

## Discipling the Nation

*Jesus said “... go and make disciples”*

### Introduction

Large numbers of people have made commitments to become followers of Jesus Christ at Impact World Tour events. Mel Gibson's *Passion* film (released Feb 25) will continue to stir interest in the Christian faith for some time to come. Along with the more usual evangelism activities churches engage in throughout the year, we could well see a much larger number of people joining the Church this year than we have for some time. People usually attend events where they hear the Gospel (whether a church service, an IWT meeting, an Alpha course, or some other event), because they have been invited by existing believers. These believers are seeking to “make disciples”.

However, if we want the Church in the next decade to be healthier than it is today, if we want to see God's Kingdom extended, it is important to consider the further discipling of these new believers.

This supplement contains brief comments on the issue of discipling from a number of evangelical Christian leaders. We are grateful for their contributions as a symbol co-operation and unity, as well as for the significant insights they offer.

The supplement also contains some of the ideas raised in a series of meetings on discipling believers convened by VISION Network last year. The people who attended those meetings at various times included pastors, bible college lecturers, consultants, and missions agencies.

The main point arising from those meetings is that discipling is not “doing a course or a program.” It is about long-term *relationship*. It is a *process* where a mature believer builds into the life of a younger believer, and helps them *grow* in the faith.

Having said that, we were seeking to identify topics which should be addressed at appropriate stages of Christian development, and for which many good courses and programs already exist. We no longer live in a Christian culture, and we can not assume any prior knowledge of “things Christian” on the part of new believers.

The topics identified, sample programs, and timescales involved, are *suggestive not prescriptive*. Some churches may want to pick parts of what is suggested to complement existing programs. Some may have or know of good resources other than the ones suggested - (if so, please let us know). Some may want to pick up the whole lot, but over a different time-scale. Others may simply use the list to stimulate their thinking as a basis to create their own list of topics.

Finally, we are grateful to Rhema Broadcasting Group, who have scheduled the week of 22 – 28 March for a major focus on discipleship, including talkback and interviews with some of the leaders from this supplement. Check [www.vision.org.nz](http://www.vision.org.nz) for details of programme times.

Brian Winslade, National Leader, Baptist Churches of N.Z.

### Keeping it together

It's time to recognise the false dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship. They need to be seen as two sides of the same coin. Perhaps we could drop one of the terms?

My early days in ministry were with a para-church organization. Evangelism, we said, was presenting the gospel and getting people to make a decision – usually in the form of a “sinner's prayer.” Discipleship was stage two and began after a person was supposedly converted. These days I'm not so sure this dichotomy squares with what the Bible teaches.

Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples – of every people group within the world. Disciples are committed learners of Jesus who have heard the gospel and entered a life process of transformation.

Conversion to Christianity is actually a lengthy process. It implies accrual of knowledge about God and faith and our sinful state. It encompasses the emotion of a Holy Spirit encounter, but also involves a reasoned mind.

Discipleship also calls followers of Jesus into community with the church. It's more than a personal ideology. True discipleship expresses itself in mutually accountable relationships, observable commitment, and service within the body of Christ.

2004 looks like a bumper year for evangelistic initiatives. A number of organizations are already counting numbers of respondents. Praise God for each repentant prayer offered! However, let's be cautious about calling these responses conversions. They may be significant steps in a journey, but a disciple of Jesus has a demonstrated commitment that can only be observed over time.

Perhaps the issue of discipleship comes down to the content of the gospel we present. New Testament preaching went further than just introducing people to the head of the church. A true introduction to Jesus introduces the body of Christ as well.

John Fulford, President, Churches of Christ

### **Heart Call for Discipleship**

The Apostle Paul dared to make a statement that stands as a constant challenge to me: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). And especially when this is backed up by a further word in Hebrews 13:7 "Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

The challenge, of course, is in the realisation that in my own ministry it is not so much *what I teach* but *who I am* that is affecting and influencing the lives and ministries of those who have any regard for me. But it helps when I realise that as long as I am focused on JESUS, and all that he is and says and does, then I don't have to be so worried about my influence on others. Paul sums it all up so well in Titus 2:7-8.

In thinking about this, I am vividly recalling the special people in my own life who have been and still are such a wonderful inspiration and encouragement to me. They include a grand array of family and friends, preachers and teachers in a variety of churches. They are real saints of God who took a personal interest in me and intentionally or unintentionally shaped and moulded my faith and character, helping to set the direction and purpose of my life in Christ.

In declaring that, I have to add that I am also reminded of some whom, like Judas and Demas in the Scriptures, I had loved, trusted and relied on, yet who fell tragically from the hope and trust I had held in them. This has yet served as apt warning for me to guard my own heart and life from similar tragedy.

Our Lord himself challenges us still in John 21:20-22 that regardless of what others do: "What is that to you? You must follow me!"

Carl Jukes, New Life Churches of New Zealand

### **The Cutting Edge**

It's interesting the priorities that many modern day churches have, the busyness, the activities, the focus on the church achieving her destiny - yet the epitome of our fulfilment (according to Jesus) is to 'make disciples.'

Basic Bible discipleship could be one of the most undercooked parts of church life in New Zealand.

I believe one of the traps many leaders fall into is in assuming people know more than they do. It is now likely that the new believers and young people who arrive at your church have an extremely limited understanding of even commonly known Bible stories – let alone the basic precepts and foundation stones of Christianity.

Somehow it doesn't seem as if discipleship classes or the straightforward teaching of doctrine are 'hip' or on the cutting edge, and yet when reminded we all agree that 'making the basics beautiful' is the cornerstone of building disciples and a great church.

Richard Waugh, National Superintendent Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand

### **It's not playchurch!**

In his recent book *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard describes the process of spiritual transformation as being inevitable for every human being on the planet. Whoever we are, we *will* be spiritually shaped by the experiences and choices we have lived through or made in the past. There's no avoiding this – we cannot escape the process of spiritual transformation.

The issue for churches and church leaders is this: Accepting that spiritual transformation is inevitable, how will we ensure that our churches provide an environment within which *genuine* spiritual transformation can occur? That is transformation into the person God has created us to be, a person who reflects the character of Jesus Christ. This is an issue we must wrestle with as we seek to effectively impact the community. Half-hearted disciples in half-hearted churches will not win the nation for Christ – it's not playchurch!

That said, there are some characteristics of the emerging New Zealand culture that we must understand as we get more serious about discipleship:

- As a relatively secular country (compared to some from whom we would seek to learn) many New Zealanders have a much longer discipleship path to travel – we cannot afford to make assumptions about prior knowledge or exposure to Christianity.
- This is particularly pronounced within those regions experiencing high rates of immigration. In my own church, East City Wesleyan, we are seeing large numbers of immigrants from mainland China coming to Christ – the gospel certainly has the power to save! But we are learning about the need for deep discipleship within this segment of our church community who come from an atheistic background typical of communist countries.
- Discipleship that is *only* programme-based may simply feed the consumer mentality we Kiwis have all been formed to have. Whole-of-life approaches to discipleship do not easily square with our quick-fix consumer culture.

In all of this I am convinced that discipleship processes can be made more complicated than they need be! When I read the Scriptures I see Jesus relating to an intimate group of disciples in a “whole of life” situation. John Wesley rediscovered this truth in 18<sup>th</sup> century England – the power of small group life to transform lives. Wesley’s class meetings were the powerhouse of the emerging Methodist movement – a force for spiritual formation that revolutionised the generation in which he lived. It can happen again, here in our time, in this nation – but we must grasp the primary place that discipleship must have in the church and confront the deficiencies of our efforts to date.

Derek Eaton, Anglican Bishop of Nelson

### **We need all the help we can get**

We live in an age and a church culture where “easy believism” abounds for many of us. There seems to be only a thin veneer of real Christianity. Scratch the surface and the basic old norms and values are often still very evident.

Generally speaking it’s comparatively easy to become a Christian – opening the mind and heart and responding to God’s amazing love and call and all that that means.

What then follows is not easy, and we have Jesus’ word on that. Being a disciple takes a life-time. We will know joys and sorrows, highs and lows along the way. We need all the help we can get.

Discipling people is one of the major tasks of the local church. The local church is called to disciple people – not just ‘convert’ people or bring them to faith. Real evangelism includes discipling and any church worth its salt will see this as an important priority – constantly bringing people to a faith in Jesus Christ, constantly seeing that faith and commitment deepening. The local church must be equipped for this primary task.

Hami (Sam) Chapman, Executive Chairperson for Project AWHI

### **Discovering the diamonds within**

In 1870 Baptist Pastor Russell H Conwell, founder of Temple University Philadelphia, heard the legend of a wealthy Persian farmer called Ali Hafed who sold and deserted his own fruitful piece of land to search for immense wealth in mythical diamond fields. He died far from home, an old and disillusioned pauper. Not long afterwards acres of fabulous diamonds were found on Ali Hafed’s own land. The truth is that diamonds are not in far away mountains or in distant seas, they are in your own backyard if you will but dig for them.

The mandate to make disciples therefore is simply the process of helping people dig deep in search of the “diamonds that lie within their own backyards”. It is not the seeking for or the importation of spiritual treasures from foreign mythical fields. Our history is littered with disillusioned paupers.

Discipleship is the growing awareness of how treasured we are by God, the discovery of wealth that lies within every individual and family. Acres of diamonds, found in communities like Otara, the backyard of where we live. Diamonds fused by time and life’s experience into the very core of our culture. Maori and Pakeha. Pacific and Asian. Each designed and created by God with his purpose in mind. To be loved by him. Each precious stone not a reflection but an actual expression of Christ Himself. Not moulded in a melting pot of sameness but each one unique and special.

The legend of Ali Hafed changed Conwell’s life. His lectures on *Acres of Diamonds* impacted thousands of individuals spiritually, socially, academically and financially. Men and women from all walks of life discovered the awesome potential that lay within their own lives and just how much of a blessing they could be to the

communities in which they lived. People willing to stand up to disillusioned leadership for what they believe to be right and be stood down as a consequence. People producing over time better streets, better homes, better schools, better churches and better government. These are the things that legends are made of.

Stuart Lange - chair of Presbyterian AFFIRM, BCNZ lecturer, minister

### **Lifting our game**

There is a man in our church who, as a very new Christian, was sent to prison for past offences. That was tough, but in some ways prison was the best thing that could have happened: this new believer was in daily Bible studies and prayer groups (and soon leading them), he was intensively studying through Bible correspondence courses, he was being regularly encouraged by letters and visits and by an alert, biblically-minded chaplain, and he was being constantly tested and challenged. It was an ideal, God-designed discipling package, and it produced excellent results.

I wish every Christian could be disciplined so thoroughly. Disciple-making is desperately needed in our churches, both for new Christians and for those stalled and stale. Nothing turns off an observing world so quickly as professing Christians who are shallow or hypocritical. This world needs Christians whose love for God and love for others really shines out. Those who *act* like authentic Christians – and think and speak sensibly, without sounding like nutters, bumper stickers, or self-righteous fakes.

Disciple-making means teaching people the Scriptures, and how to feed themselves. Much harder still is addressing issues of character and lifestyle: deep-seated patterns such as self-absorption, complacency, cutting corners, putting on a good act. In our preaching, home groups, and one-on-one, we need to be more intentional in calling people to a high level of discipleship – while recognising that ultimately only the Holy Spirit can give believers a true hunger to grow and go “full on” for the Lord.

Church leaders *alone* can never adequately disciple their flocks. Small groups are crucial, especially when they are genuinely welcoming to new people. In particular, we need mature enthusiastic Christians who can take newer believers under their wings and consistently nurture and encourage them in the Lord. Effective discipling, like evangelism, is best *relational*: it can readily cross barriers of race, culture, and age, providing it is grounded in genuine Christian love and a true passion to see others grow in Christ.

A minimalistic and hit-and-miss approach to discipleship in most of our churches has produced modest results. We need to lift our game.

Dennis Acraman, Senior Pastor, Hastings A/G and A/G National Executive

### **‘Chiselling-out’ a Disciple**

*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you - Gal 4:19*

To disciple a person we need a vision of what potential can be actualized by our investment of time and energy into their life. It is the kind of vision that Michael Angelo had after finding a discarded block of Carrara marble in the Opera del Duomo. Michael Angelo started with a design in mind but his true genius was in his ability to see the inherent attitude in the piece of marble. With his chisel he released the potential within and produced the statue of David, a work that was the envy of other artists.

We can lament over a lack of discipling in the church but the real issue is more personal. Who are you currently ‘chiselling’ away at for the Lord? Who stands alongside you being trained in the ways of the Lord? Discipling involves much up-close work. In a very real way we ‘chisel-out’ our disciples; releasing them from their past, their limitations and goading them in the paths of faith and righteousness. This work is very personal and is only truly possible by being close enough to people to be able to show by example and model a holistic spiritual life in transparent open heartedness and vulnerable intimacy.

*Discipling is a personal involvement through which we see Christ being formed in other people. It is an interpersonal commitment by which we assist in the development of Christ-like character and release inherent potential in the life of another person*

### **Suggested Topics for a Sound Discipleship Structure**

Below is the content outline of the teaching component of a two-year discipleship structure. This outline

- recognises that discipling is essentially relational, and that the main priority is to help a person develop their relationship with Christ through study of God's Word (the Bible) and a healthy commitment to a local church fellowship
- does not seek to engage with the personal challenges of an individual believer
- affirms that an individual may need clear focused attention on particular challenges they face.
- recognises that the age and life stage may call for choices in the material and content.
- is generic and represents the ideas presented in the discussion groups on sound input for balanced mature growth as a believer and follower of Jesus
- offers only an indication of resources that could be used, and is not intended to be exhaustive, nor to infer that resources not mentioned are not equally suitable. If the reader has, or knows of resources which are better, please let us know.
- the idea of stages (newborn, child, adolescent, adult) represents stages of faith, and not a person's chronological age

### **1. Fundamentals of the faith and basic doctrines (Newborn Stage)**

There are fundamental understandings that articulate who God is and the nature of our relationship with him. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Creation, Sin, Redemption and Christ's return to Restore, the Kingdom of God, The Body of Christ the Church, the journey of discipleship and maturing into his likeness. These form a foundation of knowledge and experience from which the believer will grow.

#### **Sample Resources**

There are a number of programs which are already widely used to introduce people to these basic doctrines and concepts of the faith. They include:

- Alpha
- LifeQuest
- Journeys
- Christianity Explored
- Knowing God (J I Packer)

### **2. Christian Living (Newborn/Child/Adolescent Stage)**

The experience of the Christian community over nearly 2000 years has revealed a wisdom regarding helpful practice that allows the follower of Jesus to grow into the likeness of Christ. This is a life of relationship with God through prayer, his word, the indwelling of His Spirit experienced both personally and as part of a fellowship of believers, practiced and applied in all of life, home, work, school with neighbours, with fellow believers and before non believers. The importance of the fellowship of the community of believers, the church, is not to be understated.

#### **Sample Resources**

- *The Purpose Driven Life* (Rick Warren.) The *40 Days of Purpose* campaign, running in many churches around Easter 2004, not only covers this material but is also an opportunity to build unity within a church and between churches
- *Experiencing God* (Henry Blackaby)

### **3. Biblical Worldview (Adult Stage)**

We have been saved from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (of God). What does this new kingdom look like? What are the implications for us that we are not of this world any more, that our Western society is not a Christian one, that the ruling philosophies of government, education, economics and morality are not God's? How do we critique, challenge and engage with society? Does it matter?

### **Sample Resources**

These questions and others are usefully discussed through such programmes as:

- *How Now Shall We Live* (Colson/Pearcey)
- *How Shall We Then Live?* (Schaeffer)
- PEERS survey and course (Nehemiah and Masters Institute)

### **4. Marriage, Family, Parenting (Adult Stage)**

Marriage is under severe pressure in many Western cultures. Dealing with legislation is one issue, but it is important for Christians to have a vision and tools to build Christian marriages, homes, and families. The basis of loving, constructive and moral relationships with one another (the basic building blocks of a society), needs to be communicated also to new believers at the earliest stage possible.

### **Sample Resources**

Some organisations well-known for courses and materials in this area:

- Parenting With Confidence (seminars and tool-boxes)
- Focus on the Family (videos and books)
- Family Life (marriage enrichment conferences and Home Builders study series)

### **5. Faith in the Marketplace (Adult Stage)**

It is very important that the new believer understand that their faith is to be lived 24 / 7 / 52. It is about all of life. How does what I do at church connect with what I do Monday to Friday? There should be no separation of "secular" work from "sacred" work. They are the same. How do we determine right and wrong in the workplace? What does Christian work look like? What does Christian business look like?.

### **Sample Resources**

There are good books, courses and video series available to support this.

- books: *Faith at Work, Where's God on Monday? Thank God it's Monday!*
- courses BCNZ, SoCCS, Carey Baptist College
- videos: *Christian Life & Work* and *A Vision for Marketplace Ministry*, both by Mark Greene

### **6. Outreach / Missional (Adolescent / Adult Stage)**

The new believer will really know both growth and hunger to grow when they share their new experience and their faith. They usually know more non-believers than the average Christian. The change occurring in them as a consequence of a new faith is often more profound and more obvious than with older Christians. The new believer needs to hear God's heart for mission, that the church is missionary, and this applies both locally and internationally.

### **Sample Resources**

Evangelism training tools include:

- *Contagious Christianity*
- *Share Jesus Without Fear* – William Fay

Other resources and practical opportunities to experience this expression of Christian life include:

- Short-term missions trip / assignment
- Beach missions
- Spending time with Christian social agencies eg Drug Arm, Tear Fund, World Vision, City Mission etc

## **7. Conflict Resolution (Adult Stage)**

“Wherever two or three are gathered in my name there is conflict”. Sometimes it can seem like this. Conflict is endemic in society and Christians need to learn God’s ways for dealing with it; to minimise it but also to resolve it as a working, living expression and example of God’s Kingdom. It will be a light on a lamp stand. It will be a skill for their own lives which the new believer can use.

### **Sample Resources**

- RESOLVE is a Christian disputes resolution service which can help with difficult conflicts (should be considered by Christians instead of the public court system where possible)

## **8. Christ and culture**

Christ died not just to redeem individuals but to redeem all the world. (John 3:16) We are to disciple whole nations (Matt 28:19-20) and nations will enter eternity with God (Rev 21:24) God wants not just a new us -- he wants a new New Zealand. We must explore with the new believer the engagement with our own culture - the mission to the West. We need to know that God’s heart is strong for the poor, the disadvantaged and the discriminated against. In New Zealand it will mean seeing through God’s eyes the Treaty of Waitangi and racial harmony, immigration issues, drug issues, our materialism. What is our role in terms of justice and peacemaking?

### **Sample Resources**

- *Discovering New Zealand’s Christian Heritage* (Col Stringer)

### **Conclusion.**

Details on the resources referred to in this supplement can be found on a database linked under the resources tab on the VISION Network website at [www.vision.org.nz](http://www.vision.org.nz). The database was developed by Stephanie Butel of OAC (Open Air Campaigners).

If you know of a resource which you think should be listed on this resource, please organize your material in a format similar to those already listed, and send to [admin@vision.org.nz](mailto:admin@vision.org.nz).