

Making Disciples: The Way Forward in Missions

Preamble and Introduction

We praise the Lord for His dealings and goodness to our generation. It is appropriate for us to look back at God's great work among us over the past years. We celebrate the great exploits He wrought through the fathers in the faith. It is worthy of mention that the mustard seed has grown and brought forth great branches and many birds of the air from all over the world have come to nest on it. Several men and women have jeopardized their lives to make this a reality. Indeed God is building His Church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Africa was like a jungle that no one understood. It was called "the dark Continent" probably not just because the peoples are dark skinned but the entire land sat in the region of darkness and death waiting for the light of the gospel. Though Africa was not left out on the day of Pentecost and in the early days of apostolic mission, it fell back into darkness as the early efforts of the apostles who went into North Africa was not sustained with concerted discipleship. God has moved again over the past three centuries to send the light into the nations of Africa and other lands called the third world countries.

Today, we celebrate Africa and Asia being lightened with the gospel light though at the expense of several lives of early missionaries who died in their thousands due to the harshness of our terrain. She is taking her place in the purpose of God as one continent that must produce the manpower for the end time mission enterprise. We celebrate our past leaders in mission, who took the bull by the horn and poured out their lives as a drink offering on the soil of our nations. We celebrate the many Church denominations that have taken roots in the land, such that whole tribes have turned to embrace Christianity even if it is just nominally. We celebrate the impact of the gospel in bringing education, health care and social development. It is on record that it was the missionaries that initiated and facilitated these laudable developments in our lands. We celebrate with grateful hearts what the Lord has done for us.

I could go on and on enumerating our high points of celebration except that my heart is drawn so strongly to look at where we are in God's purpose today. The story of Joshua comes so strongly as a clear illustration of our experience.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them--the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." Jos 1:1-5 NKJV

Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed. This is the land that yet remains: all the territory of the Philistines and all that of the Geshurites, from Sihor, which is east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (which is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines--the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites; from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorites; the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon as far as the entrance to Hamath; all the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth, and all the Sidonians--them I will drive out from before the

children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you.
Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of
Manasseh. Jos 13:1-7 NKJV

This story will form the outline of my submission to this august Assembly of God's servants and Mission executives. Permit me to draw issues of our strategy for the future from this story, while we apply our hearts to the realities of our modern day. My concern in this paper is the future and not the past. There is nothing we can do to affect our past. The past is past already. Our only opportunity to make a difference is what we do now and henceforth. And our response in this consultation will form the basis of the Church's advance in the coming days. We cannot just end this consultation as a mere talk shop.

I will look at disciple-making as the way forward for us in mission.

Indispensable Realities that Warrant Disciple-making

1. Moses, My servant is dead

This is one reality we must face squarely in our thinking. There is no everlasting man of God, though we serve the Everlasting and Ever living God. The anointing on a man's life can be great and so effective; it does not stop the carrier from going the way of all the earth. We serve a tenure and there is the limitedness of our lives and times. A man on stage today is the man in the grave tomorrow. We must think seriously about finding replacement sons if our mission will not abruptly terminate with our demise. Finding replacement is not at your death bed. It is only what you can do while you are on your feet and on the run. All who waited till their death bed to find heads on which to transfer the grace and anointing they carried for years have only wasted their opportunities. Their success actually became failure as they did not raise successors. Don't give up the ghost with the baton on your breast. Labour to raise men and women who would take over from you, if possible while you are still alive to provide some supervision. Every missionary in a mission field must seek to disciple and raise local men and women who can anchor the burden, the vision and the mission. This was the way Paul laboured. They pioneered Churches but did not leave until they had raised and ordained faithful men who were able to teach others also. Paul raised Timothy and commissioned him to do the same (Acts 16:1-4; 2Tim.2:2). Christ at the onset of His ministry called men to be with Him that He might make them fishers of men and commissioned them to do the same (Matthew 4:19-22, 28:19-20; John 17:18; 20:21).

2. A living dog is better than a dead lion

"But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten." Ecc 9:4-5 NKJV

"Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them." No matter how great Moses was, he is now dead. Singing about him will not bring him here. We may speak so much of our fathers in mission: Hudson Taylor, William Carey, etc and other great founders of mission work in the past and recent generations, brothers and sisters hear the word of the Lord "Moses My servant is dead." It is your turn now to arise. It is your own chapter now. It does not matter what we have or do not have, a living dog is better than a dead lion. Destiny has come upon us and this is the generation we have to serve. David served the Lord in his own generation and fell asleep with the fathers. We must arise now and go over our own dauntTOKYOing Jordans as well. What we need to do here in this consultation is to seek to see our duty face to face. We must listen to God on what strategy He is lending us for our own generation. I perceive very clearly that we need to invest time to study and understand again the "Discipleship strategy" and how to run with it.

Joshua arose in response to this call and began to run. You may think he achieved much and he had

declared another celebration in Chapter 11 and 12 until God came with undeniable verdict of the reality of his own life and ministry as well when he could almost do nothing any more.

3. “You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.”

What a thought we must keep at the back of our minds. It is that years are rolling in and out on us. Joshua was confronted with a reality he could not look away from: “You are old and advanced in years.” If there is a way to tie down our years from advancing or if we ourselves may not advance in years, it would have been easy. Look at your heads, my friends! You were not grey-haired like this a few years ago. You are advanced in years but I do hope that you have advanced in your mandate. Are your years remaining sufficient for the very much land of your calling remaining to be possessed? Do you measure the time of your life consumed already in proportion to the fraction of your mandate you have accomplished? What is the fraction remaining compared with the fraction of your usable years? This arithmetic may depress many, but it is a reality we must face if we are thinking rightly about the way forward. If you will not be able to finish or run with the vigour of your younger days, who are you preparing to step into your shoes or rather bear the burden with you and remove from you? Is it when you would have been finally stricken that you will instigate a crash program?

If we must arise, we must arise right away. Time clicks quietly away and our world is growing more complex and sophisticated in wickedness. Lands conquered before have grown wild again and have become fresh mission fields. We may not classify them in the 20-40 windows, but they are becoming tougher than the unreached people groups we are familiar with in mission circles. I am speaking about Europe, North America and what you call “First world countries.” Secularism, humanism, spiritism and other philosophies have ravaged the land and the youth of those nations are groping in “enlightened darkness” seeking for direction. It is time for God to raise men and women from our midst to be sent back as missionaries to confront the land and rescue the trophies our fathers died to secure. Such missionaries must be the ones that are dead to pleasure and mammon. The omission of Joshua in the pursuit of his mandate only became apparent at the close of his own chapter:

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. Jdg 2:7-10 ESV

It was the omission of concerted discipleship to raise replacement sons. The smooth transition between Moses and Joshua was possible because Moses had spent time to pour his life on Joshua in consistent discipleship. There was no man on which to place the Spirit that was on Joshua at the point of his own departure. He had colleagues who were his age mates. They outlived him just for a short while when they also began to pack up in death. Where is the Joshua generation behind our “Moses?” And where are the younger men and women we hope to pass the baton to? This is the burden for disciple-making as the way forward in missions. Elisha poured water on the hand of Elijah as he followed him about in discipleship. Timothy agreed to be circumcised in order to follow Paul in discipleship, though he had been saved at Lystra. This deliberate and concerted relationship with men and women in discipleship is critical for the Church and especially for mission in the coming days.

4. “This is the land that yet remains”

God is very meticulous. He is very empirical as well. At the onset of Joshua’s calling, God gave him the scope and dimension of his mandate. When Joshua needed the sun to stand still and for the moon to remain over the valley of Ajalon for him to execute judgment on the occupants of the land, God answered him. He gave him all the resources needed for his ministry but alas, a wrong strategy did not allow Joshua to finish. While the public thought he had finished, God came with a chart of the land that yet remained to be possessed. We may roll out drums to celebrate ourselves and only begin to

decorate our territories if we lose sight of the scope of our mandate and what still remains for the Church to do in the nations. “This is the land that yet remains to be possessed” came to me as a reality from which I cannot run away. The scope and focus of this paper will not allow me to delve into this. I do hope there is another person who will help us see where we have reached and the yet many lands to be possessed. We need objective analysis directly from the Spirit of God. We now have men in our ranks who are specialists in propaganda and exaggerated publicity. The media pictures of mammoth crowds we see in crusades are no more reliable. Digital technology has made hypocrisy and manipulation the easy thing to do right on the computer. We must be ready to face God and let Him give us the reality of what remains for us to possess. Again, this will help us to examine our strategy very objectively and honestly.

What God told Joshua to do at this point is to “Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh.” This is still the call unto raising men who can face the unconquered lands when our “Joshuas” have become too old to go. To have sendable men and women, they must be raised. This was what Paul foresaw and he began to raise Timothy, who was also to commit the same truth to other faithful men who would be able to teach others also.

The disciple-making strategy in mission

To think of disciple-making as different from the great commission is very absurd to me. The only commission we are actually given is “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” Amen. Matt. 28:18-20 NKJV

It is the crux of the great commission. It was that with which Jesus Himself started His ministry on earth. It was the method of all the earlier prophets who were used of God even in the Old Testament. Leaders were only secured from among those who had come along in discipleship. It was the only means by which God recruited men for His work.

I perceive there is a misconception and a conspiracy in recent times concerning this matter of discipleship in our commission. Many have thought and even taught that discipleship is like a “New Converts Class” that runs for few weeks. Others seek to replace the biblical word with other concepts alien to the Bible like “Mentoring,” “Coaching,” etc. I would have kept mute about this trend, except that the coming generation may not know the God of the Bible as we introduce concepts of the modern day business models of ministry which Christ’s life would not tolerate, if we are His disciples indeed. The import of discipleship was lost as we began to promote crusades and crowd-pulling meetings as the measure of success in ministry. Discipleship is Christ’s method of growing His Church. He had the most powerful crowd-pulling anointing and could easily have emphasised the crowd ministry but He rather focused on disciple-making. It is slow and does not allow the popular tractions of our day. Many even in His own day left Him as He began to speak to them of the meat that perishes and the meat that endures to everlasting life. All the parables He gave to illustrate the kingdom show the pattern of discipleship. It is like the mustard seed which is planted and buried away from sight. It grew and brought forth large branches. Christ Himself would not rush at the crowd. He was satisfied to sit upon the twelve and watch them grow to 120 before He left them for heaven. Disciples, when properly raised, will multiply themselves. The multitude ministry will not give us the way forward in mission in the coming days. I believe the only way for us to adequately respond to the great commission is to make disciples the way Jesus and the Apostles made them. To raise more labourers for the harvest of the unreached peoples, we must follow His pattern of raising men, which is concerted discipleship. Disciple-making is the core of the great commission. The instrument that God uses to tie a man down for His use is Discipleship. He uses discipleship to separate a man from people or things that might have hitherto been riding his life or may want to ride his life in the future. Mk. 11:1-6; Mt. 4: 21-22. Compare with Luke 18:22-25.

Permit me to briefly bring an input here on the definition and concept of discipleship as practiced all through Scriptures. This may help to set the focus on how to actually make disciples if we are serious about moving forward in effective and authentic mission work.

What is Discipleship?

- (i.) Discipleship is a process of reproducing or imparting the life of a teacher to a pupil. It is a life-long process, a systematic and cumulative way of making someone (a student, a pupil, a trainee, an apprentice, a raw material, and a disciple) to be conformed or transformed into the image, the stature and the full personality of the Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke 6:40)
- (ii.) Discipleship is God's means of achieving His eternal purpose and central goal of calling any man to Himself to be conformed to the image of His only Son, the Saviour Jesus Christ, in order that Christ might be the first born among many brethren. (Rom. 8:28-29, Heb 2:10-11) Without this conformity to His image, such that we become of the same stock (quality, nature and personality) with Him, He will become ashamed or shrink to call us brethren. Discipleship is the only means designed by God to bring us into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, growing up into Him in all things and all the ministry gifts have been given to achieve this (Eph. 4:11-16).
- (iii.) Discipleship is God's family training scheme: (Gal. 4:1-2, Hab. 12:7-11)
For an heir who is a child to be brought into his inheritance, he is kept under training and tutelage till he grows to walk into the heritage of his father. It involves discipline and training of character. The tutors and governors of the Kingdom are men and women appointed by Our Father God, to watch over our growth and development until we become like the Son whom He loved. This is discipleship. Not to partake of this family training is to grow wild and become a bastard and even a vagabond.
- (iv.) Discipleship can be likened to a "Master-Apprentice" or "Teacher-Pupil" relationship, with a predetermined curriculum and behavioral objective, between the Christian and the LORD Jesus Christ. It is a personal apprenticeship under the Master Jesus with a view of becoming like Him. But the other peculiar aspect of this is that Christ delegates others of His disciples to make other disciples for Him. This is why it becomes a mandate for each one of us in response to the great commission. (Luke 6:40; Matt. 4:19-20; Matt.11:29, 30; Matt. 28:19-20)
- (v.) This process has a beginning, an entrance and a definite starting point (which are not unconscious, but deliberate) when the pupil voluntarily yields his neck to the yoke of the master to learn of him Matt.11:28-30, 1 Kings 19:19-21. Men of old have taken others along in a discipleship relationship with a clear focus of preparing them for the Lord's use.
- (vi.) Discipleship is a process and not just an event, because the conformity to His image will not take place in one experience. It consists of a systematic set of steps, exposures and training, carefully arranged in order until God's goal is achieved. It is not a program nor a course, nor an activity, but a relationship. It is a life-connection, which is not physical or visible, the flow of the divine new lifestyle in exchange for the old lifestyle. This exchange of lifestyle involves most of the time, falling and rising, correction and whipping; you may sometimes weep and bleed, it can be painful to bend to a new shape and focus, a man who is set on his old ways of living. It calls for a very close association with the Master and with the human hands God is using to raise the disciple. (Heb.12:6; Ps.118:18; Job.5:17-18; Prov.3:12; John. 15:15).
- (vii.) It involves direct encounters and interactions with the Master Himself in prayer, in His word, in service and in following in His footsteps. Jn.8:31-32; 15:8-10, 1Pet.2:21. This is the need for God to raise men and women among us who are audio visuals for the believers, so that they can see how to live the life into which they have been called. (Jn 1:14-16, 1Jn.1:1-4)
- (viii.) Discipleship for each person is unique and peculiar to the individual. The pace, the

instrumentality, the arrangement of lessons and dealings as determined by the Master is also unique. The path each must tread to glory, the portion of service and talents allotted to him are also unique. No disciple should compare Christ's dealings with him with another disciple's experience with Christ. To whom much is given, much is required. Consider Christ's dealings with Peter in John 21:15-25, Thomas in John. 20:19-20, 24-29. Compare these with the labourer in Matt.20:1-6. "Take what is thine and go thy way... is it not lawful for me (The Master) to do what I will with mine own?"

In making disciples, we must be personal with the individual. We must give him the space to be himself in learning to follow the Lord. This is the labour of travelling until Christ be formed in the life of the individual. It is such men upon whom we have so labored that will be able to raise others. They are the missionaries of tomorrow.

(ix) Discipleship is not a spurious kind of thing. It is systematic and cumulative. It is ordered and arranged by the LORD Himself. He exposes the individual disciple to diverse experiences at various times and stages of his development. He gives due meat in due season (Prov.16:9; 20:24; Isa.28:9-10).

(x.) When the disciple has made real progress in his discipleship relationship with the LORD, his character, deeds and manner of life and speech show obviously to those around that he "... had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13; Matt. 26:69-73; Acts 11:26).

Making Disciples is the essence of the Great Commission. It is the pivot of every call we have received. The expectation of God over the lives of all that come to Him is for them to be conformed to His image. The conditions He gave all those who wanted to follow Him is still the condition for becoming His disciples today. Unless we confront men and women with His conditions, we may be raising churches that are alien to His dream and expectation. Mission will not produce strong churches if we do not diligently raise disciples along the terms He set for all He calls to Himself. We must not be intimidated with the modern trend as to short-measure His terms.

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23 NKJV)

And He said to all, If any person wills to come after Me, let him deny himself [disown himself, forget, lose sight of himself and his own interests, refuse and give up himself] and take up his cross daily and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also]. (Luke 9:23 AMP)

And in Luke 14, He even stated these terms more clearly and more emphatically. Though many went back from following Him, He did not lower the standard. The rich young ruler went away sorrowfully as he was confronted with the terms of following Jesus and our Lord did not run after him. What must be done in the nations is to demand for His men and women to be persons who have been evacuated of self and have known the power of the Cross on their daily lives.

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:25-33 NKJV)

The term of discipleship is the same and unwavering, whether in the Old or New Testaments. It remains sure and unchanging for all generations, all races of men, all classes and categories of men.

- (i.) Look at Abraham facing the same terms in Gen. 12:1-3. The destination is always not too clear, when disciples agree to follow their master. It is a step of unconditional surrender in faith.
- (ii.) Moses: Heb. 11:24-27
- (iii.) Look at the Levites in Exodus 32:26-29.
What conditions were they fulfilling? Obviously they were fulfilling the conditions for discipleship. Compare this with Luke 14:26. You will discover that they are similar.
- (iv.) Look at Elisha in 1Kings 19:19-21.
How does this compare with Luke 9:57-62? Analyse Elisha's estate, what he abandoned, what he chose to become, in order to be useful in the hands of God.
- (v.) Look at the Disciples: Matt 4:18- 22; 9:9 What are the implications of these terms on their lives?
Beloved, God has maintained His own position with all men, at all times, on this matter of DiscipleTOKYO ship. It is not now (with us) that He will change. We cannot make disciples if we are not already His disciples indeed. This may look confrontational, but there is no other way to do genuine mission work unless we first submit our necks to His yoke in discipleship and we are willing to draw others into the same lifestyle.