



My Final Word to the Church

By RICK WOOD, Editor

This will be my last editorial for *Mission Frontiers*. After this issue, I am stepping down as editor. Darrell Dorr will be taking over for me in this space going forward. I have been serving as editor since 2008 when Dr. Ralph Winter asked me to take over for him, knowing that his passing was near. Before becoming editor, I worked as managing editor under Dr. Winter for most of the time from July 1990 until December 2008. Since this is my last opportunity to give you my thoughts, I wanted to share with you what I feel is the single most important issue for the global Church to focus on as we seek to complete world evangelization. By “complete” I mean providing access to the Gospel to every person living within every people group.

Our Biggest Problem: Passivity

If there is one thing that limits the progress of the Gospel more than anything else, it is *passivity*. Believers are far too apathetic about their faith. They sit and listen *passively* to the pastor’s sermon each week. Many do not open their Bibles and most do not take notes. If you ask them to give you a summary of the sermon the next day, most cannot. Education experts tell us that passive listening is the most ineffective means for communicating knowledge so that it is retained. Universities know this so they do not give credit to students who simply sit and listen. They call it “auditing” a class.

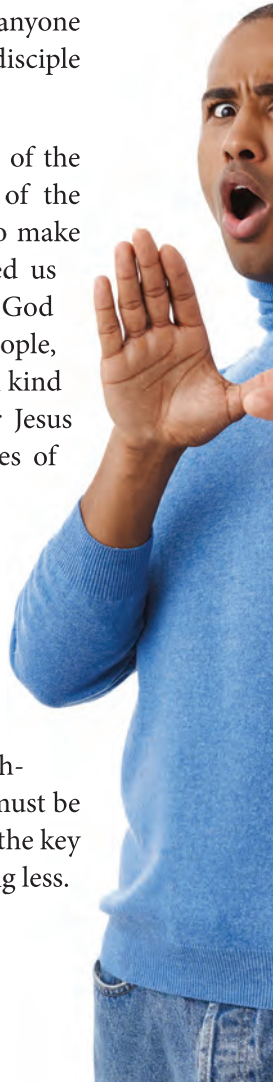
Unfortunately, this passive listening method is how most believers acquire an understanding of what is sound biblical doctrine. It is the primary method by which churches worldwide seek to “make disciples.” The vast majority of churches do not have a comprehensive program for educating their members in basic biblical doctrine, how to study the Bible for themselves, or make disciples.

Many churches have even done away with such meager attempts at Christian education as Sunday School. So most believers’ understanding of biblical doctrine is haphazard at best and heretical at worst. See our Nov-Dec 2021 issue on “Do You Have a Biblical Worldview?” for more on this. Perhaps this is why, according to researcher George Barna, only 9% of self-proclaimed Bible-believing Christians in the American church hold to basic sound doctrine, such as believing in the atoning work of Christ, the authoritative nature of the Bible, the reality of Satan, the need to share the Gospel, etc.—really basic stuff that any true Jesus follower should believe. Is it any wonder that according to some estimates, 98% of all Christians will never share their faith with anyone during their whole life, nevermind train a disciple who will go on to make more disciples.

We have created a passive “spectator” form of the Christian faith that is stifling the ability of the Church to make disciples who will go on to make more disciples in all peoples as Jesus called us to do in Matt. 28:18–20. Every living thing God has created in our world, from bacteria to people, has been designed to reproduce after its own kind or species. God’s plan always has been for Jesus followers to reproduce our faith in the lives of others.

The Solution: Learning to Make Disciple-Makers

As the Church, our focus must be on learning how to see this “reproduction” of faith take place as often as possible so that movements of disciple-making and church-planting will take place in all peoples. That must be the goal of the Church moving forward. It is the key to world evangelization. Jesus expects nothing less.



In the parable of the talents, it is very clear that Jesus expects His faithful servants to work to gain an increase for Him, our master. The one servant who *passively* sits back, does nothing, and buries the talent given to him, is rightly condemned as “*you wicked servant.*” Those servants who worked to multiply what was given to them were praised with the words all of us long to hear one day, “*well done good and faithful servant.*” The tough question we must ask ourselves is, “If we sit back and do not use the talents Jesus has given us to grow His kingdom by learning to make disciples who go on to disciple others, will we likewise fall into the category of the wicked servant?”

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The sad reality is that we have taken this passive, spectator-like form of the Church and spread it all over the world. It is failing in America, and it will ultimately fail wherever we take it. If our mission entails taking this failed model of doing church to every tribe and tongue, then our mission will fail to fulfill what Jesus has called us to do—make disciples who likewise go on to obey Jesus by making more disciples—one generation after another.

A Return to Our Roots in the Book of Acts

In the time of the book of Acts, the Church understood that following Jesus was an all-in experience of walking with God in obedience to what Jesus called on them to do. It was not an event once a week. It was all about living for Jesus and helping others to know and follow Him, too. In this environment, people understood what it meant to be a disciple

and to make disciples. There was no passivity here. As a result, the Church grew exponentially and literally took over the Roman Empire. As the Church morphed from a movement into an established institution with priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes, it lost the understanding of how to make disciple-makers and to foster movements to Jesus. We need to return to the type of church and disciple-making that we see in the book of Acts. Take note of Steve Addison’s new book on this topic and the interview with him in the last issue.

For more than 20 years, I have highlighted in the pages of *MF* the power of Church Planting Movements and Disciple Making Movements to move us from a passive, event-focused Church to a book-of-Acts-type Church that can complete world evangelization. Regardless of whether you prefer one method of making disciples over another, we must recognize that learning how to make disciples who reproduce their faith in the lives of others is the key to providing access to the Gospel to every person in every people.

Reaching Nomads or Anyone Else

The kind of church I have advocated here is exactly the kind of church that is able to reach nomads. The brick-and-mortar type church where people sit passively and listen to sermons they can’t remember is not the kind of church that can reach nomads. A nomadic church must be able to fit on the back of a camel and be able to interact personally with people. It needs to be the kind of church where nomads can learn about Jesus and His Word from each other as they learn together how to study the Bible for themselves.

Whether it is nomads in Africa or urban dwellers in New Delhi, the kind of passive Church we have in the West will not work to reach them. Learning to make disciple-makers and foster movements must be the highest priority for the mission of the Church to all peoples. 📌

