There is a crisis of discipleship in the American church today. Reams of research confirm the simple observation that in many ways the lives of most professing Christians are not much different from their nonbelieving neighbors. Like ancient Israel and the church in some periods of history, we have adopted the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the surrounding culture to an alarming degree. Although there are exceptions among individuals and congregations, they only serve to confirm the reality.

This sad situation is bringing reproach on the name of Jesus Christ, undermining the credibility of the church, strengthening atheist rhetoric, and bringing frequent charges of hypocrisy against God’s people and his work. It stands in stark contrast with the teachings of Jesus about discipleship and the witness of the church in other eras, and it presents us with an urgent and unavoidable challenge.

A significant part of our problem today is widespread misunderstanding about the nature of discipleship. Let’s briefly look at what Jesus taught about discipleship, how the early church responded, and where we are today. Perhaps this will help us see more clearly what we need to do.

Jesus on Discipleship

Jesus began his public ministry with a simple message of grace: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17), or, as Mark records it, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15 ESV). By this Jesus meant that in his own Person, God’s kingdom was now uniquely present and people should respond by believing this good news, turning from their sins, and trusting him. Soon after he began his ministry, Jesus called his first followers, Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who were fishermen. One day, as they were plying their trade on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus came up and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). The call came at an inconvenient time, took precedence over family, friends, and livelihood and carried a high personal price. All they... (continued on page 10)
Here are key moments in history when voices need to shout, “Stop!” and change course. In this special issue of Knowing and Doing, we add our voice to those who recognize that the church in America is heading in the wrong direction. We urge a stop to cheap grace, nominalism, and the compartmentalization of God. And we advocate for a renewed focus on authentic discipleship. While we don’t pretend to have all the answers, we recognize core elements that are essential to the health of the church, and we feel called to articulate those concerns.

In this special issue, you will get a hearty meal of discipleship, from understanding what it is to how to refocus your life, your church, and your ministry around discipleship of the heart and mind. Discipleship is not a check-the-box course we take; it is a focus of each key stage of life as we journey with Christ toward our destiny.

There is an urgency to our message. As Greg Ogden asks, “Where have all the disciples gone?” Too many church leaders and Christians downplay or don’t even understand what it means to wholeheartedly follow Christ seven days a week; they aren’t willing to pay the cost of doing so. Europe lost its faith in just a few short generations, and America is headed in that direction unless we change course, which involves making discipleship part of the DNA of every believing church in America. Every pastor should be actively encouraging the congregation to live as Christ called us to live—not as powerless weaklings adrift in the world, but as spirit-filled leaders for God’s kingdom.

Of course, there are signs of promise, and there are good, solid churches in America that are setting examples for us to follow. In future issues, we will be highlighting success stories and offering practical advice on how churches and individuals can focus effectively on discipleship.

Please join us by praying for the church. Pray for leaders to be raised up. Pray for the Holy Spirit to spark a new hunger for worship and a discipleship movement that will sweep this land.

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott
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Walter Hooper has on several occasions stated that C.S. Lewis was the most thoroughly converted person he had ever met. If I were to put what Hooper was saying into biblical language, it would go something like this: “From the time Lewis came to faith in Jesus Christ to the day he died, he desired, worked, and struggled, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing, to bring all of his life captive to Christ.” An evangelical would simply have said that Lewis was a model disciple of Christ. I agree with both assertions. I also believe Lewis understood the nature and purpose of Christian discipleship better than most and communicated as clearly as anyone in the English speaking world.

Because my primary aim is to demonstrate the enormous significance of what Lewis has to teach us about Christian discipleship, it is important that I make clear at the outset that Lewis did in fact struggle all his life to embody what he knew to be true of a disciple of Christ. Two examples will suffice. The first comes from a letter Lewis wrote on June 21, 1950, to his friend and former student, George Sayer. Lewis was fifty-one years old. Much of his most important and celebrated work defending and explicating the faith had been published. He was, one might say, mature and well established in his faith. But on this day he penned the following: “My Dear George, I shall be completely alone at the Kilns... from Aug 11 to Aug 19th and am like to fall into a whoreson melancholy. Can you come and spend all or any of this time with me?” Now this is a rather amazing and illuminating statement. Surprising in that a somewhat reserved Lewis should unburden himself in this way to a friend and illuminating inasmuch as it demonstrates that even at this period in his life, he was still wrestling with personal demons, still struggling to keep his way pure. It is also illuminating in that it demonstrates the depth of his commitment to following Christ.

The second example is found in the last sermon Lewis preached. He delivered it on January 29, 1956, and it was titled “A Slip of the Tongue.” Once again, it is worth noting that Lewis is now fifty-seven years old; once again we might be tempted to safely assume that while he is far from perfect, he surely has all the big issues well in hand. “A Slip of the Tongue,” however, gives us reason to pause. He begins the sermon recounting how, during his morning devotions, he misread the collect for the fourth Sunday after Trinity. Instead of praying “that I might so pass through things temporal that I finally lost not the things eternal,” he prayed, “so to pass through things eternal that I finally lost not the things temporal.” Now we might view this as quite innocent. Lewis did not. For what it alerted him to was that, after all this time, his oldest nemesis to discipleship was still alive and well; namely, his desire for limited liabilities, manifested in that persistent voice in his head that told him to be “careful, to keep his head, not to go too far, not to burn my boats.” Lest the sinister nature be missed, he goes on to make perfectly clear the meaning of these precautions.

I come into the presence of God with a great fear lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient

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ince the U.S. government moved to an all-volunteer military in the 1970s the Army has advertised itself to potential recruits in various ways. In the 1980s the slogan was “Be all that you can be. Join the U.S. Army” or “It’s a great place to start.” The Army provided training that would prepare you for the job market, and through the G.I. Bill you could earn money for college. It was a great deal: Do yourself a favor. Fulfill your potential. Be all that you can be. Things were relatively peaceful in those days, and being in the Army was almost like enrolling in a technical college for four years, with some physical training and discipline thrown in.

But in 1991, when the First Gulf War began, all these new Army recruits were suddenly saying, “You mean I have to leave my family and fight a war? You want me to go to Saudi Arabia? Where in the world is Qatar? Excuse me, but that’s not in my contract.” But, of course, it was—“Sorry, soldier; you didn’t read the small print. You go where we want you to go.”

Now the Army ads are much different. In fact, they are often addressed more to the parents than to their sons and daughters. In a time of prolonged war, with a deadly combat zone, it is the parents who are the most hesitant about Army service. One ad basically says, when your child talks about enlisting, listen before you just say No. Another tries a form of flattery—“You made them strong; We’ll make them Army strong.” Things have changed.

As you look at the ministry of Jesus in the gospels you see that he was attracting a large army of people who surrounded him wherever he went. They thought that his journey to Jerusalem was a victory march for the crowning of the Messiah. They wanted to be there when he claimed his throne—to bask in his reflected glory and to grab a share of the prize for themselves.

But Jesus didn’t want any misunderstanding. There was to be no neglected small print. He wanted to make it quite clear what was required of anyone who would be his disciple and enter the kingdom of God. Consider these words: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—even his own life—he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Or these: “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Jesus is declaring what it means to become his follower, a member of his army. And no one should enlist without fully understanding what it demands and without first counting the cost (cf Luke 14:28-32). From the beginning Jesus is entirely upfront and honest. This is an all-or-nothing proposition. You must follow me completely or not at all. In contrast to your commitment to me, you must hate your father and mother, your wife and children.

Undoubtedly, these are harsh words, especially when we give so much attention to the value of marriage and family relationships. We may blunt the sharpness of Jesus’ words a bit when he talks of hating one’s family members. We point out that the Semitic mind moved in contrasts and extremes—light and darkness, truth and
falsehood, love and hate—primary colors with no shades of gray. And in fact, Jesus himself loved his own mother, making sure that she would be cared for even as he was dying on the cross (John 19:25-27). Surely, we’re not to hate our parents. Jesus is just talking about loving him more, we say, and that’s true. And of course Jesus wasn’t literally saying that every one of his followers must be crucified just as he was or that every one must actually give away all his possessions.

But clearly, Jesus is saying that to be his disciple a person must put him in first place among all one’s relational loyalties. Any one of you who is not fully devoted to me, he says, anyone does not give up his claim of ownership on everything he has and even his own life cannot be my disciple.

Immediately, you have to ask yourself, What sort of person makes this kind of demand? If I demanded such a commitment, you’d think I was crazy—or at least you should. To make such a demand, Jesus can’t be a mere religious wise man—a mere teacher—sharing a few pearls of wisdom about how best to get along in the world. Not even a holy prophet could say the kinds of things Jesus says here. A prophet says, Follow the ways of God; Jesus says, Follow me—supremely.

If we would be his disciples, Jesus demands our ultimate and absolute devotion—the kind of devotion that rightly belongs to God alone. If Jesus is not divine, we must say he was demented if not downright demonic in making these demands, something along the lines of a Jim-Jones-like cult leader.

Do you want to be a Christian, a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ (and these are all ways of saying the same thing), then listen again to his words—“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Unreasonable Demands?

These are hard words, and many see these demands as entirely unreasonable, impossible and unthinkable. But let me try to put them in another light. I am a pastor, and as a pastor I perform weddings. And as one who officiates at weddings I am struck by the fact that these requirements of Jesus sound strangely similar to what is expected in a marriage. Isn’t the commitment made in a marriage just as exclusive, as unconditional, and as demanding as what Jesus sets before us?

I say to the groom, “Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife...Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish and forsaking all others, keep you only unto her, so long as you both shall live?” And of course I ask the same thing of the bride. And each of them will say to the other, “With this ring I thee wed and with all my worldly goods I thee endow...” And doesn’t Paul instruct husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her—unto death.

Isn’t all this included in the words, “Will you marry me?” That is, Will you make me the pre-eminent person in your life? Will you set aside your parents, your brothers and sisters, and all your (continued on page 18)
If we are to devise a successful strategy of disciple making in our churches, we must first assess the gap between where we are and where we are called to go. Max De Pree, who has popularized this biblical wisdom as top priority for leaders, writes, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." 

I want to explore the deficit that must be filled if making self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted followers of Christ is to become our new reality. The purpose of this analysis is to help you assess the gap between where you are and where you want to go. As you read on, quietly pause and ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to receive the truth that will ultimately set you free.

The State of Discipleship Today: You Are Here!

If I were to choose one word to summarize the state of discipleship today it is superficial. Many who claim Jesus as Savior seem not to comprehend the implications of following him as Lord.

This superficiality comes into startling focus when we note the incongruity between the numbers of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and the lack of impact on the moral and spiritual climate of our times. The American Religious Identification Survey of 2008 (ARIS), the most extensive done on the American population, found that fully 33 percent, correlating to 77,000,000 adults, described themselves as born again. The Gallup Poll taken during the years 2001 and 2007 noted that between 38 and 45 percent of the adult population in the United States self-designated as evangelical. These numbers scream for an explanation. How can Christian leaders moan over the moral decline of our society when at the same time so many indicate a meaningful encounter with Jesus Christ? Certainly if these millions of Jesus’ namers were actually Jesus’ followers, we would not be wagging our fingers in anger at a civilization that has turned away from God.

We have a discipleship deficit. How deep is it? What is the reality that we as leaders must define? We are able to gauge the discipleship deficit when we compare the biblical standards of discipleship with the reality of their achievement in our churches and ministries.

Let’s look at seven marks of discipleship. At the end of each section, take the opportunity to identify the gap between the biblical standard and the reality of your church or ministry.

The Biblical Standard and the Current Reality

1. Proactive Ministers. The Scriptures picture the church as full of proactive ministers; the reality is that a majority are passive recipients.

   The New Testament picture of the church is every member a minister. Writing to scattered, persecuted Christians, Peter referred
to the church in aggregate when he writes, “You (plural) are . . . a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). Every believer comes to God via Christ as mediator, and every believer is enabled to act as a priest on behalf of fellow members of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul had the everyday Christian in mind when he wrote, “To each has been given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). The New Testament describes a full employment plan that dignifies and gives every believer value based on the contribution he or she has to make.

Yet when we look at the contemporary church, we see a relatively small percentage of people who move beyond Sunday worship into the life and ministry of a congregation. The all-too-often 80/20 rule seems impossible to transcend. Invariably 20 percent of the people give 80 percent of the income. Twenty percent are involved in the ministry positions serving the 80 percent who are consumers of their efforts. This means that there are a high percentage of spectators filling the pews. As a pastor, I am consciously aware that people assume their place in the pew with a “reviewer’s” mentality. The worshiper sees it as the responsibility of those on stage to pull off a highly engaging, meaningful, and entertaining “show,” while it is the worshipers’ job to give an instant assessment of the worship experience as they pass through the receiving line. Doesn’t it seem odd for people to be making evaluative comments, such as “Good sermon, pastor” or “I enjoyed the service this morning,” when it comes to the worship of the living God?

If ministry is largely being a steward of our spiritual gifts, then the task ahead is daunting. I find good news in George Barna’s finding that 85 percent of believers had heard of spiritual gifts. But the bad news? Half of the 85 percent were ignorant of the gifts they had. One quarter of the people who thought they knew their spiritual gifts named gifts that had no correlation with a biblical profile. People said things such as “I have the gift of making cherry pies” or “I have the gift of gab.” Only one quarter who knew their spiritual gifts identified gifts that had a biblical basis.

2. A Disciplined Way of Life. The Scriptures picture followers of Jesus as engaged in a disciplined way of life; the reality is a small percentage are investing in spiritual growth practices.

One of the consistent images in the New Testament for the Christian life is the discipline of an athlete. Comparing the Christian life to a race, Paul wrote, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training” (1 Cor. 9:24–25). In making this comparison, Paul raised the bar. If athletes will put themselves through a harsh regimen to get a “perishable wreath,” how much more should Christians discipline themselves because our goal is “an imperishable one”! One is left with an obvious impression (continued on page 24)
Discipleship for Changing Times and Ministries

by Michael J. Wilkins, Ph.D.

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_Talbot School of Theology, Biola University_

As I stand on a bluff overlooking the blue Pacific Ocean near our home in Southern California, I watch lines of waves forming far out on the horizon. The waves that finally break near shore are much larger today than normal.

I check out the surf report and find that these waves were generated by a monstrous storm. The weather is sunny and calm where I stand, but the waves that break below me were generated by a ferocious hurricane-force storm many days ago and thousands of miles away off of the tip of New Zealand.

If I am to surf these waves effectively, I need to know as much as possible about their size, power, direction, and speed.

**Waves upon the Ocean and the Church**

Similarly as we stand here in the second decade of the twenty-first century, waves of various kinds of practices, fads, and styles continue to sweep upon the church. And like the waves of the ocean, the waves of church issues that impact us today are normally generated by forces far away and long ago. And if we are to ride them effectively, we need to know as much as possible about the forces that have brought them about and how they impact us today.

Following World War II, the parachurch movement spawned organizations such as the Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association that revolutionized campus and evangelistic mission. During the 1960s and ’70s, the Jesus movement transfigured traditional ways of expressing worship. The 1980s and ’90s saw the arrival of the seeker movement with megachurches that reached out to people that had never darkened the door of conventional churches. Most recently in the 1990s and the first decade of this century we have witnessed the spiritual formation movement that has transcended ecclesial lines to impact mainline, charismatic, Bible, and emergent churches with the quest for meaningful spirituality.

All of these movements generated power that impacts the church today. We find this also in waves of different forms of “discipleship” and “disciple making” that break upon the church. Discipleship is not a recent or unique phenomenon. It was initiated nearly two thousand years ago when Jesus Christ entered human history and called out to men and women, “Follow me.”

But discipleship as we know it in the church today is influenced by other forces, near and far. The terms discipleship and disciple making are related expressions, referring respectively to the process of growing as a disciple of Jesus and the process of helping others to grow as Jesus’ disciple.

Each of us carries around various conceptions of _discipleship_ and _disciple making_ that are influenced by our past experiences.
Discipleship Traditions

The waves of discipleship materials that have swept over the church in the past sixty years have in many cases caused people to be more confused than ever when they think of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. These traditions developed out of a desire to be more like the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament, yet they often became so rigorously focused on their particular practices that only an elite few could adhere to them.

**The Learner.** Some emphasize that a disciple is the person who is dedicated to an intense study of the Bible. A disciple is actively involved in personal devotional time, Bible memorization, and Bible study as a regular habit of life. This implies that a Christian becomes a disciple when she is dedicated to learning the Word of God and applying it.

**The Committed.** Others emphasize that a disciple is supremely committed to Christ. He has rejected a worldly lifestyle. This means that a Christian is a disciple when he has truly denied himself, taken up his cross, and is actively following Jesus on an everyday basis.

**The Worker.** Still others declare that a disciple is actively involved in Christian service. Her service distinguishes her from nominal Christians who simply attend the group or church. This implies that a Christian becomes a disciple when she is an active worker for Christ.

**The Mentor.** Some of us have been involved in one-on-one relationships in which an older, more mature Christian has “discipled” us. This is often called “mentoring.” Many people believe that only when we are involved in such a relationship can we say that we have experienced true discipleship.

**The Small Group.** Small groups are one of the most effective means of facilitating growth in Christians, because we can learn from the example of others, we can open our lives up to others, and we can be held accountable to the growth that we say we desire. Many suggest that in the same way that Jesus “discipled” his small band of followers, true discipleship occurs today when a person is involved in a small group.

A Definition of Discipleship

There is, of course, truth in each of these, because each encourages necessary ways of promoting growth in the Christian life. However, they have often been mistakenly advocated as ways that an individual becomes a disciple: it is often advocated that once a Christian’s life is characterized by one or more of these commitments, the person becomes a disciple.

This is the root of much of the confusion today about discipleship, implying that discipleship is a second stage in the Christian life. There is an expression found among some that goes, “All disciples are Christians, but not all Christians are disciples.” In this view, discipleship is for an elite, more committed, or more specially trained person or group of Christians.

But this is surely not what Jesus intended us to understand about discipleship and disciple making. A more
The Transforming Impact of True Discipleship

(continued from page 1)

could do was respond in obedient faith to the command of Jesus or walk away in unbelief.

As Jesus and his small team went out ministering from city to city, he called many other men and women to follow him, and numbers increased. He called them not simply to become admirers or even converts. He called them to turn from their sins, trust him, and become his disciples—people who would seek to learn and obey his word. Most would remain in their communities and workplaces as salt and light, devoted to him, growing in grace, and ministering to those around them. Over time, they would take on the character of their Master: exhibiting love, humility, service, obedience, and endurance. At some point early on, Jesus spent an entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12–16), then selected twelve of them who would form a small community to travel and minister with him and serve as apostles. They feature prominently in the Gospels, and their experience with him gives us a down-to-earth case study in how to grow into mature followers of Jesus.

Responding to Jesus’ call to conversion and discipleship was the beginning of a long journey for his first followers. To proceed on that journey, they needed instruction about how to live in the kingdom of God. So Jesus took them away for intensive teaching in the fundamentals of kingdom life. In the Sermon on the Mount, he gave them life-changing truths about things like humility, purity of heart, faith, prayer, love of neighbor, and radical obedience to his teachings, to mention only a few. Regular instruction would be a vital part of their community life as they grew in discipleship and ministry. To this day, the Sermon on the Mount remains foundational teaching for everyone who follows Jesus.

On a number of occasions, Jesus told his disciples and the crowds that following him would be costly: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:24–25; Mark 8:34–35; Luke 9:23–24). Jesus meant that it is possible to follow him only by saying a radical no to one’s self-centeredness and embracing the hard fact that faithfulness might cost one’s life. Only by decisively reckoning with these sobering realities could people be freed up to follow him faithfully.

On another occasion, Jesus said to a large crowd that was following him, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple…” So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:25, 33). Jesus was saying that love for him must take precedence over all earthly relationships and concerns, without exception. This may sound harsh to our ears, but it was grounded in love, truth, and utter realism. Jesus never minimized the cost of following him for the sake of bigger crowds. Nor did he encourage people to follow him when they were not ready. He wanted everyone to count the cost of putting him first and to prepared for the separation, rejection, persecution, and suffering that such a commitment could entail.

Although he called for total commitment, Jesus was a man of grace. He didn’t load his followers with impossible de-
Obedience is the road to freedom...

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Obedience is the road to freedom...

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C.S. Lewis

mands as the Pharisees did (and some do today). He knew how weak fallen human beings were and how demanding his teaching was. He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and will give you rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30). He invites all who are weary of burdensome, legalistic religion to cast it off, take up his yoke of discipleship, and learn from him. Paradoxically, his discipleship, while demanding, is easy and his burden is light. This is because Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to empower his disciples to obey his commands. And also because he extends grace and forgiveness when they fail. We need only consider how weak, sinful, and clueless the twelve often were during their three years with him and how patient, kind, and forgiving he was toward them. His persistent grace brought transformation to their lives, as it does to all who follow him.

Before returning to heaven, Jesus commissioned his disciples to carry on the work he had begun: “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe [obey] all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20).

This was a clear, simple, and brilliant plan. It entailed sharing with people of all races and ethnic groups the good news of God’s grace and love...

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Discipleship in the Early Church

The early church was eager to carry on the work Jesus had given them to do. We see them in Acts 1, gathered as a community of 120 disciples ready to “go, and make disciples of all nations,” and waiting for the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to do so. They did not have to wait long. When the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost, Peter’s empowered preaching brought three thousand new believers into the fellowship. A few days later, the number grew to five thousand, and Jewish leaders responded with persecution. As it intensified, the disciples gathered for urgent prayer. Because their passion was to glorify God, they prayed not for protection but for boldness to preach Christ with even greater impact. God answered their prayers, and many more were saved and became a part of this new movement of followers of Jesus.
The Transforming Impact of True Discipleship

While on earth, Jesus had led the community of disciples. As he had promised, the Holy Spirit would now expand, lead, and empower them to glorify him and carry on his mission. Their fearless, wholehearted devotion to the risen Jesus in spite of Jewish persecution demonstrated a quality of personal and corporate life that captured the hearts and minds of multitudes, and the gospel continued to spread, eventually reaching Rome.

Roman persecution came under Nero and was brutal. The Roman historian, Tacitus, tells us that in AD 64, Nero rounded up “a vast number” of believers in Rome and put them to death in the cruelest ways imaginable. Neither Tacitus nor the philosopher Seneca, were admirers of the Christians, but they felt sympathy for them because of the way they were wantonly sacrificed to Nero’s madness. Some were crucified in mockery of Christ. Others were covered with pitch and resin, chained to poles, and set ablaze to light Nero’s gardens for his guests. Still others were sewn into animal skins, thrown to vicious dogs, and torn apart in the arena to entertain the mobs. Both Paul and Peter were martyred in Nero’s insane rampage, Paul by beheading and Peter by crucifixion.

One might think that such a blow would destroy the church or at least permanently cripple it. But just the opposite happened. They had the teachings of Jesus and the empowering presence of the Spirit. And just seven years earlier, Paul had sent the believers in Rome an epistle to help ground them in the faith. He had urged them, “By the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Paul, disciple of Jesus that he was, had called them to respond to God’s

First, each of us must begin by earnestly seeking God’s grace to be a more faithful disciple of Jesus ourselves. This may involve a renewed commitment of all that we are and all that we have to him, no matter the cost.

Second, we must seek ways to help our own church become a community of disciples seeking to fulfill the Great Commission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Third, we must endeavor to live publicly for Christ and seek to be salt and light in the world, influencing our family, friends, colleagues, and community.
grace with wholehearted commitment to God no matter the cost. Thus, many withstood Nero’s cruelty with courage. And the church continued to grow.

Over the years, other emperors would order persecution: Domitian, Trajan, Septimius Severus, Marcus Aurelius, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian to mention a few. Many believers, both ordinary church members and notable leaders, were crucified, burned at the stake or thrown into the arena. But the church continued to grow. As Tertullian would later say, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” And indeed it was; by the beginning of the fourth century, 10 percent of the population of the Roman Empire (about six million people) had become followers of Jesus.

To be sure, the early church wasn’t perfect. It had problems, as did the churches in the apostolic era. But thorough teaching and discipling, the periodic fires of persecution, and the ever-present possibility of it, tended to purify the church and ensure that most members were sincere followers of Jesus. In general, there was relatively little of the compromise, nominalism, and worldliness that would afflict the church from the time of Constantine on. As Professor David Calhoun has said, “They out-lived, out-thought and out-died the pagans” and thus awakened awe in a world immersed in the darkness of pagan superstition. Summing up the first three centuries of the church, F.F. Bruce, says, “We review the history of Christianity up to 313 with no sense of shame, but with the sense that here is something to evoke gratitude and inspire courage.”

Discipleship, the American Church, and the Challenge of Our Day

There is widespread recognition that discipleship in the American church falls far short of the teaching of Jesus. In many cases, this is because people are unaware of what the Bible really teaches; in others, it is because they are misguided by flawed teaching. Regardless of the reason, relatively few professing believers appear to be living as true disciples of Jesus Christ. As a result, many dishonor him, discredit the church, turn off nonbelievers, and diminish the influence of God’s truth in the secular world.

How do we respond to such a situation? Because other articles in this issue will address this more fully, I will conclude with three summary ideas. First, each of us must begin by earnestly seeking God’s grace to be a more faithful disciple of Jesus ourselves. This may involve a renewed commitment of all that we are and all that we have to him, no matter the cost. Second, we must seek ways to help our own church become a community of disciples seeking to fulfill the Great Commission in the power of the Holy Spirit. Third, we must endeavor to live publicly for Christ and seek to be salt and light in the world, influencing our family, friends, colleagues, and community.

This is what the C.S. Lewis Institute has been training believers to do for the past thirty-five years. And more than ever, we are praying that God will raise up a movement back to authentic disciplship that will restore our tattered lives, the church, our society, and most of all God’s honor before the watching world. We invite you to join us or some other ministry with this same goal.

Notes

C.S. Lewis on Authentic Discipleship
(continued from page 3)

when I have come out again into “ordinary” life. I don’t want to be carried away into any resolution which I shall afterwards regret. For I know I shall be feeling quite different after breakfast; I don’t want anything to happen to me at the altar which will run up too big a bill to pay then.4

The root of the matter, said Lewis, was the impulse to “guard the things temporal.” Now what makes this example so full of significance is that the demon he identified and faced off with in this sermon was the most pervasive and powerful obstacle to his coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Speaking of his pre-Christian understanding of the faith in his book Surprised by Joy, he stated that “The horror of the Christian universe was that it had no door marked Exit.” The Christian way, in other words, was made horrifying precisely because of its demands. “No word in my vocabulary,” he went on to say, “expressed deeper hatred than the word Interference. But Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer.” What Lewis already knew was that at the center of what it meant to be a Christian was the call to complete surrender and obedience to Christ. But Lewis wasn’t finished yet. So great was his aversion to this Christian doctrine that he was compelled to further describe what becoming a Christian would mean for him personally.

If its picture was true then no sort of “treaty with reality” could ever be possible. There was no region even in the innermost depth of one’s soul (nay, there least of all) which one could surround with a barbed wire fence and guard with a notice No Admittance. And that was what I wanted; some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, “This is my business and mine only.”5

It is no surprise that Lewis titled the chapter in which he tells of his conversion “Checkmate.” It is also no surprise that the epigraph that heads the chapter reads, “The one principle of hell is—‘I am my own.” For what becomes clear as he nears the point of believing is that the intellectual difficulties had all been addressed; there were no longer any rational barriers to belief. What remained was the barrier of the will. One is reminded of G.K. Chesterton’s poignant observation: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”6 Lewis had come face to face with the reality of Chesterton’s point. All his attempts to find Christianity “wanting” had failed. He was now left with the “horrible” prospect of willingly allowing himself to become someone else’s; and that someone else was the one who had both the power and the right to hold him accountable to complete and absolute submission—the Transcendental Interferer.

Now before moving on, I should like to make a few observations. First, these examples reinforce both Lewis’s understanding of the call to discipleship and his commitment to it. Second, they make it quite clear...
that Lewis, like all human beings, was haunted with temptations and conscientiously worked at doing what he could to avoid them. Over the years he made notable progress both in the sanctity of his personal life and in his understanding of the faith. Among the most recognizable change in his character over time was a growing humility and compassion in his daily life. Third, they bear witness, particularly in what he says in “A Slip of the Tongue,” that he took seriously the personal commitments and promises he made before God. And last, rather than undermining the truth of what he taught, these examples add integrity and a large measure of authenticity to what he had to say about the nature and cost of being a disciple of Christ. In short, he modeled the life of a disciple.

Lewis was helped in his ability to grasp and accept this all-encompassing vision of discipleship by what he had been exposed to in his reading of the Greek and Latin classics—the idea of the absolute right of God to expect complete obedience.

Long since, through the gods of Asgard, and later through the Absolute, He [i.e., God] had taught me how a thing can be revered not for what it can do to us but for what it is in itself. That is why, though it was a terror, it was no surprise to learn that God is to be obeyed because of what He is in Himself . . . To know God is to know that our obedience is due to Him. In his nature His sovereignty by right is revealed.  

What had previously been viewed as the great terror and an unwelcome intrusion in his life, he now accepted as God's right. The suddenness of this change Lewis attributed to the fact that he came to accept the right of divine sovereignty before the power of divine sovereignty: the right before the might. Looking back, he recognized this as a great good because it settled for him once and for all where the true good of humanity lay. Union with God and obedience to his commands, he stated, is “bliss and separation from it horror.” Ironically, what had once been his deepest desire and only comfort—to be his own—was now the horror, and what was once the horror had become his ultimate comfort. Reflecting on this, he counseled that it would be good for us to remind ourselves that “God is such that if (per impossible) his power could vanish and His other attributes remain, so that the supreme right were forever robbed of the supreme might, we should still owe Him precisely the same kind and degree of allegiance as we now do.”

True Christian discipleship, Lewis would have us understand, is first a matter of the heart—the inner life: the recognition, acceptance, and surrender to God’s absolute authority over all the affairs of one’s life.

True Christian discipleship, Lewis would have us understand, is first a matter of the heart—the inner life: the recognition, acceptance, and surrender to God’s absolute authority...
fect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” a command he took quite literally. In fact he stated that it “is the whole of Christianity” and that “God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful . . . whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.” God is not about the business of making nice people but rather new men and women perfected in the likeness of Christ. Consequently, Lewis went on to say, that the only help we can expect from the Lord is help in becoming perfect. We may want something less, but the Lord is committed to nothing less. Lewis was convinced that this was the very heart of the gospel and, therefore, was also the heart of the call to discipleship. It was the primary reason for which the Son of God came and suffered and died and rose from the grave. This he made unavoidably clear in the chapter “Counting the Cost.”

That is why He warned people to “count the cost” before becoming Christians. “Make no mistake,” He says, “if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have the free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect—until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.”

That this was the ultimate purpose God had in mind for the sending of his Son, Lewis believed, and it accordingly obligated every believer to do what he or she could to assist others in the way of Christlikeness. He had, himself, a well-developed sense and awareness that the New Covenant mandate to make disciples had a particular claim upon his own life and career. I do not believe I need to take time here to demonstrate Lewis’s lifetime commitment to helping make disciples. One need only look at the enormous number of letters he wrote in answer to people’s requests for doctrinal clarification or spiritual direction, or the seemingly endless list of articles, essays, and books he wrote for the same purpose. What is perhaps worth observing is that Lewis was keenly aware that he had received the best education the British university system could offer, that he held an academic post at arguably the most significantly placed English university of his day, that he was highly skilled in the art of argumentation and possessed unusual literary gifts, and he was under orders to bring these things into the service of Christ and his church, at whatever cost to himself.

What I hope is now quite evident is that Lewis possessed a remarkably, perhaps for some alarmingly, robust sense of what it means to be a disciple: robust in its awareness of its costliness in its temporal aspect and gloriously robust in its awareness of its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal state.
Nowhere did Lewis give expression to both these aspects as concisely as in the concluding paragraph of *Mere Christianity*.

"But there must be a real giving up of the self... The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."

Notes

1. Although Lewis seldom used the words disciple or discipleship, the biblical idea was present when speaking of the believer’s call to a holy life.


4. Ibid., 138.


8. Ibid., 232.


10. Ibid., 158.


Thomas More said, “If ye make indentures with God how much ye will serve Him, ye shall find ye have signed both of them yourself.” Law, in his terrible, cool voice, said, “Many will be rejected at the last day, not because they have taken no time and pains about their salvation, but because they have not taken time and pains enough”:... “If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God, it will make in the end no difference what you have chosen instead.” Those are hard words to take. Will it really make no difference whether it was women or patriotism, cocaine or art, whiskey or a seat in the Cabinet, money or science? Well, surely no difference that matters. We shall have missed the end for which we are formed and rejected the only thing that satisfies. Does it matter to a man dying in a desert, by which choice of route he missed the only well?

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other friends, and devote yourself first and foremost to me? Will you give up sole ownership of all that you own and share with me all that have, as I make the same commitment to you?

Those are incredible requests, yet that’s what marriage entails—no other lovers on the side, no secret bank accounts, no higher loyalties—none. That’s what marriage means—or at least it ought to.

And certainly this points to one of the purposes of pre-marital counseling—to spell out what this commitment in marriage looks like. I want couples to read the small print, so that they can go beyond the romantic thrill associated with getting married and face up to the challenge, the commitment, and the devotion that marriage requires. Those who are getting married must first count the cost. I don’t want any husband or wife I marry to be able to say at some later point when the harsh winds of trials or hardship begin to blow, “That’s not in my contract!” For it is in your contract. Marriage demands everything of you. That’s what you sign up for—nothing less.

It’s a funny thing though. Even when they understand the unconditional contract of marriage, people still want to get married. In fact, they delight to get married. Why is that? Because there is something so attractive about their husband- or wife-to-be that they are drawn almost irresistibly to give of themselves to that person in love. They long to enter into that exclusive, intimate, loving relationship which marriage represents. They dream of the joy which marriage can bring. They long to entrust themselves to the other, for they believe that their marriage partner can be trusted with their very lives. So they do it.

People who are getting married don’t think of what they’re giving up; they think only of what they are gaining. They don’t think of it as some great sacrifice to be made, or some heavy burden to be borne, or some solemn duty to be performed for some greater good. Getting married is a joy; it’s a delight; it’s a cause for great rejoicing. They want everybody to know about it. A wedding is a public event, something to celebrate with a big party!

Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ must be like that, too. A Christian is one who wants to gain Christ. When you see his character, his truth, his trustworthiness, his overwhelming love and beauty, then you desire him as that precious pearl that is worth everything to obtain. It is with joy that you go and sell all that you have to gain that one precious pearl.

The Apostle Paul experienced that. He had an impressive resume, and much to be proud of, yet he writes, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Phil. 3:7-8). Nothing that this world has to offer can compare to this surpassing greatness of knowing of Jesus Christ.

Peter expresses the same excitement. He writes to the Christian believers of their experience of Christ: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” (1 Pet. 1:8). It is a surpassing greatness, an inexpressible and glorious joy. This is what is offered to the follower of Jesus Christ. To gain Christ is to know a satisfaction, a delight, a deep contentment that this world knows nothing of. It is a present reality with the promise of an eternal reward. And that pearl can be yours—you, too, can be my disciple, Jesus
says. Everyone can afford it—all it costs is all that you have. Do you mean everything, Lord? Yes, everything.

But does that mean mother and father, wife and children, Lord? Yes, even they must be entrusted into my care while you follow me. “Will you trust me?” he asks each one of us.

John White, who was associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Manitoba and author of a number of very helpful Christian books, speaks of his own struggle with this demand of discipleship in an extraordinary story from his book, The Cost of Commitment. It is worth quoting at length:

Once I had a premonition that my wife and infant son would be killed in a flying accident. We were to travel separately from the U.S. to Bolivia, South America. She would fly via Brazil, Buenos Aires, then north to Bolivia. I was to visit Mexico, several Central American countries, Venezuela, Colombia and other countries, to strengthen Christian work among students, before joining them in Bolivia.

The premonition came with sickening certainty just before we parted on the night of a wild snowstorm. I felt I was a cowardly fool as I drove away and saw Lorrie silhouetted in the yellow light of the doorway, surrounded by swirling snowflakes. Why didn’t I go back and tell her I would cancel the flights? Why didn’t I act on this foreboding?

Yet I felt a fool. I didn’t believe in premonitions—and she would probably laugh. Besides I was late, I had to get to the place where I would spend the night before my early morning flight. Fear, shame, guilt, nausea, all boiled inside me during the miserable drive to my hotel. No conversation was possible with the man who was driving me.

In bed I tossed in misery. Of course I prayed. By faith I was going to have it licked. Faith? In the presence of so powerful a premonition? My mouth was dry. My limbs shook. God was a million miles away. The hours crawled by, each one a year of fear. Why didn’t I get dressed, hire a car and go back to them?

“What’s the matter? Can’t you trust me?”

I was startled. Was God speaking?

“Yes, I’ll trust you—if you promise to give them back to me.”

Silence.

Then, “And if I don’t promise? If I don’t give them back to you, will you stop trusting me?”

Oh God, what are you saying? My heart had stopped and I couldn’t breathe.

“Can you not entrust them to me in death as well as in life?”

Suddenly a physical warmth flowed through all my body. I think I wept a little. My words came tremulously and weakly, “Yes, I place them in your hands. I know you will take care of them, in life or in death.”

And my trembling subsided. Peace—better by far than martinis on an empty stomach—flowed over and over me. And drowsily I drifted off to sleep.
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Hate them? How could I ever hate them? Yet by faith I had said in effect: I will do your will whatever it costs to me or them, and I will trust you.

Their plane crashed. Everyone on board was killed. But my wife had also had a premonition and cut their journey short, getting off the plane the stop before the tragedy occurred.

I am grateful for the way it worked out. But I didn’t know beforehand that things would go as they did. And had it not worked out that way I would have grieved (God knows how I would have grieved), but I would not have regretted my decision to trust and to go forward.

This is what it means to follow Christ fully.

Pseudo-Marriage and Pseudo-Discipleship

The demands of discipleship are like the demands of marriage. But as we think of marriage, there is a disturbing trend in our culture these days. Instead of getting married, many couples are simply living together. In this country, the number of unmarried-couple households recorded by the Census Bureau multiplied almost ten times in the last forty years, and almost two thirds of the people born between 1963 and 1974 first cohabited, without marrying.

I have to say, cohabiting seems like a very sensible thing to do, and I can understand its attraction. Surely, no one buys a car without first giving it a test drive. Shouldn’t we try out living together first before making some big, binding commitment?

And why do we even need to make that kind of commitment anyway. We love each other—isn’t that all that counts. And if we no longer love each other, then why should have to stay together? If someone else comes along who attracts me, why should I have to be locked in to just one partner? Cohabiting allows me to keep my options open—isn’t that what it means to be free? Cohabitation before or instead of marriage has now become quite normal.

Yet no matter how normal it becomes, such cohabitation is a form of deception for the simple reason that it is a result of a confusion of categories. You see, cohabitation looks a lot like marriage—you have a man and woman living in the same house together, sharing the same bed. But, in fact, it differs from marriage in the one essential thing that makes a marriage a marriage. Cohabiting couples, I’m sure, share a certain kind of romantic love—but it’s a love that’s lacking that one essential element that comes in true marital love. It lacks commitment—that public pledge of exclusive, unconditional, life-long, loyal love that makes the nature of that relationship very clear to everyone affected by it.

That’s why cohabiting before marriage isn’t a trial marriage at all. It is nothing like a marriage, for it lacks the one thing that makes a marriage a marriage. And the testimony of both the Bible and human history is that the kind of relationship between a man and woman to be had in cohabitation is contrary to how we were created to live. We are so made that our lives as men and women together most flourish, and the society we live in most flourishes, when men and women live in exclusive, committed life-long relationships of loyal love, recognized publicly through the covenant of marriage.

People who cohabit are deceived into thinking they are experiencing marriage when they’re not. It’s an imitation, a poor reflection, a shadow of the real thing. They don’t know what it is to give of themselves fully and to live with someone who is committed to them with all their heart and soul unconditionally, exclusively, with a love that only death can destroy.

Now let’s get back to those hard words of Jesus we’ve been considering: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his
father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

Notice carefully the word “cannot” in that phrase. Jesus doesn’t say that if you don’t love him above all else that he won’t allow you to be his disciple, as if it were a matter of his giving you his permission. The word here is dynatai, which suggests not permission but possibility. In other words, it’s not possible to be Jesus’ disciple without these conditions. A failure to commit yourself to him exclusively and unconditionally is incompatible with what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Imagine for a moment someone coming to the wedding altar and saying that, Yes, I want to get married to you, so long as I can continue to sleep around with other women, and I can just give you 10% of my income, and I’m free to come and go in this marriage whenever I like. No, you don’t get it, we would say, that’s not marriage, that’s something else entirely. That’s not what marriage means.

Jesus is saying the same thing about being his disciple. It means an exclusive, unconditional, loyal love that is supreme in one’s life. To have a relationship with God himself through Jesus Christ is like a marriage—it requires this kind of commitment, in a sense, by definition. Without it, there can be no relationship at all. You can have a half-hearted, semi-committed relationship with a pagan god, perhaps, but not with Yahweh, the Lord, the God of the Bible who created the heaven and earth and who has now revealed himself in Jesus Christ. It’s just not possible. He is a jealous God; he will tolerate no rivals—you shall have no other gods before him. There is simply no other way to relate to this God.

Do you see what this means? It means that a lot a people are deceived. They think they can engage in spiritual cohabitation, having a kind of spiritual relationship with God without any sort of public and exclusive commitment. They think they can have a relationship on their own private terms, when they want it, however it suits them, without that unconditional and exclusive commitment to Christ.

Superficially, what they have looks like real Christianity. But it is fundamentally different, and it lacks the core of what makes a person a follower of Christ. Jesus demands that we give him our lives—it’s that simple. And is that asking too much? We’d do it for a husband or wife; why not for the God of the universe?

Isn’t this what baptism means for someone who comes to be baptized as an adult? Their baptism is like a wedding. It is that public act by which they say, I want to be joined to Christ—forever. I am willing to die with Jesus Christ—to go down in the grave with him, so that I might be raised with him. In faith I give all that I am, so that

And what is so sad about this deception is that many people try this kind of co-habiting Christianity and find it dull, boring and entirely unfulfilling. Consequently, they either give it up altogether, or just continue to go through the motions, engaging in religious activities, with no expectations, no satisfaction and no joy.

I may gain all that he is. And in baptism we also see visibly displayed God’s pledge of commitment to us in the gospel as we are joined to Christ.

I’ve heard of people refusing to be baptized simply because they don’t want to be seen with their hair wet! Can such a person really be a disciple of Jesus? What would
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you think of a bride or groom too embarrassed to get up in front of a church to say their wedding vows? Do they understand what marriage is about? You’d say, they just don’t get it. And many who are a part of that crowd of people who gathered around Jesus just didn’t understand that when Jesus calls a man, to use the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he bids him come and die. They want a casual relationship, but he won’t have it. It simply can’t work that way.

And what is so sad about this deception is that many people try this kind of cohabiting Christianity and find it dull, boring and entirely unfulfilling. Consequently, they either give it up altogether, or just continue to go through the motions, engaging in religious activities, with no expectations, no satisfaction and no joy. It’s the same way many people respond to a cohabiting relationship, and so they reject marriage, when, in fact, they’ve never tried it.

But just as God created us to prosper as men and women together in the relationship of marriage which is by definition, exclusive and unconditional, so God has created us to prosper as human beings in a relationship with himself which is by definition, exclusive and unconditional. Anything less is a poor imitation of the real thing.

Once we see Christ for who he is, and we taste the sweetness of his love and grace, we will not see these words of Jesus as some onerous demand upon us. Instead, we will see this as our natural response to his beauty and grace. What joy we will find in offering him more and more of ourselves! Our deepest desire will be to grow in our knowledge of Christ. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

By the way, I saw a new military ad on television not long ago. It was from the Marines. It said, “We don’t accept applications, only commitments.” I think Jesus would agree. Being a disciple of Jesus requires our all—and he desires to give you his all. There can be no greater joy than that.

Notes

3. That’s true for all sorts of reasons—not least because that is the environment in which children are best brought into the world and nurtured into adulthood. That is the chief reason that the state has an interest in regulating, and promoting, marriage.

Christ says, ‘Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop [fill] it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desire you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked - the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself; my own will shall become yours.’

C.S. Lewis
RECOMMENDED READING

There are a number of good books on discipleship. The ones listed below are especially helpful:

ON DISCIPLESHIP

**In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life, Michael J. Wilkins**
This book is a tested and proven guide for helping believers understand what it means to become like Jesus Christ. It insightfully explains the process through which this transformation takes place and encourages believers in the pursuit of Christ. Well suited to anyone wishing to grow deeper in Christ.

**Spiritual Discipleship, J. Oswald Sanders**
In a clear, wise, and readily accessible way, this book addresses many of the key themes of discipleship. Well grounded in Scripture and mature spiritual experience, this book provides a very good foundation for those who want to be true disciples of Jesus. Includes study questions for small groups.

**Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**
A classic treatment of the Sermon on the Mount by one of England’s greatest expository preachers. Its biblical faithfulness, spiritual depth, and practical application have profoundly impacted many people since it first appeared in print. Originally given in sermon form, this book is very readable. Good for pastors, church leaders, and those who have been believers for a while and are hungering for more depth.

VISION AND RESOURCES

**Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time, Greg Ogden**
A veteran pastor and educator lays out a thoroughly biblical, highly relational, and eminently practical vision for discipleship and discipling in the local church. A great resource for developing a growing cadre of disciple makers in the congregation and nurturing a culture of discipleship. Ideal preparation for using the author’s Discipleship Essentials curriculum (below). Great for pastors and church leaders and anyone interested in the ministry of discipleship.

**Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ, Greg Ogden**
This discipleship curriculum has become a classic, having sold more than 100,000 copies since first published in 1998. Theologically sound and pedagogically effective, it focuses on the foundational doctrines and practices needed to establish a healthy, growing, and reproducing relationship with Christ. Designed for groups of three or four but effective in other configurations as well, this twenty-five-lesson curriculum provides the content for a relational process of discipleship. Excellent for use in churches, campus ministry, or groups of friends wanting to grow deeper together.

**Mentoring for Spiritual Growth: Sharing the Journey of Faith, Tony Horsfall**
Written by an experienced pastor and disciple maker in the UK, this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to help another person grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. It provides valuable insight into the personal spiritual mentoring aspect of the discipleship process and will be helpful to those who are just beginning to mentor as well as those who have been mentoring for some time. Highly recommended.

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The Discipleship Deficit
(continued from page 7)

that leading the Christian life is going to require spiritual discipline.

Yet when we turn from the scriptural picture to the today’s church, we observe another version of the 80/20 rule. Studies have shown that only one out of six adults who attend Christian worship are involved in some type of group or relational process that is designed to help them grow spiritually. George Barna comments pointedly on his own research, “In a society as fast-moving and complex as ours, people have to make choices every minute of the day. Unless people have a regular and focused exposure to the foundations of their faith, the chances of Christians consistently making choices to reflect biblical principles are minimal.”

According to Barna, fewer than one in five born-again adults has any specific and measurable goals related to his or her own spiritual development. Barna interviewed hundreds of people, including church leaders and pastors, and yet, shockingly, he concluded, “Not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples of the entire world—or even their entire block.” Dallas Willard adds the exclamation point, “The fact is that there is now lacking a serious and expectant intention to bring Jesus’ people into obedience and abundance through training.”

3. Discipleship Affects All of Life. The Scriptures picture discipleship as impacting all spheres of life; the reality is that a sizable numbers of believers have relegated faith to the personal, private realm.

The dominant theme of Jesus’ public ministry was the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. The future, long-awaited kingdom had actually broken into this present darkness in the person of the King, Jesus Christ. The promise is that those who “repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15) are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col. 1:13). A new authority is established in the hearts of Jesus’ followers that affects all that we are in all that we do in all spheres of life. In other words, we are fundamentally kingdom people. This means Jesus is Lord in our hearts, homes, and workplace, our attitudes, thoughts, and desires, our relationships and moral decisions, our political convictions and social conscience, etc.

Yet the reality is that we sadly suffer today from the same bifurcated existence that Martin Luther addressed almost five hundred years ago with Reformation force. In his Open Letter to the German Nobility, Luther said that the first wall of Romanism was a false distinction between what he called the “spiritual estate” and “temporal estate.” In Luther’s day, the “spiritual estate” was the realm of the church and its holy orders, which took precedence over and elevated itself above the “temporal estate,” which was the realm of government and the common life. Luther attempted to break down the wall between the sacred and secular, declaring that in kingdom terms everything is sacred.

Unfortunately we still suffer under the false notion that the religious realm lies in the sacred, private sphere. The sacred is associated with the church, family, and the interior heart commitments of the individu-
Religion is a private affair that has little impact on the public arenas of life, such as the workplace, politics, and other major institutions of society involving economics, education, and the media. There is a disconnect for many Christians when it comes to seeing ourselves as representatives of the kingdom of God in what we spend most of our time doing—our jobs. I find that many fellow believers unconsciously take off their “Christian hat” when they walk through the doorway of the workplace and put on their “secular hat.” It is assumed that they play by a completely different set of rules when it comes to their secular employment versus the way we live in the sacred realm.

How out of step this is with Jesus’ message of the kingdom!

4. A Countercultural Force. The Scriptures picture the Christian community as a countercultural force; the reality is that we see isolated individuals whose lifestyle and values are not much different from the unchurched.

John Stott describes the church of the Lord’s intention as a community of “radical nonconformity.” This phrase is a helpful summary of some of the biblical metaphors for the church. The images of alien, exile, and sojourner capture the relationship of believers to this present world (1 Pet. 2:11). The church in the biblical scheme is to be a body whose collective lifestyle forms a countercultural alternative to the values of the dominant society.

If that was true then, what is it that people see today when they look at the church? Many have concluded that the church, far from being countercultural, does not look much different from the unchurched population.

To the extent that the church is simply reduced today to an aggregate of individuals who shop like consumers to meet their own needs, we do not have the basis for community in any biblical sense. How can we possibly build countercultural communities out of such porous material?

5. An Essential, Chosen Organism. The Scriptures picture the church as an essential, chosen organism in whom Christ dwells, the reality is that Christian people view the church as an optional institution, unnecessary for discipleship.

The church of Jesus Christ is nothing less than his corporate replacement on earth. The late Ray Stedman succinctly described Christ’s relationship to the church: “The life of Jesus is still being manifest among people, but now no longer through an individual physical body, limited to one place on earth, but through a complex, corporate body called the church.”

The apostle Paul’s most fundamental image for the church is the “body of Christ.” When Paul uses this phrase it is far more than a nice word picture or metaphor. He is not saying that the church is like the body of Christ, but literally is the body of Christ. This is the place where Christ dwells.
The Discipleship Deficit

The implication that follows is that the church is not some optional afterthought for those who name Christ as their Lord. The church is central to God’s plan of salvation. God saves people into a new community, which is the vanguard of a new humanity. To be called to Christ is to throw one’s lot in with his people.

Yet it is this optional attitude toward the church that surfaces in our individualistic, take-our-own-counsel culture. How does this optional attitude express itself?

Being integral-ly involved in the church is not a ne-
cessity for Christian living. My wife and I visited a well-known Southern California church one year on the Sunday following Easter. The focus of the message was to speak to the 2,100 people who had in-
dicated they had made a decision to receive Christ dur-
ing the Easter ser-

vices. The teacher of the morning asked the worshipers: “Is it necessary to go to church or be a part of the church to be a Christian?” His answer? “No, it is not neces-

sary.” I had to do everything I could not to bolt straight up from my seat and shout, “Yes, it is absolutely necessary to be a part of the church if you are a Christian!” Unfor-

tunately that is not the prevailing wisdom, apparently even from those who should know better.

6. Biblically Informed People. The Scriptures picture believers as biblically informed people whose lives are founded on revealed truth; but in reality, most are biblically ignorant people whose lives are a syncretistic compromise.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Tes-
tament are the trustworthy depository of the self-revelation of God to humanity. This is the historic Christian confession about the unique-

ness of the Bible. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, while the Bible is the God-breathed writ-

ten Word that is the reliable witness to his actions in history. Although we would affirm that truth can be found beyond Scripture, the test of what is true is an-

chored in the written Word of God.

Yet in spite of what we affirm about the unique-

ness of this book, Christians in gen-
eral are ignorant of its content and hold convictions that are contrary to its clear and central teaching. There is a surpris-
ing disjunction between the attitude that people have about the Bible and their knowledge of it. George Gallup has writ-
ten, “Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don’t read it.”10 According to Gallup, 65 percent of the adult popu-
lation agreed that the Bible “answers all or most of the basic questions of life.”11
In spite of this affirmation, there is an appalling ignorance of the book we put on a pedestal. For example, 53 percent in Barna’s survey believed that the saying “God helps those who help themselves” is a biblical truth.

But even more disturbing than not knowing certain factual data is the prevalence of holding basic beliefs that are contrary to biblical affirmation. In a nationwide survey, 61 percent believed that the Holy Spirit was not a living entity but a symbol of God’s presence and power; whereas 58 percent believed the devil or Satan was not a living being, but only a symbol of evil. Perhaps the most disturbing finding was that four out of ten people actively involved in Christian discipleship relationships believed that there was no such thing as absolute truth.

No assumptions should be made about what people know or the beliefs they hold.

7. People Who Share Their Faith. The Scriptures picture all believers as those who share the story of their faith in Christ with others; in reality, we are an intimidated people who shrink from personal witness.

We are called to be storytellers. The Bible spins a love story of God’s pursuit of wayward humanity. For those who have been captured by Jesus Christ, we each have a story to tell of how God chased us down and embraced us in his loving arms. In so doing, the Lord has written us as characters into his grand redemptive drama. We each have an assigned part to play on the stage of history, which is the realm in which God writes his story. As unique as each of us is, there is a common story line written into the script for each of our lives. “You shall be my witnesses,” Jesus says (Acts 1:8). We each have our story and the story to tell. For it is in the sharing of the story that others come to find that they too have been written into this redemptive drama.

How are we doing in telling the story? When believers are asked if they have intentionally built a relationship with someone with the hope of being able to lead the person to Christ, only one in ten could affirm that they had. “Fewer than one in five said that they knew a nonbeliever well enough that they could share their faith with an individual in a context of trust and credibility.”

A major contributing factor to this inhibition is the intimidation that comes from living in a culture that shuns absolute truth. The only truth that is recognized today is personal truth. Any claim that there is a truth that is true for all is met with disdain and the accusation that you are being judgmental. On many occasions I have braced myself for the pushback, “You mean to tell me, if I don’t accept Christ, I am going to hell?”! Each time I have swallowed hard and somewhat reluctantly said, “Jesus is the One in whom God has revealed himself and through him made provision for us to be made right with him.” It seems so intolerant in an age where tolerance is equated with grace.

In this atmosphere of intimidation, we must ask ourselves: What do we have to offer? Do we truly believe that we have something that is so vital and personally life giving that we have something to give away?
The Discipleship Deficit

Where Are We Going?

Is this an accurate picture of the state of discipleship today? Does this accord with your reality? If this portrait of the gap between the biblical standard and the current state of discipleship is close to being accurate, then there is enormous work to be done if the gap is to be closed.

John Kotter, in his book *Leading Change*, says that the number-one reason for change not to occur is a lack of a sense of urgency. Leadership is about instilling urgency, which comes about by identifying the gaps between what is and what should be in God’s scheme. It is defining reality as it is and calling God’s people to the possibilities and dreams of what God intended us to be.

It is only as we take a sober assessment of the way things are that we can have any hope of getting to the way things were designed to be. We have hope because Jesus as the Lord of the church seeks for his bride to be without spot and blemish. For it is through his church that his life will be manifest.

Notes

5. Ibid., 11.
6. Dallas Willard,
13. Ibid., 52.

In a civilization like ours, I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Jesus Christ upon his life, or else be guilty of inattention or of evading the question.

C.S. Lewis
RECOMMENDED READING

MOBILIZING THE CHURCH FOR DISCIPLESHIP

The Trellis and the Vine, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne
The authors minister in the post-Christian culture of Australia and present an exciting and proven approach for organizing the local church around the gospel and the Great Commission. The focus is on developing disciples (the vine) who will reach out to their families, coworkers, and community to share the gospel and make disciples. Church structures (the trellis) are made subservient to this end. Pastors, elders, and church leaders will find here a mind-shift about ministry that can revolutionize and reenergize their service to God.

Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream, David Platt
This powerful book challenges believers to compare their lives and churches to the teachings of Jesus and the early church. The author, pastor of a four-thousand-member church, challenges readers to abandon worldly values such as the “American Dream,” give themselves wholeheartedly to Jesus as his disciples, and live accordingly, no matter the cost. Many inspiring examples are given of people who are gladly accepting the challenge and as a result experiencing transformation and impacting missions. This author has three master’s degrees and a doctorate in New Testament and has produced a theologically sound and personally compelling book. A great book to impart vision to anyone—from pastors to new believers.

THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Following the Master, Michael J. Wilkins
This book is a biblical theology of discipleship by the foremost scholar on discipleship of our day. Focused primarily on the New Testament, it surveys various contemporary views of discipleship, noting their strengths and weaknesses, then explores discipleship in the ancient world and in the Bible, examining all the biblical texts related to discipleship in any way. Conclusions emerge with clarity, dispelling the fog and confusion that has surrounded this subject in evangelicalism for the past sixty years. This book is essential reading for pastors and ministry leaders who want to do authentic, biblically based discipleship in the church or parachurch.

Richard Longenecker and twelve other New Testament scholars examine various aspects of discipleship in the New Testament. Covers not only the Gospels but also the epistles of Paul and writers of other epistles. Helpful in showing how the concept of discipleship is present throughout the New Testament (not only in the Gospels) even though the word is not used. Recommended for pastors, theological students, and lay people wanting more depth.

The author presents a sweeping theology of discipleship, seen through God’s covenants in both the Old and New Testaments. He sets discipleship in its fullest biblical context and greatly expands our perspective. Helps us understand what it means to follow Jesus and the grace he provides to enable the obedience he requires. This is a good book for pastors, missionaries, and others in ministry who want a deeper theological grounding in discipleship. A great complement to Following the Master, by Michael Wilkins (above).

(continued on page 35)
accurate conception is seen clearly when we go to Jesus’ final command, the Great Commission, where we understand that a person who believes on Jesus for salvation is a disciple at conversion. Jesus said that we are to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:18–20), not to make disciples out of Christians. So at the moment a person believes in Jesus and receives eternal life, that person becomes a disciple of Jesus, and the ongoing process of growth in the Christian life for all believers is discipleship.

Therefore, all true believers are disciples of Jesus; the point is whether or not they are obedient disciples. Further, in this more wholistic understanding, discipleship is not just one aspect of the church’s mission, but it encompasses all that the church does. Discipleship is the ministry of the church in helping all believers to grow in their discipleship to Jesus and reaching out to bring non-Christians to Jesus to become his disciples.

The prevalence of elitism in many of our traditions explains why many people are frustrated in their Christian life. A two-level conception of the Christian life promotes apathy among those who haven’t yet chosen to be committed, and it suggests that the higher level of commitment is optional, which in the daily world of most Christians means that commitment to Christlikeness is optional.

The fundamental picture of discipleship that we find in the pages of Scripture is the centrality of Jesus as the One we follow minute by minute through life. Discipleship is the ministry of the church in helping all believers to grow in their discipleship to Jesus and reaching out to bring non-Christians to Jesus to become his disciples.

Discipleship emphases of the past sixty years have focused upon isolated discipleship passages of Scripture or particular biblical discipleship themes in order to provide specialized ministry. However, this specialization has often come at the expense of a full biblical portrait of discipleship. A more complete definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ moves in the following direction:

Discipleship means living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ, growing in conformity to his image as the Spirit transforms us from the inside-out, being nurtured within a community of disciples who are engaged in that lifelong process, and helping others to know and become like Jesus.

Essentials of Discipleship for Disciple-Making Ministries

With this definition in mind, we can explore the following essential features of biblical discipleship that must characterize all of our attempts to develop a disciple-making ministry.

Discipleship originates with a gracious call from Jesus to enter into an intimate relationship with him.

In contrast to the form of discipleship found among the scribes and rabbis of Jesus’ day, where a person earned the right to be called a disciple through intense study and commitment, Jesus called men and women to him to be his disciples solely and only on the basis of grace. Whether it was calling Peter and Andrew by the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18–22) or offering salvation to the citizens of the city of Ephesus (Eph. 2:8–9), discipleship to Jesus originates with
a gracious call from Jesus, and it is a call that must be obeyed from the heart as we enter into an intimate, transforming relationship with him.

**Discipleship must be grounded in a personal, costly relationship with a seeking Savior.**

The new life that comes at regeneration cost Jesus, and it costs us. Although it is nothing we can buy, it is costly nonetheless. The cost is life. Jesus’ life and our life. The cost of Jesus’ life was given in his death on the cross. He came seeking those who were spiritually ill to make them well and fit for his kingdom. This initiative could only be accomplished through the penalty he paid for our sins in his loving act of redemption on the cross. He gave his life so that we might have life (1 Cor. 6:19–20; Mark 10:45).

The cost for us is likewise our life. While Jesus’ death on the cross is unique, we also lose our life through taking up our own cross (Matt. 16:24–26).

Discipleship begins with intentional evangelism that challenges people to count the cost of accepting Jesus’ call to life in the kingdom of God, which will prepare them to engage in and expect personal transformation as the normal Christian life.

**Discipleship must begin with and strive toward a transformed identity in Jesus.**

From the moment of salvation God views us differently. We have been born into a new identity as his children (John 1:12–13). We are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), who are now in process of being transformed into (2 Cor. 3:18), and conformed to (Rom. 8:29) the image of Christ, as Christ is being formed in us (Gal. 4:19).

Our identity as a disciple of Jesus affects all that we are, including the way we see ourselves, the way we relate to God, and the way we relate to others. Disciple-making ministries must help new and older Christians to find their identity in being Jesus’ disciple in all of our relationships in the home, the workplace, the community, and the church.

**Discipleship must be initiated and empowered by the Spirit of God.**

The spiritual life that accompanied Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom of God was initiated by the Spirit of God (John 3:5–6). This phenomenon is described from different perspectives by different New Testament authors: regeneration (Titus 3:5); new birth and born again (1 Pet. 1:3; 23); spiritual resurrection (Rom. 6:13; Eph. 2:5) and new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10); God’s seed in us (1 John 3:9).

We are different persons once the Spirit gives us new life. The supernatural work of God deep within our soul implants new spiritual life in us, and from that moment the direction of our lives is placed Godward as the Spirit begins to produce new life—the very life of Jesus—in ours.
John’s gospel gives us three characteristics of Spirit-empowered discipleship that give direction to our discipleship ministries:

**Being set free from the lies of the world by Jesus’ truth (John 8:31–32).** This kind of freedom is the Spirit-empowered ability to do the right and good thing, the ability to choose God, to be liberated from sin’s bondage. Discipleship means to help disciples to reject the lies of the world about our values and goals, and to find freedom to live life the way that God intended it to be lived by continually hearing Jesus’ truth about reality.

**Being loved by Jesus means to love like Jesus (John 13:34–35).** I define this kind of love as “an unconditional commitment to imperfect people in which we give ourselves to bring our relationships to God’s intended purpose.” Discipleship helps disciples to express this kind of love in our marriages, our parenting, and our relationships within the church and world. Helping disciples to experience Jesus’ love enables them to love others.

**Bearing the fruit of being united to Jesus (John 15:7–8).** Our ongoing transformation into the image of Christ comes through the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), which means that the Spirit of God is the central empowering agency of our discipleship to Jesus. Disciple-making ministries teach our people how to walk in the power of the Spirit, so that their lives exude the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of godly righteousness (Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:10).

**Discipleship must be continually guided by God’s Word.**

Discipleship ministries help their people to adopt a radical commitment to the authority of the Word of God as the absolute truth about reality. This is not simply the acquisition of truth, but the internalization of truth so that it expresses our worldview, characterizes our values, and conveys our entire lifestyle.

As we teach our people to know the Word of God, we equip them to compare God’s Word with the values of the world so that they can follow Jesus obediently in all of their circumstances (Matt. 28:20).

**Discipleship must develop through a whole-life, life-long process of becoming more fully human.**

Because of being created in the image of God, humans are like God and represent God in a way unlike any other creature (Gen. 1:27–31). The image of God is something in our nature as humans and refers to what we are (e.g., mentally, morally, spiritually, relationally), rather than something we have or do. Sin distorted the image of God in humans by affecting every aspect of our likeness to him, yet the restoration process has begun with our redemption in Christ (e.g., Col. 3:10).

Therefore, discipleship ministries help believers to develop in every area of life as whole persons, helping them to transition intentionally through all of life’s dimensions and stages, so that they are continually growing into his image. A disciple of Jesus is intent upon becoming more fully a disciple in every area of life.

I had a radical conversion to Jesus, away from a life of drugs and pleasure seeking. I discovered that my life as Jesus’ disciple helped me to become more the way that I was intended to be as a human created in God’s image. That continues to affect every...
area of my life, including my marriage and family life, my enjoyment of God’s creation as I surf or walk a mountain trail, or in my growth in serving Jesus in my profession.

**Discipleship must be nurtured in communities of faith.**

Each individual disciple enjoys a personal relationship with Christ that facilitates transformation into his image, but that personal relationship must be nurtured within two primary communities of faith—the spiritual family and the biological family.

The spiritual family is the church, entrance to which is based on obeying the will of the Father and experiencing the new birth (Matt. 12:46–50; John 1:12–13; Matt. 16:18). Brothers and sisters in Christ need one another as a spiritual community of faith to stimulate the growth of individuals as well as the body as a whole (Heb. 10:24–25; Eph. 4:11–13).

But the biological family continues to play a major role in God’s program. Marriage is a relationship in which husbands and wives mutually nurture each other’s transformation, while the parental role is designed to nurture children to know the will of God for their lives and help them to grow as whole persons reflecting the image of Christ (Eph. 5:22–6:4).

A disciple-making ministry accepts its responsibility to equip families so that husbands and wives can nurture each other and so that parents can nurture their own children. In turn, the responsibility of the family is to be the training grounds for the next generation of leaders within the church (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:4–5; Titus 1:6–7).

Discipleship is developed within the spiritual family and the biological family. Disciple-making ministries unite these two families and show how they work to support and strengthen each other.

**Discipleship must be carried out by sojourning in our everyday, watching world.**

In this earthly life, a human is a sojourner, a resident alien (Ps. 39:12). The creation awaits its renewal, and it groans under bondage to sin and decay (Rom. 8:19–22).

Regenerated disciples, however, live as people who have been set free from death and sin; our transformation has already begun. Therefore, we are at this time not of this world; our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and we are aliens and strangers in the world (1 Pet. 2:11).

Nonetheless, our purpose for being here is to advance the gospel message that has redeemed and transformed us, to be salt and light in a decayed and dark world, and to live out life in the way God intended life to be lived before a watching world (John 17:15–21).

**The tremendous privilege that we all have in the Christian life is to walk with Jesus as his disciples and to be continually transformed into his image as we grow in our discipleship to him.**

Communities of faith are necessary for purposeful gathering away where believers are strengthened and equipped. But the growth and transformation that we experience is what enables us to live effectively with Jesus in this world. Our transformation enables us to live as sojourners in the world, and “live such good lives among the pagans that… they may see your good deeds and glorify God” (1 Pet. 2:11–12).

Disciple-making churches help transformed disciples to know how to bear and exemplify the message of the gospel of the kingdom in our everyday realm of activi-
ties, offering the life of Jesus’ kingdom to a world that is dying without it.

**Discipleship is not just another program, but transformation.**

The tremendous privilege that we all have in the Christian life is to walk with Jesus as his disciples and to be continually transformed into his image as we grow in our discipleship to him. Our Lord Jesus is still at work calling men and women to follow him today, and our joyous task is to join him in fashioning our ministries to serve him to that end.

But this is not just another optional program (see sidebar, “Disciple Making and ‘Discipleship Programs’”). Rather, discipleship is central to all that we do. Discipleship is the expression of how God equips and transforms Christians for this life through the ministry of the church and parachurch ministries. As a new, powerful wave of discipleship breaks upon the shores of our ministries, we have the joyous privilege of helping our people know how to surf it effectively. Disciple-making ministries help everyday men and women who are being transformed as Jesus’ disciples to be light in a dark place, and to be the living example of the hope of transformation that our world so desperately needs.

Disciple-making ministries help disciples of every age of life and stage of growth to know how to walk with Jesus and to be transformed by him in every area of life. Adapting the author from an article originally published in the journal *Enrichment* (Winter 2008): 41–46.

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**DISCIPLE MAKING AND “DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAMS”**

Discipleship programs can be helpful because they give us tangible methods and outcomes. When programs are proven to be effective in helping gain knowledge or solidify behaviors or produce desired leaders, they can be used over and over with a variety of people in many diverse settings.

But programs can also entice us to substitute methods and forms for people. They often focus most on external behavior as a means of evaluating growth. This “cookie-cutter” approach to discipleship expects everyone to look exactly like the model laid out by the particular program. We expect people to perform according to the form that our program lays out.

If programs help, we should use them. But we need to be careful not to be enticed to force a program that destroys the uniqueness of individuals or is a substitute for the living example of Jesus in the lives of our people.
“…when you became a Christian, you answered the first call of the disciple, the invitation to put aside your own attempts to save yourself and to lead your life your own way.”

Michael Wilkins, *In His Image*

(continued from page 29)

RECOMMENDED READING

There are a number of good books on discipleship. The ones listed below are especially helpful:

COMMENTARIES ON MATTHEW

*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, John Stott
This is a clear, well-written, biblically faithful treatment of the meaning and application of the Sermon on the Mount by one of the greatest Bible teachers of the twentieth century. Very readable and edifying. Recommended for pastors, church leaders, and lay persons who want to understand the Sermon on the Mount.

A great commentary by a brilliant scholar who is devoted to Christ and brings to the text deep scholarship, spiritual insight, warmth, and great clarity. Pastors, church leaders, and Bible students will all find much value in this work.

*Matthew: From Biblical to Contemporary Life*, Michael J. Wilkins, *NIV Application Commentary Series*
An exceptional commentary. For each unit of text in Matthew, the author explains what it meant in the first century, then he examines the cultural differences between then and now. Finally, he brings out its application to life in the contemporary world. Great for pastors and lay people.
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Discipleship of Heart and Mind

Many people believe in Christ but are not experiencing a life of true transformation and fruitfulness. The Fellows Program provides discipleship of the heart and mind, and is designed for those who want to live lives of radical obedience and be effective servants for Christ in the church and the world.

This year-long program focuses on discipleship/spiritual formation, evangelism, apologetics and calling. Through sound teaching, mentoring, fellowship, small group interaction, service and readings from the best authors, the Fellows Program has helped transform hundreds of lives.

The Fellows Program focuses on a different theme each month, and includes:

- The Grace of God and True Conversion
- Following Jesus Christ
- Living a Life of Love
- Growing in Humility
- The Holy Spirit and Obedience
- Growing in Prayer
- Trusting the Bible
- Being Transformed Through the Bible
- Pursuing God’s Call on Your Life
- Understanding and Engaging Today’s World

The Fellows Program is currently being offered in Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Annapolis, Maryland. We are actively pursuing expansion of the Fellows Program to new cities in the U.S. and internationally starting in 2011.

The Fellows Program – Year Two, is offered in Washington, DC, Atlanta and Annapolis. Year Two provides a continuing opportunity to grow in maturity by exploring the Holiness of God, the depths of sin, the power of the Holy Spirit, community, mission, dependent prayer and integrity.

Modeled on the popular and effective Fellows Program, Journey is our most thorough small group discipleship program for churches or home groups. Journey follows the same themes and uses the same resources as the Fellows Program, but without live teaching or mentors.

Journey features recorded lectures, plus a workbook that includes Bible studies, discussion questions, reading lists, and additional resources.

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