


Disciple-making: What is it all about?

**Author:**Malan Nel¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Malan Nel,
malan.nel@up.ac.za

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Many theologians, pastors included, are deeply aware that the church is challenged in many ways. It often looks like we have lost the script for being church. And sociologically it may very well be a dead-end road. Theologically, many agree that before that dead-end, there is a fork in the road. A choice to continue as is or go back to the original plan: 'Go, make disciples of all the nations ...' (Mt 28:20). This article explores some of the reasons why, should we not see the choice of this fork, we may end up at the dead-end. And should we see the fork in good time and make the right choices, what would that imply? Or differently said: how did we lose the plan and what was the plan all about? The article refers to literature whose authors attempted to show the original plan and suggested transformational processes to get back what we have lost. A central departure point is a remark by Bonhoeffer that 'Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ' (see p 2 below). The article also focuses on what is meant by disciple-making¹– accepting that churches in the reformational tradition would certainly, at the fork, choose the road leading to 'Go, make disciples ...'.

Contribution: In this article, the departure point is a practical theological one. The Biblical Sciences are presumed and so is Mission Studies. The importance of the Biblical Sciences, Systematic Theology and Congregational Studies is easy to recognise.

Keywords: disciples; disciple-making; reformation; transformation; developing missional congregations; faithful witnesses; service evangelism; servant evangelism; relational.

Introduction

The research problem formulated in my first article on discipleship in youth ministry was: we have lost the radical nature of the faith community as disciples of Jesus and seekers of the Kingdom. If so, how should we invite and initiate youth into a life of discipleship? (Nel 2009:1). In a follow-up article, the focus was on theological suggestions, how to transform faith communities into a movement where we make disciples in youth ministry – in such a way that young disciples will make disciples (Nel 2015a:2). In the words of 'Turner (2021:xx): 'Make disciples of all nations' is the Great Commission's primary emphasis; no church should lose sight of this significant directive'.

After another round of reading and developing a course to train members in making disciples, the challenge was to find words for what it is we are doing when we make disciples. This is the backdrop for this research problem:

We are not making disciples, at least not enough so, as a normal way of life. For many different reasons, churches have given up on 'the great CoMission' (Morton 2013). One of the reasons may very well be that we do not know what disciple-making entails.

How did we lose this calling?

There are probably many more reasons. I briefly focus on the following three.

Christendom might have 'killed' discipleship

Christendom and its effect on the church has been part of the Gospel and Culture network and dialogue since its beginning. In the first book in the series, it was stated as such (Guder & Guder 1998):

'In this book, when we speak of Christendom we are referring to the system of church-state partnership and cultural hegemony in which the Christian religion was the protected and privileged religion of society and the church its legally established institutional form. Even when the legal structures of Christendom have been removed (as in North America), the legacy continues as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes, and social structures that we describe as 'functional Christendom.' (p. 7)

1. Disciple-making is spelled differently in the literature. I have opted for this way.

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Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Christendom, however described (cf. Herrin 2021), is a viewpoint of being church the cultural way, and even often the nationalist way. It has to do with what Rietveld (2023) calls the end of the shared Christian worldview. His understanding is explained in a remark on the back page of his book:

The social landscape has radically changed over the past 50 years. Christians were once respected, sought out, and trusted. Now we are blamed, marginalized, and viewed with suspicion. In this book, David Rietveld explains what, how, and why this has happened, in a way that the average person can understand. He begins with Christendom, where both Christians and non-Christians hold shared beliefs and values. He explains the church's role, and how evangelism and discipleship worked in that era. He then tracks the changes that have occurred and clarifies what and why things are now different. (Rietveld 2023:n.p.)

During Christendom, baptism easily became a cultural sign and often led the church into a state of 'cultural convenience' or captivity (Nel 2024:63). It changed the way churches view identity. Identity is even being equalled to language, tribe or colour of the skin. Contextual cultural relevancy of churches and congregations (cf. Nel 2011) is different. The last mentioned is about faithfulness while the aforementioned is often nothing but a denial of our true God-given identity in Christ. In Christendom, congregations are culturally determined rather than being Christ-ruled within a certain cultural context (cf. Jonker 1965).

Because of the radical nature of the Kingdom of God of which the church is a contextual *gestalt*, Christendom churches often thought along the lines of 'God is there for us'. And it was more about the kingdom of the church than the Kingdom of God, with the church seeking the Kingdom. Two prominent theologians challenged this cultural captivity and suffered heavily. Hoekendijk challenged this in the Netherlands and so did David Bosch in South Africa. Hoekendijk (1966) argued:

[T]he call to evangelism is often little else than a call to restore 'Christendom', the *Corpus Christianum*, as a solid, well-integrated cultural complex, directed and dominated by the church. And the sense of urgency is often nothing but a nervous feeling of insecurity, with the established church endangered; a flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably past. (p. 15)

Bosch's (1991) world-renowned book is a testimony to his understanding (cf. Bosch 1982 and his reference to the church as alternative community). It is indeed a time for 'missional discipleship after Christendom' as the title of the book by Hardy and Yarnell (2018) suggests. Brueggemann (2006) already helped us with his in-depth study under the title *The Word that Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*. Many churches did hear this Word; but was it Christendom-deafness that prevented more of us from hearing the *redescription* louder and clearer *then* already?

It is almost obvious why discipleship died or was rarely found in Christendom (cf. ed. Hirsch 2016:43–46). Bonhoeffer (1949:52) expressed this, writing: 'Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship,

and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ'.

The bubble, the capsule of nationalising the church, is however strong. We may live, sooner than to be expected amid the missional reformation, in a time where nationalist policies in nations try to get back the cultural convenience dominance of being church our culture's-way (cf. Hardy & Yarnell 2018:171 ff. for a discussion on the challenges concerning the 'new tribes', Gen Y [*Millennials MN*] and Z, who often know nothing or little of Christendom).

Reductionisms led to the wrong choices

When Guder reflected on 'the continuing conversion of the church', he pointed out certain reductionisms (Guder 2000:97–141; [for his description of 'four foundational components of the Church's Missional Conversion'] cf. Cho 2021:203 ff). One of them is reducing salvation to forgiveness of sin and going to heaven. This led over many years to evangelism being wrongly defined. It often led to a decision-making approach rather than a disciple-making approach.

Add to this the reductionism of seeing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus as only being about forgiveness. This led to an almost complete loss of the gospel Jesus himself represented and shared: the gospel of the Kingdom of God (for but one example, cf. Lk 8:1–3). The gospel of the Kingdom of God, one might say, in the context of this paragraph, is the gospel of the restoration of life before death – the good news of healing in the most holistic sense of the word. The God story (Armstrong 1987b:52–54) is so much more than just being forgiven, however important that is. In Guder's (2000:189–190) view, the gospel is greater, more, transformative and revolutionary in its scope than the individualised and privatised reduction thereof. Coetzee, Nel and Knoetze (2023:3) write: 'Tragically, as a result of this, evangelism ... separates Jesus as Saviour from Jesus as Lord. The salvation work of Jesus and his reign also become separated'. To put it differently, as it pertains to youth ministry (eds. Dean, Foster & Dewald 2022):

Young people are looking for a soul-shaking, heart-waking, world-changing God to fall in love with; and if they do not find that God in the Christian Church, they will most certainly settle for lesser gods elsewhere ... Most of the time we offered them pizza. (p. 7; also quoted from the 1998 edition by Morton 2013)

Losing touch with the 'Ancient Call' (Campbell 2023)

Maybe because of the shallowing of the gospel to being 'our' good news, as so often happened within our culturally convenient saved-ness, we, almost unknowingly so, did not take the *manifesto* of Matthew 28 (Van Aarde 2006:112–113) seriously enough. In my memory of life during the apartheid years, this text was preached as a challenge to go away to the nations and save them. The reductionism of the impoverished gospel of salvation was often carried forth into our missionary work as it was called then. But while doing so, in sending

missionaries elsewhere, the local congregation could continue living in their 'cultural convenience' – captivity – even affording themselves the sin of judgement, prejudice and even racism.

This happened because of the gradual acceptance of a lie – the lie that members are not disciples. Christendom-consciences could accommodate that lie. Members of a cultural club do not have to take Jesus seriously. And the idea of a church within a church developed. Even denominations made peace with the statistics that some 50% or more never even attend a worship service anymore. This became acceptable; they are at least part of the 'church' was the argument. No need to point out in any detail the catastrophic consequences. Even the evangelism efforts of people who are serious about Jesus were focused inwards – normally a few enthusiasts in the congregation trying to win its very own people back.

This is, of course, only another example of culturally dominated churches not taking the Words of God seriously. The convenience factor becomes the hermeneutical principle. The lack of discipleship-discipline is obvious. Any reformation, as referred to in the next paragraph, is the transformation of this too – taking the baptism of these members seriously, calling them to faithful discipleship.

In his book *Repairing the Missional Breach* (with the subtitle *Why the Church Isn't Making Disciples and How We Can Fix It*), Blackwell (2024) explores the shortcomings in three major movements in Christian ministry. He refers to the three in the following words: 'The age of Church Growth and Pragmatism' (2024:42–76), 'An Emergent Generosity of Orthodoxy' (2024:77–109), (the Emergent Church Movement MN), 'If Everything is Missional, Is Anything truly Missional?' (2024:110–143). In the last chapter of the book, he tries to offer insights to what he calls 'a Faithful Missional Future. Ministry Shifts Needed to Repair the Breach'. In his critique of the three movements, he helps us understand why even in these honest attempts to reach the world the 'gap' that needs to be breached is the missing link of disciple-making. He is right in referring to a remark by the well-known Michael Breen: 'No one creates a discipling culture, modelled on the life and ministry of Jesus, by accident' (Breen 2017:17; cf. Breen 1992). Even in good and extensive research (cf. eds. Burger, Marais & Mouton 2017), there is, to my mind, a too obvious absence of intentional disciple-making as part of 'cultivating missional change' (title of the book). The same is true for two valuable contributions by Van Gelder and under his leadership (2007, 2008). It remained in many ways and for far too long a missing link in our missional thinking. In a well-researched publication (Hastings 2012) of 321 pages, there is but one reference to Matthew 28:18–20. The same is to be said for so many other excellent contributions in the missional discussion (cf. Guder & Guder 1998). There are many references to equipping and formation (discipleship language), but no explicit exploration of a disciple-making paradigm (cf. Guder & Guder 1998:183–220; Marais 2017: 372–392. The heading of his chapter is 'Missional formation

and discipleship'). In other contexts, the current changes in our discussion were pointed out (cf. Nel 2015a; Nel & Schoeman 2019; cf. Hirsch 2016:111–113; Niemandt 2016). There is indeed an 'ecclesial turn' (Stoppels 2013:13–17). 'In many circles, whether mainline or among the so-called evangelicals, there is a new discovery of this neglected jewel in the crown of faithful missional churches' (Nel 2015b:2). Stoppels (2013:13) chooses to go for discipleship and discipling in his book and does so under the motto: 'Jesus called learners, not church people'.

There are many signs that we are picking up the signal of the 'Ancient Call' (Campbell 2023) again.

The fork in the road

My conversion to 'see' this fork option goes back a long way. I am not referring to that memorable evening when I realised that what my parents and many others have taught me about Jesus is true for me too: he is indeed Saviour and Lord of my life. An evening of clear realisation of what I today would call a God moment concerning my baptism as a baby. I am referring to what Sjogren (1993:35–41) called his changing from shark to dolphin, almost a second conversion, back to the world in a different way. In my case, back to the church, which is supposed to think differently about themselves and the world that belongs to God. Like in most conversions, God's grace was active long ago already. I could start in a congregation where two excellent pastors served before me. I know and sense, since my first year in full-time ministry, that the church is God's agent seeking the Kingdom of God. But this became my core academic and ministry passion as I was doing research for my doctoral (DD) dissertation (as we called it then) on youth evangelism. I realised my research is about winning our youth back and not reaching out into the unchurched world. And I saw, I think, the fork in the road far more clearly. This is not right. My immediate new research avenue after my DD degree was in what the Germans then already called *Gemeindeaufbau*. A book was just published on *Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus* (Schwarz & Schwarz 1984). The two authors, father and son, made the choice that one can hardly change the larger denomination [*Kirche*]. Rather focus on the congregation [*ekklesia*]. *Gemeindeaufbau*, to them, is about changing the *ekklesia*.

Many, myself included, did not agree with the choice while realising that there is some truth to it. In Germany, a book was published as a response to this publication and concerning this distinction (cf. Weth 1986; cf. Winkler 1989). It is to my mind however not a choice *Kirche* oder *Gemeinde* but both. This led to my lifelong exploration of the fork and road I saw. And I am still converting towards congregational reformational transformation. The main thesis is rediscovering our God-given identity in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, Word and Sacraments, and then an intentional reformational *becoming* who we already are in Christ.

The understanding of this challenging and continuing process is described in the book with the subtitle: *Who are we and where are we going?* (Nel 2015:203–346). This reformational road is not, in any way, easy. Getting out of the bubble – a capsule of ‘cultural convenience’ or captivity – is for many not at all easy and will hardly ever happen without conflict and even resistance to the point of leaving the ‘church’. Smit (2014: position 203 of 1327) once worded an understanding of mine as follows. I quote him here within my paradigm of the situation within culturally convenient and dominated churches:

In the tradition of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard, we often distinguish between admirers, learners [*pupils*] and disciples of Jesus. *Admirers* are those who respect the life and teachings of Jesus and may even often quote these. They admire him as the best among men and like to listen to his words. *Pupils* are people who study his teachings, they know these teachings inside out, can talk about them and even teach them. *Disciples* are those whose lives are destiny-bound with Christ, whose lives have been touched and changed by him and His Spirit and people who no longer live for themselves but for him and others. (Author’s own translation, and *emphasis*)

What follows in the next paragraphs is an attempt to help churches and congregations that have seen the fork and opted for the reformational challenging road with mountain passes, dangerous curves, among others. These paragraphs suppose, even assume, that such a process of transformation is active and that this reformation includes a rediscovery of every member being a disciple. The process intentionally works towards an understanding that members are all disciples in becoming, disciples in the making (I pleaded for this in 1994 already [Nel 1994:89]). And as we are becoming disciples ourselves, we realise that this calling is ours: ‘Go, make disciples of all nations ...’ To put it in the words of Dickerson (2020):

To be a disciple of Christ is to allow Christ to transform you. And to be a disciple is also to be a disciple maker, and thus to be involved in that transformation process in the lives of others ... To state this as a double negative: those who want to be disciples of Christ are not given the option of not being involved in the work of disciple making. (p. 9)

Our transformation includes a deep awareness of our brokenness as and while we are being healed. Van Aarde (2006) once put it this way:

In this radically new dispensation one finds in Matthew an imperfect (‘onvolledig’) church that cannot, like the 12 of old, claim a certain humanly roundedness – even the twelve has changed to the eleven after Jude, Iscariot left – the broken group (church), the ‘sinners church’. It is this broken church that receives the great commission – not a perfect church, but an imperfect one, the elevenish (Bruner 1990:1090) church. (pp. 112–113, [Author’s own translation])

We are aware of our dependence upon the Lord. In the gospel of Matthew, it is Matthew 5:3 that colours the gospel and the *manifesto* of the New Testament as Van Aarde (2006:112–113) describes Matthew 28:19: ‘Blessed are those who know how

dependent they are upon God’.² To us is the Kingdom we seek and wish others to find and seek too. O’Loughlin (2022:67–80) refers to us as *Wounded Pilgrims* in a chapter on *Amazing Grace: Moving Onwards as Wounded Pilgrims*. I have tried to reflect on myself as such a dependent and wounded pilgrim in an Afrikaans book (2020) under the title *Om uit genade te leef* [To live by grace].

The following paragraphs assume churches and congregations who choose to never rest till every member rediscover ‘I am a disciple, follower, learner, committed to Jesus the Lord and faithfully making disciples that will do so too!’ Disciples in the making make disciples in the making, ... and so the rhythm continues! Osmer (1990:141) once captured it well with words to the effect that if we want to recover something, we so often first have to rediscover what we have lost (cf. Ogden 2016:170–173; Ogden 1998 for what he calls a ‘blueprint to follow when you are ready to approach people with the invitation to discipleship’). At the turn of the century, Botman (2000:201–212) challenged us with what this rediscovery in South Africa might entail.

What follows below will not focus on the *participia* ‘baptising, teaching ...’ at all. This is, to my mind, what happens when someone has become a disciple of Christ. It is a part of disciple-making. It deals with our *becoming* as an unfolding understanding of the sacramentally sealed covenantal faithfulness of the Triune God. In the words of Arthur: ‘these two instrumental participles by themselves may not fully explain the meaning of μαθητεύσατε’ (Arthur 2022b, Inductive Study of Mt 28:16–20 section).

What is making disciples all about?

Before discussing a few possible directives, one more important point. One of the most challenging corrections that might be needed for disciple-making to happen again and happen as normally as it is supposed to be, is to get the ‘go’ of this vital text in Matthew 28:19 out of its military command sphere. The style in disciple-making is relational, because the style and we whose lifestyle it becomes, are taking God into account. There is a deep relaxation in this style: God is before us. He loves more than we do, and he bestows faith (not us).

For the sake of the meaning of the text and for the sake of disciple-making itself, we need to understand it as a commitment as part of normal life, every day.

Van Aarde (2006) (cf. Wilson 1979) puts it this way:

This imperfect ‘church’ hears the commission. The verb ‘to go’ (*poreuthentes* – Mt 28:19) they heard is not a strong verb – not in the grammatical form of a command, but an infinitive. It is like ‘I am going to eat’. Not to be understood as a command: GO and eat! What is imperative in what they hear is ‘make disciples’ [*mathēteusate*], make the church one large school of Jesus followers. (p. 114, [Author’s own translation])

2. A free translation of the 1983 Afrikaans translation of Matthew 5:3: “Geseënd is dié wat weet hoe afhanklik hulle van God is, want aan hulle behoort die koninkryk van die hemel.”

Almost like, 'You're going anyway. As you go, *make disciples* of all nations ...'. So, as we go about our business anyway, we make disciples. That does not mean that *going* is negotiable as if not important. The *go* gets its power and urgency from the main verb and is indeed non-negotiable in that sense. For us to do what ought to be done (make disciples), it is necessary to go. Do what needs to be done, namely make disciples – and do this while you are going anyway (cf. Arthur 2022:122–123).

The calling of Jesus to make disciples is indeed the 'Pentecost' in the gospel of Matthew. When this verse falls out of our everyday vocabulary or is taken out of context, we lose the essence of the Jesus story and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Within the safety of the One to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given and the same One who will be with disciple-makers till the end of time (Mt 28:18 & 20), we are doing, as we go, what we are called to do: make disciples ... It is as if Acts 1:8 comes to us in a Matthew way:

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

And we know that we are God's included people as disciples of Jesus Christ, the Lord. In the meaning of Van Ruler, we are just never excluded ever again: 'God is still serious (as was revealed in Christ) about the Kingdom coming. In this coming, with which God is busy, God acts with and through people'. These acts are communicative in nature and form. God involves man in a reciprocal way by means of and in these acts. Van Ruler (1965:100) said: '[T]he Spirit never acts on his own, but always involves man, and man in his humanity'. Van Ruler coined the concept '*Theonome Reziprozität*' (Nel 2018:10).

There should be an abiding faith as we go: God is at work, and we are blessed to be involved and included in something so big, that only the present Lord can make it happen. In my home language, there is a word that carries so much of this peace: *ontspannenheid*. A word by Willimon (2020) explains this in some way in English:

We church leaders who wonder which way forward, must begin not with institutional, organizational strategies, but rather with Purves's basic question: What is God in Christ up to now and how can we hitch on to it? (p. 185)

The *must-go* becomes more and more so a *will-go* because we cannot but go and do so. Go and do what needs to be done becomes a thanksgiving '*we want to!*' Recognising that disciple-making is 'indeed, relational and personal, and rooted in love', it is indeed also intentional (Dickerson 2020:123,113).

What then could be important pointers towards what we do when we 'go' and make disciples? I assume that pastors see themselves as disciples and as disciple-makers. It is not part of this article to explore their role. Within the tradition of the reformation, it is a given: pastors are gifted people, given to and trained to equip God's people for ministry (cf. Eph 4:7–16).

In the context of this article reading Hull's (2007) book on *The Discipling-making Pastor* is a must.

Life lived honestly – discovering Jesus in word and sacrament

Disciples are people called into a relationship with Jesus. In this relationship with the living Lord, we discover life in a new way. In this personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Lord of our life, we, as disciples ourselves, have found new meaning. Even many believers (members) who did not, previously, faithfully follow the Lord, rediscover this when it dawns upon them what life in Christ is about. I am quoting Sjogren to make a point about how even a committed Christian may discover how to live life in a new way and change from shark to dolphin, as he calls it (Sjogren 1993):

Looking back, talking with me must have been as exciting as going to the dentist. What I shared during that time was the truth, but the package in which the message came wrapped was incredibly unloving and insensitive. At that time, I was in actuality functioning more as a *soul alienator* than a *soul winner*.

After 5 years of enthusiastically offending people for the Lord, I could see the fruit of my efforts all around me: I had traumatized most of my friends, relatives and neighbors. I told myself I was being rejected because I loved God so much, but my victims didn't see any love at all in what I'd done. I had managed to ostracize all of my family and friends in the name of the Lord. Even so, the aggressiveness of the shark model seemed to me to be the only possible gear for bringing Christ to non-Christians. (p. 36, 37)

Deep change happens when we discover life before God in Christ in Word and Sacrament. Scholars agree that disciples who will make disciples are rooted in the Word of God and the Sacraments (cf. Blackwell 2024:15–41; Campbell 2023: 28–39; Dickerson 2020:14–30; Yarnell 2018:27–45). We discover what life in Christ is all about by exploring the Bible where we meet Jesus and get to know him better and better. I hesitate to call this the disciplines of our Christian Walk of life – as I am deeply aware that the *consequences* of following him so easily become the *requirements* for being a disciple. And when it is misunderstood, legalism shows its ugly face. Dean et al. (ed. 2022:131) talk about the *practices* of such a life. Christian practices, disciplines, are the consequences for us as we follow the living Lord.

Disciple-making is basically about living life the Jesus way, every day among all the people in our spheres of influence. In Word and Sacrament, we 'learn' and we 'experience' him in his true nature and in his total difference in being. We cannot discover life that will disciple others in any other way. We know him, we love him, we serve him and never stop discovering who he is – to know, love and serve in a Christlike way.

Because our lives are being changed as we walk *Coram Deo*, we confess that:

- Jesus has not only changed our lives.
- Jesus made life liveable even though we have to take up a cross as we follow him.

- Jesus added value to our lives in every sense of the word.
- We discover that the joy is in the journey and not only in the destination of life eternal.

Living this life to its fullest is of itself disciple-making! As part of the church as God's Jesus-movement, we become, more so every day, Jesus-people (as we were called many times [cf. Wood 1974])³ or good-news people as McPhee (1978:17) called us. We are called upon to represent God in a Christlike way. Volf (1998) puts it this way:

What does it mean for the church to embody and pass on the love of Christ and 'the righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rm 14:17)? How would it fulfil its most proper calling to participate in God's mission in the world? ... How is participation in the life of the church – how is being a church – related to the plausibility of the Christian way of life? (p. 7)

Living with a new understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom

One of the most enlightening discoveries in the life of a disciple is the different nature of the Kingdom of God as Jesus made us see it. This discovery includes that Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 8:1; cf. Willard 2010:31 'We need to announce, teach and manifest the good news that Jesus Himself announced'). We have a unique example of what good news entails when discovered as the gospel of the Kingdom. We discover this in the answer to the question of John the Baptists (Lk 7:20–23 [NIV]; cf. Willard 2010:29–59):

Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? ... Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Disciple-making is to grow into this understanding of good news. I am willing to say that without this understanding, we can, in no way, make disciples. Our invitation to others to come to follow Him should be embedded in good news where the broken become healed holistically. One may say that should the non-followers not 'see' (verse 22), they may not 'hear' the invitation.

What then does it mean for disciple-making? As disciples, we seek the Kingdom the Jesus way, and that makes the good news seen and heard so loud and clear that people come and seek that healing in life as they did according to the Gospels (cf. Lk 15:1–2). This implies that we who are making disciples confess:

- We take God, whose Kingdom it is, seriously.
- God is at work.
- God's Kingdom has been coming ever since.
- God gives faith. God helps the broken to begin to take God seriously and be saved by grace and through faith (cf. Eph 2:1–8).

3. For more information about the Jesus People Movement cf. Bustraan (2014).

In literature, this is referred to as making disciples the Jesus way (cf. Dickerson 2020:110–124; Peterson 2007). Spader (2019:99; cf. [the in-depth discussion by] Malphurs 2009:47–91; Morton 2013:127–151) has motivated it this way:

Over 4 years, Jesus had taken His disciples from seekers (Jn 1:39) to followers (Jn 10:27) to coworkers (Mt 4:19) and then finally to disciple-makers (Lk 10:2). Then He told them to do what He had done with them: to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus modeled the process by which they must do that. The book of Acts shows the disciples following through with this command. Acts can be outlined according to the Commission given in Acts 1:8.

It was stated in many ways by different authors. I summarise what the Jesus way may mean in the words by Blackwell (2024:33–41):

- 'The first phase of the disciple-making model of Jesus is the come and see invitation ...
- The second phase of the disciple-making process of Jesus is the come and follow me or associate with me phase. Developing disciples takes time and frequent association ...
- The third phase of the disciple-making process of Jesus is the come and I will make you fishers of men phase ...
- The fourth phase of the disciple-making model of Jesus is the go and bear fruit phase and it is the deepest level of the process of disciple making.'

Sjogren (1993:45–46), whose conversion from shark to dolphin was so lifechanging, learned to 'see through Jesus' eyes', meaning Jesus saw through the eyes of:

- The Kingdom of God
- Scripture
- Mercy
- Simplicity
- Integrity
- His culture
- Reality.

In the words of Arthur, one may say it this way:

The Matthean Jesus embodies perfect alignment between what he commands, promises, and does: (1) he promises to make his disciples ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων (4:19); (2) he fulfills his promise by teaching special truths and principles, and by modeling certain behaviours before them (4:20–28:18); (3) he gives them on-the-job training as disciple-makers by sending them, first, to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10:1–41); and (4) finally, he commissions them into global service of making disciples of all the nations (28:19–20). (Arthur 2022b, [Inductive Study of Matthew 28:16–20 section]; cf. Bauer 2019:309–327)

Cleaning up our subconscious

Following Jesus in the above-mentioned way calls us to work on what is so often even hidden within ourselves and for ourselves: prejudice on so many levels, covered-up racism and so many more deeply buried emotions. Emotions that show, even though we do not even know that it does. It is no

wonder that Campbell (2023:48–51) calls the Great Commandment the Jesus *Shema* and relates it to the Great Commission. To live by love for God and neighbour is in so many ways already disciple-making.

This might call for a daily cleanup of a deep nature. Heuser and Schawchuck (eds. 2010:28–31) refer to this as self-examination. They refer to Psalm 51, examples from the life of Luther, Calvin and Wesley. They end the section with a beautiful quote from Gaddy (1991:11): ‘O, Lord, give me beauty of my inner soul, and let the outward person and the inward person be the same’. It covers the willingness to what one may call *motif*-analysis. Prayer is emphasised so often in disciple-making – praying for people in our sphere of influence. As often as this happens, it has to include our willingness to look into the mirror and trust God for some deep cleaning of our subconscious. In disciple-making, we do not act publicly in a certain way. We are ourselves with growing integrity. It is about being before doing. In more than one sense, our being is our doing.

Growing our emotional and cultural intelligence

Together with the above deeper look into ourselves as we relate to the ‘other’, disciple-makers have to work on their emotional and cultural intelligence. This article is in no way a place to unpack what these two forms of intelligence encompass. I am referring, briefly so, to a recent way of stating it (Nel 2025a):

Goleman ([1995] 2020:43) goes on to summarize the research by Salovey and Mayer (1990:189) and presents five components of emotional intelligence:

1. Knowing one’s emotions. Self-awareness – recognizing a feeling as it happens – is the keystone to emotional intelligence.
2. Managing emotions. Handling feelings so they are appropriate is an ability that builds on self-awareness.
3. Motivating oneself. Marshalling emotions in the service of a goal is essential for paying attention, for self-motivation and mastery, and for creativity. Emotional self-control – delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness – underlies accomplishment of every sort.
4. Recognizing emotions in others. Empathy, another ability that builds on emotional self-awareness, is the fundamental ‘people skill’. (The ability to recognize what other people feel, need, or want. MN)
5. Handling relationships. The art of relationships is, in large part, a skill in managing emotions in others: the ability to manage other people’s emotions. (p. 7)

Add to this the research by Livermore on cultural intelligence (CQ). He portrays cultural intelligence drive as ‘the motivational dimension of CQ [which] is the leader’s level of interest, drive, and energy to adapt cross-culturally’ (Livermore 2009a:26). Kim, who has done good research on how these play into preaching, helps us understand the necessity of developing both emotional and cultural intelligence. I think Kim (2017:5) is right in pointing out that ‘Cultural intelligence [CQ] resembles emotional intelligence [EQ], which measures one’s capacity for relational and interpersonal skills’ (cf. Nel 2021b:165, 2025:8).

The issue in disciple-making is to work on this ‘love: desire ----> ability’ (Livermore 2009b:13). We are ‘compelled’ by the love of Christ and us being a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:14, 17) to represent God in this culturally diverse world and to do so with emotional and cultural intelligence (Nel 2021:166; cf. Cho 2021:167–197 for his chapter on ‘The Holy Spirit shaped the earliest church in an intercultural context’).

Developing compassion – a deep sense of caring for others

This vital component of our *being* in disciple-making runs through all that has been said and through what is to follow. Let me state it in the words of Armstrong (1987:30):

There is another dimension of listening, which is not a skill but a gift of God. It is the quality of compassion. We must listen with our hearts as well as with our ears. The word compassion literally means ‘to suffer with’. It means being able to feel what the other person feels, sharing his or her agony, empathizing, suffering with the one to whom we are listening ... Compassionate listening implies availability on the part of the faithful witness and a commitment to follow through in whatever way the situation calls for. The commitment is not so much a listening skill as it is a frame of mind and heart. It is the proof of one’s compassion and the test of one’s sincerity. Good listening must give rise to appropriate action, by which others will know they have really been heard. That is the service aspect of our evangelism, and we shall have an opportunity later ... to see what commitment would entail in different true-to-life situations. (cf. Sjogren 1993 and the many examples of caring; Bauer (2019:319): ‘the mission of disciples is compassion-motivated’)

Learning that service is listening and listening is caring

Both Armstrong (1979) and Sjogren (1993) developed a style of reaching out to others that is called service evangelism and servant evangelism, respectively. For Sjogren (1993:22) ‘servant evangelism = deeds of love + words of love + adequate time’.⁴ Armstrong (1979:53) describes service evangelism in these words. The word ‘service’ is intended as a style of evangelism that is:

- caring
- supportive
- unselfish
- sensitive
- responsive to human needs
- evangelism done by a servant church, whose people are there not to be served but to serve.

The systematic theologian Migliori (2023) wrote, to my mind, justly so:

The servant model of the church has much to contribute. At its best, it helps to overcome the split between the spiritual and the mundane, between concern for evangelization and

4. For anyone interested in how the congregation he served changed and changed lives, reading his book will be an eye-opener. The sub-title is indeed true: A refreshing new approach to sharing the love of Jesus with other.

struggle for justice, a split all too frequent in other models of the church. (p. 306)

Linking up with this style for and in disciple-making is vital. It is built upon Jesus' word according to Mark 4:35–45. Jesus explains the word *serves* by *giving life*. Disciples follow him in this understanding and learn that service is first *giving* someone your *attention*. Service is listening and listening is caring enough to serve someone by listening. And listening determines when, what and even whether I am going to say anything (Armstrong 1987:24). Henry Nouwen (2006 [March 11]) once put it this way and under the heading 'Listening as Spiritual Hospitality':

To listen is very hard because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept.

Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discover their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.

As we grow in sensitivity for what is the best in life (cf. Phlp 1:9–11), we learn to discern how and what, serving the Jesus way might imply. We are called to serve people back (cf. Nel 2002:66–87).

Learn how to share our faith when words are necessary

Living life, more and more so, the Jesus way, often opens opportunities 'to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (Pt 1 3:15, NIV). Even such an answer we give 'with gentleness and respect' (Pt 1 3:16 NIV). Over many years, even parents have not been equipped how to share their faith when our baptised children ask about our faith – this in a space like no other, where disciples are made (cf. Dt 6:4–9; Nel 2018:82ff. for his understanding of the family as a hermeneutical sphere, 'a space where understanding is being facilitated'; cf. ed. Dean et al. 2022:96–99 and their discussion of families being 'the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents').

Faith-sharing is part of our lives. We need to be prepared to answer why we believe in and follow Jesus. In a new course under the name 'Disciples make disciples. Invitation to life which is in Christ'⁵ (Nel 2025b), at least two of the weeks of training focus on faith-sharing: what it is and how we do it in the most natural and non-confrontational way when an

5. Afrikaans title: *Dissipels maak dissipels. Ultnodiging tot die lewe wat in Christus is* (Nel 2025b).

opportunity opens up to answer a question or share a story of faith. The 2 weeks were taken over from the course Faithful Witnesses (Armstrong 1987:38–53), building an argument for our role in the 'leap-of-faith'. Scholars doubt whether Kierkegaard ever used the words 'leap of faith', (McKinnon 1993:107–125) but Armstrong accepted that the image comes from him. Richard Schacht (1973:307) explains how Kierkegaard saw the truth and being in the truth in these words: 'The ultimate reality is God; and a person can place himself in a relation to this ultimate reality only by suspending his reason and making a "leap of faith"' (cf. Hannay 2020).

Learning how to invite – disciple-making and evangelism are relational and invitational

It would be possible to write another article on what this invitation entails and how it is to be done. Osmer (2021) titled his book *The Invitation: A Theology of Evangelism*. Disciple-making is invitational. Humbly, but sincerely, we invite others. We relay Jesus' call: 'Come follow me, associate with me, commit to me and my way of being and doing'. He called with authority, so much so that, for example, a tax collector left everything and followed him (Mt 9:9). We are but representatives of the One calling and we do so 'with gentleness and respect' (1 Pt 3:16). When we live the life given and received in the abundance of the life promised (Jn 10:10b), this invitation takes on new meaning. It is almost 'come follow with us, why would you ever want to miss out on what God has in store' (cf. Campbell 2023:54).

In the course referred to above, members are helped to handle what is called 'decision-making points'. However sensitive and informed by theological insights, one cannot escape these moments. One such theological insight and guiding principle in disciple-making is the fact that we understand that it is not about decision-making but disciple-making – an invitation to a way of life where many more such decisions, to stay faithful in our following of the Lord Jesus, are required. It remains however a choice to stand up and follow him – and for some people it is a decisive first one.

Conclusion

The church and every local congregation are called to transform and reform to get in line with what is called our New Testament *manifesto* (Van Aarde 2006:112–113). We need to rediscover that the Great Commandment and the Great Commission go together. We need to repair this breach too (cf. Blackwell 2024). Disciple-making churches act on two levels: people who are already members by their baptism become, unfold in their association with the Christ, AND as they do, they become active disciple-makers. One may look at it as strengthening the core while inviting others into this new way of living – as we continuously discover to live life the Jesus way. May we see the fork in good time and choose life over and against a dead-end death!

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