



How Disciple-Makers Relate to Ever-Present Global Disruptions

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The other day I was on a Zoom call with a group of Frontier Mission trainers. They were there from around the globe; Africans, Asians, Europeans, Americans and more. We prayed together, seeking God, and listening to His voice. We wanted to hear what He would say to us as Frontier Mission trainers at this time. I'm grateful to serve in a movement that places a high value on hearing God's voice individually and corporately.

We shared Scripture. Then, we took the time to practice listening prayer. After a period of waiting, one of our trainers said, "I feel that the fires in Australia and the disruption of COVID-19 are just the beginning. We will experience many more disruptions. We need to be ready. We can't let these stop us from obeying God's mandate to make disciples."

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I didn't particularly like hearing this. Be ready for more disruptions? Hmmm. That didn't sound good! What did that mean for me as a mission leader? How was I to be ready? Was there a way to *get ready* for more disruption and *also get ready* to bring in the harvest?

A few days after that meeting, in my home city of Minneapolis, violence erupted in our streets. Another unexpected disruption.

Only days before, cyclones hit South Asia, my home for many years, along with an unusual attack of locusts. Disruption on top of disruption.

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These are not easy times to live and minister in. When disruption hits, it is hard to keep our heads above water and our eyes fixed on Jesus. The demand on ministers of the gospel has dramatically increased. Needy people knock on our doors and ring our phones. At times, we feel overwhelmed. While helping others, we experience a rollercoaster of our own emotions.

I take courage in knowing that while disruptions surprise me, they are not a surprise to God. He was not caught off guard by the coronavirus, nor anything else happening in the world nor my personal life. As I stay connected to Him, as I abide, He will show me how to live a fruitful life as a disciple-maker amid a continual disturbance of what I perceive as normal life.

When Disruption Gets Personal

Beyond the disruptions of the world, as we serve, there are personal challenges. For missionaries supported by churches and individuals, this may mean loss of income. Economies are struggling and joblessness is rising worldwide. When your financial support plummets, it hits home in a very tangible way.

Ten days after my colleague said she felt more disruptions were coming, she was diagnosed with cancer. That's personal. This past month I've faced personal challenges as well. After hurting my back, I slipped and fell, twisting my leg and ankle beneath me. I also had tooth problems, and my assistant quit suddenly, during an ever-increasing workload as we opened enrollment for my online course: *Getting Started in Disciple Making Movements: Even if You Are Busy, Can't Speak the Language Well and Have No Money*.

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External disruptions are hard. Personal disruption and challenge even more so. Are these events spiritual attacks, the pruning process of God?

I am not a last days scholar or eschatologist. I don't consider myself qualified to speak on those matters. As a DMM practitioner, I like to keep things simple. Though I enjoy in-depth Bible study, most of the time I take Scripture at face value.

I have no clear idea about whether these are the last days. I do know that Scripture says in the last days we will experience increased times of difficulty. The Bible also speaks of a great harvest in the end times. The two go together. This understanding must inform how we respond, rather than reacting or ignoring the many disturbances that come our way.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2 Tim 3:1 ESV)

Three ways disciple-makers can relate to life's disruptions:

1 We can react in fear.

Fear is pervasive and contagious. Conspiracy theories, "fake news" and rumors feed our fearful hearts and minds. Anxiety is a very human reaction. Like pain, fear can be a good thing. It protects us when danger lurks. Abiding or chronic fear, however, is never from God. Getting stuck in fear-mode is not a reaction disciples of Jesus can afford to give in to.

Fear paralyzes. It causes us to react in selfishness. We hoard food and toilet paper instead of being generous with those in need. We focus on the bad things that could happen, rather than seeing what God is doing around us.

The Psalmist said, "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." (Ps. 61:2) When we feel fearful, we must turn to Him, our solid rock. Resist fear and it will flee from you. Give in to it, feed it, and it will grow.

As disciple-makers, a fear reaction says, "I can't do anything until this is over. When the lockdown lifts, I'll be able to disciple people and start new groups or churches again. When my health is better, I'll share Jesus with my neighbors. After travel restrictions lift, I'll start going to train disciples again."

The problem with that position is we don't know how long this disruption will last. Nor do we know what new disruption might follow. Courageous action is the opposite of fear. It's what this season of difficulty asks of disciple-makers.

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2. We can ignore disruptions, pretending they don't exist.



Sometimes it is easier to stick your proverbial head in the sand. We don't know how to respond, so we pretend nothing has changed. We ignore the disruption and hope in time it will disappear. In a few months, things will go back to normal, we think. Hunker down and stay safe, and in a while, things will be better.

This response is also not from God. Jesus told us to discern the times we are in. In Matthew 24, Jesus told His disciples that they could expect difficulties. Though it is not for us to know “the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority” (Acts 1:7), we cannot ignore world events. We must be watchful and aware of what is happening.

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If we ignore disruptions, we miss the great opportunities they afford us for disciple-making. There is a great spiritual openness in the world today. People are open to having spiritual conversations like never before. Governments, busy fighting Covid-19, are less focused on persecuting Christians. Dramatic changes have happened as millions have learned to access resources online.

Will we ignore this openness? This great opportunity to reach lost people and multiply disciples, if it requires us to change how we function?

Our models of what a movement looks like must shift to accommodate what is happening. Movements will cross borders differently. How we find Persons of Peace may change. Our primary method of going to these people may be through social media rather than knocking on doors or chatting in a shopping mall. House churches may predominantly meet on Zoom and through WhatsApp groups.

As I write that I cringe. I don't want that! None of us do. But if that is what it takes to go and make disciples in this time, are we willing to shift and adjust our preferences?

We don't like to think about this. It was not in our strategic plan for multiplication.

But what if all that happened is preparing us for a time when brick and mortar church buildings can no longer function due to persecution? Are we learning? Pivoting? Experimenting? Or simply wishing the disruption would end and we could go back to the way it was?

3. We can respond in faith.

As much as fear is contagious, faith and hope are even more so. When we abide in Christ and meditate on His Word, our hearts are filled with fresh confidence in God's promises. These are incredible times to be alive and work as disciple-makers. Spiritual hunger is growing virally. With everything

shaken, people are looking for a God who loves them and can provide comfort, hope and life.

By demonstrating genuine faith in these uncertain times, we reflect His glory. We shine as bright lights...and so we must!

Jesus said, “The harvest is ripe, the workers are few.” That has never been truer than it is today! “Look to the fields, they are white unto harvest,” said the Master. We must go in response to His call and the ripeness of the harvest fields. Whether that means going online, or to our neighbor while standing six feet apart or going through a phone call...we must go! Persons of Peace wait to be found. Rise to the challenge of these times and face them head on, your hand in His.

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Let’s allow this time of disruption to strip us of old habits of disciple-making and church. Many things we did previously weren’t in line with New Testament practices anyway! Allow difficulties to prune both your ministry and your life. New growth and fruitfulness will result.

What does it mean to respond in faith? It means we prayerfully and actively go after the new wine and new wineskins Jesus is releasing. We embrace and step into them wholeheartedly. We allow God to use trials to bring lasting change in our lives as well as our ways of operating as disciple-makers.



The World Will Change

When in high school, I read the book *1984* by George Orwell. It was my junior year (class 11). I would graduate the next year in 1985. How strange to read a book written in 1949, forty years earlier, and see how closely it had predicted what our world was like. On many things, it was right on.

One thing Orwell got right was that the world was changing. Life was not going to stay the same. In that sense, he spoke prophetically.

What will the world be like in forty years? It would be foolish of me to venture a prediction. What I can say with confidence, is that it will not be the same as it is today. The world is changing and we must change with it.

A Future Hope

The future I hope for is one where the movements numbered across the globe have grown beyond our wildest dreams. Seeing organic movements to Christ has become normal. The majority of Christians have shifted from being only church members to embracing a lifestyle of disciple-making, sacrifice, love and obedience.

In that future, the Church looks different than it does today. It is far more similar to what we saw in the New Testament. Signs and wonders are common, and those that are daily being saved in every corner of the globe have become impossible to track. With this growth has come persecution and great suffering, but the body of Christ is stronger and more united than ever before. People from every tribe and tongue and nation gather to worship and love the one who died and rose again. Usually not in big gatherings— but under trees, in homes, in coffee shops, in chat rooms on the internet, on Zoom and WhatsApp, in hospital waiting rooms, in airports and train stations— they gather to worship, encourage and spur one another on to reach and serve the lost.

Let the disruptions come if that is what it takes to move us into a season of greater harvest, renewal, and disciple-making. Amid the chaos of today and tomorrow, we say, “Come, Lord Jesus, come. Let your kingdom come in me, my city, my region and among the unreached. Help me respond in faith to what You are doing. Let me cooperate with You and be an obedient disciple who follows You into the unknown future ahead. For Your glory. Amen.”

