

CHOSEN
TO BE A
DISCIPLE

What Every Person Should Know

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To my loving wife, Gina

To all the laypeople, elders, pastors, administrators, theology students, and professors that I've met through the years who would like to be disciples of Jesus...

This book is for you.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,
that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

—Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you
that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain,
that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

—John 15:16 (NKJV)

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because
God from the beginning chose you for salvation
through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

—2 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV)

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Preface

I'm always concerned about the fact that many people leave our churches every year. In February 2019, after attending the NAD (North American Division) Church Plant Boot Camp in Florida and reading some books, my soul was rekindled with the need for church members to be disciples of Jesus. Discipleship became the motto of a school of evangelism that we have for some churches in the Greater New York Conferences, where I presented two seminars on discipleship. I became more and more concerned about the status quo of some churches.

In July 2019, I was in Mexico, studying for a PhD in Business Administration. Dr. Emmer Chacon gave an assignment for his class, Biblical Worldview II. We were required to do some research and prepare a paper on a theological topic. I thought that was a good place to write about discipleship. While I was researching for the task, God convinced me that I must write a book on this topic. And to prove that this was what I needed to do, the Lord worked many incredible miracles throughout the process of producing this book.

In this post-COVID-19 era, if you are still alive, there's a reason for it. God has a purpose for you. He wants you to become a disciple of Jesus. Megatrends will continue to change and

reshape our world with disruptive innovation at an unprecedented pace. More than ever, it is critical for you to focus on that which remains constant: God’s purpose for your life, to be a disciple.

I invite you to read this book with a spirit of prayer so that the Holy Spirit can reveal to you the truth found within these pages for a deeper spiritual experience. My hope for you is that after reading this book, you will discover the necessity and the joy of being a disciple of Jesus. It’s so fulfilling and so enjoyable to be in fellowship with Jesus.

Part I

Why Be a Disciple?

Chapter 1

Chosen to Understand the Necessity of Being a Disciple

“Discipleship, at heart, involves transformation at the deepest levels of our understanding, affection, and will by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, and in relationship with the people of God.”

—Jim Putman

From 1965 to 2017, the Seventh-day Adventist Church grew to 37,138,884 members. Of these, 14,521,088 chose to leave—a net loss of 42 percent. “In effect, four of every ten church members are slipping away.” In the vast majority of denominations, churches are declining or at a plateau.

It is heartbreaking to see that, after 15 or 25 years, some churches are declining or remain with the same level of membership. Something is wrong. It does not need to be that way. One of the reasons could be that many church members do not understand how to be disciples of Jesus. That is a real tragedy!

In this world, there is real controversy. This fight must concern each of us on this planet; everyone needs to understand the effect of the issue. American Christian pioneer Ellen Gould White writes, “Many look at this conflict between Christ and Satan as having no special bearing

on their own life; for them, it has little interest. However, within the domain of every human heart, this controversy is repeated.”

We are all in a battle. We all have our fights. To win this battle and restore in our souls the image of God, Jesus gave to His followers a precise order: make disciples. Before Jesus left His disciples, He commanded them to go and make disciples of all the nations. This order is known as the Great Commission. It is so important that we find it at the end of each of the four Gospels: Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–20, Luke 24:45–49, and John 20:21–23. But the Great Commission is more than adding people to a new church. It is God’s way of helping men and women to become more like Jesus. That is why the enemy will do all in his power to prevent the church from accomplishing this very task. The Great Commission—making disciples—is Jesus’s last will for His church.

The Problem

I would like you to acknowledge that there is a problem. Something is being terribly neglected in our process of evangelism. This is very serious and can influence you to live a shallow Christian life.

Joi Tyrrell, communication director for the Bermuda Conference, thinks that the significant number of members leaving the church is “a cause of great concern” and “the problem facing the church today.”

Although discipleship, in Jesus’s words, is the strategy of winning the world, for Opoku Onyinah (2017), this order has been grossly ignored and replaced with the making of converts. Mark Brown (2012) identifies the problem as the fact that the church is teaching people how to become Christians, but not how to become disciples.

Bill Hull (2006) has argued that the church is creating a non-discipleship Christianity. Church culture in the global North—along with Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa—has broadly accepted the idea of non-discipleship Christianity. People can be Christians without making any effort to submit to and follow Christ.

Hull affirms, “How the church has missed this obvious mandate can only be attributed to a diabolical scheme. The crisis at the heart of the church is that we give disciple making lip service, but do not practice it. We have lost the integrity of our mission.”

Alejandro Bullón (2017) affirms that the problem is that most Christians are content with being believers. They are not disciple-makers; they are mere spectators of the Sabbath program. They judge and evaluate the program, approve or disapprove. They contribute their tithes and offerings but are not committed to the mission.

Dallas Willard (2006) writes that “the governing assumption today, among professing Christians, is that we can be ‘Christians’ forever and never become disciples. That is the standard teaching now—the ‘Great Omission’ from the Great Commission.”

Jeffrey Lynn (2014) adds another dimension to the problem. Many churches have their focus on evangelism at the expense of discipleship. They seek mostly to win converts and do not facilitate the process by which converts become disciples. Many have missed this point: Matthew 28:19–20 is all about making disciples, not winning converts. As G. Earl Knight writes, “An emphasis on discipleship and not just membership will prove to be effective in caring for the members.”

Similarly, Scot McKnight argues, “Most evangelism today is obsessed with getting someone to make a decision; the apostles, however, were obsessed with making disciples.”

When we consider the history of God’s people, we can see how easy it was for us to shift from His will. Reread the history of Israel. Look at the early church. These early Christians wanted to stay at Jerusalem, despite Jesus’s order to go from Jerusalem to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NKJV). White has said, “When the disciples followed their inclination to remain in large numbers in Jerusalem, persecution was permitted to come upon them, and they were scattered to all parts of the inhabited world.”

The command to make disciples is evident in the Bible, but many Christians today are far from understanding and following this order. In the past, the disciples did not adhere to the instructions of Jesus. After His ascension, they stayed at Jerusalem, contrary to Jesus’s command. It took the fire of persecution for them to leave Jerusalem and spread the good news in other countries.

The same way the first disciples misunderstood the command not to station only in Jerusalem, many Christians today do not understand the order of Jesus to be a disciple and to make disciples. I pray to God that we open our minds to understand the problem that we are facing today regarding the Great Commission. Even though we are sincere Christians, human hearts do not always follow the full will of God entirely. For three years, Jesus had to redirect the disciples from time to time regarding their misunderstandings of His teaching. Our only hope is to be in continuous fellowship with Jesus. He will transform us and guide us all the way.

John Thomas Green (2012) argues that the command to make disciples is imperative for Christians to follow. The North American church has struggled in this endeavor. While churches are doing great in programs and ministries, these programs and departments are not adequately making disciples of Jesus Christ. Lynn (2014), referring to George Barna’s research, states that “the current state of making disciples of Jesus Christ ... is dismal.” Lynn indicates that in most local churches, we can find systems for evangelism, but we do not have any systems in place with a specific goal of discipleship. Over the course of many years, churches have developed an evangelistic culture.

In his 2006 book on discipleship, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, Hull refers to “bar-code Christians”—people who believe the right things but don’t follow Jesus. In *Disciple-Making Pastor*, his book published in 2007, Hull affirms that multiplication is critical to reach the world and fulfill the Great Commission:

The Great Commission without multiplication is evangelism paralyzed from the neck down. By specifically commanding the making of disciples, Jesus specified the work product of the church. He did not say, “Make converts” or “Make Christians.”

That many believers have missed this indisputable mandate can only be attributed to a diabolical scheme. The crisis of the church is that we give disciple-making lip service but do not practice it. We have lost the integrity of our mission.

White has said, “The true missionary spirit has deserted the churches that make so exalted a profession; their hearts are no longer aglow with love for souls, and a desire to lead them into the fold of Christ.” Strength comes through exercise, White adds: “Thus, the Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers not only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength he already had; he becomes a spiritual paralytic.”

You must address this situation in your life on a personal level. God wants you to be a disciple. I say to not only be a believer, but a disciple. If you do not, you will lose the most exceptional opportunity of your life.

The Consequence

This situation has severe consequences on many lives and on the local churches.

Lynn (2014) has said that in our generation, the crisis of the church is a crisis of product. What kind of believer does the church produce? Church members or disciples? The outcome expected by Jesus is that the church will produce disciples. Christ ordered His church to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19 NKJV).

Many Christians neither understand nor follow the order of Jesus to make disciples. That’s why some believers are weak and do not experience the joy of salvation. They are ready to leave the church over any problem that arises. They lose their joy—or what should be joy to a child of God. Or sometimes they stay in the church, but their presence makes it hard to distinguish between those who believe in Jesus and those who do not.

Cole (2018) mentions that the church in America in many ways reflects the culture of America. American culture encourages receiving over giving. The average church member may be inclined to view the church from a consumer mentality rather than a serving and giving mindset. Church members are tempted to desire being served rather than serving.

Bobby William Harrington (2017) quotes Dallas Willard to say that the most significant issue in the world today is identifying believers who “will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him.”

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006) declare that consumerist views of faith encourage churches to develop an overprogrammed church culture. Consumerism exists as an often-unchallenged assumption in American life, especially in churches.

Vanessa Marie Seifert (2013) indicates that consumers look for what is appealing, and the attractive church model caters to this consumerist church perspective.

Cole (2018) adds that this consumer mentality naturally spreads into the church. Ministry slowly shifts from serving to being served.

White writes, “Many have a form of godliness, their names are upon the church records, but they have a spotted record in heaven.” She adds, “Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore, they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth.” She writes, “Many there are against whose names will be found written in the books of heaven, not producers, but consumers.” She indicates the danger of this consumerist culture and of “those who do little or nothing themselves for Christ.”

Bullón (2017) argues, “We have many members but few disciples. Don’t you think it’s time we made a change?”

The Importance of Being a Disciple

One of the solutions to the issue of plateauing or declining churches is to refocus and embrace the order of Jesus again by making disciples. When Jesus chooses someone, He calls this person to fullness of life. But this can be possible only through the discipleship process.

Onyinah (2017) writes that due to the importance of discipleship, the whole Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is involved in the commission that Jesus gives to His disciples. In the Great Commission, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... behold, I am with you till the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18, 20).

Hull (2006) writes that discipleship is God’s top priority because Jesus practiced it and commanded His disciples to do it, and His followers continued it.

Bullón (2017) mentions that Jesus began His ministry by making disciples. He did not seek merely believers or church members.

Eldon Babcock (2002) indicates that from the very beginning of Jesus’s ministry, He was training men to build His kingdom, not to make converts. Making disciples was important to Jesus, and the disciples are essential to the church of today as well.

Our hermeneutic of the Great Commission must be rearticulated. Today, it seems, we have changed the Great Commission. Through our evangelistic campaigns and other activities, we work very hard to make converts, not disciples.

Bullón (2017) adds that no disciple is made in an evangelistic campaign or with the simple exposition of the truth of the Bible. Disciples aren't made in a week or a month. It takes time and life experience. A disciple is a person in constant growth, and growth is not an event but a process.

Evangelistic campaigns are crucial, but they are only the initial part of the process.

Bullón (2017) argues that Paul was aware that the only way new believers would remain true was by sharing their faith.

Hull (2006) quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, saying, "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."

I think it's time to pause and reflect on this issue in our lives. It's time to follow the divine plan of life.

A Divine Plan

Making disciples is not a man-made strategy; it's an order from the Lord. This is how the Father proceeds to restore His image in each soul. It's more than just adding new converts to the church. It's God's way of facilitating the process for every believer to become like Jesus. God wants you to become like Jesus. Isn't that amazing? This is His plan. It must begin in your life right here, right now, to continue into eternity.

John wrote, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2 NJKV).

Bullón (2017) argues that the divine plan for evangelism is different from what we are doing now. We cannot forget the divine plan and create our own designs, believing that in this way we are helping God. If we do, we risk reaching the final day and discovering that although we did many good things with the best of intentions, we did not do the Father's will.

Babcock (2002) writes that fulfilling the Great Commission means making disciples, not just making converts. This requires helping people to become disciples.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11–12 that the principal role of the church leaders is to prepare the people to do the work of service and ministry so that the body of Christ is built up.

White says, "The only way to grow in grace is to be interestedly doing the very work Christ has enjoined upon us to do." She adds:

Satan summoned all his forces and at every step contested the work of Christ. So, it will be in the great final conflict of the controversy between righteousness and sin. While new life and light and power are descending from high upon the Disciples of Christ, a new life is springing up from beneath and energizing the agencies of Satan.

You must recognize that you are in a spiritual battle. This fight is real.

White writes, “Never does one leave the ranks of evil for the service of God without encountering the assaults of Satan” That means when a person makes a decision for Jesus and gets baptized, he or she will be prone to satanic attacks.

Usually, after baptism, new converts are left by themselves to go through the motions, to be just members. We leave them by themselves exactly when they need us the most. When they are transitioning to a new life, when they are receiving continual attacks from the enemy, it is precisely at that time that we abandon them. As a result, it is not surprising that so many members leave the church every year. We are wasting many lives. This is where we are losing the battle in the Great Commission.

Moreover, sometimes we underestimate the negative publicity that an ex-member can create against the church. This may have a negative effect on his or her family, friends, and colleagues. It will have a ripple effect. That means when one person leaves the church, it may be more difficult for someone from his or her entourage to come to the church. Discipleship will help a lot in this situation. That is why we must pray to the Lord to help us understand the necessity of discipleship, because when we are disciples of Jesus, we are in love with Jesus. Whatever the challenge we face in life or inside the church, we will never leave Jesus. We will always follow Him.

Personal Application

If you are reading this book, you are indeed chosen by God to understand the necessity for you to be a disciple of Jesus. Because you are a chosen one, God has a marvelous journey before you. Do not settle for little in your spiritual life when God has so much in store for you. Be determined to reach your full potential in Jesus.

Suggested Prayers

1. Jesus, in the darkness and the struggles of my life, open my eyes so I can see the beauty and the peace of walking with You every day as a disciple.
2. The Holy Spirit opens up my mind so I can discover the shallowness of my life and embrace the richness of the life that Jesus offers me today.

