

From Conversion to Commission: The G-U-I-D-E Model for Recovering Disciple-Making as the Core of the Church's Mission

*Joel Oluwatosin Alabi*¹

¹ Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, United States

Correspondence email: joalabi@liberty.edu; joelalabi@gmail.com

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Abstract

The contemporary church faces a growing crisis of spiritual shallowness marked by a declining commitment to intentional disciple-making. While conversion and church attendance remain emphasized, the formative and reproductive dimensions of Christian discipleship are often neglected, resulting in congregations shaped more by consumerism than Christlikeness. This article argues that disciple-making is not an optional programmatic emphasis but the very heart of Christ's mission and the enduring mandate of the church. Grounded in the ministry of Jesus and the Great Commission, the study contends that ecclesiology divorced from intentional discipleship fundamentally misunderstands the gospel's purpose. Employing a biblical, theological, and pastoral methodology, this article examines Christ's disciple-making strategy, the role of spiritual gifts, and the responsibility of the church in forming reproducing disciples. Particular attention is given to youth and emerging adults as a revealing case study of the church's current discipleship deficit. The article's primary contribution is the presentation of the G-U-I-D-E framework (Gather, Understand, Imitate, Develop, Empower), offering a coherent and pastorally viable model for recovering disciple-making as a formative, relational, and missional practice. By re-centering discipleship within the life of the church, this study calls for ecclesial renewal aligned with the heart of Christ and the mission of God.

Keywords: *consumerism, discipleship, ecclesiology, mission, spiritual formation, youth and emerging adults*

Introduction

Across much of contemporary Christianity, discipleship stands at a critical crossroads. While churches in many global contexts continue to grow numerically, a persistent concern voiced by pastors, theologians, and sociologists alike is an increasing spiritual shallowness of congregational life. Faith is often reduced to event-based participation, moral affirmation, or religious consumption rather than sustained formation into Christlikeness. This condition has given rise to what many describe as church consumerism, where believers relate to the church primarily as clients rather than as apprentices of Jesus Christ.¹ The result is a widening gap between Christian confession and Christian practice, between belief and embodied obedience.

¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13–32.

This crisis is particularly visible among youth and emerging adults, who function as a revealing case study of the church's broader discipleship challenges. Numerous studies indicate that younger Christians frequently disengage from the church not primarily because of doctrinal disbelief, but because they perceive little connection between Christian faith and lived transformation. What younger believers most often hunger for is not more information about Christianity but a formative, relational experience of it—one in which faith is embodied, practiced, and shared within an authentic community. When the church reduces discipleship to content delivery or institutional participation without intentional relational investment, it fails to provide the very environment in which durable, transformative faith is formed and sustained.² Where churches emphasize attendance, programming, or isolated spiritual experiences without intentional formation, younger believers are often left without the theological depth, communal support, or missional vision necessary for resilient faith. Consequently, many drift toward individualistic spirituality or exit ecclesial life altogether. At the heart of this problem lies a confusion between conversion and discipleship. Evangelical churches, rightly committed to proclaiming the gospel and calling sinners to faith in Christ, have at times treated conversion as the culmination rather than the beginning of Christian life.³ Yet in the New Testament, conversion initiates a lifelong process of learning, imitation, obedience, and mission. Jesus did not merely summon individuals to belief but called them to follow him—to be with him, to be formed by him, and to participate in his redemptive mission (Matt. 4:19; Mark 3:14). When churches prioritize decisions, attendance, or institutional loyalty over formation and obedience, they risk producing converts without disciples. This tension signals not merely a pastoral challenge but a theological crisis. Discipleship is not an optional ministry emphasis or a specialized program for the spiritually motivated; it is intrinsic to the gospel itself. The risen Christ's final commission to the church is not simply to evangelize, but to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that he commanded (Matt. 28:18–20).⁴ As such, disciple-making belongs to the church's very identity and mission, grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus.⁵

This study is guided by three interrelated research questions: What does the ministry of Jesus reveal about disciple-making as the normative pattern for the church's mission? How do spiritual gifts, ecclesial structures, and pastoral leadership function as instruments of intentional disciple-making? And what practical framework can recover formative, relational, and reproductive discipleship in the contemporary church, particularly among youth and emerging adults? In pursuing these questions, this article advances the following thesis: that

² Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162–171; David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 23–52; "Building Authentic Community Among Gen Z: Discipleship and Connection at Transformation Church," Barna Group, last modified December 3, 2024, <https://www.barna.com/research/authentic-community-gen-z/>; Gregory A. Smith, "Religion Holds Steady in America," Pew Research Center, last modified December 8, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.58094/dkqp-6k90>.

³ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 1–15.

⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 24–33.

⁵ Michael Jon Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 40–58.

disciple-making is not an optional programmatic emphasis but the theological core of the gospel itself, inseparable from Christology, ecclesiology, and the *missio Dei*. Where churches divorce evangelism from formation, or privilege institutional growth over relational reproduction, they fundamentally misrepresent the method and mandate of Christ. Accordingly, this paper argues that disciple-making is the heart of Christ's ministry and the church's enduring mandate, and that the recovery of intentional, relational, and reproductive discipleship is essential for the spiritual vitality and missional faithfulness of the contemporary church.

Research Gap and Contribution

The existing literature on disciple-making is substantial but fragmented in ways that leave critical theological and ecclesiological questions unresolved. Foundational contributions from Robert Coleman,⁶ Bill Hull,⁷ and Greg Ogden⁸ have established the biblical and methodological case for intentional, relational discipleship. Building on these, practitioners such as Jim Putman⁹ and Edmund Chan¹⁰ have translated disciple-making principles into viable ecclesial models, emphasizing relational environments and intentional multiplication as marks of a healthy church. More recently, Kinnaman's empirical research has exposed the discipleship deficit among younger generations, demonstrating that faith attrition is driven less by intellectual doubt than by the absence of formative, relational investment.¹¹

Despite this body of work, two significant gaps persist. First, the existing literature tends toward either practical methodology or sociological analysis, rarely integrating the two within a coherent biblical-theological and ecclesiological framework. Second, and critically, no existing study presents a unified, pastorally actionable framework that holds together Christology, sanctification, spiritual gifts, ecclesiology, and missional reproduction in a single discipleship model. Recent empirical studies confirm that churches with intentional discipleship processes demonstrate measurably stronger faith formation outcomes,¹² yet the theological architecture undergirding such processes remains underdeveloped in peer-reviewed scholarship.

This article addresses these gaps by offering the G-U-I-D-E framework as an integrated model that is simultaneously biblical, theological, and pastoral. Its contribution lies not in

⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Ada, MI: Revell Books, 1994), 21–38.

⁷ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 17–45; Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached — We Must Follow* (Nashville, TN: HIM Publications, 2018), 11–29.

⁸ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 33–61.

⁹ Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 19–42.

¹⁰ Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 27–54.

¹¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23–52; Barna Group, “Building Authentic Community Among Gen Z.”

¹² Wati Runggeari and Victor Deak, “Spiritual Transformation in the Perspective of Christian Theology,” *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, no. 7 (July 2025): 3407–3424, <https://doi.org/10.55927/eajmr.v4i7.238>; Jos de Kock, “Spirituality and Theological Formation: Seven Critical Considerations,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 17, no. 1 (February 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/19397909241234294>.

novelty for its own sake but in coherence, recovering and systematizing the method of Christ in terms accessible to contemporary ecclesial practice, and applying it with particular urgency to the youth and emerging adult context where the discipleship deficit is most acute.

Method and Structure

This article employs a biblical, theological, and pastoral methodology. Exegetically, it engages key scriptural texts related to disciple-making, principally the Synoptic Gospels, the Pauline epistles, and Acts, attending to their grammatical, narrative, and theological dimensions. Theologically, it draws on systematic and missional categories, situating disciple-making within the doctrines of Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, and sanctification. Pastorally, it synthesizes insights from practical theology and contemporary empirical research to address the discipleship deficit observable in the contemporary church, with particular attention to youth and emerging adults.

The article proceeds in five movements: (1) an examination of Christ's disciple-making method; (2) a constructive presentation of the G-U-I-D-E framework; (3) a theological analysis of spiritual gifts as instruments of formation; (4) an ecclesiological account of the church and its leaders as discipling agents; and (5) pastoral and practical implications for contemporary ministry.

The Method of Christ: Disciple-Making as the Heart of the Gospel Mission

The ministry of Jesus Christ reveals that disciple-making is not an auxiliary program of the church but the very heart of the gospel mission. Rather than prioritizing mass movements or institutional expansion, Jesus intentionally formed a small community of disciples whose transformation and reproduction would carry the mission of God forward. This method (conversion, formation, and mission held together as a unified process) constitutes a normative pattern for the church's life and witness.

Jesus' Call: Come – Be Made – Be Sent (Matthew 4:19)

Jesus' invitation to the first disciples encapsulates the entire logic of discipleship: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19, ESV). A surface reading might suggest three sequentially distinct ideas, but careful exegetical attention reveals their inner unity. The imperative "follow me" (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου) signals a summons to personal allegiance that exceeds conventional rabbi-disciple relationships; as France observes, unlike the typical pattern in which the disciple chose his rabbi, Jesus reverses the initiative, calling disciples into a relationship defined entirely by his own authority and agenda.¹³ The promise "I will make you" (ποιήσω ὑμᾶς) is theologically decisive: the verb ποιέω denotes not self-improvement but active, ongoing formation by Jesus himself, underscoring that discipleship is fundamentally Christ's work upon the follower, not merely the follower's imitation of Christ.¹⁴ The resultant vocation, "fishers of men", draws on the metaphor of gathering, evoking eschatological urgency and missional purpose, anticipating the universal scope of the

¹³ Richard Thomas France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 143–145.

¹⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1992), 88–89; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 151.

Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20).¹⁵ These three movements (personal summons, formative transformation, and outward mission) are not sequential stages but a unified, simultaneous call; to follow Jesus is already to be remade by him and sent through him.¹⁶

Discipleship, therefore, is fundamentally relational, as it begins with personal attachment to Jesus; transformational, as Christ actively reshapes the disciple's life; and missional, as disciples are drawn into God's saving work for others. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously argued, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die," underscoring that discipleship entails a reorientation of the whole life, not mere assent to doctrine.¹⁷ Jesus' method resists any attempt to reduce the gospel to information transfer or private spirituality; instead, it calls persons into a lived apprenticeship under his lordship.

Christ's Investment Strategy: Depth Before Breadth

A striking feature of Jesus' ministry is his deliberate concentration on a limited number of disciples. Mark records that Jesus "appointed twelve... so that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14–15). This text reveals a clear prioritization: presence with Jesus precedes proclamation for Jesus. Formation precedes function. Rather than dispersing his energies broadly, Jesus invested deeply, shaping the inner lives, communal bonds, and missional identity of the Twelve.¹⁸

This strategy reflects what Robert Coleman famously described as Jesus' "plan of evangelism," wherein multiplication flows from intentional formation rather than numerical immediacy.¹⁹ Depth before breadth is not inefficiency but divine wisdom. Jesus' ministry demonstrates that sustainable mission arises from transformed persons who embody the message they proclaim. The early church's expansion in Acts confirms this pattern: those who had been shaped through sustained discipleship became the instruments through whom the gospel spread across cultures and continents (Acts 1:8).

For the contemporary church, this challenges metrics of success that prioritize attendance, visibility, or programmatic growth over spiritual maturity and reproducibility. Disciple-making precedes church expansion because it establishes the theological and relational foundation upon which genuine growth rests.

The Great Commission Reconsidered (Matthew 28:18–20)

The Great Commission provides the climactic affirmation of disciple-making as the church's central mandate. The grammatical structure of Matthew 28:19–20 is exegetically decisive. The passage contains one finite verb — the aorist active imperative *μαθητεύσατε* ("make disciples") — accompanied by three participles: *πορευθέντες* ("going"), *βαπτίζοντες* ("baptizing"), and *διδάσκοντες* ("teaching"). This structure establishes *μαθητεύσατε* as the governing imperative: making disciples is the command; the three participles describe its

¹⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 89.

¹⁶ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 39–42.

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1963), 89.

¹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Way of the Cross: Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 83–87.

¹⁹ Coleman, *The Master Plan*, 27–35.

manner and means, not independent obligations.²⁰ France, noting the climactic placement of this commission at Matthew's conclusion, argues that it draws together the entire narrative arc of the Gospel — the kingdom proclaimed, embodied, and now entrusted to a community — and that “all the nations” signals a decisive expansion beyond Israel's boundaries, fulfilling the universalist trajectory of Matthew's Christology.²¹ Davies and Allison likewise observe that the Trinitarian formula of v. 19b grounds the act of baptism not in mere ritual initiation but in incorporation into the life and name of God himself, giving disciple-making a profoundly theological rather than merely sociological character.²² Nolland further emphasizes that *διδάσκοντες τηρεῖν* — “teaching them to observe” — situates the content of discipleship not in doctrinal information alone but in embodied obedience, a point that resists any reduction of the Commission to catechism or creedal instruction.²³ Taken together, the grammar and theology of Matt. 28:18–20 confirm that the church's primary vocation is neither evangelism in isolation nor social engagement in abstraction, but the integrated, ongoing, obedience-forming work of making disciples.

As Christopher Moody observes, disciple-making aims at reproduction, not consumption; obedience to Christ necessarily includes helping others follow him.²⁴ Reconsidered in this light, the Great Commission confronts contemporary ecclesial models that equate success with decision counts or doctrinal literacy alone. Jesus envisions communities of obedient learners who live under his authority and extend his mission through relational multiplication. Disciple-making, therefore, is not one task among many but the integrative centre of the church's gospel mission.

The Process of Disciple-Making: A Biblical and Pastoral Framework (G-U-I-D-E)

Disciple-making in the ministry of Jesus was neither accidental nor informal; it followed a discernible, intentional pattern that combined relationship, instruction, imitation, formation, and mission. The G-U-I-D-E framework (Gather, Understand, Imitate, Develop, Empower) offers a biblically grounded and pastorally robust model that reflects Christ's own method while addressing the needs of contemporary ecclesial contexts. Importantly, this process integrates sanctification and mission, ensuring that discipleship produces mature believers who reproduce the life of Christ in others.

Situating G-U-I-D-E Among Existing Frameworks

The G-U-I-D-E framework does not emerge in a vacuum but engages in a well-established tradition of disciple-making models, each of which illuminates a dimension of the process while leaving others underdeveloped. Robert Coleman's eight-principle model

²⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 640–645; Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 419–422.

²¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1110–1115.

²² William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 684–688.

²³ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 1264–1268.

²⁴ Christopher Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples: A Practical Theology of the Church* (Beaumont, TX: DMD Initiative, 2021), 41–45.

(Selection, Association, Consecration, Impartation, Demonstration, Delegation, Supervision, and Reproduction) remains foundational, offering the most exegetically grounded account of Jesus' intentional method and establishing reproduction as the telos of all discipleship investment.²⁵ Coleman's framework, however, is primarily descriptive of Jesus' historical practice and does not offer a transferable pastoral sequence easily adaptable to contemporary ecclesial structures. Jim Putman's relational model, articulated through five developmental stages (Spiritually Dead, Infant, Child, Young Adult, and Parent) provides a valuable diagnostic tool for assessing where individuals are in their formation journey and calibrating pastoral responses accordingly.²⁶ Putman's strength lies in its relational attentiveness and its insistence that disciple-making is a long-term, stage-sensitive process; its relative weakness is that it is more taxonomic than missional, describing states of maturity without providing a corresponding action framework for the disciple-maker. Greg Ogden's triadic model emphasizes intentional small-group multiplication in clusters of three or four, offering a structural corrective to both mass-program and lone-ranger approaches to discipleship.²⁷ Edmund Chan's Intentional Disciple making model similarly foregrounds the church's identity as a discipling community, integrating theological conviction with organizational intentionality.²⁸

The G-U-I-D-E framework both draws upon and advances this tradition. Like Coleman, it is rooted in the method of Jesus; like Putman, it attends to relational process; like Ogden and Chan, it is structurally transferable across diverse ecclesial contexts. Its distinctive contribution lies in integrating five sequential but mutually reinforcing movements — relational proximity, formational teaching, life-on-life modeling, communal development, and missional empowerment — within a single unified framework that holds sanctification and mission together at every stage. Where Coleman describes what Jesus did and Putman diagnoses where disciples are, G-U-I-D-E provides a practitioner-oriented map of how disciple-making proceeds from first contact to reproductive sending.

Pastoral Viability: Congregational Evidence

The claim that G-U-I-D-E is pastorally viable is not merely theoretical. Each of its five movements corresponds to practices whose formative efficacy has been empirically documented in congregational research. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin's landmark study of over 250 thriving congregations found that churches effectively retaining and forming young disciples consistently demonstrated three overlapping commitments: keychain leadership that empowers others, empathetic listening embedded in relationships, and the prioritization of Jesus over institutional agendas. These map directly onto the Gather, Imitate, and Empower movements of G-U-I-D-E.²⁹ Ngala's empirical study of 945 church members similarly found that mentoring relationships, role-modelled Christlikeness, and small-group fellowship produced statistically significant differences in spiritual transformation between discipled and undiscipled groups. These findings validate the Imitate and Develop movements in

²⁵ Coleman, *The Master Plan*, 21–109.

²⁶ Putman, Harrington, and Coleman, *DiscipleShift*, 57–103.

²⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 127–161.

²⁸ Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 61–89.

²⁹ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad M. Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 55–92.

particular.³⁰ Barna Group's research further confirms that the minority of young adults who sustain resilient faith are distinguished not by doctrinal knowledge alone but by depth of relational investment and experiential engagement with the church community. This is consistent with the relational logic undergirding the entire G-U-I-D-E sequence.³¹

It must be acknowledged, however, that G-U-I-D-E as a named, integrated framework has not yet been subjected to a formal longitudinal case study within a specific congregation. Such empirical testing (tracking formation outcomes across the five stages over a defined period) would significantly strengthen the model's evidential base and represents a productive direction for future practical-theological research. What the existing evidence does confirm is that each component of the framework, taken individually and in combination, reflects practices consistently associated with durable, reproductive faith formation in diverse ecclesial contexts.

Gather: Relational Proximity and Invitation (John 1:39)

Disciple-making begins with gathering, an intentional movement toward relational proximity. When Jesus invited his earliest followers, "Come and you will see," they "came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day" (John 1:39). This encounter illustrates that discipleship is not initiated primarily through instruction but through presence. Jesus gathered disciples into shared life before shaping their understanding or assigning them mission. Relational proximity establishes trust, visibility, and accountability which are essential conditions for spiritual formation. As Wilkins notes, discipleship in the Gospels assumes sustained relational access to Jesus, not sporadic contact.³² These challenges modern church practices that prioritize programmatic efficiency over relational depth. Gathering is not about numerical accumulation but about cultivating spaces where life can be shared and observed. Pastorally, this dimension underscores the importance of hospitality, intentional relationships, and incarnational ministry. Disciple-making cannot occur at arm's length; it requires the willingness to invite others into one's life and to walk with them over time. Such relational commitment reflects the incarnational logic of the gospel itself (John 1:14).

Understand: Teaching That Forms Belief and Practice (Matthew 13:52)

Gathering alone is insufficient without understanding. Jesus consistently taught his disciples in ways that shaped both belief and behavior. In Matthew 13:52, Jesus describes the trained disciple as one who brings forth "what is new and what is old," integrating revelation with lived wisdom. Teaching, therefore, is not mere information transfer but formational instruction that reshapes worldview and practice. Jesus' pedagogy combined explanation, parables, questioning, and correction, aimed at internal transformation. As N. T. Wright observes, Jesus taught in ways that re-narrated Israel's story around himself, calling disciples

³⁰ Francisca W. Ngala, "Spiritual Transformation: A Focus on Strategic Approach to Discipleship," *British Journal of Education* 6, no. 9 (September 2018): 62–66, <https://ejournals.org/bje/vol-6-issue-9-september-2018/spiritual-transformation-a-focus-on-strategic-approach-to-discipleship/>.

³¹ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 31–47.

³² Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 74–77.

to inhabit a new vision of God's kingdom.³³ Biblical literacy thus becomes a means of spiritual maturity, equipping disciples to discern truth and live faithfully. Pastorally, this dimension calls the church to recover catechetical depth without abandoning accessibility. Teaching must be tethered to obedience (Matt. 28:20), ensuring that knowledge serves transformation. Disciple-making falters where instruction is detached from lived application or reduced to abstract theology.

Imitate: Life-on-Life Modeling (1 Corinthians 11:1)

A central feature of biblical discipleship is imitation. Paul's exhortation, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1), reflects a pedagogical model rooted in example rather than abstraction. Disciples learn not only by hearing but by observing a life shaped by the gospel. Jesus himself embodied this pattern, inviting disciples to watch how he prayed, served, suffered, and trusted the Father. Life-on-life modelling bridges the gap between doctrine and practice, making holiness tangible. Bonhoeffer rightly emphasized that discipleship is "a visible act of obedience," not a hidden interior posture alone.³⁴ This dimension highlights the ethical responsibility of disciple-makers: formation occurs whether intentionally or not. The lives of leaders inevitably shape those who follow them. Consequently, disciple-making requires integrity, humility, and transparency, acknowledging that growth often occurs through shared weakness and repentance, not perfection.

Develop: Growth Through Discipline and Community (Hebrews 12:11)

Discipleship necessarily involves development, a process that includes correction, discipline, and perseverance within community. Hebrews 12:11 affirms that divine discipline, though painful, "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Growth in Christlikeness is neither instantaneous nor individualistic; it unfolds through sustained engagement within the people of God. Sanctification, in this sense, is communal before it is private. The New Testament consistently locates spiritual growth within shared practices such as teaching, fellowship, prayer, and mutual exhortation (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24–25).³⁵ Discipline is not punitive but formative, aimed at aligning believers more fully with Christ's character. Pastorally, this challenges consumerist models of church participation that resist accountability. Development requires submission to God's formative processes mediated through community, leadership, and Scripture. Disciple-makers must cultivate environments where grace and truth coexist, allowing space for growth, failure, and restoration.

Empower: Sending Disciplers to Multiply (Luke 10:1–9)

The disciple-making process culminates in empowerment. Jesus appointed and sent disciples "two by two" ahead of him, granting them authority to proclaim the kingdom and embody God's power (Luke 10:1–9). Empowerment signifies trust. Jesus involved disciples in mission before they were fully mature, relying on divine grace rather than human readiness. This sending underscores that disciple-making aims at reproduction, not dependency. As Christopher Moody notes, mature disciples are those who disciple others; reproduction is a

³³ Nicholas T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 241–245.

³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63–65.

³⁵ Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 47–9.

mark of spiritual health.³⁶ Empowerment integrates sanctification and mission, affirming that growth occurs not only through inward formation but through outward obedience. For the church today, this demands a shift from clergy-centric ministry to equipping models that release believers into meaningful participation. Empowered disciples extend Christ's mission while continuing to grow, embodying the dynamic relationship between holiness and witness.

The Role of Spiritual Gifts in Disciple-Making

The New Testament presents spiritual gifts not as optional enhancements to Christian life, but as divinely given means by which Christ continues his formative work in the church. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12–14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4:10–11 together offer a coherent and mutually reinforcing theology of gifting that is fundamentally ecclesial, missional, and reproductive. When rightly understood, spiritual gifts function as instruments of disciple-making, equipping believers to participate actively in the formation of others and resisting reductionist models that confine ministry to clergy alone.

Gifts as Grace for the Body, Not Self-Expression (Romans 12)

Paul introduces his discussion of spiritual gifts in Romans 12 with a strong exhortation toward humility: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). This framing is theologically decisive. The key term here is not merely *χάρις* (*charis*, grace in the broad sense) but the more specific *χάρισμα* (*charisma*) — a word Paul appears to have coined, appearing almost exclusively in his letters (with the sole exception of 1 Pet. 4:10).³⁷ A *charisma* is literally a “grace-gift,” the concrete result of grace (*charis*) distributed sovereignly by the Spirit for the common good of the body. The distinction matters pastorally: gifts are not expressions of personal spirituality, status, or charisma but specific, Spirit-determined capacities entrusted to each believer for others' formation.

Paul's emphasis on sober self-assessment establishes mutual dependence as the normative posture of the church. Romans 12:6–8 lists a diverse range of gifts (prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, and mercy) without ranking or restriction to formal offices. Each believer contributes something essential, yet no believer possesses everything necessary for the church's growth. Teaching clarifies truth, exhortation encourages obedience, leadership provides direction, and mercy embodies Christ's compassion. Each plays a formative role in shaping Christlike lives. As Dunn notes, Romans 12 dismantles individualistic spirituality by rooting gifting within the metaphor of one body with many members.³⁸ Disciple-making, therefore, is not the achievement of gifted elites but the cooperative work of a grace-endowed community. This has significant pastoral implications. When gifts are treated as platforms for self-expression, discipleship becomes distorted, producing spectators rather than participants. Conversely, when gifts are recognized as responsibilities entrusted for others' growth, disciple-making flourishes, and humility becomes the soil in which multiplication takes root.

³⁶ Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples*, 88–94.

³⁷ The term *charisma* (*χάρισμα*) appears in Rom. 1:11; 5:15–16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30–31; 2 Cor. 1:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:10. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 725–728.

³⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 725–728.

Diversity, Unity, and Love: The Theology of Gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14

First Corinthians 12–14 offers the New Testament's most theologically comprehensive treatment of spiritual gifts. Writing to a congregation that had distorted gifts into instruments of status and division, Paul establishes four foundational principles directly relevant to disciple-making. First, the plurality of *charismata* flows from the one Spirit: “there are varieties of gifts (*charismata*), but the same Spirit; and varieties of service (*diakonia*), but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities (*energēmata*), but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” (1 Cor. 12:4–6). This trinitarian grounding of gifting significantly implies that gifts are not human capacities enhanced by religion but expressions of the triune God's ongoing mission through the body.³⁹ Second, each gift is given “for the common good” (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, 1 Cor. 12:7). This phrase categorically rules out any privatization of gifts or reduction of their purpose to personal enrichment.

Third, the body metaphor of 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 establishes that no gift is dispensable and no believer self-sufficient: “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (v. 21). Disciple-making requires the whole body, not a gifted subset. Fourth, and most significantly for discipleship formation, Paul subordinates all gifts to love in chapter 13, and prioritizes in chapter 14 those gifts that “edify the church” (οἰκοδομή, 1 Cor. 14:4–5). The criterion of edification (the building up of others toward Christlikeness) is the hermeneutical key for evaluating the use of every gift. Where gifts do not build up, they have been misdirected from their purpose. Stott rightly observes that a healthy church is characterized by an “every-member ministry” grounded in the body's diversity, where every gift, however seemingly modest, contributes to communal formation and outward witness.⁴⁰

Every Believer as a Minister: Rejecting Clergy-Centered Models (Ephesians 4:11–13)

Ephesians 4 presents the clearest ecclesiological connection between spiritual gifts and disciple-making. Christ gives leadership gifts to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) not to monopolize ministry, but “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Hoehner's exegetical analysis of this passage demonstrates that the three purpose clauses of verse 12 form a sequential structure in which the equipping of the saints (v. 12a) is the proximate goal, the work of ministry (v. 12b) is the means, and the edification of the body (v. 12c) is the ultimate end.⁴¹ Leadership, on this reading, exists not to replace the ministry of the many but to activate it.

Hoehner further observes that verse 16, “the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow”, confirms that maturity is a corporate and participatory achievement, not the product of a gifted few.⁴² This vision directly challenges clergy-centered discipleship models that concentrate ministry in the hands of professionals. Such models often produce dependency

³⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 529–533; John R. W. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 83–101; Max Turner, “Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22, no. 2 (January 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02202007>.

⁴⁰ Stott, *The Living Church*, 83–101.

⁴¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 541–549.

⁴² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 578–582.

rather than maturity, attendance rather than obedience. As Moody argues, the church's failure to mobilize all believers' gifts has resulted in shallow discipleship and stalled reproduction.⁴³ The *telos* of gifting in Ephesians 4:13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood", frames maturity as communal and eschatologically oriented, defined not merely by theological knowledge but by Christlike stability and missional participation.

Stewardship of Grace: 1 Peter 4:10–11

First Peter 4:10 emphasizes the theology of gifting through the language of stewardship: 'As each has received a gift (*charisma*), use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (*poikilēs charitos Theou*).' Peter's framing is distinctive in two ways. First, the universality of the gift, "as *each* has received", underscores that no believer is ungifted, and none is exempt from the obligation to deploy their gift for others. Second, the metaphor of stewardship (*oikonomoi*) implies accountability: gifts are not owned but entrusted, not permanent possessions but responsibilities. Peter further categorizes gifts into two broad streams: speaking gifts and serving gifts (v. 11) with each oriented toward the same end: "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." This doxological *telos* integrates formation and mission, confirming that the deployment of gifts in disciple-making is simultaneously an act of worship. The *charisma* of 1 Peter 4:10 is the same word Paul uses across his letters, underscoring that this is not marginal New Testament teaching but a consistent, cross-canonical theology of gracious empowerment for communal formation.⁴⁴

Gifts as Instruments of Multiplication

Measured biblically, spiritual maturity includes reproduction. Just as healthy organisms reproduce, healthy disciples make disciples. Bonhoeffer's insight remains pertinent: "The first step in discipleship is not a religious act, but obedience."⁴⁵ Obedience includes participating in Christ's ongoing work of forming others through the *charismata* He supplies. For contemporary churches, this reframes assessment and accountability. The question is not merely whether gifts are exercised, but whether they are producing disciples who can disciple others. When gifts terminate in self-fulfilment, the church stagnates. When gifts are stewarded for multiplication (as Paul envisioned in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, and Peter confirmed in his first epistle), the church embodies the method of Christ.

The Church and Its Leaders as Disciple-Makers of Disciplers (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 2:2; John 7:38)

If disciple-making lies at the heart of Christ's method, then the church must be understood as the primary environment in which disciples are formed and disciplers are reproduced. The New Testament does not envision the church as a religious service provider or a passive gathering of believers, but as a Spirit-shaped community oriented toward formation, mission, and multiplication. Likewise, church leadership is not defined by task accumulation or visibility, but by spiritual parenting that equips others to reproduce the life of Christ in faithful succession.

⁴³ Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples*, 131–145; Ngala, "Spiritual Transformation," 52–69.

⁴⁴ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 725–728; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 529–533.

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 61.

The Church as a Formative Community (Acts 2:42)

Acts 2:42 provides a paradigmatic description of the early church: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This fourfold devotion reveals the church as a formative community structured around truth, relationship, worship, and spiritual practice. Discipleship in this context is not incidental but communal, sustained, and holistic. The verbs used in Acts 2 emphasize perseverance and intentionality. Devotion (*προσκαρτεροῦντες*) implies steadfast commitment rather than occasional participation.⁴⁶ Formation occurs through shared life under the Word, not through isolated spiritual consumption. The church becomes the space where belief is shaped, character is refined, and obedience is learned through embodied practices.

Importantly, this formative life immediately results in outward witness and numerical growth (Acts 2:47). The church’s internal health fuels its external mission. As Guder observes, the early church did not grow because it adopted techniques for expansion, but because its communal life visibly embodied the reign of God.⁴⁷ Thus, disciple-making churches prioritize spiritual depth not as an end in itself, but as the engine of multiplication. For contemporary ecclesiology, this challenges models that reduce church to event-centred programming. Where formation is neglected, disciple-making deteriorates into attendance. Where formation is central, disciples are shaped who can disciple others.

Leadership as Spiritual Parenting (2 Timothy 2:2)

Paul’s instruction to Timothy, “what you have heard from me... entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2), offers one of the clearest biblical visions of leadership as spiritual parenting. The verse describes four generational layers, emphasizing intentional transmission rather than individual competence. Leadership here is measured not by what one accomplishes personally, but by what one reproduces in others. This paradigm applies across leadership roles within the church. Pastors are called to shepherd and teach with the aim of equipping others for ministry (Eph. 4:11–12). Elders provide spiritual oversight, doctrinal stability, and moral example, modelling maturity worthy of imitation (1 Pet. 5:1–3). Deacons serve by facilitating the church’s practical ministry so that spiritual formation and mission are unhindered (Acts 6:1–7). Each office contributes uniquely to the shared task of discipling disciples.

A critical danger for church leadership is confusing faithfulness with busyness. Leaders who do everything themselves may appear effective, but they ultimately stifle multiplication. D. L. Moody captured this tension with enduring clarity: “It is better to train ten people than to do the work of ten people, but it is harder.”⁴⁸ Training requires patience, relinquishing control, and investing relationally in others who may initially seem inefficient. Yet this is precisely the method of Christ. Christopher Moody rightly argues that churches stagnate when leaders prioritize execution over equipping.⁴⁹ Spiritual parenting requires leaders to

⁴⁶ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 73–75.

⁴⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 83–85.

⁴⁸ Dwight L. Moody, cited in Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples*, 209.

⁴⁹ Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples*, 205–217.

absorb short-term inconvenience for long-term generational fruit. Without this mindset, churches produce dependents rather than disciplers.

Healthy Churches Produce Rivers, Not Reservoirs (John 7:38)

Jesus' promise in John 7:38, "Whoever believes in me... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water", offers a compelling metaphor for ecclesial health. The image is not of water collected and contained, but of life received and released. Healthy churches are rivers, not reservoirs. Reservoir churches accumulate resources, knowledge, and people but fail to release them into mission. River churches, by contrast, understand discipleship as dynamic participation in God's redemptive flow. What believers receive through Word, sacrament, and community is meant to overflow into witness, service, and disciple-making. This metaphor underscores a missional ecclesiology shaped by multiplication. As Newbigin observed, the church exists not for itself but as the sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's kingdom.⁵⁰ When disciple-making is neglected, the church becomes inward-focused and stagnant. When disciple-making is embraced, the church becomes a living conduit of grace.

Leadership, therefore, must continually ask not only whether the church is growing, but whether it is reproducing. Are disciples being equipped to disciple others? Are gifts being activated for multiplication? Are ministries forming rivers of life or reservoirs of activity? Overall, the church fulfills its calling when it functions as a formative community led by spiritual parents who train others to carry Christ's life forward. Such churches do not merely survive cultural shifts; they participate faithfully in Christ's ongoing mission through generational disciple-making.

Pastoral and Practical Implications for the Contemporary Church

The recovery of disciple-making as the heart of Christ's method carries significant pastoral and practical implications for the contemporary church. In a cultural moment marked by fragmentation, shallow spirituality, and generational discontinuity, the church's faithfulness will increasingly be measured not by attendance or activity, but by its capacity to form resilient disciples who reproduce the life of Christ in others. Disciple-making is therefore not an optional programmatic emphasis, but a theological necessity rooted in obedience to Christ and participation in his ongoing mission.

Disciple-Making and Spiritual Resilience

One of the most pressing pastoral concerns today is the lack of spiritual resilience among professing Christians. Many believers demonstrate theological familiarity without moral endurance, spiritual depth, or missional conviction. Disciple-making addresses this deficit by integrating belief, practice, and identity within a relational framework. As Willard argued, the absence of intentional discipleship produces "vampire Christianity," which seeks salvation without transformation.⁵¹ Scripture consistently links perseverance in faith with formative processes rather than mere conversion experiences (Col. 2:6–7). Disciple-making cultivates habits of obedience, communal accountability, and spiritual disciplines that sustain believers through suffering, doubt, and cultural pressure. Empirical studies in practical theology further confirm that faith communities emphasizing spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, Scripture meditation, and worship) are more effective in guiding individuals toward spiritual

⁵⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 118–121.

⁵¹ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 30–33.

transformation and resilience in their faith journey.⁵² Thus, disciple-making functions pastorally as a means of spiritual strengthening rather than spiritual exhaustion.

Youth and College Ministry as Disciple-Making Ecosystems

The implications of disciple-making are especially urgent in youth and college ministry contexts. Research consistently demonstrates that faith attrition among young adults is not primarily driven by intellectual skepticism, but by a lack of relational investment and formative discipleship during adolescence and early adulthood. Kinnaman and Matlock's landmark study identifies that the minority of young adults who retain vibrant faith — termed “resilient disciples” — are distinguished not by superior doctrinal knowledge but by deeper relational and experiential connection to Jesus and the church community. Burge's sociological analysis of the religiously unaffiliated further confirms that disengagement is less a crisis of belief than a crisis of belonging, driven by institutional disconnection rather than theological rejection. Recent data from both Pew Research Center and Barna Group reinforce this pattern, demonstrating that young adults who remain churchgoing tend to prioritize authentic community and relational depth over programmatic content.⁵³

When ministries prioritize entertainment, information transfer, or event-based engagement without relational depth, young believers remain vulnerable to disengagement. Viewing youth and college ministries as disciple-making ecosystems reframes success away from crowd size toward formation trajectories. Jesus' model suggests that intentional proximity, consistent teaching, modeled obedience, and gradual empowerment form the soil in which durable faith takes root.⁵⁴ Churches that integrate younger believers into intergenerational discipleship relationships, rather than segregating them indefinitely, foster continuity of faith across life stages (Ps. 145:4). Pastorally, this requires a shift from consumer-oriented programming to apprenticeship-oriented formation. Youth and college students must be treated not merely as recipients of ministry but as future disciple-makers in training.

Obedience as Reproduction, Not Mere Knowledge

A further implication concerns the nature of obedience itself. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus commands his followers to teach disciples “to obey everything I have commanded you,” locating obedience at the center of disciple-making. Obedience in the New Testament is not equated with information mastery but with embodied faithfulness that bears fruit in others (John 15:8). Contemporary churches often equate spiritual maturity with theological literacy alone. While doctrinal knowledge is indispensable, it becomes distortive when detached from reproduction. As Bonhoeffer warned, knowledge without obedience produces “cheap grace,” which dulls discipleship rather than deepening it.⁵⁵ Disciple-making reframes obedience as participation in Christ's mission. This involves living, modeling, and transmitting the gospel through word and life. From a pastoral standpoint, this calls for evaluative criteria that move

⁵² Runggeleri and Deak, “Spiritual Transformation,” De Kock, “Spirituality and Theological Formation.”

⁵³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 261–265; Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23–52; Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 31–34; Ryan P. Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 87–103, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17vf41v>; Smith, “Religion Holds Steady in America”; Barna Group, “Building Authentic Community Among Gen Z.”

⁵⁴ Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples*, 145–162.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 43–47.

beyond attendance and content delivery toward questions of fruitfulness: Are believers growing in Christlikeness? Are they discipling others? Are gifts being mobilized for multiplication?

The Future of the Church and Intergenerational Faithfulness

Finally, disciple-making bears directly on the future of the church. Sociological studies consistently demonstrate that congregations which fail to transmit faith intergenerationally experience rapid decline, regardless of doctrinal orthodoxy or institutional longevity.⁵⁶ This decline is not merely structural but formational, rooted in a failure to cultivate lived faith across generations. As John H. Westerhoff III incisively argues, the modern church has too often reduced faith formation to the transfer of religious information, relegating it to Sunday morning instruction rather than embedding it within the rhythms of family life, congregational worship, and communal practice.⁵⁷ When faith is taught as facts rather than nurtured as a way of life, younger generations may learn about Christianity without ever learning how to believe, practice, or inhabit it. The biblical vision, however, emphasizes generational continuity through intentional teaching and modeling (Deut. 6:4–9; 2 Tim. 1:5). Disciple-making, therefore, is not an optional ministry strategy but the primary means by which the church nurtures faith that is experienced, embodied, and sustained across generations.

Intergenerational disciple-making safeguards the church against both nostalgia and novelty. Older believers contribute wisdom, stability, and tested faith; younger believers bring energy, creativity, and contextual awareness. Together, they embody the fullness of Christ's body (Eph. 4:15–16). Pastors and leaders therefore bear responsibility not only for present effectiveness but for future faithfulness. Overall, the pastoral task of the contemporary church is inseparable from the disciple-making mandate. Where disciple-making is neglected, faith thins and fragments. Where disciple-making is recovered, the church becomes resilient, reproductive, and ready to bear witness across generations until Christ returns.

Conclusion

This study has argued that disciple-making is not a secondary ministry strategy but the very heart of Christ's redemptive mission and the defining vocation of the church. By examining the method of Christ, the biblical process of disciple-making, the role of spiritual gifts, and the formative responsibility of the church and its leaders, we have seen that discipleship is fundamentally relational, transformational, and reproductive. Jesus did not merely proclaim the kingdom; he embodied it through a community formed in his likeness

⁵⁶ Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 41–58; Vern L. Bengtson, Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18–36, 181–196; Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–22; Jerry Pipes and Victor Lee, *Family to Family: Leaving a Lasting Legacy* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board of the SBC, 1999), 11–29; Adam Gemar, "Parental Influence and Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Belief, Attitudes, and Practices: Recent Evidence from the United States," *Religions* 14, no. 11 (October 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14111373>.

⁵⁷ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 18–27.

and sent in his authority. Therefore, the church's faithfulness cannot be measured by numerical growth alone, but by the presence of disciples who increasingly reflect Christ and reproduce his life in others. Theologically, disciple-making is participation in Christ's ongoing mission. To follow Jesus is to be drawn into his redemptive work. This entails being formed by his word, conformed to his character, and commissioned to extend his reign. Discipleship is thus inseparable from Christology and ecclesiology because the church becomes truly Christ-shaped only insofar as it lives out the method of Christ. When disciple-making is neglected, the church risks substituting information for transformation and activity for obedience.

Pastorally, this calls for sober reflection and renewed commitment. The contemporary church must acknowledge where it has settled for consumerism, passivity, or programmatic efficiency at the expense of formation. Such recognition invites repentance, not merely at the level of individual piety, but at the level of ecclesial imagination. Renewal begins when churches reorient their structures, leadership practices, and ministries around intentional disciple-making rather than institutional maintenance. Looking forward, the vision set before the church is one of hope rather than scarcity. Churches that recover the heart of Christ will become communities where faith is deepened, generations are connected, and the gospel is embodied and transmitted. Such churches form faithful, resilient, and reproducing disciples (men and women) who do not merely attend church but live as apprentices of Jesus for the glory of God and the life of the world.

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