

THE WAY OF THE DISCIPLE IN CHURCH PLANTING

DR. JACK ALLEN, JR.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CHURCH PLANTING
NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INTRODUCTION

We have a number of arguments flaring in Southern Baptist life today. It's nothing new, and it's not necessarily bad. We are people of strong convictions that we zealously defend for the sake of reaching people for Christ more effectively.

An important argument—to me anyway—concerns the starting of new SBC churches. The argument long since passed the point of whether or not to start churches; new churches are the bones of the Southern Baptist Convention. Church planting represents one of the hottest topics in Southern Baptist life today. Many of our leaders know that the future of our denomination depends on starting healthy, multiplying churches. Perhaps the question of when to start something gets hung up on what kind of church to start or how to get new churches to multiply.¹

If so, the SBC is hung up on the wrong question. A better question concerns how to develop the type of men and women who make disciples rapidly enough to make a new church thrive.

It is my position that well-formed Christian disciples make other disciples faster than their spiritually immature peers even if the latter excel at entrepreneurial skill or raise more money. I hope to advance the argument beyond the mechanics of church planting—the *doing* end of things—and onto the spiritual development of the church planter—the *being* end.

¹Two key facts lead to growth of the SBC: (1) new churches offer an extraordinarily effective way to lead lost people to Christ, and (2) churches that sponsor new churches also grow. Neither of those realities can be seriously doubted, but still we see only about five percent of Southern Baptist churches sponsoring new churches. Ed Stetzer and Philip Conner, "Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007," Center for Missional Resurgence February 2007 [report on-line]; available from http://www.namb.net/atf/cf/%7BCDA250E8-8866-4236-9A0CC646DE153446%7D/RESEARCH_REPORT_SURVIVABILITY_HEALTH.PDF?tr=y&auid=2440992; Internet; accessed 21 January 2008; and Jeffrey C. Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship: A Statistical Analysis of Sponsoring a Church Plant as a Means of Revitalization of the Sponsor Church" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary).

The equipping and support of church planters is a Southern Baptist initiative that keeps its promise. Nevertheless, our program is not perfect—efforts to do better reward us. I feel ill over stories of failed church plants and disingenuous church planters. Every Baptist Association Director can recount his experience with a church plant that failed even though he picked a skillful young man to lead it and gave him plenty of money.

I want to help my partners in the field find godly men to plant healthy, multiplying churches. This paper sets out some objective criteria by which one might evaluate disciples and disciple making in local churches.

Can one find objective measurements for what it means to be a spiritually formed disciple of Jesus Christ? Does a system exist to measure disciples for church planting fitness? One hopes so. Such a system offers a gold coin of promise. One side pays the potential planter by increasing his readiness for the field. The flip side pays equippers of church planters by adding to our knowledge of what traits to assess and teach. Ultimately, if the hypothesis proves true, *all* churches benefit because all churches want to make disciples that multiply themselves by making more disciples.

Painting an objective portrait of a disciple seems easy enough, does it not? The New Testament tells us the kinds of things disciples do; perhaps they can be measured. Disciples pray, learn the Apostles' teaching (Bible), develop friendships with other disciples, tell people about Jesus, perform good works, and worship God. They also lie, cheat, and steal, and sometimes receive correction, repent, and get back to walking with Christ.

Baptists tend to measure worship attendance, baptisms, and money in the collection plate, all of which are easy to enumerate but not necessarily indicative of discipleship. Most believers agree that nothing seems more complicated than trying to figure out if someone is keeping up with Jesus on a long walk.

Perhaps one place upon which we can agree to find measurements is within the Bible. But where does one go in the Bible, and how does he rightly apply ancient measurements to the contemporary church? Years ago, Southern Baptists had a Yale-educated, sage; a biblicist known as the conscience of Southern Baptists, T. B. Maston. He served as Professor of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for forty-two years, retiring in 1985. He published extensively on race relations, social justice, ecology, marriage, sexuality, gender roles, politics, church and state relations, war, and biblical ethics in general. He walked with Christ for a very long time and taught thousands of ministers to join in the way of the disciple. Maston based all his teaching on biblical principles observed through his ethical lens.² Not all Southern Baptists agree with Maston's

²William M. Tillman, Jr., ed., *Perspectives on Applied Christianity: Essays in Honor of Thomas Buford Maston* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 5-6; and Jimmy R. Allen, "Thomas Buford Maston: Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics" *Christian Ethics Today: Journal of Christian Ethics* 47:9 5 December 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/047/Thomas%20Buford%20Maston->

hermeneutics on every issue—nor do I. As for his view of Scripture, however, I cannot quarrel. Maston felt that “the Bible is the most important possession of the Christian churches, far more important than all of their buildings, institutions, and endowments.”³ To guide the search through the Scriptures, this paper makes use of Maston’s section on “The Way of the Disciple,” in his textbook *Biblical Ethics*.⁴ Maston’s body of work, enormous in scope and depth, demonstrates his conviction that it is the job of local churches to make disciples.

IS “MAKING DISCIPLES” THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

How can anyone dispute that the purpose of the local church is to make disciples? Jesus gave his followers a simple, easily remembered statement to guide us to productive lives. It is known as The Great Commission, and its heart is Christ’s statement to, “make disciples.”⁵ The statement is simple but not simplistic, memorable but overlooked. Preachers sermonize over it, children memorize it, and cornerstones memorialize it, but do we do it? Christ’s statement offers a guaranteed key to locking up arguments and anxiety while opening the door to joy and productivity. It promises an open-ended *more* for our lives, our churches, and our training centers.

Jesus told His followers to make disciples and new churches do so far more effectively than do older churches—at least that is what the math says. That math, however, is based on baptism rates, which do not seem to be a very comprehensive measure of a disciple. We are offered one, single, most-likely-to-succeed idea that will draw the heat out of the majority of the arguments in the Southern Baptist Convention, increase our baptisms well over one million souls per year, and provide a fat pot of gold on which we may draw resources to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. One thing: start churches. Church planting is the single most effective answer to what ails the Southern Baptist Convention, but church planting can become a mechanized *start something at all cost* strategy. When that happens, church planting is the *wrong* strategy for us to adopt.

Church plants are not technological products cranked out from assembly lines; they are spiritual and living organisms. We are in the business of spiritually developing people.

As long as there have been Southern Baptists, we have talked (fussed, fumed, argued, yelled, debated, and had a few cordial exchanges) about the best ways to plant churches. Our tribe began and increased on the backs of courageous missionary preachers who left the comfortable east for the western frontier—once in the field, they started churches. Then

%20Baptist%20Apostle%20of%20Biblical%20Ethics%20By%20Jimmy%20R.%20Allen_047_06_.htm; Internet; accessed 16 January 2008.

³T. B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics: A Survey* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1967), v.

⁴Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158-64.

⁵Matt. 28:19.

they gathered in Associations and Conventions and discussed—what else?⁶—starting churches.⁶

I enjoy dozens of these same conversations every week. Generally, people like to tell me about the right funding for church plants, the right model of church to plant, and the right skills a church planter needs. Three rights make one flaming wrong. Not that the big three are wrongheaded by themselves; simply that they do not represent the first issue. What is missing is that if the planter is trying to make disciples, it helps if he or she *is* a disciple. None of those three alone offers a way through the morass of contemporary North American hedonism apart from it being carried on by a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The command to *make disciples* is a fat request. While it is easy on the memory, it weighs hard on the mind. What, exactly, *is* a disciple? One can use a dictionary to find the basic meaning of the word, but churches need more meat out of it than that.⁷ If Jesus thought making disciples was important enough to commission us to the task, perhaps we should know what exactly that means; i.e., what are we to make and how do we make it? A successful definition of *disciple* should lead us to better ways for selecting those upon whom to spend church planting resources.

Today's unchurched, dechurched, and increasingly *Pagan* North America requires that church leaders spend more energy on the planter than the plant. The focus should be on *the way of the disciple*. Maston used six categories, labeled the way of . . . humility, forgiveness, service, fruit-bearing, the cross, and the way of the Lord.⁸ Over the next several pages, we will briefly examine the content of each category and offer a prescription for assessing and equipping disciples as church planters. We start at the point of our anemia: humility.

THE WAY OF HUMILITY

I had a business partner once who was the first man I knew who openly wanted nothing to do with churches while confessing to being a Christian—he did not much like churches or other Christians. He saw no hypocrisy in his opinion, having come by it as he described, through experience.

As a boy, Roger had been something of a star on the basketball court. His problem with Christianity was that his father—a church leader—upbraided him regularly and thoroughly for his lack of humility regarding his athleticism. Roger was not my partner

⁶Granted, the conversations were on the topic of missions, but the historical record indicates (and any missionary will tell you) that “missions” concerns itself with starting churches.

⁷A disciple is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. “Disciple,” available from <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/disciple>.

⁸Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158-64.

long—I found that he took his father’s criticism as a license to become exactly what his father warned against—he acted like an arrogant jerk.

I do not pretend to be an expert on the intricacies of the human mind, but I think that neither Roger nor his father understood humility. They also did not understand the church as Jesus intended it. Roger was a risk taker and courageous, and those two traits led him to success on the basketball court. It did not hurt him much in the business world until his attitude wrecked his relationships.

Normally, the men willing to start churches are men with great courage and confidence—men like Roger. Church planters lean toward arrogance like a politician leans toward a handshake. They tend to be high-capacity men with records of high achievement. Their achievements, however, lead them to often thinking too highly of their opinions and abilities.

One of my friends defines humility “not as thinking too lowly of yourself, but not thinking of yourself at all.” I like his slogan, but it leaves me with a dilemma. The moment I think it, my next thought is of myself and whether or not I measure up to the standard. Sort of self-defeating, is it not? A humble man might do a bit of self-examination and realize his attitude is fine. An arrogant man’s introspection will *always* result in the conclusion that he is doing just fine, and thus he will fight for a high opinion of himself. Such subjectivity will not do for our purposes.

Maston defined Christian humility less subjectively and more as a series of actions. He found, “a close connection between humility and the spirit of service.”⁹ Using Christ’s condemnation of the Pharisees as an example, we can see that as one grows more concerned with his religious appearance than how his religion acts itself out in public, he or she grows arrogant and, by extension, becomes useless as a disciple. James referred to the arrogant man as the one who hears the Word but does not act on it, and therefore deceives himself into thinking he is practicing Christianity.¹⁰

Church planters are tasked with receiving a vision from God and communicating it to others in a way that helps a new church form. Heady stuff, don’t you agree? By its nature, such divine-human communication carries the temptation to let all within earshot know what “God told me” in a tone that can carry underlying messages like, “and therefore I am better than you,” “you need to do what I say,” or “hand over your money.”

Moreover, because church planters are often young men, and because they often lead many adults to Christ, it can appear that they are successful without the necessary long walk in the same direction. The body of biblical wisdom literature indicates that real success is only measured over a significant period of time (one may think decades instead of years at this point).

⁹Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158.

¹⁰Jas. 1:22.

Denomination officials, hungry for a good story to tell member churches, often give unproven men status too early. We all know what usually happens when a young man or woman receives too much publicity—they become overconfident and often arrogant. Better to offer help, encouragement, support, instruction, and very little status.

Fortunately, God remains interested in the spiritual health of his children. He will not allow arrogance to go unchallenged. He assures disciples that wisdom follows humility; arrogance is a scary type of foolishness that pays negative dividends. One of the ways God humbles people is by putting them in the hands of someone who takes advantage of them—someone who *out-arrogants* them.¹¹ Once the disciple has been hurt; he (hopefully) learns his lesson. He has a new task to learn: forgiveness of the one who hurt him.

THE WAY OF FORGIVENESS

Every church planter finds himself either forgiving people who think it is their spiritual gift to offend him or quitting the field feeling bitter and broken. Stories among church planters and their wives are eerily consistent when one asks about what it feels like to be betrayed, slandered, or cursed, and often by the leaders of sister churches in their area.

It is *normal* for leaders of non-growing churches to try to prevent a new church from starting or growing. Normal offenses tend to consume enormous amounts of time and energy fighting and defending one's vision. In reality, all the planter usually accomplishes by trying to defend himself is to take time away from doing what he was called to do (make disciples). Jesus told his followers to forgive others just as God forgave us. Forgive them quickly and move on to something productive.

Church planters seem to have more than their share of opportunities to practice the discipline of forgiveness. Therefore, it seems important that potential church planters be trained to forgive. It seems even more important to seek men with a painful story, or a life that required them to develop a habit of forgiving offenders. We might think it too much to require people to forgive an offender before the offender has repented. After all, does not the lack of repentance free Christians to hold a grudge? When I put it that way, most people agree that God wants Christians to forgive people anyway.

God offers forgiveness, but it must accompany man's repentance in order to be effectual. "The act of forgiveness is incomplete without repentance."¹² The problem is that *all* church planters (and their wives) hear baseless accusations against their ministries. *All* church planters receive news of broken promises—usually involving funding cuts or facilities that will not be available after all. Accusers and promise-breakers believe in the rightness of their decisions and almost never budge. Repentance is not coming. If the planter chooses to fight every offense, he wastes so much time that he endangers the growth of the church. In reality, all he can do is forgive the offense and pray that God will help him

¹¹Joseph offers a prime example. His arrogance made him a slave, and it almost cost him his life (Gen. 37).

¹²Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 160.

grow his church beyond the reach of offensive people. In a sense, the church is like a tree that the planter can climb when predators hunt him.

Lack of repentance matters not one whit—church planters benefit only when they learn to forgive people who will *not* repent. “One can have the willingness to forgive . . . regardless of the attitude of others.”¹³ If the victim holds a grudge, he will become a bitter and ineffective hand for Christ.

Lindsey’s husband Pete did all he could to grow a new church. The first ten months he led twelve people to Christ and gathered a group about triple that size for weekly worship and Bible study. When the letter came telling Pete that his salary was to be reduced by half, Lindsey was the first to read it. “What do they expect? We did more than they asked!” she cried on the phone.

I confess that I was mad too, but it did not matter. The decision was in concrete. When Pete found out that money he was promised had been diverted to cover road maintenance at a Christian camp, he bounced off the walls, but Lindsey went right through the roof. She threatened to call a lawyer, then she threatened to quit, then she got very, very quiet.

Pete eventually returned to winning people to Christ, and Christ kept on bringing people to Pete. By the end of the second year, enough people joined the church to cover the earlier loss of funds. During the next two years, though, the church stopped growing and started to decline. By the end of the sixth year, Pete and Lindsey packed up the dishes and moved two states away. The church died.

What happened? Lindsey drank an unforgiving spirit and told everyone within earshot about the broken promises. She even went to the camp and made sure the director heard that his road cost her family a badly needed vacation. It did not take much of that kind of talk for people to start looking for a new church. Lindsey’s weak discipleship cost her husband his ministry—she would not forgive the offense.

Perhaps someone could have intervened. Did anyone see the sign that something was wrong when Lindsey stopped serving others? I cannot help but feel that we should have known something and helped her get back on track. Lindsey’s focus turned inward to her needs. Service demands that we look outward to help others with their needs.

THE WAY OF SERVICE

In some ways new churches may offer a more measurable proving ground for service than established churches simply because the needs are more obvious. Newer churches do not have many disciples who know what to do. Fewer hands do the ministry because most of the people are still learning how the Christian life works. Most people seem to think that service requires a great deal of religious training. Biblically speaking, however, serving the

¹³Ibid.

needs of others do not mean offering religious experiences, therapy, or even evangelistic visitation. Those are all excellent things to offer, and to some degree they do entail service, but Christ defined the general service offered by his disciples as something far more practical. He told us to give people food, water, hospitality, and clothing. His only command regarding visitation was to go see people who were either sick or in prison.¹⁴ He requires no special training.

The meaning of service in most churches (even new ones) usually refers to the Sunday gathering for worship and preaching. As a result, the members of churches rarely know how to serve the needs of others in their community. Because so little that happens in the name of *service* actually involves serving others, the unchurched react with skepticism to any church's promise of relevance.

I was helping a church planter by surveying a neighborhood in Nashville, asking people what they might look for in a new church. One guy bluntly told me that he wanted a church that was more concerned with handing out cold water on a hot day than getting in his wallet. I said it sounded like he had a bad experience in church. He told me that he attended church for many years, but quit after a business meeting where his church decided to care more about the look of their campus block than the people who lived a block over.

New churches may find a rich vein of dissatisfied saints waiting to join someone who cares about serving people. It is likely that most church planters find little time to spend doing tangible acts of service. Time spent feeding hungry people means time lost recruiting people who can feed themselves, and pay for the salaries, insurance, rent, sound system, or invitation postcards.

Jesus never said to spend all our time doing community service ministry, but he did say to spend some time in community service. He seems to have united serving and witnessing into concurrent actions. Moreover, he made it clear that whenever disciples perform acts of service, they are treating *him* well—Jesus took service personally. He “identified himself [with people in need].”¹⁵ When a guy's bills need paying, it requires an enormous amount of faith for him to leave work early so he can spend time visiting prisoners. Yet, do we not think that that the faith required to put our needs aside to help out “the least of these” is exactly the kind of faith that Jesus asks his disciples to exhibit?¹⁶ Of course it is! Faithful service gets results, and we find a close relationship exists between the disciplines of service and fruit-bearing.

THE WAY OF FRUIT-BEARING

Donnie Bullmann (not his real name) was a walking cliché. He was six feet tall, two hundred forty pounds (most of it in his chest), and loud as a sportscaster's blazer. I met him

¹⁴Matt. 25:35-36.

¹⁵Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 161.

¹⁶Matt. 25:40.

at a conference in the 90s. True to his name in every way, Bullmann sported slick hair, an expensive, Western-cut suit complete with a matching boots and belt ensemble, and a thick, gold wristwatch. He was the first person I remember meeting who displayed Christian bling. He had a Bible that doubled as a car-jack, and he could lead a fire hydrant to faith in Christ.

Bullmann was a real, live evangelist. He got on a city bus and led a guy to the Lord two stops later. He always flew on Southwest Airlines so he could change seats and lead more people to Christ. I think he led an entire tramcar to Christ in the Atlanta Airport between Gate B and baggage claim. He spent at least two days every week knocking on doors and *always* procured names of people who prayed to know Christ. I asked him how he did all that, and I remember his answer: “Jesus sends us out to bear fruit, brother!”

Donnie preached a sermon that equated fruit-bearing with convert-making. He used John 15:5 and over a dozen stories to make his point. The biblical passage likens Jesus to the vine and disciples to the branches. (I am quoting Donnie from memory, so this may not be exact, but it is close):

Healthy branches produce grapes and people can see if a vine has any grapes on it from a long way off. So, the fruit the Lord is telling us about must be something big enough to see at a distance. People are big enough to see. New Christians are big enough to see! If you're connected to Jesus, everyone will know because you'll have a bunch of new Christians hanging around you.

I liked Donnie immediately—he motivated me.

Donnie led an obnoxiously bold life for Christ. He really believed that everyone could do what he did with the same results. I adopted his bold style. I liked his sermon so much that I made it my own. I stole it. I wondered why my version had no effect on my listeners and why my one-man, loud, door knocking, witnessing campaign had no effect on people who expressed fondness for Jesus as I was telling them to repent. People cursed me, slammed doors in my face. One guy threw a beer on me and another guy sent his dog after my hide—and these were my church members! (OK, they were not really my church members.)

Bullmann did not receive much appreciation from other Pastors. I wondered why until I worked at a homeless shelter with him one day. We were supposed to be serving lunch. They put us behind a stainless steel counter, in front of a huge pot of tongue-scalding soup, and gave us plastic shower caps (why I do not have a picture of that moment is evidence of God's grace). I started sweating immediately, but not nearly as much as Donnie. He was wearing a powder blue shirt that was so starched it looked like it was made of wood. In about five minutes that shirt started changing color under the arms, then around the collar, then in a line down his back. He was wearing an apron, but you know he had to have two of those half-moons that big, sweaty guys get on their chests—*real attractive*.

Anyway, they handed us big steel ladles and told us they were opening the door. Our instructions were simple: “smile, be nice, serve soup, and keep the line moving,” but Bullmann had another plan. About the time a sweat drop laced with Final Net attempted a half gainer from the end of his nose to the lip of the big, steel pot, he announced: “Jack, you

stay here and serve soup. I'm going to do the *Lord's* work." He popped off his shower cap and emphasized the word *Lord's* as if it were a cue.

It occurred to me at that moment that soup-ladling looked pretty lame, so I asked the lady running the line if I could go do the *Lord's* work too. She patted my hand and said, "Some of God's children are too big to just smile and serve soup." I put my shower cap back on.

It turned out that Bullmann did not like to serve soup or much of anything else, and his attitude corroded a hole in his ministry. He made converts, but evidently not too many disciples. I still see him every couple years. He generally has a new job and his resume in his pocket. He has very little fruit. Disciples walk in the way of fruit-bearing, and the fruit is two, intertwined and inseparable varieties: saved souls and good deeds.

Every year, when I read John 15, I remember that a disciple who bears fruit introduces people to Christ and performs good deeds. A thorough interpretation of fruit-bearing includes the good works a disciple spontaneously does because he or she loves Christ.¹⁷

Charles Roesel built a huge church outside Orlando by ministering to the needs of people in his community. His church members run a school, a laundry, a carwash, feed people and house homeless men and women, care for children, and operate a medical clinic. They use it all to make it easy for people to know Christ personally. They help people and they talk about Jesus a lot, and thousands come. That's bearing fruit. Roesel told me that the main reason churches do not grow is that, "People give first class loyalty to third class causes. Evangelism is not our priority [in the SBC]."¹⁸ That's from a guy who sacrificed his time and ambitions building a big church in a small town by doing community service projects.

Church planters also make sacrifices in order to bear fruit. They have to pick up a cross.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

When Jesus told his followers to pick up a cross and bear it, he knew what he was saying, and believers have stumped their toes on his words ever since.¹⁹ Cross-bearing is not fun; it is painful. It means dying to sin and rising to redemption, to be sure, but it does not stop there. The way of the cross means hosting my own "white funeral;" laying me down to

¹⁷George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 273. Hans Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, 71, quoted in Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 161.

¹⁸Personal conversation with Charles Roesel, Atlanta, GA, July 30, 2007. Dr. Roesel is the former Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Leesburg, FL.

¹⁹Luke 9:23.

die to everything in me that is not of Christ. The way of the cross is dying to oneself in faith that people will find Jesus alive in him.²⁰

People talk of their rebirth as though they just witnessed their own deaths, when often they merely witnessed the death of an idea that life was good enough without Jesus in it. There is nothing light or small in admitting that one needs Christ, but bearing one's cross (voluntarily ceasing to be self-directed) weighs more heavily. The former weighs on our mind, but the latter weighs down our soul and is crushing. The way of the cross crushes the strongest, most confident man or woman. It crushed Jesus.

The crushing weight of the cross is the Potter's hands mashing clay into something useful to his purposes. People—I, anyway—hold wickedly selfish thoughts and ambitions inside themselves like so many clods of dirt, pebbles, and sticks in a hunk of clay fresh from the riverbank. God says, "Carry the cross," so that he may use it to mash all that junk out. He is looking for men and women willing to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."²¹ The cross presses selfishness out of a person until "selfish motives and purposes . . . will no longer be the center around which one builds his life."²²

What on earth does all this have to do with church planters? It seems to be relevant to all disciples. Church planting, however, tends to test one a bit more intensely than other kingdom tasks (indicated by the high failure rates among church planters). God tends to allow a good bit of the harshness of life to fall on the backs of church planters. Planters constantly battle to defeat the natural human tendency toward placing themselves at the center of the work. Disciples walk the way of the cross, and church planters seem to need to learn the way of the cross early. The cross represents a close kin to obedience in the way of the Lord, which is our final category.

THE WAY OF THE LORD

The way of the Lord is simple obedience. Just as Christ, the Word of God incarnate, obeyed the Father, the disciple obeys the Word of God. If God calls one to plant a church, he should get about the business. If God calls him to another area, then he should make disciples as best as he can there. Either way, Christ's "follow me" is an ongoing invitation offering no options other than to follow him without grumbling or questioning.²³

Why would a believer want to do anything other than follow Christ joyfully? Jesus came to the world to reveal God to us. Following him opens a person up to his revelation of himself. Once we have received Christ, he goes to the world to reveal Christ to them.

²⁰Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, entry for January 15.

²¹Matt. 5:48.

²²Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 162-63.

²³Ibid., 164; Matt. 4:19, 8:22, 10:38; Phil. 2:14.

Believers walk through life as God's incarnate ambassadors if they walk in the way of the Lord.²⁴

How does one follow Christ today? Does he merely read the Bible and do precisely what it says? If it were that simple, every believer would harass the Jews first, the wander around the Middle East for a few years, and some have tried that route. More likely, walking in the way of the Lord means taking steps to obey the principles Christ laid down, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, and respecting the instruction of wise teachers in the faith.²⁵

Of first importance is the principle of giving up what one thinks is his. "For the chosen few that gathered around [Christ, the way of the Lord] meant abandonment to everything."²⁶ A disciple today follows Christ when he willingly abandons personal ownership of all things, accepts the role of a bondservant-steward over all that Christ has given him, and lives in a way that reflects his decision.

Giving up ownership of a car or house while being allowed complete control over its use seems easy. A rougher road involves separation from the security of high-paying jobs, loving parents and siblings, and the culture with which someone is familiar and comfortable—and this all to plant a church that will likely fail in five years. The way of the Lord is not normally a parade up Easy Street. It is often a lonely path with few companions, especially for church planters. A feeling of loneliness does not, however, mean one is actually alone. Christ promises that he has gone before and will continue alongside his disciple.²⁷

Moreover, the command to follow Christ is not a threat backed up with a will-bending hammer. Rather than demanding conformity, God's call protects the disciple's freedom. At the same time, the Lord gives his disciple the necessary faith, direction, and courage to follow.²⁸

CONCLUSION

While he did not speak directly to the training of church planters, Maston's work provides our discipline with a good place to start. Discipleship can be measured. The Lord left church leaders with a series of objective criteria to assess and equip candidates for missionary work. This is ripe for additional research, and will yield helpful insights for future generations.

²⁴Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 163.

²⁵Heb. 13:17.

²⁶Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 164.

²⁷Matt. 28:20.

²⁸ Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 164.

Assessment in humility can only come from someone who has known a candidate for several years and in a variety of situations. All of us want to think that references can be trusted, but we know better. We can find no substitute for the honest appraisal of people who spent time together. On the field, humility can be measured whenever a church planter meets with his field supervisor. Either the candidate takes instruction or he does not.

Forgiveness can be measured by carefully listen to a person recount his painful memories and experiences of forgiving others. Simple questions on an assessment form can reveal whether or not a man willingly serves others, but more reliable data come from working alongside a person making the call on whom to support. Real knowledge in a man's qualifications will require denominational directors and equippers (including me) to know someone well enough to *see* him forgive others, and to do community service projects alongside candidates for church planting funding *before* signing off.

Similarly, ministry partners can give insight on whether a man is a soul-winner or timid in sharing his faith. There is no reason to place church planting resources in the hands of a timid witness.

Walking under the cross takes years of practice as does walking in the way of the Lord. Nothing beats expressions of obedience better than experiences of obedience. It makes sense to start churches only with men for whom starting things by sacrificing their agendas and obeying Christ through tough times has become the norm. Until a man *and his wife* establish a record of personal sacrifice and obedience, no one can know if they have ordered their lives around Christ. A legitimate church planter will have a track record of following Christ's call. Assessors will want examples of times when the candidate exercised faith to continue along a significant path with nothing more than a prayerful leading and one or two Scriptures keeping him or her going.

Church planter assessment and training requires time and personal contact to implement and measure. Equippers can offer a series of assignments in the areas of evangelism and the development of at least one small, discipleship groups composed of new or near-believers recruited by the student. Ultimately, the path suggested by this study is one of year-long internships supervised by experienced disciples. As leaders give assignments, the degree to which the intern follows his or her assignment and the attitude displayed gives a reliable reading on his potential for multiplying disciples in the future.