

# THE GREAT DISAPPEARANCE

WHY THE WORD 'DISCIPLE' DISAPPEARS AFTER  
ACTS 21 AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR US TODAY

MIKE BREEN





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*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

## INTRODUCTION | THE GREAT DISAPPEARANCE

Personally, I don't think it's unusual to weigh someone's *last words* as pretty important, particularly when that person knows the words will be their last ahead of time. They've thought through them, measured, weighed and calculated. They are designed to have a specific importance.

Through the ages, Christians have weighed these last words and even given them a specific title: *The Great Commission*.

And for a while, this idea of "making disciples" really sticks. Most of the book of Acts is littered with references to people making disciples or having disciples. Paul, in Acts 19, is shown to have disciples he's investing in every day (and later sends out to evangelize and plant churches across the whole of Asia minor).

But then...poof.

The word 'disciple' disappears after Acts 21 and isn't mentioned in Paul's or Peter's or John's letters. Even though all three of them clearly have disciples of their own.

It's gone. It just vanishes.

It's *the great disappearance*.

And the question I want to pose is "why?" When the call to "make disciples" are the last words of Jesus, why would it drop off the pages of scripture so early on? How can this be? To me, this seems to be an important question. And if we can understand the answer, we might be able to understand something about how we are to function as the church today.

## THE LOGICAL BEGINNING

### **1 Corinthians 4:14-17**

*I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you*

*to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

Now it's clear from the Paul's writing in the New Testament that he has discipled Timothy. You can even see that implicit understanding in this particular passage of correspondence with the Corinthian church.

But if we peel back the contextual layers of this passage, we'll start to see some clues emerge.

That word "guardians" is the Greek word *pedagogos*. It refers to a specific person who was hired by the parents and brought into the extended family *oikos* (Greek word for 'household', making up 30-70 people extending to blood-and-non-blood-relationships) to stay with the family from the time the child was weaned until the age of 12 or 13. This guardian would teach the child the classical Greek education of reading, writing, arithmetic, and logic. The guardian was there to provide the basic information.

When the child turned 12, he or she went through a ritual, a moment of religious significance in the Greco-Roman household (*oikos*). The pedagogue brought a 12-year-old girl to her mother. Her mother, even though she lived with this appalling perspective of being a second-rate citizen outside the home, actually carried the most significant role inside it. She managed the whole household. Her role was to understand the complexity of the organic and organized components of the *oikos*.

She knew how to deal with the sick. She oversaw the educational process. She managed the economic infrastructure and cash flow. She was the business manager and the shaper of a hospitable environment for guests. (Remember, pretty much all business was run through the home, and she oversaw this aspect of the business.) Make no mistake: This was a job. In fact, it was probably a job for three or four people. You had to be a professional dynamo to do this well.

From that point on, the girl "stood at the shoulder" of her mother, **discovering how all the information she had learned was actually grounded in everyday life.** Once she married, she would either extend the *oikos* or, along with her husband, *start a new oikos*.

A son at the age of 12 was brought, in a similar ceremony, to the shoulder of his father to learn the trade of the family. He would learn to ask, "What is it that this family produces?" He would come to understand the trade, craft, or business of the house. Paul's father was a tentmaker. How do we know that? *Because Paul was a tentmaker!*

"What are you going to do when you grow up?" is an entirely new question of the last 100 years. Nobody ever asked that question of children previously. It would be ridiculous. Children were going to do what their parents did. It took such a rare set of circumstances for a son to do something else that he would never ask the



question.

From age 12 on, the son learned to imitate his father with the normal methods of apprenticeship in the craft and trade of the house.

In this passage, Paul was referring to a pattern of life that everyone understood. He was shaping his message to a context so that people could comprehend it.

### **So why the great disappearance? Why do we see the language of ‘disciple’ disappear from the pages of the New Testament?**

The reason is that the Gospel was moving away from the cultural heartland in the geographical area known as the Holy Land. The Gospel was moving from Israel—from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria—and was now reaching the ends of the earth. In Corinth, there were very few (if any) rabbis and disciples. And the vast majority of the pagan cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, Alexandria and Rome had no understanding of what the word ‘disciple’ meant because that word was always used in reference to a Jewish rabbi.

These people had *no idea* what a rabbi was.

**So Paul looked for an analogue, a guiding picture, that the church could understand, one that included all that was involved in discipleship to a rabbi. If you are being disciplined by a rabbi, you certainly want to know what the rabbi knows. But a more important question is this: “How can I become *who* the rabbi is? Yes, I want to know what he knows, but I also want to be like him!”**

Paul understood this relational context because he himself was a disciple of Gamaliel. Paul understood the world of rabbis and disciples, but suddenly he was on mission to people who didn’t have a cultural reference point for it. I think he decided, “It’s silly for me to try to explain this. There must be some cultural reference that I can use that gets to the heart of the discipleship process. They’ve got to get what spiritual formation looks like. They need to know how it happens.”

What metaphor did he use? The parent and the child.

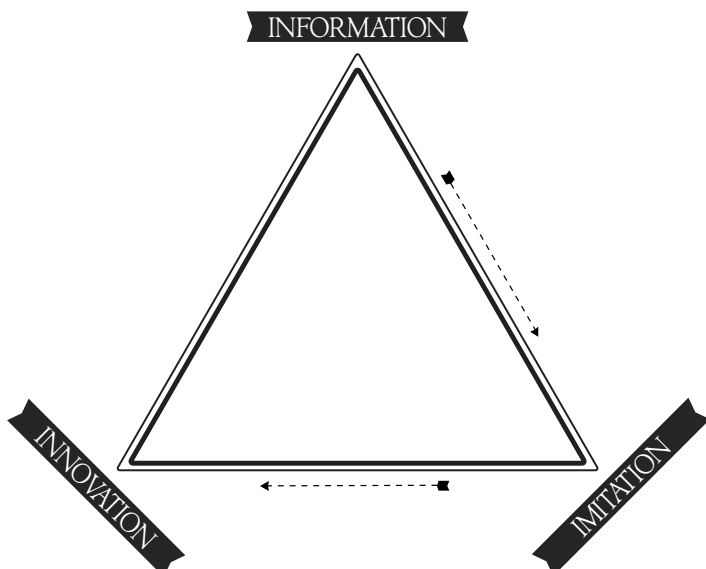
Paul didn’t use this metaphor in a paternalistic sense, but in the sense of formation, growth, and development. He said, “All of you have seen this picture. It’s something you understand. As you are raised, there is a pedagogue who gives you the necessary information. It will be the foundation for all training later in life, but the parent offers the model to be imitated. And eventually, you’ll start your own household and innovate on what you’ve learned.”

This was the perfect metaphor for Paul, and thus, for the rest of the New Testament. The scriptures replace the rabbi/disciple relationship with the parent/child relationship. Look at the rest of the New Testament, and in almost every book, you will see that the way the text understands spiritual formation is through

the lens of parent and child.

Now remember, as scripture defines a disciple, it is someone who *learns*, over time, to do everything that Jesus and his disciples could do, both on the inside and the outside. The Interior life and the Exterior life. So if we want to learn to live by the Spirit, to go where he goes, to have a vibrant Interior life, we must learn to do this. We shouldn't be expecting a holy zap out of the sky to instantly change everything for us.

It's here that we arrive at perhaps the most important part of understanding discipleship and what it will take to be disciples of Jesus. If someone is to learn to be like Jesus and to do the things he did, it will almost certainly involve Information, Imitation and Innovation. This is at the heart of both the Rabbi/Disciple relationship, as well as the Parent/Child relationship. It's why Paul was able to make the analogy switch.



We get the importance of information, right? In fact, our whole system for discipleship is currently built around it.

- Information from Sunday teaching/preaching from the pulpit? (Check)
- Information from Bible studies in small groups or Sunday school? (Check)
- Information from books we read? (Check)
- Information from the next conference we attend? (Check)
- Information from reading the Bible during our personal devotions? (Check)

I could go on, but there's no reason in belaboring the point. Information is incredibly important. We need to know what the Bible says. We need to know what it means in terms of theology and doctrine and what the Church has said for hundreds and thousands of years. Information is good and is a non-negotiable.

But it isn't *enough*.

We need to see that information in real flesh and blood. We need it incarnated in the life of someone else that we can watch, follow and learn from. If the statement "Jesus is Lord" is reality, what does that mean in someone's life? It's one thing to understand that with our head, but what do we do with that in real life?

For instance, people in our culture have a difficult time reading something like "Jesus is Lord" and getting all that this statement is trying to imply. Why? Because we aren't a country that has monarchies or nobility or anything of the like. The word "Lord" doesn't translate well to our every day life.

This is precisely why Imitation is so crucial to discipleship. We need to see what the life of Jesus looks like in the life of others and then use that in our own life. We need models and examples that we can pattern ourselves after. What does it look like to be a disciple on a college campus? What does it look like to be a disciple in corporate America? As a stay at home mom? As someone who owns their own business? In other words, if we were discipled by those people, we'd look at their lives carefully, and if something clearly looks like Jesus, we imitate it. If it doesn't look like Jesus, we don't. **We don't need perfect examples but we do need living ones.**

*(Now I am aware that this idea makes most people uncomfortable from the outset. But hang with me and I'll get to why it does and address some of those core issues.)*

Most importantly, though, this is simply what the Bible shows is involved with discipleship. If we are to look at how the early church discipled people, Paul probably gives us the clearest articulation of what was at work. To return again to this scripture, in his first letter to the Corinthians, in the fourth chapter, Paul writes, "I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. **Therefore I urge you to imitate me.**"

To recap what we just hit on, Paul was saying that spiritually, there were plenty of people telling the Corinthians what they are doing wrong, plenty of people putting information into their minds like a pedagogue, but there are next to no people willing to take the time and extend grace and openly invest into their lives like a father. Paul uses the metaphor of a father and son to strike to the heart of our discussion of imitation.

When I was younger I would shave with a straight razor. I'd put the shaving cream in my hand, dab it on my face, smear it around, turn the water on and begin to shave. One day I looked down and there is my daughter Beccy, who was 5 or 6 years old at the time, asking if she could shave too. So I take a little shaving cream, put it in her hand and show her how to put it on her face. At this point, I've pulled up a chair so we can share the sink and look into the mirror. I give her a

toothbrush and she watches me draw the blade over my face and then put it under the water to wash it away. She takes the toothbrush, strokes it over the shaving cream leaving a line of clear skin, rinses it under the water.

I do my left side. She “shaves” her left side.

I do my right side. She “shaves” her right side.

I shave my neck last. She “shaves” her neck last.

I rinse my face, splash on some aftershave, dab my face with a towel.

She rinses her face, splashes on some aftershave, dabs her face with a towel.

Many parents are familiar with this kind of routine. Our kids learn to walk through life simply by watching us walk through life.

Many kids will have a very similar walk to their parents, the same kind of gait. My son Sam looks absolutely nothing like me. You would never know he was my son unless you looked at his feet; it’s the only thing he got from me (poor kid). But if you watched us walk side-by-side, you’d think we were the same person. He has the exact same gait as I do. And I can remember him as a small child walking behind me, imitating my walk.

Paul is using the metaphor of a father to teach us something incredibly important.

Think of it this way. If you want to become fluent in another language, Spanish for instance, usually three things will happen. First, you’ll learn the basic information of the language: Spanish classes 101, 102 and 201. That gives you a solid foundation. But to really advance your skill, maybe you hire a personal tutor and apprentice yourself to that person, learning to do what they do. Lastly, to truly become fluent, you move to a place where Spanish is the dominant language, like Spain, and you spend a year or two immersing yourself in the language and culture.

That’s what Paul is getting at here with this metaphor of the father. A good father teaches his kids important information about the world and is very intentional in providing them with a healthy worldview. He teaches them about God, faith, what it is to be loved by God and to love others.

A good father teaches his kids through apprenticeship: riding a bike, putting together a lego castle, typing on the computer, reading a book, writing, balancing a checkbook, loving their spouse well, interviewing for a job. “Do it like I do it.”

A good father teaches his kids through giving them lots of access to their life: You will know how to know God by watching me. You will know how to read scripture when I read it and interact with it in front of you. You will know how to love your spouse by the way I treat my wife (your mother). You will know how to pray because

we will pray constantly.

This is what imitation *done well* can really look like. We often talk about *raising* kids but a better way of understanding it is our charge is to *disciple* our kids. We certainly won't be perfect, but we have to be intentional.

What Paul seems to be saying is the same type of relational dynamic that exists between him and his disciples should exist when we disciple people. Perhaps it isn't as "fatherly" in the way we see it between a 35 year old and a 5 year old, but there is that kind of significant life investment. Look at what Paul says in verse 17: "For this reason I am sending you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will **remind you of my way of life** in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

It is as if Paul is saying, "Look, I can't be there, but I'm sending Timothy to you. I've spent a significant amount of time investing in him and he now carries the DNA of the Gospel of Jesus which he learned from me. It's so strong, when you see Timothy, you will see me."

Think about the common phrase we use when talking to kids: "You have so much of your father in you." This is such a beautiful picture of the transference that Jesus begins with his own disciples and Paul is now articulating.

In Acts 19, Paul takes a group of disciples and pours into them for 2 years and they go out and plant churches in all of eastern Asia, planting them *exactly like Paul planted churches*.

To make the point even stronger, Paul says again to the Corinthians, "**Imitate me as I imitate Christ.**" (We aren't imitating people to become like them. We imitate people to become like Jesus! It's just that Jesus uses them to help us get there.)

And to the Thessalonians he writes, "Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became **imitators of us** and of the Lord."

Hopefully you have picked up on it. Look what Paul says:

- Therefore I urge you to imitate me
- Remind you of my way of life
- Plant churches like I planted churches
- Imitators of us

Now we're getting to the heart of it.

If we want to know how Jesus disciplined people and how the early church (including Paul) certainly seemed to disciple people, this is what we need to know: **Discipleship requires Imitation.**

This is the nitty gritty of what it means to be a *learner*.

Jesus asked his disciples to imitate his life. That was his process. It was how he passed on the DNA. Jesus told his disciples to disciple people in the same way he disciplined people: Imitation.

Too often we've been given large swaths of information for what it means to be a Christian, like a giant check list. Read your Bible and memorize important scripture verses. Pray. Go to church. Tithe. Witness to your friends. Be Jesus in the work place.

All of that information is incredibly important...but doesn't it assume that we already know how to do it well? **Telling me to do something is different from me knowing how to do it.** Telling me to develop my Interior life doesn't mean I can do it well! I need someone to help me, to show me in their own life. Just because I'm told reading my Bible is important doesn't mean I can read it well. That is a big book and can get really confusing, really fast. And news flash: If you've never prayed before, it's kind of weird! We're talking to and listening and having a conversation with someone we can't see. How in the world do you do that?

What we need is to see people who know how to do things well so we can do it like they do it first. If you didn't know how to cook hamburgers on a grill without burning them, you'll probably find someone who cooks hamburgers you like and have them show you how they do it...and then you'd do what they did. If you don't know how to drive a car, you'd have someone show you how and then do what they did. And if you don't know how to pray or read your Bible well, you'd find people who know how to do that well, let them show you and then do it like they do it.

Look. Our lives don't have to be perfect, or close to perfect, for us to begin multiplying the life we have in Jesus into others. But people desperately need a flesh and blood example to look at, watch, ask questions, receive teaching and apprentice themselves to. If they are struggling to read scripture, we say, 'There are lots of ways of going at reading scripture, but why don't I work with you and show you how I do it. It's really worked well for me.' It's not enough to toss someone a book on reading the Bible or giving them a sermon audio (though that would still be helpful).

We have to give the practices that we keep as a flesh-and-blood reference of how to live life with Jesus. We don't simply tell people to pray; we teach them to pray as we pray. We don't just instruct people to forgive; we show them what it looks like to forgive when we've been stabbed in the back. In the end, we need to be at a place of enough stability and maturity in our own spiritual lives so we are confident it would be a good thing if people did imitate us.

There are all of these things that have been called *spiritual disciplines*; prayer, reading the bible, fasting, silence, retreats, sabbath, community worship, tithing, etc. All of these are invaluable parts of our spiritual growth if we are to become mature Christians. *But how do we learn to do them well?* Because there is a difference between doing it and learning to do it well.

Take fasting, for example. We've heard about this before, but do we really know how to do it well? Dallas Willard says this: "If you are hungry when you are fasting, you're not fasting. You're learning to fast." Fasting is when you are so plugged into the nourishment of the Father that your body is physically, in a way we don't completely understand, being nourished by him. Most of us get really hungry when we are fasting! That means we aren't fasting, but still in the process of learning to fast. In the same way that if I'm in the batter's box and swinging at pitches and missing, I'm not hitting the ball, I'm *learning to hit the ball*. Eventually, with enough practice, I'll hit the ball. In the same way, with enough practice, I'll fast and be nourished by the Father himself and won't be hungry.

What we need are people who know how to do these things well, people who have been where we are at, who are willing to invest in us and let us see enough of their lives so we can learn from them as we follow Jesus.

**We don't want people doing open-heart surgery on us who have only read a book on it and then given a to-do list. We want someone who has trained and apprenticed with someone who knew what they were doing, who has performed hundreds of open-heart surgeries.**

Discipleship is the exact same thing.

Think back to the metaphor of a father and a son. The Father does something, the son does something. The Father shows his son how to do something, the son does it in a similar way. Eventually the son develops a personality and style of his own, *but that can't happen without imitation happening first*.

**The purpose of imitation is that it gets us to innovation. But we can't short circuit that process.**

A little while ago our team was at a worship service and we were standing behind someone on our team, David Reichley. While we were singing and worshipping, we got to capture the essence of this beautiful relationship. David was helping to run the service (behind the scenes) and while he was doing this and able to





worship at the same time, his son came up next to him. It was such a poignant set of moments that we had to capture it (albeit on a terrible camera phone). His son walks up to him, looks up as he's worshipping and smiles. David smiles back and continues singing. His son inches closer and soon they are touching, side by side. David has been swaying while he's singing and soon his son is swaying too. Then, David puts his arm around his shoulder and the entire rhythm and essence of David worshipping is being physically transferred into his son. It was a priceless moment.

This is how we see Paul and the early church making disciples. And if the Great Commission wasn't just for them but is for us as well, we too will become disciples by imitating someone whose life looks like the life of Jesus, letting their rhythm and grace as they follow Jesus become our rhythm and grace. Letting their skills become our skills. Learning to follow Jesus as they have learned to follow Jesus. Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of Jesus' famous "Take my yoke upon you" passage, calls it "learning the unforced rhythms of grace."

This is the way of discipleship.

## WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY

Now if you're anything like us, you probably have two, slightly negative knee-jerk reactions to the idea of imitation. And they probably have to do with Power and Confidence.

### POWER

Power, is *really* hard for us. The idea of imitation is particularly difficult for Americans because it means you have to admit that someone else's life has something yours doesn't. That you're lacking somehow. That your life needs something that theirs has. To do this is a blatant admission of weakness and Americans are accustomed to being strong.

America is for the strong, not the weak.

To admit weakness, to do so in an intentional way, somehow sacrifices an element of power we think we have. If we want to live into the life Jesus has for us, if we want to be disciples, we have to relinquish the idea that we are strong enough or that the power of our will can do anything. It requires a type of *healthy* submission.

This is a difficult and truly humbling experience, one that constantly reminds us how different the Kingdom of God is from the culture that we live in: It is the weak who are strong. As Paul says, "His power is made perfect in my weakness." When you enter into a discipling relationship, you are essentially saying, "There parts of you where there is more of Jesus at work in you than in me. And I want what you



have.” This is a fundamental posture of weakness and one where we are willingly giving power to someone else.

In fact, it puts us in a position of vulnerability and you won’t meet many people who like that idea or are terribly comfortable with it.

This is one of the reasons we’ll push the idea of imitation aside. It opens us up to the possibility of manipulation. Having the ability to directly invest and influence people’s lives comes with a certain type of power. And as we know, power of any kind can be abused. So for many of us, for fear of it being abused, we simply don’t engage with it.

What we have seen used to effectively, however, is not to ignore the possibility of manipulation. Rather, to counter it with the principle of “low control, high accountability.” You see, the two questions we constantly have people engage with are “What is God saying to you and what are you going to do about it?” These are the two fundamental questions of Christian spirituality.

**As leaders, we can never let our voice become a substitute for the voice of God.**

Our job isn’t to tell people what to do. Instead, we are called to teach people how to hear the voice of God for themselves. To weigh it. To test it against the scriptures. And then to step into the invitation of the Kingdom.

We are also a culture that’s prone to severe distrust of those with authority. We’ve seen too many politicians, business leaders and pastors we’ve believed in fall rather publicly and so we are afraid to be let down yet again. As you know yourself, you are more prone to not trust someone than to trust someone. It is a terribly cynical culture, and perhaps for good reason. Entering into a relationship of imitation is giving someone the space to speak into your life. Not because they have a title, but because we see more of Jesus in their life than in ours. That doesn’t usually play well with us.

*Unfortunately, it doesn’t change the fact that scripture clearly says Discipleship requires a level of Imitation. We shouldn’t throw the baby out with the bathwater just because there’s tension. Rather, we must learn to live in the tension. **To a certain extent, refusing to engage with the power that God gives us as his kids is almost as destructive as abusing it.** Discipleship is about learning to use the power God gives with wisdom and discernment that is beyond man’s abilities. The discipler gives their life with the utmost humility because at the end of the day they realize they have nothing to offer apart from the Father. They act as servants, not as those operating from places of power because they provide for others.*

*It means that while they are discipling others, they are still being disciplined. Every disciple has a life that is open and accountable.*

When we’ve seen it break down, it’s because someone stopped being accountable.

It is about submission. Everyone is submitting their life to someone. Everyone is being disciplined. For me, even today, my own life is regularly and rhythmically open to a set group of people. The process of discipleship never really ends. There is no arrival. Learning to be like Jesus is a lifelong pursuit. That's why you can't ever say, "I've been disciplined." That puts it in past tense and discipleship is something that never ends. It should always be active. "I'm being disciplined." We are always *learners* of Jesus.

So when we've asked people in the past if they want to be disciplined, we try to deal with this from the very beginning. Often the invitation to a discipling relationship with us sounds like this: "Look, I want to invest my life into yours. And the places where you clearly see Jesus at work, copy those things. Look for Jesus in me. The rest...well...the rest you can scrap. I'm not perfect and you should know that from the beginning." It is admitting early and often that I can be wrong. If we give insights, if we give advice or Challenge, we give it with humility, respect and leave the choice of how to respond in their hands, not ours. Disciplers are not controllers, they are releasers.

## CONFIDENCE

With confidence, it comes down to you and me. It comes down to the fact that we know we're created to disciple people and it isn't just about me "being fed." We know if we are invested in, eventually, we need to invest our lives into others. Scripture doesn't give much leeway on that one. And if we are going to offer our lives to a small group of people to imitate, we actually have to believe that our life is worth imitating.

Now we're going to take a sudden turn here, because in order to discuss discipleship and imitation seriously, it requires us to look into the future and ask what Jesus is asking us. If we are his disciples, it means we will eventually be discipling people. That idea raises up some things in us.

At gut-level honesty, most of us don't have the confidence to offer our lives as something to imitate, do we?

Why?

Because we don't think it would be a good thing.

Our lives are often chaotic, hard, challenging and slightly depressing enough. Why in the world would we want to pass that on?!

Maybe our marriages aren't in the best place.

Maybe we're single and haven't exactly lived the "purest" of lives.

Maybe we're not particularly good parents and that's not a relationship we want

anyone to see.

Perhaps our work-life/home-life balance is really out of whack (greatly contributing factors the fact we have issues in our marriages and parenting).

We might be loaded with debt.

Perhaps we feel isolated, alone or feel very little sense of peace.

We wonder, though we have a hard time admitting, if God is actually moving in our lives or our communities.

We read the book of Acts and think it must be for other people or other times.

For the average American Christian, we're sad to say, this might be reality. It's very possible this is your reality. So when we start to talk about offering our lives as something to imitate in the future...well...we don't even like the lives we are leading. Why would we pass it on?

And herein lays one of our biggest problems: **We can't possibly conceive of discipling people because we don't have lives we'd want others to have.**

Would it be a good thing if there were 8 more of you running around?

We are so consumed with being successful (the drug of choice for people in the United States) or simply surviving the chaos, or having more stuff or being popular that we aren't much different from people who don't know Jesus.

Even for pastors.

If we don't have that kind of life, well, that's kind of the ballgame.

The fact is, imitating most of our lives might not be a good thing.

And yet...yet...it's not supposed to be that way. Yes, it would be nice to give our lives, but the reality is that we don't even know how to live ourselves.

Why?

**Because most of us have never truly been disciplined.**

Maybe you've grown up in church. Maybe you've even gone to seminary. Maybe you lead a church, small group or Bible study. Maybe you've read every Christian book there is to read from the last 50 years.

Great! It means you have an outstanding informational foundation. *But you still might need to be disciplined in the way that the Bible understands discipleship.*

I have met more leaders than I can count who, combined, lead hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people *and have never been disciplined*.

What if it didn't have to be that way?

I wonder if there are people in your life, who God has been preparing in advance, who are open to you, who would want to invest all that God has given them into your life?

I guarantee there is a person you know who, when you look at them, consider them and pray about them, you think, "You know what? If in 20 years my life looked like theirs, that would be a really good thing."

## WHERE IT CAN LEAD

You see, our issues with Imitation are about BEING disciplined and DOING the discipling. **Being** disciplined means we have to open up our lives, be vulnerable and give up our perceived power. **Doing** the discipling means we have to be confident that giving our lives to be imitated is a good thing. Are there dangers to imitation? Yes. As there are with all good things. But if we exist in a relational system where the principle is lived out that "every disciple disciplines," it means that we are all being held accountable by someone.

But there is an all-important third stage of discipleship; Imitation is only a piece of the puzzle. It starts with Information, leads to Imitation, but then we get to **Innovation**.

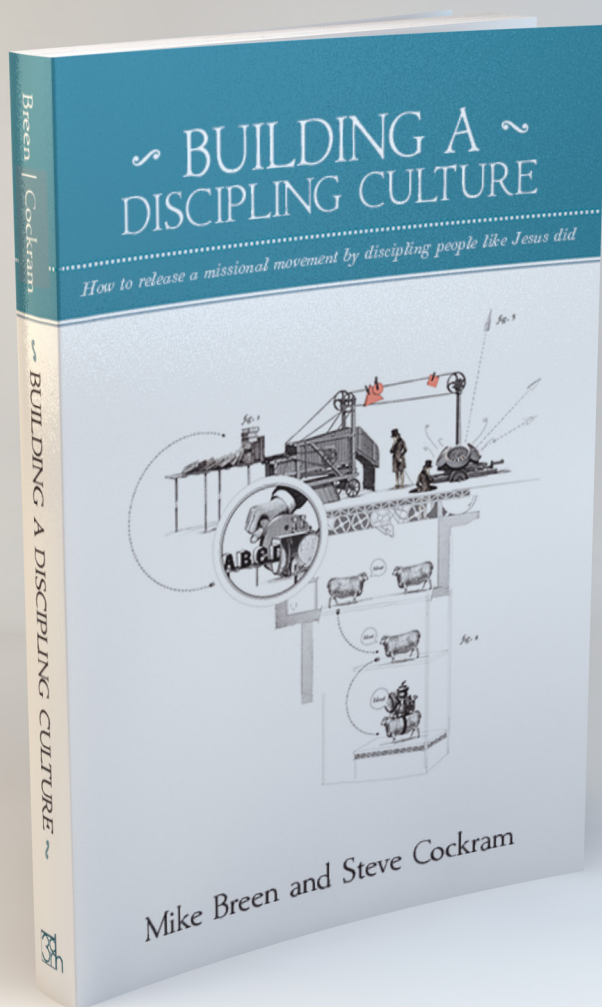
As we begin to understand more and more of the information that we are receiving, and as we are building a solid foundation of doing the things of Jesus from someone else's life (imitation by apprenticing ourselves to them), eventually, as we begin to mature, we contextualize things so they are the best fit for our life and personality. So really, we are building off the foundations of others.

We may have *learned* to pray or read scripture or disciple or engage in mission in one particular way...but as we get our feet beneath us we are able innovate and come up with new ways because we have built on a solid foundation. If you look at my son Sam, his walk is distinctly Sam...but it still has traces of me in it! It's just fascinating to see.

That is what the discipleship process is like. It always has traces of the faithful women and men who have gone before us and we continue to innovate off of their hard work, sacrifice and investment for Jesus and his gift to us, his eternal Kingdom.

Indeed. We stand on the shoulders of giants.

If you'd like to read more about the practical realities of doing discipleship this way, we recommend this book.



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