

The Future of Disciple-Making

Susanta Patra

‘What will be the future of disciple-making?’ ‘Are we going to continue our ministry of making disciples or disciple-making will be a forgotten chapter in the context of our time?’, and ‘How are we going to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples?’

THE CO-VID ERA

Never in our lives have we seen anything like the CO-Vid pandemic and its consequences. This pandemic has been like an alien invasion. The invaders killed, they multiply, and they spread across the world, hidden in the bodies of their hosts.

We have lived through a period of deep disruption, chaos, isolation, and anxiety. The things and people we hold most dear have been separated from us and the normal order of life has been utterly upended. As we navigated this pandemic, it was obligatory to remember the absolute tenderness and perpetual closeness of God. Amidst the chaos and fear, God was always closer to us and we could hear the divine whisper in our hearts. THE CO-VID ERA taught us; A new way to Hear His Voice, A new care for Others, and A new desire to do what is Right.

THE WORLD AFTER CO-VID

We are living in the bubbling convergence of massive social, philosophical, ecological, economic, and technological disruptions. These disruptions are reshaping our lives. The pandemic has been highlighting some of these interferences, especially in terms of how people communicate, socialize, and enact their lives and religious commitments. The era has brought numerous changes both inside and outside our personal lives, family, society, and our Church as a whole.

Evidently, the impact of the past pandemic is real and ongoing. It has caused significant disturbances. Hence, I have identified five sets of way-forward for us to reflect on as we move into the future of disciple-making ministry.

1. Adaptability is the key – The pandemic has shattered human living through a period of extraordinary change, with jobs lost, businesses closed, graduations canceled, and weddings, travels, and vacations postponed. In such a situation, we the disciple-makers are expected to be adaptable. “I define adaptability as the ability to be creative and flexible in the face of new situations,” says Laurie Leinwand. Hence, cultivating a passionate heart for the new

seekers & believers and Cultivating adaptability in ourselves is the key response to the Gospel, Seekers’ & new believers’ mindsets/contexts, and disciples’ living styles from earlier times.

2. Opportunity is important – The post-pandemic era has opened numerous closed doors to pioneer evangelism. More people today are living their lives without hope, satisfaction, answer, release, and future. More and more educated urbanites go through agony, uncertainty, pain, guilt, insecurity, and depression, which turn into suicidal or demonic oppression. This era has created more hunger for the truth and longing to fill the inner vacuums than we ever knew. Therefore, availing all opportunities in this context of our time is most important.

3. Communication is vital – We in Asia are more used to teaching, praying, and encouraging our new seekers or believers physically. But we are now expected to be more creative and innovative since working from home, watching YouTube live streams, or attending Zoom meetings have become the mode of communication. Moreover, the pandemic has changed all technologies into digital modes of communication. The digital modes offer convenience, reduced travel time, and cost to meet a seeker or new believer for follow-up & discipleship. Moreover, the teaching of doctrinal truths is lesser important in communication than shaping the new believers to follow God who is still “doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). Hence, our communication as disciple-makers is vital in the present context.

4. Leadership is the incentive – Leadership is all about bringing transformation in the life of people. “Disciple-making is an intentional systematic process of teaching & training believers to practice a dynamic relationship with God, be matured in Christ, and multiply the



entire process.” In other words, leadership is discipleship. There can be no Christian leadership without discipleship and no discipleship without leadership. The two are inextricably linked. To try to lead without making disciples takes us off our mission and limits our ability to impact Asia for the gospel. To try to make disciples without leading creates church attenders/members, but not people who imitate the character and life of our Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2). Our goal, whether you are in vocational ministry or not, is to move others onto God’s agenda by leading them to fulfill the one thing Jesus asked us to do, ‘make disciples’. What God yearns for the Church to be, is not a multitude of devotees but disciples.

In other words, leadership is discipleship. There can be no Christian leadership without discipleship and no discipleship without leadership. The two are inextricably linked. To try to lead without making disciples takes us off our mission and limits our ability to impact Asia for the gospel.

As a disciple-maker myself, when I think of my own Christian life journey, I measure my growth in many areas. I have metrics to measure my financial growth, my fitness goals, my success in my profession, and lots of other things. But how do I measure my spiritual growth? How can I be assured that the person I am today is not the same person I was yesterday? Certainly, I could look at whether I know God’s Word more or pray more today than I did a year ago. But if Bible study and prayer do not result in a radical change in my life then I have to ask the question, “What effect is reading the Bible and praying really having on my life?” I would like you to go through Philippians 2:3-8 and ask questions to yourself and measure your own spiritual growth. Our disciple-making depends on whom we are building, how are we preparing, and at the end of our labor, what would be the outcome.

5. *Group Identity is dynamic* –In most Asian Countries, there is a new sense of belonging to a group, a new socio-cultural identity, and a deeper feeling of security in fitting into the cluster of choice. Your disciples connecting themselves to a group involves the influence of personality, power, and behavior on the group process.

While the Bible never prescribes a particular model for discipling others, Jesus invested in groups of varying sizes. Larger groups learned

from his teachings and miracles, while his closest followers benefited from personal discipleship and specific instruction. While one-on-one discipling is valid and has its purposes, I want you to think about meeting in a group of three to five instead of privately with one in this post-pandemic era. Let me share with you what I experience practically - whys and wherefores;

+ All of us including our new disciples struggle with suppressed transparency. Just like Adam before us, our native tendency is to grab the fig leaves and cover up the shame in our lives (Genesis 3:7).

+ Although all our disciples are born again, each of them continues to struggle with a tendency. They drag their “former manner of life which is corrupt through deceitful desires” around with us (Ephesians 4:22). Eternally saved, but not sanctified, is the problem.

+ If you try to mature your disciples outside of a community, you will not be successful. Isolation from a small group of disciples is self-defeating as it will hinder them from following Jesus, who came to penetrate and transform the human community. Making disciples is a process. Moreover, isolating from other disciples is counter to the aim of the Gospel. (Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 5:1)

+ Two of the more common responses that I hear about this subject are: (1) You do not know him or her in my group and (2) I find no one in my life whom I can trust. Either one of these may be true, and if so, this is where the gospel must transform your thinking.

Hence, each of us disciple-makers ought to acknowledge the importance of keeping our new disciples in a group while leading them to maturity. Truly, what God yearns for the Church to be, is not a multitude of devotees but disciples...”

All of us know that these days are different from before. Those of us engaged in disciple-making on a day-to-day basis know the demands of this ministry. Mission leaders across all spectrums ask me; ‘How long does it take these days for a new believer to become a disciple?’ I have often responded to them that it can take 3 months to 3 years. All of us here indeed know that disciple-making is a difficult process. In this process, we primarily require regular & efficient Biblical tutoring, nurturing through Spiritual Fellowship, and fostering Emotional Care.

6 Indicators of Spiritual Growth

- 1) Making Better Choices
- 2) Being Determined
- 3) Feeling for Others
- 4) Desiring to Learn
- 5) Influencing People
- 6) Improving Relationships

Although in the process of disciple-making, we are expected to lead a person from the stage of a seeker to the experience of conversion and thereafter, prepare the new believer to become a follower of Christ. Of late, we have witnessed that several new believers carry with them more baggage from their past (guilt, doubt, interpersonal issues, the obsession with caste, creed, and/or class, etc.). Hence, regular inward regeneration leading them to real solid transformation is the task. Furthermore, in this process, we ought to focus on their relationship issues and prepare them to accept the Absolute Authority of Jesus, Implicit Obedience to God and His Word along with Undivided Loyalty in their lives for other believers.

DISCIPLES' TESTIMONIES

"My name is Asish. I am from Uttar Pradesh. I got saved by a team of young people who came to our village to conduct a Gospel campaign during the pandemic. I was fascinated by their lives, their singing, and the message they proclaimed. Moreover, their friendliness got me attracted to them. I finally gave my life to Jesus Christ as they guided me. But during the pandemic, a lot of questions, confusion, and doubts crushed me. I had nowhere to go. The lockdowns shattered me. I tried to speak to those young people who had led me to Christ over the phone. But they were not satisfactory to me. But after the lockdowns were over, I met them personally to pour out my anguishes. I am happy now to testify that each of my questions was answered, every confusion was resolved, and the team helped me to turn my doubts into deeper faith in Christ. Now I praise God for the labor of love in me."

Many such stories have helped us to establish a system to identify each new believer's growth although some take more time while others take just a few months to grow and be faithful disciples of Christ, willing to pay the cost of their discipleship. Our general evaluation is done through the following 5 questions.

- #1 – How SELFLESS is he/she?
- #2 – How much is he/she willing to SACRIFICE?
- #3 – How much is he/she willing to SERVE?
- #4 – How much is he/she willing to SUBMIT?
- #5 – How much is he/she willing to SUFFER?

Moreover, we have recognized that the public confession of a new disciple's faith determines his/her status in our Disciple-Making. Furthermore, our target is to prepare each new disciple to be a strong witness and lead at least 5 people to Christ in 6 months. Such initiative assures us of his/her growth in discipleship and leads us to our Post-Disciple-Making process.

"My name is Sushil. I am from a Rajput background. I gave my life to Christ in a Gospel meeting conducted

by the Christians. Although I accepted Christ, I had lots of wounds, pains, and fears, particularly when I returned home to be with my parents during the pandemic. There were fears, pains, and deaths everywhere. I was consistent in my faith although my parents, neighbors, and relatives planted more confusion, which made me crazy with more questions and grief. My Christian friend, who was discipling me kept good contact with me and called me at night to discuss all my problems. Sincerely, my faith in Jesus was shattered due to the pandemic. Although my friends caringly answered all my questions yet I took 3 years to make a decision to get baptized. Even after baptism, my people confused me. However, one good thing I did, was when I had questions or confusion, I ran to my Christian leader and got them answered. Furthermore, it took another 2+ years to get established in my faith. Now I am free from all my negative questions and following Christ as His disciple. Gradually, I learned; and I do not forget to do good and to share my faith with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). I am deeply engaged in discipling another 13 of my friends who recently came to Christ through my Gospel presentation."

Finally, the pandemic has taught us many new things. However, in this new era, our Great Commission in making disciples of Christ is to be enhanced. The process given is crystal clear - 'Evangelize', 'Baptize', and 'Catechize (Teach)'. The Vision of disciples-making ought to be renewed daily in this new post-pandemic new era.

However, this new era has taught me to prioritize the following few non-negotiables.

Finally, the pandemic has taught us many new things. However, in this new era, our Great Commission in making disciples of Christ is to be enhanced. The process given is crystal clear - 'Evangelize', 'Baptize', and 'Catechize (Teach)'. The Vision of disciples-making ought to be renewed daily in this new post-pandemic new era.

Spiritual Formation undergirds all the others and is the way we summarize what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matthew 22:37-40).



Personal Wholeness focuses on emotional health and proper self-respect, and biblical, emotional, and spiritual maturity are inseparable (Ephesians 4:17-5:33; Colossians 3:1-16).

Healthy Relationship is the dimension that reflects the biblical command to, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” From our families to our friendships, all relationships can be marked by love and wisdom (1 Corinthians 13)

Vocational Clarity means we have a sense of calling and purpose to disciple-making that is more than our current job or vocation. It daily informs us of our life and work. (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Economics and Work is the dimension that speaks to our daily lives as the place where our discipleship and

mission are carried out. (Jeremiah 29; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; 1 Timothy 2:1-6)

While facing the Challenges of the Post-Pandemic Transition in Disciple-making, we need to introspect and make Disciple-making in Asia even more Effective. May the Lord grant us His grace to disciple Asia for His glory and in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

“These men who have upset the world have come here also...”

- Acts 17:6-7



Susanta
globalsusanta@gmail.com

Dr. Susanta Patra served as General Secretary of India Missions Association for five years. He is serving with Church Planting Mission called NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP, which works today in 18 states in Northern India.

asian missions advance

Quarterly Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association *published by*
the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development

ASIAN MISSIONS ADVANCE, published from 1978 to 1993 by the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development
as the Occasional Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association, has re-started publishing from August 2011
as the Quarterly Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association by the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development

1520 James M Wood Blvd, #303, Los Angeles, CA 90015, USA
www.asiamissions.net | www.ewcmrd.org
voice/fax: +1 626 577 5564 | email: missionsadvance@gmail.com

ISSN 2765-0936

Editor

Steve K. Eom

Managing Editor

Damples Dulcero - Baclagon

Contributing Editors

Jonas Kang, Chris Sung; Lalano Badoy
K. Y. Cheung Teng; Isaac Soundaraja; Yohanes Nahuway;
Chong Pae Kim; ;Chansamone Saiyasak ; Hong Yang

Publisher

East-West Center for MRD Publishing