

# The Master's Plan of Discipleship

## Returning to what Christ taught his followers

By Jay Zinn

In the 1970s I enjoyed the teachings of five prominent leaders in the Charismatic movement. Known as the "Fort Lauderdale Five," these great and gifted teachers came into a mutual covenant of accountability out of concern that the charismatic movement had become too subjective and individualistic. Vulnerable pastors and saints alike were falling into sin because they lacked structure in their lives.

So these five men decided to submit their ministries to each other, and other pastors started to follow their model of discipleship. Their relationships and the teachings gained wide approval, strengthened by a monthly magazine they created called, *New Wine*. Networks were formed, and at the peak of the movement, an estimated 100,000 members across the United States were involved. Similar networks emerged as well among other ministries.

The original intent for their discipleship and accountability was biblical, but some following this model formed imbalanced and immature alliances in so-called "covenant relationships." The networks started to become more autocratic and legalistic and many lives were destroyed. To this day, I've met a number of pastors and others my age who were deeply wounded by the fallout of what came to be known as the "Shepherding" or "Discipleship Movement." The crux of the problem occurred over submission to authority. Young and immature shepherds in house church settings and ministry networks inadvertently transferred the "Lordship of Jesus" to the "lordship" of the *discipler* over the *disciple*. Driven and intimidated by the fear of man, disciples became loyal to a fault and would do nothing apart from the invasive authority of the young "shepherd" they had placed themselves under. In the end, it had grown into the classic problem Paul addressed to the Corinthian church:

*One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name (1 Corinthians 1:12-15 NIV).*

In defense of the men who began a discipleship method with a biblical foundation, it was not their original intent for it to become what it had become. This was a case of good intentions corrupted by immature saints who tried to play the role of the Holy Spirit in someone else's life. What started as a pure stream of motive, flowed down the side of the mountain acquiring the debris from the banks of men's foolish carnality. Eventually, the "Fort Lauderdale Five" disbanded, withdrew from the movement, and some gave public statements distancing themselves from the growing controversy.

### Swinging on the Pendulum of Truth

Since then, Christians who have come out of that era are still suspicious of "discipleship" and the bad name the movement gave to it. So a return to discipleship means a return to examining the way of Christ and the disciples in the early church. The strategy Jesus used to lay the foundation for the church was discipleship based on servanthood, not lordship. He invited specific men into a "covenant

relationship” with Himself so that he might train them and set them loose into the world to advance the gospel of the Kingdom of God. It required discipline and sacrifices for these men with their initial training lasting three years, and later, empowerment by the Holy Spirit anointing them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The word “disciple” speaks of becoming a wholehearted follower of Christ as a disciplined learner. Proficiency in any area of life requires certain disciplines to learn everything you can in the process. No one becomes a strong, mature believer overnight. It is a process. A process Jesus chose to use with twelve men. But his discipling methods were instructional not dictatorial, sacrificial not self-serving, invitational not demanding, by example and not lordship. The “method” of discipleship modeled by Christ was geared to empower his men to be all they could be in their God-given destiny. The method of discipleship during the movement in the 70s strayed from empowering people to chaining them to self-imposed dictators. Their methods became spiritually and emotionally abusive.

So does that mean we throw out the whole concept? No. The principle still exists and is important—extremely important. All truth, when initially discovered, has the tendency to swing toward the extreme employment of man and become hurtful. But it doesn’t mean the principle isn’t true, it just needs to swing back to the center in a balanced method of appropriating it.

It has been said that truth out of balance leads to heresy, and when the heresy is challenged and fought against, the opposition tends to move toward the extreme opposite side of the center. It becomes truth out of balance again, until it adjusts toward the center—in time. I believe this is what happened to the discipleship movement. It began as a genuine need to bring accountability to loose-living saints, and became imbalanced. Saints were hurt, marriages were hurt, churches were hurt through splits, and many lives were destroyed. The opposition that rose to challenge the heresy (truth out of balance) swung the pendulum the other way toward extreme individualism and a “hands-off” approach in pastors toward shepherding the flock. Instead of sheep being smothered by invasive shepherds, they were left to fend for themselves without spiritual fathers and mothers. I believe God is preparing to restore discipleship to the church, only this time through balance and maturity—making Jesus the Lord and His disciples as “facilitators” for people’s growth, not as “lords” over their faith.

### **Change People—Change the World**

*“Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” —Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)*

Karl Marx, the founder of the communist party, once said, “Philosophers **interpret** the world, the point is to **change** it.” And change it he did through the initial method of discipling others. He used Christ’s pattern because he understood that a changed world is the consequence of changed people. If you can change someone’s belief system, you can create change agents to transform the society around them. The numbers then increase exponentially from generation to generation until the whole world becomes transformed. This was the goal of communism and is the goal of Islamism today. Such change agents of an ideology or religion are in it for life for the *next generation*. Somehow the Western church has lost track of this.

### **Moving the Church Back to Center**

The apostle Paul said that, “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself*” (2 Cor. 5:19 NKJV). And Christ is now in us, to use us to reconcile the world to Him. Jesus did not come to create another choice for man to fulfill his intrinsic need for religion. He came to reconcile us to Himself, Jesus the person, Immanuel—God with us. How did he do that? Look at his strategy. Look at the methods he employed to bring men to Himself and then ask yourself, does this reflect the methods used by the church today?

It is time to bring the pendulum back to the center on discipleship. To change the world, to advance the gospel, requires changed people, not religious people. People who are devoted not to a movement called “Christianity” but to Jesus Christ, the person, the Son of God manifested in the flesh. This is what is at the heart of discipleship. Growing deeper in love with Jesus.

Evangelism today has taken on a different form than in the early church. In the Western church, today’s most popular method of evangelism is “seeker-friendly” Sunday services 101. The strategy is to get unbelievers into a church service, tailor-fit to speak to their lives and toned down enough so as to not appear overtly religious. Through a few songs performed by phenomenal musicians and singers, modern technology, the arts, and relevant messages, thousands are praying to receive Christ. And who would not praise God for that? Every Sunday service is programmed as an evangelistic event *for* unbelievers. It is a method that works.

But how effective is it in making disciples? The Master’s plan for evangelism was different. Instead of a steady schedule of mass evangelism events, though he occasionally spoke to the masses, he concentrated on the few. He trained them privately and sent them out among the unbelievers to bless them, heal them, and demonstrate the gospel of the Kingdom in power.

Please understand I am a firm believer in preaching the gospel in evangelistic events. I was saved 40 years ago in a church revival meeting under the preaching of an evangelist. It worked. So I’m not throwing stones at churches that use the “seeker-friendly” model to bring them in. The question I pose is, do our methods of evangelism get the job done of fulfilling the great commission; i.e.—to make disciples? Is it our purpose to only aim for the **short-range** goal of getting decisions for Christ, and then say, “I’m done, that’s all I need to do?” Or is it our purpose to aim also for the **long-range** goal of making disciples who will mature until they’re ready to disciple others? The short-range goal of “converts” requires some but very little sacrifice. The long-range goal of making “disciples,” however, requires a lot more sacrifice of time and energy.

### **Christ’s Two-Pronged Plan**

Everything we do must have a purpose, an end-game that aligns itself with Christ’s purpose when he was here. His plan was two-pronged:

- 1) To save a people out of the world for Himself, which He did through the cross in **one day**.
- 2) To build a church of the Spirit that would never perish. This took him **three years** of time, energy and patience with twelve men.

Everything Jesus did had this two-pronged plan in mind. He ordered his life around it. He let nothing sidetrack him or get in the way of it—to save mankind and make disciples to carry on what he began to do and teach. Therefore, he conceived a plan that would not fail to fulfill this objective. A plan that contained **eight guiding principles** as explained in Robert E. Coleman’s book, *Master Plan of Evangelism*.

## Christ's Eight Guiding Principles of Discipleship

### 1. **SELECTION** — “He [Jesus] ... *chose* twelve of them.” **Luke 6:13 NIV**

To start his church, Jesus did not rent a building, find a great band, or mail out glossy fliers that said, “Tired of synagogue as usual? Tired of the irrelevant, dry teaching of the Scribes, Rabbis, and Pharisees? Give us a try. We do synagogue different.” This month’s series: “Eight Keys to an Abundant Life.” Next month’s series: “Ten Reasons Why My Yoke is Easier and My Burden is Lighter than the Talmud of the Pharisees.”

People were the Lord’s method for winning the world. They were mostly common, laboring men and women representing a cross section of society. They were teachable, willing to learn, and honest. He concentrated on the few and not the crowds because the aimless masses in Jesus’ day were willing to follow anyone who promised them a better future, but easily kept in check by their fear of the authority of the religious leaders. Thus it was a time of great confusion.

Jesus needed competent, grounded leaders to withstand the fickleness of people and the satanic forces of the world. He was a realist and understood his human limitations and the limitations of the people who were scattered like lost sheep. Jesus could draw a crowd whenever he wanted to, but they mostly followed him for the loaves, fishes, miracles, healings and deliverance. What would happen to them after he died? They’d scatter and return to their homes. So his strategy for starting His church included finding twelve men and pouring into them for the long-range goal of growth that would last until the end of time.

I love what Robert Coleman says in his book, *Master Plan of Evangelism*:

*“Here is where we must begin just like Jesus. It will be slow, tedious, painful, and probably unnoticed by people at first, but the end result will be glorious, even if we don’t live to see it. Seen in this way, though, it becomes a big decision in the ministry. We must decide where we want our ministry to count—in the momentary applause of popular recognition or in the reproduction of our lives in a few chosen people who will carry on our work after we have gone. Really it is a question of **which generation are we living for?**”*

### 2. **ASSOCIATION** — “Lo, I am *with you* always.” **Matthew 28:20 NKJV**

Jesus stayed with the twelve. In fact he fashioned and built his entire ministry around them. There was no formal classroom; the world was his classroom and He was his own curriculum. He spent more time with the twelve than anyone else and kept them close to observe and listen. This took time and energy because developing leaders is like training children in the natural. They need to be around you. They’ll mimic you. They need to be led beyond their own world of self-interest.

Mass evangelism is important, but it won’t prepare leaders for evangelism. Prayer meetings and training courses are important, but preparing leaders requires staying close to those we seek to lead.

Five decades ago it had been estimated that 50 percent of those who made decisions for Christ and joined a church eventually fell away and few grew in sufficient enough knowledge to be of any use for advancing the Kingdom.

Church was not meant to become an assembly line solution of Christianity 101 sermons on morality for unbelievers. Making whole-hearted followers of Christ is only accomplished through meeting with

people on a regular basis—and that requires a sacrifice of our time. To do otherwise is to abandon new believers to the devil in the same way that parents would give birth to their children and then abandon them in an alley to fend for themselves.

Every new convert needs a Christian friend to follow until they come to a place where they can lead another. And the only way new converts can be trained is by giving them a leader to follow. **Dawson Trotman**, founder of The Navigators asks: *“Where is your man, where’s your woman? Who are you leading? Every Christian is born to reproduce.”*

3. **CONSECRATION** — *“Take my yoke upon you.”* **Matthew 11:29 NIV**

I was told many years ago that one cannot be a leader who has not first learned to be a follower. To serve and follow Jesus is to be willing to commit to his Lordship in possessions, time, speech, thought life, and family life. It is an intentional life of dedication and commitment to obey the teachings of Christ. This doesn’t mean you neglect responsibilities in everyday living, but all our agendas should evolve around Christ’s agenda for us.

What is our assignment, who is our assignment? Jesus prayed to ask the Father who he was to invite to be with him and focus on their growth. He was committed to their welfare, to serve them, rather than to be served. But this was done through the spirit of invitation, gentleness, and patience. The Lord had consecrated Himself to their growth, and they consecrated their life and time to him to receive training.

4. **IMPARTATION** — *“Receive ye the Holy Spirit.”* **John 20:22 NIV**

Everything God makes, imparts. The Father gave his Son’s life for others. His Son freely gave up his life for us. But who are you giving your life away for? What are you imparting to others? Freely we have received, but to whom are we freely giving? Love gives, it does not hoard. We must not hoard what has been freely given to us. Jesus’ disciples learned self-giving through observing what he did for others and what he did for them. He equipped them with tools for evangelism, including signs and wonders, and He gave them the Holy Spirit at Pentecost so that they could live, love, and serve in the ministry of evangelism. They learned to carry on in their lives what Jesus began both to do and teach.

5. **DEMONSTRATION** — *“I have given you an example.”* **John 13:15 NKJV**

The twelve observed his life! In prayer, mercy, winning people to Himself, helping them understand the scriptures, washing their feet, feeding them, healing them, and dying for them. Jesus once said to his disciples at the last supper, *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”* (John 13:15 NIV). In other words—*imitate me*. Paul understood this when he said, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1 NKJV).

6. **DELEGATION** — *“I will **make** you fishers of men.”* **Matthew 4:19 NKJV**

Jesus did not have a home or motels to house his disciples. They were basically nomadic and full-time campers. So menial tasks were divided up among them when they were alone with Christ and among the throngs of people. They didn’t let Jesus cook all the meals, clean the dishes, wash the clothes, and gather wood for the fire. They all pitched in with assigned tasks, even when he sent them out, two by two to heal the sick, injured, and infirm.

Jesus first led them into a vital relationship with God, but then he showed them how he worked. He involved them in evangelism, yes, but they needed to be willing to do the most menial of tasks no matter how small. He did this because he was concentrating his energies on the most promising individuals to carry on the work. Whatever Jesus asked them to do, he had also done before them. His pattern went something like this:

*I do, you watch—*

*I do, you help—*

*You do, I help—*

*You do, I watch.*

Then: “**You go and do likewise!**”

7. **SUPERVISION** — “*Do you not yet perceive?*” **Mark 8:17 NKJV**

Children need constant supervision or they will hurt themselves and others. They don’t know how to feed themselves what is healthy for them to eat, or how to avoid entrapment and death by predators. Supervision isn’t forever, but long enough to educate, train, and equip them to know how to discern between good and evil and make the right choices so that they may have successful, quality lives. They also need affirmation in their growth, to receive feedback from mom and dad about their accomplishments in the smallest details.

This is the same for new converts. Jesus wanted to hear their reports and difficulties, listen in on their immature quibbling among themselves, be present enough to turn failings into lessons, and victories into celebrations. Through lessons of success or failure, Jesus equipped the twelve for ministry. Until disciples are brought to a place of maturity, close supervision, not smothering, is necessary.

8. **REPRODUCTION** — “*Go and bring forth fruit.*” **John 15:16 KJV**

Jesus did not tend the garden of his disciples without expecting fruit from his efforts. He intended and expected them to **reproduce**. Jesus’ ultimate goal for his disciples was that his life would be reproduced in and through them into the lives of others. Multiplication was the ultimate end for the twelve.

It doesn’t matter how many men or women we enlist for the cause. What matters is how many they conquer for Christ. Today, as back then, the test of an evangelistic program is not the number of people who are being reached for first-time decisions. The real test is: *Are those who are being reached for Christ reaching others? Is our fruit bearing fruit? Are we only making converts—or are we building leaders who can, in turn, build other leaders?*

World renowned evangelist, Billy Graham, was once asked, “*If you were a pastor of a large church in a principal city, what would be your plan of action?*”

Billy Graham replied, “I think one of the first things I would do would be to get a small group of eight or ten or twelve people around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price! It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have, over a period of **years**. Then I would actually have twelve ministers among the laypeople who in turn could take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them. I know of one or two churches that are doing that, and

it is *revolutionizing the church*. Christ, I think, set the pattern. He spent most of his time with twelve men. He didn't spend it with a great crowd. In fact, every time he had a great crowd it seems to me that there weren't too many results. The great results, it seems to me, came in this personal interview and in the time he spent with his twelve." (*Master Plan of Evangelism* – p. 103)

### **No Other Plan**

Robert Coleman speaks of an old story of Jesus ascending back into heaven and encountering the angel Gabriel shortly after he arrived. Gabriel was terribly interested in what the Lord had been doing on earth. Jesus responded by explaining that while on earth, he had died on the cross to save men from their sins and had been raised by God's power. He had now returned to heaven to take his place at God's right hand to intercede for those whom he had come to save. Jesus concluded by saying that it was his desire that all people everywhere hear the message of what he had done for them.

Gabriel responded, "And what is your plan for getting this done?"

Our Lord responded, "I have left the message in the hands of a dozen or so men. I am trusting them to spread it everywhere."

Somewhat surprised, Gabriel exclaimed, "Twelve men! And what if they fail?"

Jesus is reported to have said, "I have no other plan." (*Master Plan of Evangelism* — p. 167)

### **A Legacy that Lasts**

I have been pastoring and teaching God's people since November 1975. My greatest concern always surrounds the question, "*Am I making a difference in people's lives?*" I've always attempted to make disciples of people and not just church attendees. The stakes are high and I feel an eternal obligation in my calling as a shepherd because these are God's kids assigned to my care and feeding. Like most pastors, my time is very limited just because of the demands of normal church life: weddings, funerals, counseling, administration, managing, education, studying, preaching, fellowshiping, and crisis-management. Plus time is needed for my own family, developing my other vocation, and a personal relationship with God. The list goes on. You'll notice that "discipleship" did not make my list. Where do I fit that in?

Several years ago the Lord spoke to me as I rapidly approached my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. My time in life is running out and I still have so much I want to do for God's kingdom and his people. So the Lord gave me my orders to develop a system of discipleship that would outlive me. Take all the basic and fundamental principles of growth that have served me and create an easy to follow workbook of weekly assignments for groups of four. A workbook that would easily equip and train others into maturity without legalism, lordship, or fear-based manipulation. I would become a cheerleader and help others become cheerleaders, sponsoring their own groups employing the assignments I lay out each week.

I've completed my first volume of 26 weekly assignments and have been working with several groups of four to experiment with the process. It has proven to be a completely rewarding experience for me and those in the groups. I facilitate, the Holy Spirit does the teaching through the feedback from each member about what the Lord showed them in their studies and how it applied to their lives. I am

witnessing growth. I'm reproducing disciples with tangible results. This is something that's hard to know for a pastor whose time is filled with all the other things I listed above.

To disciple the few is a slow, tedious process without the public applause pastor's receive from a well-presented message. Few people remember from week to week what I had preached the previous Sunday, but they do remember the Holy Spirit nuggets they get from me—up close and personal—around the table with three other people I meet with every week for two hours. They do the assignments, I show up, and the Holy Spirit teaches us all. I have more fun at these sessions than all the other things I do as a pastor.

I hope that one day all pastors and saints will come back to the basic and most important strategy of Christ—to make disciples to disciple the nations. After forty years of walking with God, this is the place to experience the most tangible, visible fruit that satisfies the dry and thirsty soul—the place where you reproduce fruit that remains.

**Note:** If you would like to order the workbook I mentioned, you may find it at [www.izeebooks.com](http://www.izeebooks.com) under the "Online Store" tab. It is called, *The Discipleship Group—26 Weeks of Partnership with God*.

