus the Messiah needed to come. While we understand the gospel to be good news, this good news emerges from the context of bad news. If people have a clear understanding of the bad news, they are much more able to see the real needs in their lives. Only then will their hearts become ready to accept God’s way to enter heaven.

Two things will contribute to our witness as we tell the story. First, Christian Scripture is lifted up to show that it records God’s actions through coherent stories. Once this happens, people start to appreciate the authority of the Bible. Second, when we begin with the truths of Scripture, our listeners are given an opportunity to discover and accept our credibility as interpreters of God’s Word. When they start to regard us as having spiritual authority, discipleship has developed considerably into a stage of trust in a growing discipler-disciple relationship.

A discipler needs wisdom to address the needs of the people. This can be done effectively in the context of a team. Our team has identified the need for our disciples to learn more about Jesus. Christian theology refers to this as Christology. To help the people develop a proper understanding of Jesus, our team has decided to journey together with them through the Gospel of John. We look closely at the life, miracles, and teaching of Jesus. We help those who are on the journey of faith to observe carefully the Word of God, aiming not just at cognitive knowledge but on the application of God’s word to life. Questions are asked so that the learning will effectively impact lives. We often ask, “If you have learned something important from this study, can you apply it so that it changes your life?”

We focus on Christology because the lordship of Christ is of primary importance. In Matt 16, Jesus asked his disciples who people thought he was. When Peter confessed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the Lord responded by proclaiming him blessed because God had revealed this truth to him (Matt 16:16–17). He further declared that he would build his church and immediately commanded his disciples to inform no one that he was the Christ. Jesus demonstrated his lordship by blessing Peter, selecting him as a foundational leader, announcing that he would build his church, and silencing his disciples about his identity. Jesus’ lordship demands that each one

plays his role—whether that is active ministry or silent obedience—while Jesus builds his church that cannot be destroyed. As disciples, Christ’s lordship obligates us to take up our cross, obey the Great Commission, and embrace the Great Command to love God and love one’s neighbor.

We focus on Christology because, as the story of Ced shows, the world needs to develop a proper Christology that demonstrates that God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is not irrational but essential.

Many followers of ethnic religions believe that faith and practice need to go together. To address these needs in discipleship, we have adopted the Navigators’ topical

### Discipleship is not just talk but gives life to the talk. Jesus teaches love which he unconditionally displays on the cross.

discipleship series as a sort of follow up and reinforcement to the Chronological Bible Stories as they combine doctrine and practice. The topics covered by the series are: Your Life in Jesus the Messiah, The Spirit-filled Follower of Jesus, Walking with Jesus, The Character of a Follower of Jesus, Foundations for Faith, Growing as a Follower of Jesus, and Our Hope in Jesus. These topics provide foundational support for our teaching about Jesus as the Christ. We also make sure that our message is contextual and speaks to felt needs. As a result, many of the students we sponsor are now praying in the name of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

### Discipling with a holistic mindset

In addition to helping people better understand who Jesus is, we are often confronted with other personal needs. When our friends share their concerns and needs with us we have evidence that we have established close relationships with them. For instance, the mother of one of our sponsored students had obtained a loan from us to set up a small store in her home to earn a living to

support her family. After a month, however, she stopped operating the store as her family had consumed all the supplies bought with the loan. We felt our trust had been betrayed and perceived that the deception was intentionally made to take advantage of the situation. We chose to respond in love so that our witness would not produce a bad odor but retain a good savor. In the end, we simply asked her to repay the loan by small installments over two years. It’s too easy to get sidelined by the betrayal and drift from the goal of our venture. Discipleship is not just talk but gives life to the talk. Jesus teaches love which he unconditionally displays on the cross.

We also had another major setback when one of the professing believers who was baptized reverted to her old religion, perhaps because she wanted to be buried in the traditional way within her ancestral land. However, since she desired to continue attending the house meetings, we allowed her to do so, hoping that she would continue to grow in faith as she studies God’s word and meets with followers of Jesus. Through our witness of genuine love, living out God’s word, and prayer, we entrust her to God even though there may be risks involved.

We also encourage the students we sponsor to give back to their communities. Toward this end, we organized a tree planting activity in one community and planned a sports activity for the young children in another. We have enlisted some of them to help out in our free medical clinics for their communities. We always tell our sponsored students that we want them to succeed and that once they have done so they should, in turn, help others.



We find that a concrete demonstration of love and help can draw others to the gospel. At first, the husband of one of the believers was not attracted to the teaching of the gospel, though he was not opposed to it. However, when we started a project to grow mushrooms to help supplement people's income, he was drawn to the fellowship of believers and even joined the project. We also taught some married believers about God's design for marriage and the biblical principles for a godly and healthy marriage.

As we operate a free medical clinic within the few communities, we seek permission to pray with people who attend for healing in the name of Jesus. When some of them need medical follow up, we journey with them to the local hospitals so they can receive specialized treatment and help them apply for financial

### **... discipleship must be designed to help believers in Jesus understand the universality of Christ's body and that they are members of a larger community of faith.**

assistance through local government channels. While this requires a large expenditure of time and effort, it helps people come to view our presence as of high value. Praying for the sick in the name of Jesus has become a great opportunity to open hearts to the gospel as we integrate the gospel message in our prayers. Such prayer is even accepted at the home of the local religious leader.

### **Discipling believers through a caring-community**

A strong sense of community brings solidarity to a society. Everyone depends on everyone else, so when someone loses the feeling of belongingness, the consequence is great. In order to help maintain this feeling, we believe that followers of Jesus should not be extracted from their community context. Even so, discipleship must be designed to help believers in Jesus understand the universality of Christ's body and that they are members of a larger

community of faith. As translators speak of "dynamic equivalence" and finding a "functional substitute," the community of Jesus needs to adopt language that communicates without causing too much offence. This presents disciplers with an immense challenge as they work on their unfinished task. Below are some of the examples that our team is currently doing.

1. We carefully build relationships with believers. We ensure that our relationships are mutual and reciprocal by sharing experiences, eating together, and talking informally in homes. We ask personal questions about how they are doing. We facilitate family enrichment seminars and workshops to help them improve their family dynamics. Often, the result of our interaction is mutual learning.

2. As mentioned above, our team designed a mushroom livelihood project to augment the income of the believers. This caused a lot of excitement as they felt cared for and has caused others to be attracted to the fellowship of Jesus. At least one person who had been reluctant to join the fellowship is now listening and attending their meetings.

3. The sponsorship program among students is not just a program *per se*, but an activity that demonstrates personal care for others. We visit homes to meet the parents and guardians of our students. People know that we desire to see things in their lives improve through our follow-up and care.

4. We try to bring visitors into our communities, in part to help Christians and churches understand our cross-cultural ministry. While this impacts mobilization, it also benefits our ministry to the community of Jesus' followers. The presence of our visitors helps the

new believers understand that the community of Christ is a family and that it is extensive. Knowing that they are not alone brings comfort and peace to their hearts.

These positives do not mean that we face no challenges. We have already mentioned the lady who is afraid of what may happen to her after she dies. She is particularly afraid of being buried in the Christian cemetery, placed inside a coffin, and cemented into a grave. She inquired if followers of Jesus could be buried in the traditional way. The answer to this question is not simple. And even if the cultural expression is deemed to be okay, who will perform the religious rituals and what would they look like?

### **The discipling process and stages among the sponsored students**

We always begin the discipling process through the Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) method, as the group among whom we work recognize and accept biblical characters such as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as historical. Since the stories of these biblical characters are welcomed, we use them to introduce concepts of sin, the atoning sacrifice promised by God to stop the work of Satan, and how forgiveness of sin comes through believing on Jesus as the Christ. This helps to form a new Christian worldview in them and dismantle their previous worldview. After a year or so, when these sessions were complete, we held a retreat for the sponsored students where we reviewed these CBS sessions and reinforced them by playing experiential games to illustrate the main points of these stories so that everyone can recognize our inability to save ourselves, that we need someone to rescue us, that there is only one way of escape, and that Jesus was sent by God to help us escape.

Following up on the demonstration of our need to be saved, we began a study of the first two chapters of John's Gospel so that they can develop a deeper understanding of

the claims of Jesus and discover how they can believe in him. After a few months, we held another short retreat and clearly presented the gospel, asking if they would accept and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. To disciple the ones who did, we began to use the materials from the Navigators while we continued to study the Gospel of John.

During this camp we encouraged the new believers to open and close each session with prayer. These prayers would begin with thanksgiving and close with petitions and requests. We also taught them to sing Christian songs in English and in their own language before our Bible study sessions. At the most recent retreat, we conducted Holy Communion, and explained the significance of it and invited them to partake if they wished to. All of them did. We have also challenged them to share their faith with their friends in school as well as their siblings and some of them did. We recognized that the biggest challenge would be presenting the gospel to their parents. We had already shown the "Jesus" film twice to their mothers in their language, but as yet have not invited them to pray and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is because we have yet to clearly present the gospel and are still seeking to show and deepen their understanding that Jesus is truly the last sacrifice that is needed for the forgiveness of sin and so gain entry into the Kingdom of God. We sense some of them are open but a few are still resisting. So the way through this challenge is to enlist our prayer supporters to petition the Lord of grace to pour out the Holy Spirit and convict their hearts and minds to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith. The most important and powerful weapon that we have for our ministry is prayer and we can testify that God is faithful to hear our prayers and answer them in miraculous ways.

### **Discipling our co-worker who is from a traditional background**

Our co-worker was born into a traditional family and grew up in a traditional community. Though

her mother was from a native tribe and had a Protestant background, she had conformed to her husband's religion. From an early age, our co-worker was taught and followed all that her father's religion required. This is what would be expected. However, when our co-worker was young, some followers of Jesus tutored students in her community and she was given an opportunity not only to receive further instruction in her subjects, but also to hear stories from the Bible. Her exposure to the Bible stories was the fodder the Holy Spirit used to build in her a hunger for God's word. She thus continued to seek the truth about Jesus. By God's grace, her father did not object to her learning more about Jesus and she eventually began to attend a local gathering of believers regularly.

After some years, she moved to the city and took up a job away from the community where she had grown up. While there, she reconnected with the friends who had tutored her and taught her Bible stories and began to attend a local church. So that she will understand that the Christian life requires outreach to others, she was introduced to the Kairos course on cross-cultural mission. In connection with this course she took part in an outreach to another community. She later returned to her own community where she taught in the preschool for some time. Throughout this time, her desire to learn more of God's word continued to develop. In order to help her learn how to read and understand the Bible, we have led her in one-to-one discipleship based on Andrew Reid's book *Postcard from Palestine*.<sup>2</sup> She has learned that hard work is needed to understand the Bible correctly and she appreciates the gems that she unearths through the skills she is learning and putting into practice. She now knows that having a right understanding of the gospel leads to God-glorifying living.

Now she partners with another team member to teach the Chronological Bible Stories to a few new sponsored students. A key aim is for her to help students see God's way of salvation through the Old Testament stories with the goal of showing that Jesus was God's perfect sacrifice for the

sins of mankind. This is helping her learn how to craft questions that will help students learn about God and have a right perspective of biblical characters and their own lives. When there is opportunity to dialogue with the students more personally, she shares her testimony and encourages them to continue to learn more about Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Discipling an ethnic believer begins with us living out the Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbors. It progresses as we address both their physical and spiritual needs. We use the powerful word of God to challenge and correct their worldview so that they may be convicted by the Holy Spirit to trust in the Lordship of Jesus as God choose to accept him as Savior. As they come to faith in Jesus, we teach them to read the Bible for themselves so that they can apply God's word in their lives and so impact their families and their community. Our goal is the transformation of lives that will in turn impact those around them for the Lord's glory.

Our holistic approach of showing love and concern for the felt needs of our contacts such as providing a free monthly medical clinic and follow-up, high school and college student sponsorship, and livelihood projects gave us a platform to establish good relationships with the people so that we can share the gospel through Chronological Bible Stories that point to Jesus as God's chosen Savior. We have learnt that this task of making disciples is not based on our own strength, wisdom, or ability, but upon God's word and his Holy Spirit. This knowledge reminds us to labor in prayer and rally others to join us so that the Lord will work in the hearts of our contacts and so transform them into disciples of Jesus. 🌀

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> We sponsor high school and college students as part of a holistic initiative to help meet the needs of our friends.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Reid, *Postcard from Palestine*, 2nd ed. (Kingsford, NSW: St. Matthias, 1997).





**Wat Ho Meas** is the first Cambodian OMF missionary. He and his wife, Laura-Jane, are working among university students and faculty members in Sendai, Japan. Ho completed a PhD in Asian Economic History at Hokkaido University and earned a Diploma in Ministry Studies and Bachelor of Divinity from the Irish Baptist College / Chester University. He and Laura-Jane have a five-year-old son, Joseph.

## ➤ My Personal Experience of Discipleship

### Background and turning Point

Cambodia, where I grew up, was exposed to Catholicism with the coming of a Portuguese Dominican Missionary, Gaspar de Cruz in 1555. Then in 1923, about thirty years before Cambodia was granted independence from France, the first evangelical Christian missionaries arrived. David and Muriel Ellison, who led the pioneer work, came with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), and set up a base in Battambang, Cambodia's second largest town, in an area known as the "rice bowl" of the country. Soon after their arrival, they started the very first Bible college. Battambang province, in the north west of Cambodia, is where my grandparents and parents, my siblings and I were born and brought up. It is amazing to me that the good news of Jesus Christ was brought to my hometown even before my parents were born.

I grew up in a Buddhist home and culture, and never understood about Jesus until I left my hometown in 1996 to attend university in the capital, Phnom Penh. There was a small church, which I passed on my way to Junior High School every day, but like most people I despised Christians and called them by a derogatory name that means something like "The Jesuses". I never heard anything about who Jesus really was. As a Buddhist, I learned about sin, good deeds, hell, and heaven, but I never had confidence that I would go to heaven after death because I never felt that I did enough good work to gain enough merit to go to heaven. Pictures of hell that were painted on the walls of some Buddhist temples are still vivid in my mind, showing its reality and fear, a place full of suffering and punishment because of a person's "karma" or evil deeds. Like many other Cambodian Buddhists, I considered that Buddhism

belongs to Cambodia while Christianity belongs to the West, and sought to keep the tradition of visiting various temples in order to dedicate offerings to my ancestors through the mediation of Buddhist monks. At my family home, we had altars located in a few different corners of the house, and I would often pray for our family's health, protection, and blessing from our dead ancestors and any god who has power to do so, and replaced the offerings on a regular basis. Since Cambodia went through civil war during the 1980s, we believed in spiritual powers and sought their protection from harm or being killed. As much as we were able, we sought to appease the spirits by trying to do the right thing through our words and giving the right offerings.

While living in a student dormitory in Phnom Penh in 1997, I met Shoichiro Sugaya, a Japanese missionary, who often came to teach the Bible to a Cambodian medical student in the room next door. After this encounter I was invited to attend an OMF-run student camp. There I met Jay Angeles, a Filipino missionary, and after the camp, I studied the Bible with him and another Cambodian student for about six months. Jay then reached the end of his three years in Cambodia, but the Lord had not finished with me. One day, I went to visit my former school friend, Rith, who had grown up in my hometown. Rith lived in a Buddhist dormitory located inside a pagoda, so it surprised me to see that he had a Bible on his bookshelf, and I asked him how he got it. He told me in a hushed voice, because he was afraid that the monks and other students living next to him might hear, that he recently had become a Christian through meeting a local Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) worker. I then told him my secret—that I had been studying the Bible with Jay for nearly six months and had become interested in God and the Bible. We were

excited to find ourselves talking about the same topic, and he was very keen for me to attend the Sunday church service with him and to meet the local CCC worker. I went along with him to Phnom Penh New Life Church, and after understanding about my sins, God's forgiveness, and his great promise for both life on earth and eternal life in heaven, I prayed to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. I had a great sense of joy in my heart after believing in Jesus, and it was a completely new beginning.

From the start I was challenged not only to believe for myself but also to share the good news of Jesus Christ with other people. Looking back, my faith grew through sharing Jesus with strangers, friends, and family, because they often came back to me with questions. "Why do you believe in Jesus?" "Why do you have to tell others about Jesus?" "Can you not just keep it to yourself?" "Is Jesus Christ really the only Saviour?" Responding to such questions confirmed my own faith in the Lord Jesus. The Lord gave me great joy in sharing my faith with my family, and I am very thankful that my two sisters and two cousins are now followers of Jesus Christ and involved in the local church. My mother prayed to receive Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour just before she passed away twelve years ago, but we are still praying for the salvation of my father and brothers as well as the wider family.

### Discipleship experience in the East

In the early days of my Christian life, most of my Christian involvement was with Cambodia Campus Crusade for Christ, and I was discipled by a local staff worker while studying at university. CCCC is good at challenging believing students to share the good news of Jesus with others, and they used basic Christian faith materials translated from the same materials used by CCC in the USA. On the Sunday I first went to church and expressed my desire to believe in Christ, someone guided me to pray using the prayer in the back of the *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet. A simple Bible study was then

conducted after I prayed to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, followed by a couple of more in-depth foundational studies from CCC's *Agape* booklets for an extended period of time.

The local worker, who also became my good friend and spiritual mentor, met with me and a few other friends once a week to study the Bible materials together. The group often spent time eating together and had sleep-overs at the local Cambodia CCC office, where we talked about God's word, Christian living, and Christian witness. On top of this, Cambodia CCC organized evangelism seminars for all young believers in order to encourage them to be courageous in sharing the good news of Jesus with other people. All this experience helped me grow as a Cambodian Christian, but sadly not all my friends who believed and were discipled have remained faithful to the Lord Jesus but have compromised because of family pressure. Only three of us remain, two of whom are serving the Lord full-time. The third is involved in a small Cambodian Christian fellowship in France while working full-time with a secular company there. Looking back, I believe that it was the Holy Spirit who worked in us and kept us. Cambodia CCC's strength is in evangelizing and challenging believers to share the good news of Jesus, but looking back I think there were some weaknesses in the area of more in-depth study of Scripture. However, the Lord used them to help me believe and grow as a Christian in my early days and I am very thankful to those who taught me and guided me.

After graduating from university, I worked for a year with Food for the Hungry International for Cambodia (FHI Cambodia) under a Korean missionary couple, Sung Min and C. S. Lee. They were very passionate and visionary about their work in Cambodia. And while they have strong personalities and expected Cambodian staff to follow their vision, they were kind and generous. They encouraged me as a young Christian to be strong and have a vision for Cambodia and in many

ways they treated me as if I was one of their children. My experience working with them at FHI allowed me to learn about missionary life and gave me the opportunity to serve the Lord through serving Cambodian people living in the countryside. Through this, I gradually began to understand about God's mission, whether in Cambodia or elsewhere.

Working in this situation, I was encouraged to see the missionaries' experience of God's provision in their life by faith. Out of this experience some questions also arose, because I could see that missionaries from overseas tend to have a safety net in terms of aspects like health care and finance, whereas for Cambodian staff or pastors of local churches, the expectation to live by faith, even if receiving a small salary, often seemed more costly. Yet, I realized the importance of not creating dependency on missionaries. Even though I only worked with FHI for a short time, I felt that I was treated well by Sung Min and C. S. Their love and concern for me was shown through various kinds of practical help and faithful prayers. They even came to visit me when I was later studying Japanese in Malaysia, and on another occasion arranged a trip for me when I was passing through Korea. After learning that I had been given a full scholarship to do postgraduate study in Japan, Sung Min and C. S. told me that they would send me as a "student missionary" to Japan. This seemed to echo the Cambodia CCC's motto: "Evangelize, Build, Disciple and Send," although they were thinking more about sending disciples out within Cambodia. On my last Sunday, Song Min and C. S. asked me to sit in the middle while people from their church plant gathered around me, prayed, and laid their hands on me. After arriving in Japan, I realized that Japan needs the gospel just as much as Cambodia even though we Cambodians often find it hard to see beyond our own needs. Having been "sent" in this way gave me a sense of responsibility to not only study, which I sought to do faithfully, recognizing the wonderful chance given, but also to seek opportunities to witness for Christ.



From the start of my life and study in Japan, I was involved in Sapporo International Church, especially the English Speakers' Fellowship, and also a Friday night outreach to Japanese working and retired people. This church gave me a great experience in serving the Lord cross-culturally. I believe that my faith grew and was protected by the good fellowship of God's people there. As time went by I was given opportunity, alongside OMF missionaries and an Ethiopian co-leader—also a postgraduate student—to share in leading the English Speakers Fellowship and facilitate Bible studies. Later, I also was invited to serve as a deacon in the church. Preparation for leading the Bible study often helped me to dig deeper in Scripture. Even so, I always felt inadequate in interpreting a Bible passage and lacked confidence in explaining it to the group. I also had a difficult time grasping the whole context of Scripture. It was also challenging to relate the Bible helpfully to people from many diverse cultural backgrounds or respond to pastoral challenges in people's lives. Nevertheless, this became part of my ongoing discipleship. The Lord taught me through interacting with people from various cultural backgrounds, including missionaries, widening my worldview and Christian perspective. He showed me that Christians and churches go through similar struggles regardless of cultural background, whether in Cambodia, Japan, or elsewhere. Christians can be easily discouraged by issues that happen within the church or fellowship: internal conflict in a church or fellowship; unfaithful teaching of God's Word; perceived inconsistencies between a leader's lifestyle and his teaching; or power-seeking in a church by some individuals.

Quite early in my time at Hokkaido University, while I was going through struggles similar to other postgraduate researchers, three Christians (an Ethiopian, a Filipina, and myself) decided to meet for Bible study and prayer once a week on the campus to encourage one another and lift up one another to the

Lord. As time went by, others joined (including Japanese, Brazilian, Ugandan, American, Nigerian, Kenyan, Indian, and Korean). This fellowship helped many of us who went through stress and struggles, and also enabled us to reach out to others on the campus. God blessed me with a Christian friend from Ethiopia, Mintesnot Gebeyehu, who later became my best friend and best man when I was married. I realized it was very important to have a close trusted friend to share with deeply, and we fasted, prayed for and encouraged one another, seeking to keep one another accountable and learning together. The fact that he and I were part of the same church helped us understand the local Christian context in which we lived and to get to know Japanese Christians. Above all, this experience made me feel like a part of Christ's body worldwide. I appreciated learning from his knowledge of Scripture and his perspective on fasting. He also encouraged me to treat prayer and fasting as a normal part of the Christian life. Perhaps these Christian disciplines were valued more in his experience of discipleship than in the contexts in which I had grown.

God provided me with continuity from my conversion and discipleship in Cambodia through an ongoing link with Shoichiro Sugaya. Being an OMF missionary from Japan to Cambodia, and having known me before I became a Christian, Sho came to visit me a couple of times in Sapporo when he was on Home Assignment. He told me that he had been concerned about me when I first arrived in Japan, and he often prayed for my protection and spiritual growth, because he knew how immoral, secular, and tempting Japanese society could be. During his first visit, he was very encouraged to see me surrounded by many good Christians in the church, and was very thankful to God for answering his prayers. I too was very thankful and encouraged to learn that Sho had continued to care for me and pray for me over the years. He and Yoko later became very good friends to my wife and me. Before we were married, we sought their advice and

counsel, and they prayed a lot for us as we sought the Lord's will together. In 2011, when we came to serve for a short time in Iwate, Japan, Sho came to visit, and we were conscious of his continued care as a brother and mentor. To this day, our relationship with the Sugayas remains one in which my wife and I feel we can be challenged, helped, and encouraged in faith.

## Discipleship experience in the West

As a family, we moved from Japan to Northern Ireland for an extended period of time, my first experience of life outside Asia. Once again, I was exposed to another culture and needed to adjust to a new way of living and local ways of thinking. I can highlight three significant areas the Lord used to help me grow as a disciple during those four years: the local church, Bible college, and OMF Ireland.

One of our primary concerns as a family was to find a local church where we could be nourished through Bible teaching and the fellowship of God's people. The Lord guided us to make our spiritual home in a Baptist church in Belfast, which later became our main sending church. We believe that it is important to be part of Christ's body through committed involvement in a local church and this became part of our discipleship journey and spiritual growth. We benefited greatly from the teaching of God's word and the pastoral care of this fellowship.

Since my wife is from Northern Ireland, being part of the local church helped me understand a little more of her culture and local spiritual perspectives. It was my first time to learn about so many denominations and the sensitivity of the words "Catholic" and "Protestant" because of the political context. In Cambodia and Japan, the word "Protestant" does not carry any sensitive meaning politically, but can be comfortably used by evangelical churches.

The history of the gospel coming to Ireland through St. Patrick and others, and Northern Ireland's rich

Christian heritage, including the Ulster revival in 1859, known by some as "the year of grace," made me interested to learn more in this context. I was interested to understand the Irish/Northern Irish church's thinking and to interact with local Christians, and also had a clear sense of God's calling to deepen my understanding of Scripture, so I undertook a three-year Bible training course at the Irish Baptist College—a small college of about fifty full-time students, mainly providing training for pastoral ministry.

During these three years I greatly enjoyed studying God's word and making friendships with local students. Being the only Asian student and only one of two international students, I stood out a lot, but people were friendly and some were more open than others. God gave me a few close friends with whom I could pray and share more deeply, friendships that continue until now. God also blessed me with a good mentor in one of the lecturers. Life is busy for us all now that we have each moved into ministry locations, and it is always a challenge to find time to meet, but we need to find ways to make it happen. Even though we are geographically far apart, we can meet through Skype or communicate by e-mail. I think that good friendships have been a major part of my discipleship because friends can help each other grow in Christ and keep one another accountable before God.

I also learned through a college-related church placement from serving alongside a retired pastor. He especially gave me insight into pastoral care within the local church. Although retired, he remains a member of the church he once led, and as long as health allows him will continue to actively serve God's people, especially through home or hospital visits. He quietly ministered to people behind the scenes and has deeply blessed many lives, including our own. Shadowing him taught me that behind-the-scenes work is just as significant as upfront ministry, even though it may go unnoticed. My impression is that this type of pastoral visit and prayer in people's

own home seems to be lacking in many churches in Asia, but for those we visit, it can be an experience of growing in discipleship. From our interaction with Japanese Christians, African Christians in Sapporo, and with Christians in Ireland, regardless of East or West, I think that pastoral visits and care outside official church meeting times are very important. People may show two very different sides of their personality: life in the church building and in their own nest, and usually they are more true to themselves in their own home. My wife and I personally experienced the importance of pastoral visitation, when this same pastor turned up at our door unexpectedly at a time that we most needed someone to pray for us and with us. It was also very encouraging for us when our own church pastor came to visit our home to get to know us, explain about church life, and welcome us to get more involved. As a result we felt freedom to seriously explore becoming committed members of that church.


A third area of growth was through involvement with OMF Ireland. I got to know many good people who are committed to pray for missionaries and the Lord's work overseas and others who have spent time serving him voluntarily and sacrificially on the home side on top of their own professional work. Getting to know some of these people was a very enriching experience for me. It humbled me to see people, including many in their later years, serving the Lord in such varied ways. Even when unable to be physically active, these Christians and mission supporters were deeply committed to praying. It was a good reminder to me that the Lord can use each and every individual, regardless of age. God calls some people to be senders and others he calls to go, but both are involved in the great and important work, and share in the same blessing and responsibility of making Christ known. I believe that all of this is part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

In the process of Bible training and then preparing to come to Japan with OMF, we experienced the sacrificial

giving of people who have taught us by their example of faith. We are grateful for these partners who have also been disciplers to us, sharing with us how the Lord led them to handle their finances and to share prayerfully and obediently in His work. We hope that in our engaging with people in the process of building partnerships, we too have been able, in some sense, to disciple others or lead them into involvement in the Lord's work.

## Conclusion

As we now serve the Lord in Japan reaching out to university students and postgraduate researchers, and find ourselves not only sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, but also walking alongside people on their discipleship journey at all different stages, I hope that we will be faithful encouragers and helpers, having received so much in our own ongoing growth in faith.

It is a great privilege to be a disciple of Jesus Christ whether we come from the East or the West. Knowing him goes beyond cultural differences, since we share in the same body of Christ. Sometimes we have been intentionally, consciously "discipled" by someone; sometimes people have discipled us without realizing it; sometimes we ourselves are aware that we are discipling others, and sometimes it is just a natural part of friendship or relationship. Discipleship is indeed a journey. No matter where we are, as much as we are able, it is important for us to identify a local church that can be a spiritual home, seek out Christian friends, and allow ourselves to be helped or influenced by godly people. However, as a missionary, I realize that sometimes spiritual life can be lonely or isolated depending on our context of service and where there may be few Christians within our natural network. We need to work out how to keep growing since our awareness of discipleship as an ongoing process gives us a helpful sense of accountability and promotes spiritual growth. Being part of the body of Christ, we need him, but we also need one another because together we shine with the glory of God. 

# An Interview with Hwa Yung



Hwa Yung was Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia from 2004-2012. Over the years, he has maintained an active ministry of preaching, theological teaching, and writing. He has also been actively involved in the Lausanne Movement and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

## Inculcating Holiness and Enhancing Discipleship in the Asian Church

**The growth of the church in Asia during the past century is a reason for great rejoicing. As we face the future, do you foresee any challenges that could impact the growth of the church and Christian discipleship?**

One of the main challenges I see is the relevance of Christ in twenty-first century Asia. Evangelical missions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were largely driven by the concern to bring the gospel of salvation in Christ to a non-Christian world. Many responded to the spiritual aspects of the gospel as well as its perceived blessings in this life, including healing and deliverance from demonic powers, the gospel's ability to effect "social lift", and so forth. Millions turned to Christ because they saw him as being relevant to life, both now and in eternity.

While twenty-first century Asians continue to ask, "Is Christ relevant today?" the essence of relevance has changed. Many Asian nations remain mired in poverty, corruption,

totalitarianism, watered-down democracies, and denial of human rights and freedoms. The Majority World wants to know how to succeed in nation-building that incorporates all the blessings of modernization and economic growth, together with social justice, democracy, civil society, political stability, and peace. Does the Christian message have anything to say here? This question is perhaps most starkly put by the emergence of the phenomenon of "cultural Christians" in China against the backdrop of Tiananmen 1989!

The social and political impact of Christianity in the Majority World does not appear to be commensurate with the numerical growth of the church. Many countries where Christians are in the majority remain relatively "underdeveloped" in the socio-political and economic spheres. The Philippines, for instance, is the most Christian nation in Asia (92%), and yet it ranks a lowly 105 on the Corruption Perception Index and remains a laggard amongst the fast growing economies of East Asia.<sup>1</sup>

The Asian church must demonstrate both in theology and practice that the gospel of Christ can and does make a difference—that it can bring both moral reform to individuals and socio-political transformation to nations. This will only happen when the church itself is holy and discipleship is a daily imperative for Christians.

**How can this be done in the Asian church?**

To help the church become holy and to foster proper discipleship, we need to discover the structures that can best implant the gospel in Asia. Many of the traditional denominational structures have been found wanting. Not only are they remnants of two thousand years of church history but, in many cases, they have become highly institutionalized and the leaders are often morally compromised. Many feel that the mega-church model, with its independent church mentality, provides a viable alternative. But anyone who knows the Asian mega-churches, from Seoul to Jakarta, will smile at this naiveté. As institutionalized

structures they may be highly successful in terms of membership numbers, programs, and finance, but there remains a serious doubt whether they are effective in disciple-making. The parallel growth of smaller independent churches is no real solution because of the lack of accountability and often the absence of clear rules. Many tend to replicate problems found in mega-churches, only on a smaller scale. Furthermore, the whole independent church movement has tended to foster a church culture in which the leaders submit to no one except themselves! The consequent fragmentation of the church hardly inspires confidence for fostering discipleship in Christian lives.

**During the past century, many Asian churches have experienced phenomenal growth. Is there any way to sustain the revivals so that the church continues to grow in number and depth of discipleship?**

Sustaining revivals is a huge challenge. Even the most famous ones come to an end sooner or later. For example, the "wild-fire" church growth experienced by Protestant churches in South Korea peaked around 1990. Since then they have struggled with stagnation and, in some cases, decline. Contributory factors may include divisions, lack of social involvement, over-emphasis on growing mega-churches, inadequate pastoral oversight, distrust of leadership, and nominalism. In recent years, charges of autocratic leadership, nepotism, misuse, and embezzlement of church funds have not helped to arrest the declining pastoral image.<sup>2</sup> All these are related directly or indirectly to the issues of holiness and discipleship.

On a smaller scale, the work of the Borneo Evangelical Mission (now incorporated into OMF International) gave rise to the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) in East Malaysia. Building on the firm evangelistic and pastoral foundations laid by the missionaries, the SIB has grown to become one of the three largest Protestant churches in the country. The phenomenal growth from the

1970s onward was fuelled to a large extent by revivals. In Sarawak, the Bario revival of October 1973 gave rise to a similar revival in Bakelalan a month later. These revivals had a powerful impact on Sarawak, where the Christian population grew from approximately 19% in 1970 to almost 43% in 2000. Even so, the Sarawak church has plateaued and is in danger of serious decline due to the twin problems of urbanization and Islamization.

**As I reconsidered my heritage, it dawned on me that John Wesley did not make the same mistakes in his use of small groups in the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival. ... Wesley used a system of five interlocking groups to provide pastoral oversight over new Christians and enable them to become true disciples.**

These examples illustrate how the Asian church must grapple with the problem of sustaining revivals and averting nominalism through faithful and effective pastoral oversight.

**Can holiness and numerical growth be assured by simply appropriating the right pedagogical methods?**

Although I have focused attention on the themes of commitment and holiness in my own teaching ministry, I have found the impact to be far less than I had hoped. Over the years I have come to the conclusion that, pedagogically, I had overlooked four things.

First, much of my approach has been too cerebral. I had assumed that once a person understood intellectually what is needed in his Christian life, he will automatically strive to act and live accordingly. This pedagogical mistake is repeated over and over again in our training and discipling programs. According to a prominent clinical psychologist, behavioral transformation in human beings comes about as a result of changes, not primarily in the left side of the brain (which deals with logical reasoning), but in the right side

(which deals with emotions, etc.).<sup>3</sup> So much for modernity's educational methodology!

The second mistake is to emphasize the "quiet time" when it comes to prayer and regular Bible study. This inadvertently prioritizes the individual over the community in discipleship, affecting both the less educated and even university trained professionals who find maintaining a disciplined "quiet time" difficult.

Third, instruction on holiness tends to focus on the Bible while most of our church members do not know their Bibles well and many do not find it easy to apply, due to its historical and cultural distance from modern life.

Finally, while the Bible calls us to "watch over" each other (Gal 6:1-2; Heb 12:15), little mutual accountability is observable in modern church life. While this role should be fulfilled in small groups or cell groups, few of our churches include accountability structures in their small group programs.

**You have mentioned four challenges facing the Asian church today. As you have considered these challenges, have you come to any conclusions that might help the church as it faces the future?**

As I reconsidered my heritage, it dawned on me that John Wesley did not make the same mistakes in his use of small groups in the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Wesley's small group structures, wisely re-appropriated



today, could provide the answers to each of the four challenges outlined above. Wesley used a system of five interlocking groups to provide pastoral oversight over new Christians and enable them to become true disciples.<sup>5</sup>

*The Society*—the Cognitive Mode—functioned effectively like our church worship services, with hymn singing, prayers, lectures, and preaching. It was held regularly.

*Class meeting*—the Behavioral Mode—was the heart of Methodism and compulsory for every Methodist. It focused on changing behavior.

*Band meeting*—the Affective Mode—was a voluntary meeting for those

were all required to attend. Mixed in regards to sex, age, social standing, and spiritual maturity, the classes contained ten to twelve people who met weekly under a leader who was responsible for their spiritual oversight. The aim of the meetings was to produce appropriate patterns of Christian behavior.

Class meetings usually began with a short hymn followed by the leader sharing his or her spiritual condition to set an example for others. The emphasis was on personal experience and aimed at producing holy living. A group often remained together for years, maintaining the confidentiality and mutual acceptance that was absolutely essential. While visitors could attend two meetings max—

### **The real question is how do you actually carry out the discipling process at the small group level?..But where is the church whose small groups take accountability seriously and make holiness their primary goal?**

who had advanced in their Christian growth and desired to go deeper in the faith. It went beyond behavioral change to the affections, the inner desires, and motives.

*Select society*—the Training Mode—was for a “select” company who were handpicked from the most faithful to be developed into being models or standard bearers of the movement.

*Penitent bands*—the Rehabilitative Mode—was for the weakest who lacked the willpower to live up to the behavioral demands of the Methodist movement. They were similar to modern rehabilitation centers.

At the center of his system were the classes and bands. A focus on them will provide guidelines that would be helpful in modern small group ministry.

The classes were recognized to be the best way to exercise pastoral oversight over new converts who

during which time they must decide to become members or not—meetings were generally closed to allow for openness and accountability.

Bands were voluntary and for more advanced Christians who wanted to grow deeper in love, holiness, and purity of heart. They consisted of four to six persons of the same sex, general age, and marital status, who were required to be ruthlessly honest in sharing their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections so that they could grow in holiness.

**Wesley’s class and band meetings were developed in eighteenth century England. In what way could they possibly be relevant in twenty-first century Asia?**

Wesley’s model shows relevance, not because it is a Western method, but because it provides appropriate wineskins or structures for pastoral oversight and discipleship. While some feel the need to choose between different denominational structures

(whether traditional or new ones, independent or mega-church), this is a non-issue. The real question is how do you actually carry out the discipling process at the small group level? Most churches today have some sort of small group structure that includes one or more of the following: worship, Bible study, fellowship, evangelism, and prayer. But where is the church whose small groups take accountability seriously and make holiness their primary goal?

The cell-churches that were so popular in the late 1980s and 1990s speak of cells having a dual role of disciple-making and evangelism. But in practice, with the preoccupation of cell-multiplication—numerical growth—little effective in-depth discipling was carried out. Moreover, given the constant presence of new comers because of the evangelistic emphasis, such cells simply could not provide for the confidentiality needed for serious discipleship. Contrast this with Wesley’s small groups that had a primary focus on discipling and inculcating holiness. Whether one opts for a particular denomination structure or some independent form, what is crucial is that small groups can be found at the micro-level that exist to instill holiness in Christian life through pastoral support and mutual accountability.

**You earlier said that we need to learn how to sustain revivals. If revivals are the work of the Holy Spirit, can we do anything to sustain them?**

In contrast to many revivals which were short-lived, Methodist growth in England was sustained for a hundred years, from around 1740 onwards. By 1840, about 4.5% of England’s population fifteen years old and above was Methodist.<sup>6</sup> Methodist growth in the U.S. was even more spectacular. From around 1771, Methodism grew until it peaked in the first half of the twentieth century when some 6.5% of the total population were Methodists.<sup>7</sup> These must be two of the longest sustained revivals in modern history!

Why were the revivals in England and the U.S. sustained when they have not been in more recent years in Korea and East Malaysia? The evidence shows that the classes and bands helped inculcate holiness in the lives of the first few generations of Methodists. The emphasis on holy living sustained the revivals, and its neglect brought about their eventual decline.

Alan Gilbert has argued that the eventual decline of Methodism in England was linked to the demise of the class meetings—the most important means of pastoral oversight and nurture in early Methodism.<sup>8</sup> Richard Lovelace and Howard Snyder have both made similar observations about American Methodism.<sup>9</sup> That this is so should be totally understandable from a spiritual point of view. Revivals are ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. Sin grieves him and drives him away (Eph 4:30). Thus without holiness and obedient discipleship, no revival can be sustained!

**You earlier observed that our pedagogical methods for discipleship are too cerebral and individualistic, that they assume too much of the ordinary church member and lack the dimension of mutual accountability or “watching over” one another. What can be done to eliminate this problem?**

We should not forget that the faith has its rational and intellectual side. The early Wesleyan society meetings addressed the cognitive or cerebral dimension of discipleship. But the behavioral and affective dimensions of the faith were addressed through the class and band respectively. The central emphasis placed on small groups ensured that the discipling process steered clear of the danger of modern individualism by firmly embedding accountability and mutual pastoral oversight into the classes and bands. In these meetings

### **The central emphasis placed on small groups ensured that the discipling process steered clear of the danger of modern individualism by firmly embedding accountability and mutual pastoral oversight into the classes and bands. In these meetings very simple terms were used to explain what Christian discipleship was all about, and it was modeled by spiritual guides.**

very simple terms were used to explain what Christian discipleship was all about, and it was modeled by spiritual guides. In contrast, modern-day Christians are often left to distil for themselves from all the details and complexities of the Bible what Christian living involves.

**How would adopting these practices make the church more relevant to twenty-first century Asia?**

For the church to have an impact on the nation and the world, it must first be transformed. This is precisely where Wesley’s emphasis on holiness is so absolutely crucial for the future of Christianity in Asia. For how can the church bring reconciliation to societies sharply divided by race, religion, and class if the church itself does not know true reconciliation within itself? Again, what moral authority do Christians have to speak prophetically against corruption and injustice in society when we are so often deeply compromised and sucked into corruption and injustice in our life and work? Wesley’s focus on holiness allowed him to address contemporary issues head-on and thus bring about moral change and socio-political transformation.

While Britain in the eighteenth century could be reckoned “as corrupt as any” of the emergent nations Africa and Asia in the 1960s,<sup>10</sup> by the mid-nineteenth century things had completely turned around. Historians have noted two key Christian influences that acted together with others to bring this about. One was the work of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect. Wilberforce’s two goals in

life were the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire and the “reformation of manners”—i.e. moral reform—within Britain. While Wilberforce’s story is relatively well-known, many know less about the socio-political impact of Wesley’s work. Even so, some scholars have pointed out that Wilberforce’s achievement was partly built on the foundations laid by Wesley.

Whereas Wilberforce’s moral reforms affected primarily the upper classes, the revival under Wesley impacted largely the poor. Wesley’s stated goal was, “To reform the nation, especially the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”<sup>11</sup> Thus the emphasis on holiness and moral living lay at the heart of Wesley’s pastoral concern, and the class meetings was the means by which the revival “spread scriptural holiness over the land.” As a result, Roy Hattersley, Deputy Leader of the British Labour Party in the 1980s, could say of Wesley’s followers:

Because they imitated as well as followed him, they became a vital influence on the character of nineteenth-century society. Methodism encouraged the working poor to be ambitious, industrious and respectable—the qualities which made them the indispensable backbone of industrial and imperial England.... Not in his lifetime, but certainly by proxy during the hundred years which followed his death, Wesley was one of the architects of modern England. John Wesley’s Second Reformation created a new Church and helped build a new nation.<sup>12</sup>

One must give credit where credit is due. It was not so much the man John Wesley that made the difference in nineteenth century, but his great legacy of the classes and the bands he left behind!

**While we can learn a lot from Wesley's discipleship program, we cannot return to eighteenth or nineteenth century England. Do you have any final words as we consider how the church can make a difference in twenty-first century Asia?**

If the Asian church wants to impact the world of the twenty-first century, it must take seriously Wesley's agenda and put holiness at the heart of our discipleship programs and adopt modern-day equivalents of classes and bands. How do we do this? Let me mention seven key objectives.

1. We must focus on holiness and discipleship. Ordinary church members and leaders need to return to a life of holiness that is modeled for all.

2. Small groups must be brought back into local churches. And though we cannot make small group attendance compulsory as Wesley did, we should aim for 100% attendance.


3. The primary purpose of our small groups should be holiness and discipleship. Any other model should be rejected. While a small group meeting might include worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and the like, accountability has to be brought back to the center.

4. A simple explanation of Christian living—perhaps based on an updated version of Wesley's General Rules—should be made available for all believers.

5. There should be mutual accountability among leaders. In line with Wesley's bands, deeper fellowship and mutual accountability should be fostered for those who are more mature and in leadership

positions. This will ensure that leaders and pastors are open to correction and counsel. This may be one of the biggest challenges for the Asian church.

6. We need to share this challenge with other churches—denominational and non-denominational—so that they will see the need of inculcating holiness and discipleship among their members and recognize that small groups are a key means of doing so.

7. We need to strike a balance between grace and law. There is always a big possibility that those who pursue holy living will lapse into legalism. The trick is to be able to enforce or encourage attendance at the equivalent of class meetings today and to be held accountable without becoming legalistic. This requires wise pastoral leadership and a deep work of the Spirit. In other words, a revival! 

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Out of 176 countries surveyed, Philippines ranked lower than Malaysia, China, and Thailand. See <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results> (accessed 28 February 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See Bong Ring Ro, "The Korean Church: Growing or Declining?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19 (October 1995): 336–353; Yonggi Hong, "Nominalism in Korean Protestantism," *Transformation* 16 (1999): 135–141; Joon-Sik Park, "Korean Protestant Christianity: A Missiological Reflection," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36 (April 2012): 59–64.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Wei-Jen Huang, Faculty Member, Northwestern University Medical School (29 September 2009). He refers to three books: Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994); *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self* (New York: Norton, 2003); and Daniel J.

Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (New York: Guildford, 1999). He says that these are "based on state of the art research, which validated the biblical truth that it is love that heals (it's the felt grace, the emotional experience of being validated, understood and cared for that transforms people, not the left brain intellectual debates)."

<sup>4</sup> While Wesley's use of small groups has been largely ignored by scholars, two who have featured it are Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1980), especially 53–64, and Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> The following classifications and their respective functions follow Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 83–126.

<sup>6</sup> A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (London and New York: Longman, 1976), 30–39.

<sup>7</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 213–214.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England*, 181–182.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 166–267; and Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> See Ronald Wraith and Edgar Simpkins, *Corruption in Developing Countries* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 9.

<sup>11</sup> From "Large Minutes," cited in Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 214.

<sup>12</sup> Roy Hattersley, *John Wesley—A Brand from the Burning* (London: Abacus, 2004), 410–411.

# So That's What They Call it Now!

## Learning from the Past

Last year my wife and I visited a prayer meeting in Seattle where we shared our vision for working with the OMF Mission Research Department and explained why mission research is so important. To illustrate the point, we mentioned a controversial topic in mission which needs to be addressed. Immediately, those in attendance returned quizzical looks and asked, "What does that mean?" As we explained, an OMF retiree with many years of experience said, "Oh, so that's what they call it now!" Her retort highlighted several things for us. First, it demonstrates that many of the missiological issues discussed today are far from new. While some concepts are new to us, they were often addressed by older generations who referred to them using different terminology. The second point comes directly from this. Though many excellent new books and articles have been written about mission, great wisdom can still be gleaned from those who have gone before and invested a lifetime practicing and reflecting upon mission.

So that we can engage the ideas of some who went before, I would like to inaugurate a "So that's what they call it now!" section. How better to weigh our modern practice against our historical legacy as we approach and celebrate the 150th anniversary of CIM/OMF? Our initial blast from the past will feature some thoughts from a former General Director that speak to our questions about discipleship. If a disciple is a person who follows Jesus as a student, he or she must learn to obey what he taught. And the best way to learn what Jesus taught is to engage in the study of the Bible on a personal basis as well as in public. The following article by J. Oswald Sanders lays down some guidelines for personal Bible study that will benefit both missionaries and the people they disciple.

One more thing before we get to the article. In order to find an older piece of work that would speak to today's questions about discipleship, we pored over a number of old *China's*

*Millions and Overseas Bulletins*. In doing so, we were hard pressed to find the word "discipleship". And then it dawned on us that the concept is encapsulated in the term found in the OMF mission statement—"To glorify God by the urgent evangelization of East Asia's peoples." Though some today think of evangelization only in terms of evangelism—the preaching of the gospel—the term has a long history of referring to the process by which the gospel impacts a people, place, or culture with the person and teaching of Christ.

It is therefore likely that many of our predecessors, upon hearing that we were discussing discipleship, would ask, "What do you mean by that?" When the answer revealed that it was a new way to refer to evangelization they would nod their heads and say, "Oh, so that's what they call it now!"

*Editor*

## Bible Study for Personal Profit James O. Sanders

In treating this subject there is no need in such a journal as this to dilate on the full inspiration of the Scriptures, for with our whole hearts we believe it to be not only God's Word, but God's Word to us (1 Thess. 2:13). We believe that it has relevance not only to our times but to our lives. We believe that through it God reveals not only general principles, but truth appropriate to our changing needs. We believe that

it is admirably adapted to make the man of God perfect and mature in character, and to equip him for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–18). With this background of conviction we can proceed to consider how we may study the Bible that these two ends may best be secured. What is written here will be familiar ground to many, but a rethinking of familiar truths can be helpful.

In our Bible study it is too easy to read with a view to the profit of others for whom we have spiritual responsibility, but we must reserve a time when we read selfishly, for our own profit. It will benefit others later. Devotional Bible study differs from exegetical study, but the latter should not be neglected. The nurture of our own spiritual life is a prime necessity to effective service. Now we are alone with God. He speaks



to us through His Word. We speak to Him in prayer. It is a two-way conversation. This is communion, when we share with God what we have in common in Christ, Who is the centre of Scripture. Where will we meet the Lord and commune with Him? At the mercy seat, “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat” (Exod. 25:22).

### Our objective

The supreme knowledge is the knowledge of God in Christ, and to know Him more perfectly is the aim of our devotional Bible study. Every highway and byway in Scripture leads to Christ. In Him all promises and predictions are fulfilled. He is the key that unlocks the secrets of the Book. Directly or indirectly all Scripture leads to His Person and work, His mission and offices, His two advents, the consummation of all in His coming kingdom. If we fail to find Him in the Old Testament, it becomes merely interesting religious literature.

### The approach

1. Use a Bible without divisions or notes so that your thoughts do not automatically run into old moulds. Leave it open to the Holy Spirit to flash fresh light on the page.
2. Have another version by you to stimulate thought. Long familiarity with the words of a loved version tends to render them commonplace and innocuous.
3. Read the portion to find out exactly what it says. One of the

milestones in D. L. Moody’s career came when he decided to find out what the Bible *said*, not first what it *meant*. This is not so elementary as it may appear.

4. Read broadly in the Bible, not favourite devotional portions only, or those which are comforting. God speaks to us as really in His warnings and rebukes as in His encouragements. At times our personal profit is secured better by a shattering word than a comforting one.

5. Read expectantly, constantly in the attitude, “What saith my Lord to his servant?”

### The art of meditation

The blessed man of Psalm 1 is the man who meditates in the Word day and night. Meditation is not dreamy reverie. It is concentration of mind on the thoughts of God, depending on the Holy Spirit for enlightenment. It is a spiritual chewing of the cud. “Thy words were found and I did eat them,” said Jeremiah (15:16). This illustration is very apposite. We break off a piece of bread and masticate it until it can be swallowed. It is then cared for by the gastric juices and becomes part of our physical constitution, transmuted into blood, bone, muscle—and even thought and speech. How? That is a mystery to the uninitiated, but we do not stumble at it. We just reach for another piece of bread.

So with meditation. Take a small passage, or sentence, or even a word and think on it. Ask yourself

questions about it; recall other related passages; turn it into prayer, remembering that God is speaking to you in it. When this process of mental mastication is complete, the Holy Spirit, we know not how, takes the thoughts on which we have meditated and incorporates them into our spiritual life. We have been fed with the Bread of Life, Christ Himself.

As a simple example, take Psalm 23:1. Meditate on “*shepherd*”. Think of all the Eastern shepherd is to his sheep. Next “*The Lord*”. Allow your mind to dwell on His greatness, holiness, love, care, power, His self-expression in Christ. Next “*my*”. Join the two thoughts and worship that so great a God should sustain such a relationship to you. Then “*is*”—at this very moment He is and always will be my Shepherd.

### Turning Scripture into prayer

As an inspired prayer book, the Bible is a great stimulus to the life of worship and devotion. The Psalms, for example, strike every note in the whole range of human experience. There is something to match every mood and meet every situation; to kindle inspiration and inspire faith; to stimulate worship and encourage intercession. For this reason it is wise to have Bible reading before your time of prayer. In turning a Psalm into prayer, apply it to your present situation and need. The psalmist’s physical foes become your spiritual enemies. Use his inspired words as the expression of your own heart. With him, become lost in wonder, love and praise at the greatness and goodness of God.

Where there is a promise, fulfil the conditions and claim it; a warning, heed it; an example, emulate it; a command, obey it without evasion or delay, for obedience is an essential element in receiving more light. Look for the spiritual principles which, though not formally enunciated, are everywhere present in the Word.

Nothing so feeds the spiritual life as worship. Dr. R. A. Torrey bore testimony to the great transformation which came to him

when he learned not only to pray and return thanks, but to worship. “Earth has no joy,” he wrote, “like that which fills the soul as we bow before God in worship, asking nothing, seeking nothing from Him, occupied with Himself and satisfied with Himself.” The Scriptures are rich in material to induce worship. What vast tracts await our exploration and exploitation! What spacious themes—His sovereignty, holiness, mercy, love, faithfulness, patience, grace. When viewed as the unveiling of Jesus Christ rather than as the unfolding of future events, the Apocalypse is especially rich in devotional content.

### The use of the imagination


Dr. W. E. Sangster gives helpful advice on the use of the imagination in Bible study. “The devout student,” he writes, “has learned to live in the Bible. By a reverent use of the imagination, he has developed a method of slipping within the covers of the book and making it autobiographical.” He suggests that the noblest use of the imagination is not to plan things for the future, but to run back through the corridors of time and call up the scenes and facts of our Lord’s life, and to be present as if in body at every recorded event of the history of the Redeemer; to run back through time and jostle with Peter and James and John when they stand around the Saviour; to see Lazarus emerging from the tomb; to sit with Mary at Jesus’ feet.... The proper use of the imagination is to take true things and make them vivid in the life of today. We can read the Bible from the outside or the inside. We can come to it in a detached fashion and always be external to it, or we can slip between its covers and live within the divine Word itself. Here is a suggestion well worth trying out.

### The Holy Spirit

Probably one of the main reasons for not deriving more personal profit from our Bible study is our often unwitting failure to accord to

the Holy Spirit His place as the Interpreter of the Bible. If we approach the Scriptures depending, consciously or unconsciously, on our human abilities and equipment, what we derive from them will be largely on the level of the human. If we read in dependence on the Holy Spirit, He is pledged to “guide us into all truth” (John 16:13). The unaided mind, William Barclay reminds us, discovers only partial truth. Even strenuous thinking unaided by the Holy Spirit can lead to frustration and bewilderment, for the mind by itself can produce more problems than solutions. Thinking and praying must go hand in hand. The Spirit can give us a flash of illumination and we should expect it.

It is the delight of the Spirit to take of the things of Christ and shew them to us (John 16:13). He is the intermediary of Christ and God and speaks to us what He hears from God. He is Christ’s remembrance (John 14:26), and as we rely on His co-operation in our study, He will bring to our remembrance the very verses or truths we need, and at the very moment.

Since this is true, each time we approach the Word for personal profit we should bow and humbly seek His help and illumination. 

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the OMF *Overseas Bulletin* (March 1961): 34–36.

The subsequent issue of the *Overseas Bulletin* contained a letter to the Editor which recognized the irony of the General Director alerting missionaries of their need for personal Bible study and acknowledged that experience proved how right he was.<sup>1</sup> Just as J. O. Sanders’s article is of benefit to missionaries of a later generation, this letter illustrates one more way in which we can read our Bibles profitably and reminds us how crucial it is to find a method that will help us develop as disciples of Christ.

*Editor*

It must seem strange to us that the General Director should deem it necessary and proper that he should submit an article on “Bible Study for Personal Profit” for publication in the *Overseas Bulletin*. Surely this is a subject in which we ought all to be teachers rather than need someone to teach us.

Up until a year ago my own devotional Bible study brought the minimum of profit to me. Then I was again advised to use a notebook to write down each day the Word of the Lord to me. I took this advice and bought myself a large notebook that cannot be forgotten. I cannot tell you what profit and spiritual blessing this method has brought to me each day as I have waited upon Him for His Word to me which I have then written down in my book. After more than a year I have a notebook half full of rich thoughts from the Lord from many parts of Scripture.

For those who have not tried this method I enthusiastically suggest it to them,

Yours sincerely,  
*A fellow worker.*



Masthead of the Overseas Bulletin

While many will benefit from this simple technique, others—both missionaries and those they disciple—will be helped by other methods. We have therefore added the popular SU Bible Reading Method below as well as a list of books written to enhance personal and/or group Bible study.

Editor

## Scripture Union Bible Reading Method<sup>2</sup>

**Pray** before reading, asking God to help you understand and receive his Word. Through Christ you are in the Father's holy presence. Approach Him boldly, humbly and expectantly.

**Read** carefully the Bible passage for the day. Refer to the preceding and following sections as necessary so that you read in context.

**Meditate** on what you have read, waiting in openness, ready to obey God's Word to you. First, think through the passage, asking yourself such questions as:

1. What is the main point of this portion?
2. What does God—Father, Son or Holy Spirit—reveal of Himself?
3. What insight am I given into myself, and into my life situation? Is there an example or a warning to heed? A promise to claim?
4. What does Christ require of me now, in thought, word or action?

Then complete your meditation by reading the S.U. Bible study guide. In light of these insights from your fellow Christians, think further about what God is saying to you.

**Apply** what God has taught you from today's reading to the circumstances of life—situations at work, home, school, or church. Use what you have learned in order to become more like Jesus.

**Pray** again. This time, turn the things you have learned into prayers. Thank God for His greatness and love. Confess your sins. Remember the needs of others. Adore the Lord in His beauty. Go forth to serve Him with joy.

## Books on reading the Bible

*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour.* Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

*How to Read the Bible for all its Worth*, 4th ed. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

*The Story of God, the Story of Us: Getting Lost and Found in the Bible.* Sean Gladding. Downers Grove: IVP, 2010. This book is specially suited for use with a group

*Transforming Bible Study.* Bob Grahmann. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.

*Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today.* Adam Hamilton. New York: HarperOne, 2014.

*The Bible Reading Start-up Guide* (Scripture Union, 2007). Whitney T. Kuniholm. Available free at: <http://www.scriptureunion.org/CMT/uploads/biblereadingstartupguide.pdf>.

*The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice.* Lindsay Olesberg. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Overseas Bulletin* (May 1961): 81.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scriptureunion.org/you/su-bible-reading-method> (accessed 8 September 2014). Another good source for information on reading the Bible, including many links, is <http://cms.intervarsity.org/studentsoul/item/start-reading-bible>.

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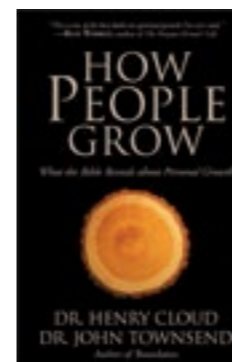
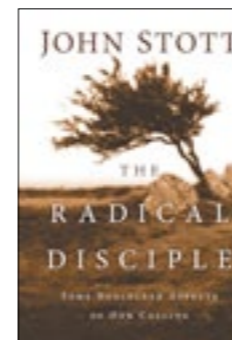
## Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus' Educational Methods for Today's Church.

By Sylvia Wilkey Collinson. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004. ISBN 1-84227-116-4. Reviewed by Allan Harkness.

"Making disciples", as a contemporary strategy for effective Christian formation, has plenty of advocates. What is distinctive about Sylvia Collinson's doctoral dissertation (published in the Paternoster Theological Monographs series) is the range of insights she presents which are not commonly juxtaposed for appreciating the topic. In so doing, she provides a significant contribution to both the theory and application of disciple-making that has potential to be widely adopted. Indeed, one reviewer has suggested that Collinson's work "could signal a paradigm shift in thinking and practice" (David Burke, "Review: *Making Disciples*," *Journal of Christian Education* 48, 2 [September 2005]: 63–64).

Collinson's concern arises from the contemporary dominance of a school-based model of education in the Christian faith; she seeks to investigate and assess discipling as a relevant model for teaching and learning the faith. Moving through the practice of discipling by Jesus and his followers in the Synoptic Gospels, to the church in the first century as reflected in Acts, the NT letters, and Revelation, she demonstrates that a biblical discipling model has six components: it is relational, intentional, mainly informal, typically communal, reciprocal, and centrifugal in focus.

The biblical material alone is worth delving into. But Collinson's stimulating discussion of the possible educational outworking of the components today (including for theological education) doubles the value to the book. If you can't get hold of the book, look for these two articles which present the main features of Collinson's perspectives: Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, "Making Disciples: A Relevant Educational Strategy?" *Journal of Christian Education* 43, no. 3 (2000): 7–18 or Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, "Making Disciples and the Christian faith," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005): 240–250.



## The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of our Calling.

By John Stott. Downers Grove: IVP, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8308-3847-9. Reviewed by Walter McConnell.

*The Radical Disciple* is the last book John Stott wrote, and it is classic Stott. If you have read him, you'll know what that means. If you haven't, you should find out. While it addresses discipleship from beginning to end, it was not written as an introduction to the Christian faith—that was covered in his classic, *Basic Christianity*. Rather, as the subtitle indicates, it was intended to highlight "some neglected aspects of our calling." Stott thus speaks out on "eight characteristics of Christian discipleship that are often neglected and yet deserve to be taken seriously" (16). These are nonconformity, Christlikeness, maturity, creation care, simplicity, balance, dependence, and death. Together, they demonstrate the extent and depth to which discipleship should reach into our lives as we follow Jesus' teaching and learn to obey his commands. They also remind us that discipleship is not a program but a life-long student-teacher relationship with the Lord.

## How People Grow.

By Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. ISBN 981-04-6481-9

This book is a result of the authors' journey of discovery in their helping profession based upon their examination of Scripture and various growth models used in Christian circles. Drawing upon biblical teaching, the authors explore the principles of spiritual growth that can bring about true and lasting transformation of the soul. They emphasize the importance of understanding spiritual growth against the bigger context of God's work of redemption and reconciliation. The book is aimed at readers who are concerned about their own growth and those who desire a comprehensive approach to biblical growth in order to facilitate growth in others. With many practical and real-life examples, the book seeks to address issues that hinder spiritual growth, even in the lives of those who may have no lack of biblical knowledge or zeal in ministry. The authors show us that spiritual growth is holistic and permeates every arena of life, leaving no room for a dichotomy between the spiritual and secular life.



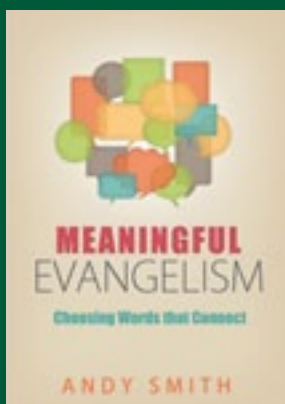
## Recommended Books on Discipleship



### **1-2-1 Discipleship**

By Christine Dillon. Borough Green: OMF and Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009.

In my mid-twenties I became convicted that all Christians were to “make disciples” but had no idea how to go about it since I had never been formally disciplined. When I looked for help, I found books that either inspired me to disciple others but didn’t help me practically or resources that claimed to be “for discipleship” but were merely topical lessons for new believers. So I embarked on a trial-and-error journey to learn how to make disciples. Over time, I was privileged to disciple many people and was given the opportunity to apply what I learned at OMF’s training course, “Multiplying Effective Evangelists and Disciplers” (MEED). That course was the laboratory from which *1-2-1 Discipleship* emerged to provide relief for others who did not know how to make disciples and send them on their way. The book focuses mainly on one-to-one situations and considers such issues as: What is discipleship? What is its goal? Does it matter when and where we meet and how to make those decisions? What should we learn together and how? And how long should the discipling process last? *1-2-1 Discipleship* is designed to de-mystify the process of discipleship for those just learning how to make disciples and provides guidelines for those training others to obey Christ’s final commandment. It is also available for Kindle and is currently being translated into Chinese.



### **Meaningful Evangelism: Choosing Words that Connect**

By Andy Smith. Manila: OMF Literature, 2011.

Twenty-five years of ministry in the Philippines has taught Andy Smith that pre-evangelism, evangelism, and discipleship are one ongoing process that moves people from wherever they are to help them become more like Christ. This wasn’t always the case. As a new worker, his evangelism bore little fruit and he started to wonder why. Eventually, he discovered that his ineffectiveness was tied to the use of terms and methods that had worked in the U.S.A. but did not connect with his Filipino friends.

Over a period of several years, the Spirit taught him that he could use different sets of words when he talked to people about sin, salvation, and Jesus. He first found one set of words that resonated with many Tagalogs and Bikolanos when he spoke to them about their relationship with God. He then found another. Through his study of Scripture, the Spirit’s prompting, and his interaction with people, Andy learned that many sets of words—all of which have biblical grounding—could be used to touch hearts with their need of Jesus.

But helping people to find release from sin through salvation in Christ does not solve all their problems. Many know Jesus only as the Savior from sin, but not as the Healer. As a result, some still visit the shaman. Since they do not yet know him as the Redeemer, many continue to live in fear of the spirits. By discipling them so that their understanding of sin, salvation, and Jesus is expanded, their faith matures in ways that significantly impact their daily lives.

*Meaningful Evangelism* is recommended for anyone who would like to become more effective as an evangelist or discipler. It is available in several OMF centers and as an e-book (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iBooks).