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# Shaped By Calling: Establishing a Healthy Trajectory for Discipleship

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SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

SHAPED BY CALLING

ESTABLISHING A HEALTHY TRAJECTORY FOR DISCIPLESHIP

SUBMITTED TO DR. ED SMYTH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THEO 6995 THESIS  
PROJECT FOR MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY  
CHUCK J. SHOCKI  
MAY, 17TH, 2017

Shaped by Calling  
Establishing a Healthy Trajectory for Discipleship

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts  
Christian Studies

2017

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE. BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND.....	13
CHAPTER TWO. AIMLESS DISCIPLES.....	19
CHAPTER THREE. WHERE THE CALL TO FOLLOW IS GOING.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR. DYING AS A WAY OF LIVING.....	43
CHAPTER FIVE. THE FREEDOM TO BE FOR OTHERS.....	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	69

## Abstract

The call of the first disciples reported in Mark 1:17 provides significant commentary on the essential attributes necessary for authentic life changing discipleship. In His words, "Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men" Jesus establishes a paradigm for discipleship that is at once an invitation into a master/student relationship (i.e. "*Follow me*") that would engage his followers in a transformational process (i.e. "*and I will make you become*"), that would eventuate in their being shaped for *a specific vocation* (i.e. "*fishers of men*"). In this prototypical summons, these elements of following, becoming, and out-reaching should be viewed as the indispensable DNA of healthy disciple making. This paper explores how the vocation of self-giving for the purpose of communicating Good News to others is the essence of "fishing for men", and is not only how the gospel reaches out into the world, but is also the primary catalyst for the formation of Christ's image in his followers.

## Introduction

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."<sup>1</sup>*

The most commonly held belief is that the Gospel of Mark was used by Matthew and Luke as the primary source material for their Gospels. That being the case, it lends even greater weight to the idea that Jesus' call to discipleship placed at the forefront of Mark's gospel is the most primitive one we have, and in my view, the most instructive when it comes to understanding the essential nature of what Jesus had in mind when he begins the business of making disciples. According to Mark, the initial call of Jesus to become one of his disciples is first an invitation into a relationship (i.e. *"Follow me"*) that would begin a transformational process (i.e. *"and I will make you become"*), which would eventuate in becoming trained in *a specific vocation* (i.e. *"fishers of men"*). In this "prototypical" summons, these three elements should be viewed as the indispensable DNA of healthy disciple making. In the approach of Jesus, these are the essential elements whereby ordinary people like Peter and his companions come out of themselves and into a discovery of their God ordained purpose. It is my aim in this paper to show how these primitive elements are still the non-negotiable stuff of authentic transformational discipleship.

Peter Druckers, known as the father of modern business, suggests that there are two essential questions every enterprise ought to consider if they hope to achieve and sustain

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:17 ESV

success. "What business are we in?" and, logically following, "How is business?" Certainly, the church, commissioned to go in to all the world and make disciples, would have to say, "We are in the business of making disciples." However, looking through the lens of Jesus prototypical call to Peter, the answer to Drucker's first question would more accurately be stated, "We are in the business of developing Christ followers who become good at reaching others." Or perhaps for congregations of hundreds and thousands of such individuals, "We create organizations that are exceptional at reaching people!" According to Jesus, this is the business we are in.

While much of my work in this paper will be aimed at developing the idea of the essential transformation required to "catch people" in a theologically informed sense, and in the sense that Jesus demonstrated, suffice it to say for now that healthy disciple making, at least in the primitive call recorded by Mark, has a clear purpose in mind; becoming fishers of men. While this business of learning to 'catch' others may seem simplistic at the outset, (The quip, "Fishing is nothing more than a jerk on one end of the line waiting for a jerk on the other!" comes to mind), Jesus saw it in much more compelling terms. He described it as a vocation that demands "following him", "denying one's self", "taking up one's cross", "giving up one's life" all with the intent of communicating the Gospel's life changing message to others. ("Self sacrificing for the sake of others" in Volf's rich terminology)<sup>2</sup> In that process of self-giving for the sake of communicating Christ's truth to others, Jesus promises, "finding

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<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 23.

one's own life" will happen as a by-product.

On the development of Christian character, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed, "It is a Christian insight that the person as conscious being is created in the moment of being moved-- in the situation of responsibility, passionate ethical struggle, confrontation by an overwhelming claim (such as, "The fields are ripe for harvest but the workers are few"<sup>3</sup>); thus, the real person grows out of the concrete situation."<sup>4</sup> The "real person growing out the concrete situation" touches on that aspect of following Christ whereby life is found in the process of giving it up for the right reasons. "No one takes my life" Jesus said, "But I lay it down of my own accord."<sup>5</sup>

This initial foray into the dynamics of disciple making as Jesus understood it begs the second of Drucker's pivotal questions: "How is business?" How are we doing at creating disciples and developing churches that are proficient in the Jesus style of self-giving for the sake of reaching others? In his book, "Vanishing Grace",<sup>6</sup> author Philip Yancey addresses the question in part by drawing attention to the dwindling interest in evangelical churches in America: "The United States is undergoing a marked change in its attitude toward religion" Yancey writes. "When a blogger named Marc Yoder wrote about "10 Surprising Reasons Our Kids Leave Church," based on interviews in Texas (a comparatively religious state) his post

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 9:35 NIV

<sup>4</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 32.

<sup>5</sup> John 10:18 NIV

<sup>6</sup> Philip Yancey, *Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 20.



went viral. Instead of a hundred or so hits, his website got more than half a million. “There’s no easy way to say this,” wrote Yoder, in words that struck a nerve: “The American Evangelical church has lost, is losing and will almost certainly continue to lose our youth.” Writing of his own experiences while living in Chicago, Yancey shared that “No one else in our six-unit condominium, filled with mostly young urban dwellers, went to church, and most of them viewed Christians with suspicion.” In a poll of 18,000 people across 23 countries, the question was asked, “Is religion a force for good?” A total of 52 percent of those surveyed judged that religion does more harm than good, and that with a few exceptions, the countries that had the most history of Christianity—especially in Europe—had the least respect for religion as a force for good.<sup>7</sup> Surveys in the U.S. show a steady rise of the “None” category, indicating those who claim no religion on census reports.<sup>8</sup> Too often the Christian response to such trends is to accentuate the divide between church and culture “by making harsh judgments about the people they disagree with.”<sup>9</sup> By many informed measurements, the business of making disciples who are good at reaching others in the way that Jesus did does not seem to be going as Jesus intended!

John, known as "the beloved disciple" wrote, "Whoever claims to live in him must live

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Yancey, *Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 20.

<sup>8</sup> James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching The Religiously Unaffiliated*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2014) 8.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Yancey, *Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 20.

as Jesus did."<sup>10</sup> I am convinced that one of the primary reasons the business of making disciples is not going as well as it could be is that we have managed to unravel in our thinking and in our practice the DNA of Christ's primitive call to follow him into a transformational relationship that eventuates in the vocation of self-giving for the purpose of effectively communicating the good news of God's kingdom to others...as Christ did. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son"<sup>11</sup> reminds us that genuine love first and foremost requires sacrificial engagement. Bonhoeffer writes, "Whoever evades the Earth (and by implication those who inhabit it) finds not God but only another world, his own better, lovelier, more peaceful world. He finds a world beyond to be sure, but never God's world, which is dawning in this world. Whoever evades Earth in order to find God finds only himself."<sup>12</sup> Somehow, in our current understanding of the nature of discipleship, we have managed to "evade the Earth" by separating the idea of learning about Jesus from doing what Jesus actually calls his followers to do in becoming people who, like him, are sacrificially abandoned to the task of reaching others.

I intend to demonstrate throughout this project just how the journey toward Christian maturity is catalyzed through active engagement in his mission of sacrificially reaching others in the way that he did. In almost 40 years of pastoral work, I have found this to be a truism

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<sup>10</sup> I John 2:6 NIV

<sup>11</sup> John 3:16 NIV

<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Berlin*, Edited by Larry Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 288.

both for individuals and for movements of Christ followers: Through active self-giving toward those who do not yet share our faith, we “find our lives” as Jesus said we would. When churches collectively dedicate themselves to reaching those not yet in the church, they find their best corporate lives. When we give up our preferences for the sake of reaching those who remain outside of God's redemptive care, we are living like Christ in the world, and experiencing the life he promised.

William Booth tells of a vision he once had that was the driving force behind his founding of the "Salvation Army" movement. In this vision, a multitude of people were perishing in a storm-tossed sea, but for a few who'd been pulled from the tumultuous waves to safety and onto a great rock. Though some of those in safety turned to help their perishing brethren, particularly disturbing to Booth in his vision was how most of those who'd been rescued seemed to have very little interest or concern for those whose lives were yet in peril. And thus, the mission of the Salvation Army was birthed.<sup>13</sup>

Living in Arlington, Washington, I had a first-hand encounter with an environmental disaster and human tragedy when in March of 2014 an entire mountainside gave way after weeks of soaking rain, unleashing the Oso Slide, a river of mud and debris that gathered speed and plowed through the small town of Salmon at speeds more than 100mph. In an instant, life was changed for an entire region as the community of Salmon, Washington disappeared

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<sup>13</sup> William Booth, *A Vision of the Lost*,  
[WhatSaietheScripture.com/Stories/A.Vision.For.The.Lost.html](http://WhatSaietheScripture.com/Stories/A.Vision.For.The.Lost.html)

beneath a mountain of earth. As part of a spring church clean up project that day, I was sent on a debris run that took me out Hwy 530 and up to the threshold of a disaster I knew nothing about. I marveled as police and aid units from what seemed like every county in the state formed an endless life line of vehicles trying to make their way to the slide scene. Over the ensuing days, weeks and months, our combined communities of Darrington, Arlington, and Oso drew together in exemplary fashion. From the initial volunteers who joined with search dogs and Search and Rescue units plodding through the dangerous slide area looking to save neighbors whose homes and family members were buried beneath fathoms of mud, to the elderly of our communities making warm meals for the volunteers, to the mayors and civic leaders who attempted to wrap their collective arms around their devastated neighbors, and yes, to even the regional ministerial association who came together with uncommon compassion and intentionality, our hearts were united in one common cause: to rescue and care for our devastated friends and to try and make some tangible difference in their recovery process. That dramatic cause brought out the best in us, and I'll forever think of it in terms of the value of responding to a life and death situation as one. You might say that for a season of time, we found our best selves in giving them away, together, for others. Throughout the ordeal, it seemed so natural to view one another as co-laborers in Christ serving a cause that required all of our collective efforts and individual contributions. When we gathered to plan and to pray, our collaboration was energized and our petitions were heartfelt. For a time, our primary expressions of corporate and personal spirituality were action oriented, and we

collectively were the better for it.

Framed in Wesleyan terms, intentionally prioritizing the work of the harvest can be viewed as a means of grace whereby congregations and individual members are oriented and activated toward authentic spiritual progress. In this paradigm, my ability to lovingly incarnate the Gospel and influence others toward a relationship with their Heavenly Father becomes the measurement of my progress as a Christ follower. In this paradigm, you put away the notion that Christlikeness can be attained apart from engagement in his mission of sacrificially reaching others. Discipleship and outreaching toward others must happen as one.

I've had the opportunity to witness first hand the stalemate that can settle into entire church communities when the pursuit of Christ is separated from engagement in his mission. The congregation I am privileged to lead was established over 75 years ago, and has served in its current location for over 50 years. When the congregation moved into its existing facility in 1964, it entered into what many considered its "golden age" of ministry and evangelistic effectiveness. Catalyzed through the efforts of a unified core of individuals comprised of several families from the medical community (the city's only hospital is located directly across the street from the church facility) and numerous building contractors and tradesmen, these key families shared an enthusiasm for service characterized by authentic ministry to one another (evidenced through the establishment of home groups and Sunday school discipleship programs that have continued for over 30 years); a genuine compassion and concern for the poor and impoverished of the world (evidenced both locally and globally through the

establishment of ministries that continue to serve the marginalized); and an authentic effort to share the Good News (evidenced through "home calling" and "bussing" ministries aimed at helping outsiders become insiders). The overall impact of these multifaceted efforts to love and disciple one another, to care for the poor and oppressed, and to reach out to those outside the community of faith was a strong and sustained season of growth in numbers and health for the church. At one time the congregation numbering only 50 members when it moved into its new facility grew to over 400 in weekly attendance. Conversions, baptisms, and testimonies of life change became a regular and normative part of the congregational life, causing the church to be widely recognized as the "light house" church in the area. "To know Christ and to make him known"<sup>14</sup> became the motto that summarized the missional awareness of the church in this significant and elongated season of ministry effectiveness. Over time though, things begin to change. Once vibrant and energetic families became empty nesters and retirees. Ministries that were once inclusive and community enlarging began to grow exclusive and community limiting. Medical and contracting teams that once included an evangelistic fervor begin to take on more of a service to the needy with a silent witness understanding and practice (i.e. "Preach the gospel at all times...use words only when necessary.") conversions, baptisms and stories of life transforming encounters with Jesus Christ became more lore and legend than living reality for the church and the church family begin to slip into a style of congregational life where insiders became deeply bonded to one another, and outsiders remained outsiders. Expressions

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<sup>14</sup> Arlington Free Methodist Church, "*Building for Eternity*" Campaign, 1958.

of this glacial inward turning of the church were myriad: Home groups once known for their inclusive and welcoming embrace became tightly knit communities where those in attendance logged decades of meetings and potlucks with one another, knew each other's deepest darkest secrets, and living rooms that were once open to receiving the many who were being drawn into the Body of Christ now became "too full" for new people, and the conversations "too familiar" to include those who were new to the church. Though the church retained a solid reputation as a service oriented group, conversions, baptisms and testimonies of life impacting encounters with Jesus Christ became fewer and far between, and less a normative part of the church culture. Even the mid-week "community meals" became another expression of the ingrown nature of the congregation, as outsiders finding their way into the meal often sat alone or with those they came with, with very little interaction between them and the more established members of the church. While many good and dedicated families have remained at the church, gone was the once passionate duty "to know Christ and to make him known". Even the mission statement evolved to give expression and lend validation to this new state of affairs: "Our mission is to grow together in Christ to serve the world", which looks healthy at first glance, but had become a rallying cry for drawing the ranks into closer homogeneity. Soon to follow was an escalation of internal conflict, turf wars over insignificant issues, members expecting and in some cases demanding preferential treatment, decline in church attendance, and a prevailing sense of lethargy throughout the congregation that had become separated from its reason for being.

"The church doesn't have a mission, God's mission has a church...As leaders called by God to lead in local Jesus communities, we cannot divorce mission from discipleship. Everything we do on mission must be saturated with the ethos of discipleship in the way of Jesus. We will never be the movement Jesus imagined unless we first embrace and attempt to express discipleship in its authentic Jesus-imagining form" writes Daniel Walters in his treatise "A Church for Others".<sup>15</sup> Reducing the organized church to its essence, Bonhoeffer states simply and profoundly, "The church is nothing but the part of humanity in which Christ has really taken form"<sup>16</sup> and, " Since the church is the body of Christ", he concluded that "the church is the church only when it exists for others."<sup>17</sup>

I am suggesting we return to a more Scriptural call to discipleship that invites individual and congregational transformation to happen concurrent with, or even as a by-product of self-giving outreach to outsiders. Within this model the false dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship is replaced by a more Biblical paradigm for the maturation of disciples taking place *as* they are becoming personally engaged by fulfilling daily the Great Commission and finding their unique contributions as participants in redemptive

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Walters, *A Church for Others: A Vision of the Church Inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Academia.edu).

<sup>16</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, Edit. Eberhard Bethge, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) 381.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p 382



communities that aim to live sacrificially for others as Jesus did in the world.<sup>18</sup> Here is a restatement of this perspective in axiomatic form:

*Discipleship efforts that originate with and orient toward the summons to participate with Christ in his evangelistic mission, with a primary emphasis on the call to follow Him in sacrificial self-giving for others, will be much more apt to produce mature, Christ-like disciples and healthy congregations than do discipleship efforts that lack this appropriate and Scripturally rooted outreaching, self-giving emphasis.*

The beauty of this "fishers of men and reaching others" perspective on discipleship is that it directs us toward an approach to life and worship of God that is most clearly modeled by the example and teaching of Christ in that it imitates how Christ loved God with all his heart, soul mind and strength *and* loved his neighbor as himself, it is anchored in the self-giving nature of our Triune God, and ultimately, when embraced, it contributes toward the restoration of his image in his redeemed people.

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<sup>18</sup> I John 3:16 NIV

## CHAPTER 1.

### Beginning with the End in Mind

According to Merriam-Webster, a trajectory is defined as, "A hurling across." In further defining the concept Merriam-Webster tells us that, "missiles stand a chance of hitting their target only if their trajectory has been plotted accurately." The word is used most often in physics and engineering, but not always; we can also say, for example, that the trajectory of a whole life may be set in a person's youth."<sup>19</sup> Trajectories matter; especially when the destinations in mind are ambitious and far reaching. Where you end up will always be a consequence of how you were oriented at the beginning of your journey. Trajectories matter in many sectors of our world, whether it is in projecting the value of a stock portfolio, determining the success of a business enterprise, or in establishing the happiness of a marriage relationship. One aspect of trajectory is certain: The more ambitious the target or destination, the more significantly accurate trajectories come into play. In the award-winning movie, "Hidden Figures" attention is brought to the intricate calculations required to establish accurate trajectories for launching a manned vehicle into space and plotting out it's safe return. In numerous scenes from the movie, a giant two-story blackboard forming the backdrop of the mission control room is shown overflowing with complex mathematical equations. Brilliant mathematicians scurry to and fro carrying reams of paper containing their latest computations. Others climb ladders to reach higher up the giant blackboard so they can make minute

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<sup>19</sup> Merriam-Webster, "Merriam-Webster.com, Dictionary/Trajectory"

adjustments to their trigonometric equations all with one intent in mind: Establishing accurate trajectories that will help insure a successful mission.

What does this have to with the business of disciple making? In my perspective, few things have as great an impact on the kind of disciples we are making as the trajectories we establish at the outset. In one of his summons to prospective disciples, Jesus challenged his listeners to consider the costs *before* taking on the task.<sup>20</sup> When it comes to the ultimately important matter of shaping lives in the right direction the proverb speaks succinctly and eloquently: "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." The writer is telling us that beginnings matter; perhaps more than we'll ever fully appreciate.

It behooves us to ask the question: What is the clear aim at the beginning of our disciple making? Where we end up will be profoundly impacted by how we answer that question at the start. Responses to that inquiry often include the following: "My aim is to grow people into the image of Christ; to present every person mature in Christ."<sup>21</sup> Or, "My aim is to develop disciples who love one another. Jesus himself said, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples!'"<sup>22</sup> The Apostle Paul expresses similar sentiments to his young prodigy Timothy: "The aim of our teaching is love that comes from a pure heart, a sincere faith, and a good conscience."<sup>23</sup> What mentor wouldn't be delighted to have an abundance of these qualities

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<sup>20</sup> Luke 14:28 NIV

<sup>21</sup> Colossians 1:28 NIV

<sup>22</sup> John 13:35 NIV

<sup>23</sup> II Timothy 1:5 NIV

evidenced in the lives of those whom they seek to influence along the path toward Christian maturity? My contention is this: The likelihood of influencing those we lead toward any of these highly valued virtues with any degree of consistency is severely compromised in the absence of establishing an accurate trajectory of self-giving engagement in the evangelistic mission of Christ from the very beginning. Something compelling must change the inward focus of would be disciples at the outset, lest all attempts to grow in Christ likeness be interpreted from a self-oriented and self-serving world view. Elliston highlights this disposition as one of Bonhoeffer's key insights in his work, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self." He writes:

In Bonhoeffer's worldview, fallen humans, in Adam, are incapable of living beyond themselves. This is the very essence of the fall: separating themselves from God, humans became their own gods and grew inward upon themselves. Expressive of this inward turn, humans developed a profound ability to distance themselves from all others to live lives characterized by an orientation that could do nothing but interpret everything in light of *their own inward focused orientation*.<sup>24</sup>

According to Bonhoeffer, every human being participates in either Adam or Christ, and this participation governs that person's relation to both God and others. The contrast between being in Adam and being in Christ is also a contrast between disunity and wholeness, death and life, and *an inward turn* and *an outward turn*. Being in Adam indicates the perversion of the whole human being. Human beings now do not know themselves rightly; they can know

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<sup>24</sup> Clark J. Elliston "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self" (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 24-25.

themselves neither to be good nor to be evil. "Set adrift from its moorings, human being in Adam is characterized by its attempt to locate and to justify itself through its own resources."<sup>25</sup> Bonhoeffer refers to this "in Adam" state and subsequent attempts to "locate and to justify itself through its own resources" as idealism-the reflection of human being in Adam on itself, a state which "cannot help but fail precisely because it stems from an overestimation of the human being."<sup>26</sup> For Bonhoeffer, being in Adam leaves the self isolated, leads to domination of others and leads the self into ever further disunity with itself."<sup>27</sup> Elliston summarizes this "in Adam" perspective of Bonhoeffer's in this way:

Being in Adam not only tears humans away from God, but from other humans. The sundering of relation with the Creator tears the self away from all genuine relation, including relation with other human beings. Even the most ethical idealism, one that acknowledges limit but locates that limit as self-initiated, cuts off the self from other human beings. This severing of genuine human relationality results in domination of persons by others.<sup>28</sup>

Human idealism cannot help but fail precisely because it stems from an overestimation of the human being. For Bonhoeffer, idealism's elevation of human reason results not in intimate knowledge of God, but in alienation from God. Idealism sunders the self from God by reducing God to an object of reflection in consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Clark J. Elliston *"Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self"* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, 46.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

Some will argue that anyone with faith in Christ is no longer "in Adam", but rather is now "a new creation in Christ"<sup>30</sup>, and therefore Bonhoeffer's insights on the consequences of living from an "in Adam" state no longer apply. A quick review of most of the New Testament letters quickly dispels that notion! "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Paul asked.<sup>31</sup> Rather than denying the possibility of disciples and discipleship going extremely bad, a more useful consideration would be, "Does this "in Adam" picture painted by Bonhoeffer, Volf and others accurately describe the trajectory of modern day discipleship? Do their descriptions draw attention to trends that describe much of the modern church? It has been my observation that disciples and congregations of disciples that do not have their focus on the harvest of humanity as Jesus described it easily and naturally turn inward upon themselves. Lacking a Spirit inspired fervor to bear individual and corporate witness to the message of reconciliation to a world in need of reconciliation, the gaze of Christ followers easily turns inward, and the outcomes often match the descriptions given above.

A more potentially fruitful consideration, is to ask how these trajectories might be influenced if we clarified our thinking about the initial call to discipleship. I contend that the types of disciples we are reproducing would change dramatically simply by understanding that the call to salvation in Christ is at the same time a call to learn from Jesus how to find our lives by giving them away for those not yet in the faith. The life and teachings of Jesus present

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<sup>30</sup> II Corinthians 5:17 NIV

<sup>31</sup> Galatians 3:3 ESV

ample evidence that this call to "lift up our eyes and see that the fields are ripe for harvest" is a God ordained vocation; a vocation that has the potential to divert our attention away from our "in Adam" selves, and into a more captivating, other oriented adventure with God in Christ.

## Chapter 2.

### Aimless Disciples

The tragedy of not placing this call to join Jesus in sacrificially reaching the unreached at the forefront of discipleship is twofold: The most obvious is that people are not reached. The reward of Christ's sufferings are not realized. The plentiful harvest of each generation is never gathered, and many who are desired by God are never compellingly and lovingly notified of his benevolent will. But the second tragic consequence is equally sad. Disciples are not made to take on the full "personhood" of their Savior. In Bonhoeffer's view, self-generated attempts to develop spiritually are little more than "proud children of Adam" seeking to restore the lost image of God in themselves by means of their own efforts.

The more seriously and devotedly they strive to regain what was lost, and however convinced and proud they are of their apparent victory in achieving this, the deeper the contradiction to God grows. Their distorted form, which they modeled after the image of the god of their own imaginative projections, resembles more and more the image of Satan, even though they may be unaware of this.<sup>32</sup>

When it came to interpersonal relationships, Bonhoeffer spoke of the inability of unregenerate humans to approach others with anything but the need to dominate them in relationship. "In the fall, human beings have torn themselves loose from community with God, and, therefore, also from other human beings, and now they stand alone, that is, in untruth."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 41.

<sup>33</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 51



Living out a spirituality that is still essentially sourced in and revolving around self, disciples with this orientation know little of the call to become like Christ in giving themselves up for the undeserving. Congregations of such disciples often become members of closed fraternities given to combative interactions with the very ones Christ would send them to rescue, and in many cases, validating the accuracy of Bonhoeffer's perspectives on the "in Adam" state. Bonhoeffer speaks of those who would escape the world for an otherworldly spiritual kingdom, in the end finding only alienation from the world.<sup>34</sup> This sense of being "alienated from the world" is in stark contrast to the Incarnate Christ who became flesh and dwelt among us; who became fully engaged with the world, not to judge it but to save it through the investment of his own life.<sup>35</sup>

In her book, "The Church for the World", Jennifer McBride likens the church "in Adam" to one that desires "that the God it serves be revealed not through suffering and the cross but through acts of victory and omnipotence."<sup>36</sup> Expressive of Bonhoeffer's perspectives, McBride contends that this "theology of glory neglects the importance of God's Trinitarian and Christological identity and in turn presents a false depiction of a dominating God based on an incomplete understanding of the nature of God's power and triumph"<sup>37</sup> Seeing parallels from the Transfiguration scene, McBride suggests that faith communities steeped in a theology of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>35</sup> John 1:14 NIV

<sup>36</sup> Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology for Public Witness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 5.

<sup>37</sup> IBID, 5.

glory would prefer to "leave the uncertainties of life in a fallen world (i.e. evade the world), and instead, along with Peter and John, settle on the mountain of transfiguration and witness to an exalted Christ" from positions of power.<sup>38</sup>

The disposition of evading the world is a contradiction to the summons of Christ to join him in his incarnational mission of "going into the world".<sup>39</sup> The evasive, unengaged church in Adam, sheltered within the walls of a self-generated spirituality, acting according to its unregenerate disposition, seeks to govern and influence the world from a safe distance.<sup>40</sup> Volf sees this sort of spirituality and religious movement as a side stepping of the scandal of the cross (more on that concept in my next chapter) whereby the innocent are willing to donate themselves in solidarity with and on behalf of sinful others. To the contrary, disciples in Adam attempt to dominate and legislate others through moralistic strategies. Volf explains that, "Modernity has set its high hopes (of influencing and governing others) in the twin strategies of social control and rational thought. The right design and the final argument can be, must be, and will be found, is modernity's credo."<sup>41</sup> The wisdom of the cross, to the contrary, teaches that ultimately salvation does not come either from the miracle of the right design or from the wisdom of the final argument. Volf contends that we cannot and ought not dispense with design and argument:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>39</sup> John 20:21

<sup>40</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 26.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 25.

If 'design' and 'argument' are not to create larger wounds than the ones they are seeking to heal, 'design' and 'argument' will themselves need to be healed by the 'weakness' and 'foolishness' of the self-giving love of the cross. This 'weakness' is 'stronger' than social control and this 'foolishness' is 'wiser' than rational thought.<sup>42</sup>

A quick look at church history, history itself for that matter, provides ample evidence to validate Volf's perspective on the hazards of the church's attempts to "dominate and legislate through moralistic" and unengaged strategies. "Design and argument" dressed in pious robes of Christian morality have wrecked havoc on societies and rendered the church incapable of demonstrating the reconciling message of the cross. Proponents of these approaches, often more reflective of an unregenerate need to dominate others, themselves need to be healed by the weakness and foolishness of sacrificial love for the least of these, even to the point of suffering the violence and abandonment that are central aspects of the scandal of the cross, if the church is to not go on creating wounds larger than the ones they are seeking to heal!

Given the lack of accurate self-awareness when viewing life through our in Adam lenses, this sort of change in perspective in the lives of professing Christians and their organizations is not easy to come by. "Much of the power of evil lies in the perverse truth it tells about the warped well-being it creates," Volf notes. "To such a real sense of well-being of none the-less deeply sick persons Jesus was referring when he said, "those who are well have no need of a physician" (Mark 2:17). "The truth about their sense of well-being holds them

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 26

captive to the lie about their illness."<sup>43</sup> Writing from the backdrop of racial and ethnic violence in his Croatian homeland, Volf gives a first-hand account of the hideous and destructive nature of this sort of blind spirituality:

The overriding commitment to their culture serves churches worst in situations of conflict. Churches, the presumed agents of reconciliation, are at best impotent and at worst accomplices in the strife. The empirical research conducted by Ralph Premdas in a number of countries has shown 'that the inter-communal antipathies present in the society at large are reflected in the attitudes of churches and their adherents' (Premdas 1994, 55). Though the clergy are often invited to adjudicate, the reconciling thrust quickly evaporates after the initial effort."<sup>44</sup> Along with their parishioners the clergy are often "trapped within the claims of their own ethnic or cultural community" and thus serve as "legitimizers of ethnic conflict", their genuine desire to take seriously the Gospel call to the ministry of reconciliation notwithstanding.<sup>45</sup>

This grievous account of the kind of ugliness of unredeemed religion whose reconciling thrust quickly evaporates after the initial effort evidences yet again the accuracy of Bonhoeffer's view that humans "in Adam"<sup>46</sup> are incapable of accurately "locating themselves"<sup>47</sup> and responding to real conflicts with anything other than the need to dominate or isolate. Volf notes that in times of intense social upheaval "even a genuine desire for reconciliation is absent. Cultural identity insinuates itself with religious force; Christian and cultural

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<sup>43</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 88-89.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 55-56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 56-57.

<sup>46</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

commitments merge. Such sacralization of cultural identity is invaluable for the parties in conflict because it can transmute what is in fact a murder into an act of piety."<sup>48</sup>

Blind to the betrayal of Christian faith that both such sacralization of cultural identity and the atrocities it legitimizes represent, the 'holy' murderers can even see themselves as the Christian faith's valiant defenders (as Serbian fighters have in their recent war against Muslims in the former Yugoslavia). Christian communities, which should be "the salt" of the culture, are too often as insipid as everything around them.<sup>49</sup>

While *not yet* manifest in the outright violence that was so central to the ethnic wars of Volf's homeland, it's not difficult to identify the trajectories that would take the American church toward increased hostility with a culture that has in many ways decided upon the church's irrelevancy. Lacking the self-awareness to make an adjustment toward love and sacrifice, and one that is more consistent with the cross of Christ, in many cases the Christian reaction is to up the rhetoric of judgment toward a culture that has rejected the church and its message.

The pursuit of false purity emerges as a central aspect of sin—the enforced purity of a person or a community that sets itself apart from the defiled world in a hypocritical sinlessness and excludes the boundary breaking other from its heart and its world. Sin is here the kind of purity that wants the world cleansed of the other rather than the heart cleansed of the evil that drives people out by calling those who are clean 'unclean' and refusing to help make clean those who are unclean.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 7.

Speaking as a witness to the atrocities of "hypocritical sinlessness" in the church, Volf reasons that sin is the will to purity turned away from the spiritual life of the self to the cultural world of the other, transmuted from spirituality into politics:

We want a pure world and push the 'others' out of our world; we want to be pure ourselves and eject 'otherness' from within ourselves. The 'will to purity' contains a whole program for arranging our social worlds—from the inner worlds of our-selves to the outer worlds of our families, neighborhoods, and nations. It is a dangerous program because it is a totalitarian program, governed by a logic that reduces, ejects, and segregates. Confirming over and over again the age-old theological wisdom that at the heart of sin "lies the persistent refusal to tolerate a sense of sin" (Plantinga 1995, 99), perpetrators tirelessly generate their own innocence, and do so by the double strategy of denying the wrongdoing and re-interpreting the moral significance of their actions.<sup>51</sup>

How completely contrary these dispositions are to the indisputable wisdom of Jesus who counseled his followers to "remove the plank from your own eye before attempting to remove the speck from your brother's!"<sup>52</sup> Lacking a more accurate discipleship trajectory of seeking to become like him in his death and thereby joining him in his mission of reaching others through self-giving, we choose instead to become skilled at accumulating religious knowledge and rehearsing it with each other, and worse yet, using it to fortify an "us vs. them" mentality that pits the religious church against the irreligious world. Is it any wonder that the majority of traditional denominations are shrinking in their impact rather than flourishing in a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 7:5 NIV

time when the multitudes are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd<sup>53</sup> and in the eyes of Jesus ripe for a revelation of the self-sacrificing God of reconciliation? Regardless of the window dressing, this sort of spirituality is in Adam in its clearest form. While not (yet) reaching the extremes of open warfare, the trends indicate that much of American Christianity is on a trajectory leading down these dark roads.

It's been my observation that far too many discipleship efforts are attempts to build virtues on this sort of cracked foundation. While the focus remains inward, the accumulation of knowledge can do nothing but develop a spirituality that interprets even the most altruistic truths in light of its own continued need to dominate or isolate from others. These are the kernels from which ancient and modern-day Pharisee-ism grows. "Go and learn what this means" Jesus said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."<sup>54</sup> As history unfolds, Jesus predicted that there would be times "when most men's love will grow cold."<sup>55</sup> Rather than incarnating in each generation the kingdom of Jesus metaphors of "leaven" that spreads its positive influence throughout its environment or "a great shrub" that offers shelter to the birds of the air, the church can more aptly be described as a fortress protecting its own from the brokenness of its surrounding culture. Bonhoeffer accurately understood that the modern church's fight for self-preservation rendered it "incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to the

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<sup>53</sup> Matthew 9:36 NIV

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 9:13 NIV

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 24:12 NIV

world.”<sup>56</sup> “If the salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?” asked Jesus rhetorically. Since you cannot season it, tasteless salt “is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Matthew 5:13). Yet the very warning about being thrown out calls for “the bitter cry of repentance,” as Niebuhr put it, and invites a turnabout.<sup>57</sup>

"But what should we turn to?" When the church, called to live as Christ did in the world, is so dramatically off track, the question is an important one. As I have contended, my answer is to begin by returning to a more Scriptural understanding of and call to discipleship. A more Biblically grounded call to follow Jesus, coupled with the expectation of being changed into someone who is made capable of reaching back to those from whom they were called out from establishes a far different trajectory. Rather than a summons to come away from the world never to return; (i.e. "evading the world"), the primitive and ever powerful call of Jesus invites disciples to be made into the kind of humans who are to be sent into the world just as Jesus was, incarnating the life, death and burial of Christ yet again on behalf of the world. This is an essential "solidarity" with the world in Bonhoeffer's thought for the purpose of bringing redemption to the world. As in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Moses, "one who is drawn out"<sup>58</sup> becomes the deliverer used by God to draw his own out of bondage. As with the Apostle Paul, who yearned for the redemption of his Jewish countrymen, who is called away to become a follower of Christ and an apostle to the Gentiles, becomes one who is

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<sup>56</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 300.

<sup>57</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 36.

<sup>58</sup> Exodus 2:10 NIV



willing even to give up his own standing with God for the sake of his fellow Jews.<sup>59</sup> Volf highlights this "coming away from in order to return to" disposition with great insight:

The distance from our own culture which is born of the Spirit of the new creation should loosen the grip of our culture on us and enable us to live with its fluidity and affirm its hybridity. Other cultures are not a threat to the pristine purity of our cultural identity, but a potential source of its enrichment. Inhabited by people who are courageous enough not simply to belong, intersecting and overlapping cultures can mutually contribute to the dynamic vitality of each. A truly catholic personality must be an evangelical personality; a personality brought to repentance and shaped by the Gospel and engaged in the transformation of the world.<sup>60</sup>

But how can the poison of being in Adam be extracted from the worldviews held so deeply by so many Christ followers? In a conversation Jesus had with one religious leader who seemingly was attempting to bring his in Adam perspectives into a relationship with Christ, Jesus simply said, "You must be born again."<sup>61</sup> Bonhoeffer cautions against viewing Christ's call for a radically new life simply from a creedal perspective: "Just as the form of Christ is misperceived where he is essentially understood as a teacher of a pious and good life, so formation of human beings is wrongly understood where one sees it only as guidance for a pious and good life."<sup>62</sup> While many may interpret this dramatic necessity of being born again as acknowledging some sort of creedal agreement, Jesus is implying a much more radical change of being; one in which pride and moral superiority are slain and the gaze is turned

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<sup>59</sup> Romans 9:3 NIV

<sup>60</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 50.

<sup>61</sup> John 3:3-8 NIV

<sup>62</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 92

away from personal merit (or lack thereof), and toward a desperate awareness of the need to be led by Christ and remade in his likeness. This sort of following and becoming is described by Bonhoeffer in this way: "Being in Christ is a turning toward the other 'that has come to one from without'. Being in Christ is an orientation of the self, which leads to creatureliness, *to others*, and to wholeness."<sup>63</sup> In my view, this is the essence of what Jesus had in mind, not only when he said, "You must be born again", to Nicodemus, but likewise when he says to all of us, "Follow me and I will make you become a fisher of men."<sup>64</sup>

As the disciple is oriented, so develops the character! Trajectories matter when it comes to how disciples are made and Christian character is formed, and if the original trajectory is off, the eventual destination will look nothing like what Jesus calls us to become and reproduce. Many of the aberrations and atrocities all too common in the history of the church might well have been set in motion by poorly calculated and unclear notions of discipleship trajectory instead of emerging from the unified purposes of calling, following, becoming, sacrificing and reaching. Much of this business we are in of trying to make Christ honoring disciples could be improved dramatically simply by rethinking and returning to the original summons Jesus made to ordinary men and women, and giving careful thought to how that summons *to become someone who is for others* eternally changes the trajectories of those who take it to heart. The summons to follow and become a fisher of men sovereignly meets our greatest

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<sup>63</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 62.

<sup>64</sup> Mark 1:16 NIV

need in that it orients the disciple toward Christ and at the same time, towards humanity, a crucial two-sided orientation if authentic transformation is to happen. "Follow me" Jesus said, "and I will make you become fishers of men"<sup>65</sup> could well be understood as, "Follow me and I will recreate you into someone who, like me, exists for others!"

Perhaps it should come as no surprise, that in the midst of his conversation with a religious leader still operating with in Adam perspectives, Jesus would direct the conversation toward the cross and the ultimate sacrifice of himself for sinful humanity. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."<sup>66</sup> This dying that Jesus speaks of is central and unavoidable, not only for saving the world from the death of sin, but in his mind, for the transformation of all those who would follow him into life. In a thought provoking statement, the writer to the Hebrews declares that, "It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."<sup>67</sup> It was necessary, even for the sinless Christ, to become the perfect salvation for humanity by sacrificially giving himself for those he came to rescue. That his disciples would find their greatest hope of transformation by traveling the same path is irrefutable.

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<sup>65</sup> Mark 1:17 ESV

<sup>66</sup> John 3:14 NIV

<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 2:10 NIV

## Chapter 3.

### Where the Call to Follow is Going

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich"<sup>68</sup>*

"I find that I am again in travail, until Christ is formed in you" the Apostle Paul wrote.

In another of his letters the Apostle Paul refers to the zenith of human maturity as, "the fullness of the stature of Christ". But what exactly is the fullness of the stature of Christ?

"Beloved, it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that one day we will become like him for we shall see him as he is."<sup>69</sup> Countless volumes have been written attempting to define and describe the character and nature of Son of God as he is revealed in human form.

The evangelist who portrayed himself as "the one whom Jesus loved" said the world could not contain what could be written about him<sup>70</sup>, let alone this thesis project! While a comprehensive Christological analysis is well beyond the scope of this work, what I will attempt to do in this chapter is to bring to light how Christ demonstrates and articulates his self-giving mission for the sake of sinners and connects it to his call to discipleship. Establishing this significant trajectory will set the stage for proving the main point of this paper: *Discipleship efforts that originate with and orient around the summons to participate with Christ in his evangelistic mission, with a primary emphasis on the invitation to follow Jesus in sacrificial self-giving for the unreached,*

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<sup>68</sup> II Corinthians 8:9 NIV

<sup>69</sup> I John 4 NIV

<sup>70</sup> John 20:30-31 NIV

*have a much higher likelihood of producing mature, Christ like disciples and healthy congregations than do discipleship efforts that lack this appropriate and Scripturally rooted outreaching emphasis.*

A friend of mine shares a story from his boyhood days working on his father's ranch in Southern Oregon. He tells of one particular day when his father, a man of few words, entrusted him with the task of cutting wood slats for a section of fence they were repairing. After cutting the initial slat to exact measurements, his father instructed him to use *that slat* as his template. "Follow the pattern I've set for you son, and reproduce a hundred just like it" were his instructions. The process worked to perfection on the first dozen or so slats, but somewhere in the process my friend swapped out the original template for one of the slats he had cut using the template as a guide. Thinking this was actually a bit faster and more convenient, he began using whatever reproduced slat happened to be handy for his measurements, rather than staying with the original template his father had created. He was quite pleased with his progress until he heard the bark of his old man yelling, "Wayne! What are you doing?" As he walked to where the fence was going up, he was horrified to see growing gaps and deformities along the fence line as each of his reproduced slats became increasingly less like the original!

In Bonhoeffer's famous "Cost of Discipleship" he ends with a chapter on "The Image of Christ". Following Christ as a disciple is described by Bonhoeffer as "being conformed to the image of Christ...We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of Christ Incarnate, crucified and glorified...He has become like a man, so that people should be like

him." One day, according to John the Beloved, all true disciples will be perfected in the image and character of Christ, and a large part of the perfecting will take place simply by seeing him as he is. The more accurately Jesus is seen, the more authentically humans are enabled and empowered to become like him, and the more hope they have of living as he did in the world.

In his insightful views on the nature of mature personhood, Dietrich Bonhoeffer believes, "The structure of human being is seen only in the form of Jesus Christ. The ethical task is to conform to Christ, who reveals himself to humankind."<sup>71</sup> In Christ, new options become available, but are only actualized in the life of the disciple through acceptance of one's creaturely limitations, primarily that of being dependent on Christ to mediate (be in the center) of all human relationships. "Jesus Christ, as God's Logos, stands over against knowledge that has no access to the reality of Christ. This resistance to the false knowledge of human beings characterizes the transcendent," Bonhoeffer writes. "From outside, Christology becomes the center of knowledge. The Logos we are talking about here is a person. This human person is the transcendent."<sup>72</sup> Interpreting Bonhoeffer's writings on the emergence of personhood, Elliston writes, "Only God, in Christ, serves as a barrier that can draw the self out of its own thinking, its own reflection on itself."<sup>73</sup> "Only in pure orientation toward Christ are the echoless

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<sup>71</sup> Clark J. Elliston *"Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self"* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 31-32.

<sup>72</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 1, Edited by Joachim von Soosten and Clifford J. Green, Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 50.

<sup>73</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 35.

cries from solitude transformed into the prayers of a free child before the Father."<sup>74</sup> In his book, "Ethics", Bonhoeffer reasons that, "Whenever the Scriptures speak of 'forming' they are concerned only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ...Formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as conformation with the unique form of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again."<sup>75</sup>

The first disciples certainly understood this orientation as the pathway to maturity.

<sup>76</sup>"We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten" they wrote, and thereby extended an invitation for any who aspire to grow in Christ, to likewise "behold his glory." John begins his first epistle with the words, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."<sup>77</sup>

John's words underscore our only real hope of ever being transformed into the stature of Christ: A genuine experience of his divine humanity. 'Hearing', 'seeing', 'looking upon' and 'touching with our hands' are descriptions of proximity and relationship. The kind of

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<sup>74</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. Translated by H. Martin Rumscheidt, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996)

<sup>75</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 199.

<sup>76</sup> John 1:14 NIV

<sup>77</sup> I John 1:1-2 NIV

proximity that breeds familiarity and the kind of relationship that catalyzed transformation in the first disciples. Instead of being lords in their own image, God transforms human beings into the image of the "new" human being, Christ. In pointing toward Christ, one discovers the most genuinely human, or "new", stance of human beings to be one of "being free for" others, as opposed to "being free from" others.<sup>78</sup>

The transformation of human beings into Christ-likeness, for Bonhoeffer, is a conformation to, rather than imitation of, Christ. As I stated earlier, Bonhoeffer believed that self-generated attempts to develop spiritually are little more than "proud children of Adam seeking to restore the lost image of God in themselves by means of their own efforts". In his perspective:

The more seriously and devotedly they strive to regain what was lost, and however convinced and proud they are of their apparent victory in achieving this, the deeper the contradiction to God grows. Their distorted form, which they modeled after the image of the god of their own imaginative projections, resembles more and more the image of Satan, even though they may be unaware of this.<sup>79</sup>

Contrast that self styled spirituality with the one who undergoes authentic transformation worked by God: "To be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ is not an ideal of realizing some kind of similarity with Christ which we are asked to attain. It is not we who change ourselves into the image of God." The kind of formation into the full stature of Christ we have been

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<sup>78</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 41.

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003)



discussing "occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen."<sup>80</sup> This, I suggest, is a radically different sort of transformation than the didactic, "self-help" style we so often advocate in the modern church.

Summarizing Bonhoeffer's views on the formation of Christ in individuals, Andreas Pangritz writes that, "Each new approach for his (Bonhoeffer's) ethics combines 'a more resolute Christ-centeredness' with 'a more realistic openness to the world.'<sup>81</sup> This is a key aspect of our understanding of discipleship: the pathway to Christ likeness, which is a more resolute Christ-centeredness, is also the pathway to "a more realistic openness to the world"<sup>82</sup>. They are paths that travel in the same direction, and one journey cannot authentically take place without the other. To be formed in the image of Christ is to take on an uncommon (and real) openness to (and compassion toward) the world God created. In affirming that, we take yet another step closer to grasping what Jesus meant to communicate in his provoking summons to "follow me and I will make you become a fisher of men".<sup>83</sup>

In the contents of John's Gospel, Jesus supplies us with a robust and comprehensive disclosure of his whole-hearted dedication to the vocation of God as well as his summons for his disciples to join him in his mission. As John recounts the words and actions of Jesus

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<sup>80</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 41.

<sup>81</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Andreas Pangritz, *Who is Jesus Christ, for us today?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 136.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>83</sup> Mark 1:17 ESV

unfolding before him, Christ reveals his intimacy with God<sup>84</sup>, his obedience to God<sup>85</sup>, his solidarity with humanity<sup>86</sup>, and his absolute and complete dedication to sacrificing himself to fulfill the purposes of God to redeem humanity.<sup>87</sup> He identifies himself as light and life and bread and drink and truth and protection for those he came to save, truly a man for others, and he invites his disciples to join him in his great work of harvesting men and women for God.<sup>88</sup> In fact, he marvels at times that his apprentices fail to see the urgency and opportunity to which he is calling them. Nowhere do the attributes and ambitions of Christ come into greater focus than in John 13, as Jesus depicts and symbolically demonstrates exactly what it was he came to do for people, how he came to do it, and how his disciples are to carry on his work in his absence.

### **The Clearest View of God**

"It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."<sup>89</sup> With these provocative words John the Beloved introduces the scene that would demonstrate to the world the full extent of Christ's love for humanity. The setting of the Passover Meal, his words to Peter that, "'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later

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<sup>84</sup> John 14:9 NIV

<sup>85</sup> John 10:37 NIV

<sup>86</sup> John 1:14 NIV

<sup>87</sup> John 4:34 NIV

<sup>88</sup> John 4:35 NIV

<sup>89</sup> John 13:1-2 NIV

you will understand”, and Christ's own explanation recorded in the synoptic gospels all indicate that the foot washing pre-shadowed what he would soon do on the cross in laying down his life for the lives of all the 'others' in God's creation. "Greater love has no one than this" he would tell them on the way to Gethsemane, "than to lay down one's life for one's friends."<sup>90</sup> "This is how we know what love is" John would later write, "that Jesus Christ would lay down his life for us."<sup>91</sup> That Christ would give everything of himself in substitutionary sacrifice for sinful others while they are still mired in sin is indisputable. That he would call his followers to do the same is almost incomprehensible!

In unwrapping the significance of Christ's self-revelation throughout John's Gospel, in considering the outpouring of himself for others and his 'new' command to his disciples to follow his example, we have approached one of the essential observations of my thesis. The outpouring of Jesus for others in fulfillment of the call of the Father is the fullest expression of mature manhood, and is the one great example of Christian maturity he calls his disciples to emulate. This prominent theme of the self-giving Jesus is witnessed to in the synoptic Gospels as well. In his book, "The Real Jesus" Luke Timothy Johnson observes:

The canonical Gospels are remarkably consistent on one essential aspect of the identity and mission of Jesus. Their fundamental focus is not on Jesus' wondrous deeds nor on his wise words. Their shared focus is on the character of his life and death. They all reveal the same patterns of radical obedience to God and selfless love toward other people. All four of the gospel writers agree that discipleship is to follow the same messianic pattern. They do not emphasize the performance of

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<sup>90</sup> John 15:14 NIV

<sup>91</sup> I John 3:16 NIV

certain deeds or the learning of certain doctrines. They insist on living according to the same pattern of life and death shown by Jesus.<sup>92</sup>

The pattern of Christ's substitutionary death for sinners is the only reliable model for discipleship that leads toward the formation of his image in his followers. As McBride emphasizes:

The incarnation prescribes the location of the church; the life of faith, its actions; the death, its orientation to suffering and forgiveness; and the resurrection, its mission in the world. The church must fully identify with the sinful world, live for others, and bear the suffering and guilt of others as its own. A Christ-centered ecclesiology will reveal that the church exists for mission rather than mission being one of the functions of church."<sup>93</sup>

In the concept '*analogia relationis*' developed by Bonhoeffer in "Creation and Fall", he reasons that, "as God's being in Christ is a being in love and freedom for humanity, so human being in the image of God is being in a like relation of freedom and love for others. Freedom is a relationship of being free for the other."<sup>94</sup> This leads to Bonhoeffer's position that "our relation to God is a new life in existence for others, through participation in the being of Jesus."<sup>95</sup> This truth is central to the call to become a disciple of Jesus, and highlights the essence of this paper: A call to follow Jesus is also a call to give oneself to the world as he did. A call to follow Christ that does not focus on an inseparable summons to serve the world as he did is

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<sup>92</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997) 157.

<sup>93</sup> Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology for Public Witness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 5.

<sup>94</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1997) 63.

<sup>95</sup> Clark J. Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 41.

not a call to discipleship as Jesus defined it. Our very relation to God is a new life in existence for others. For Bonhoeffer, Christ's existence for others first and foremost means that the incarnate God makes himself present in the world by belonging wholly to humanity, by being thoroughly human. Appealing again to discipleship as Christological conformation or participation he writes, "Faith is participation in this being of Jesus; becoming human, going to the cross, being resurrected. Our relation to God is a new life in being there for others through participation in the being of Jesus...God in human form! The human being for others, therefore the Crucified One."<sup>96</sup>

That the church exists for those not yet in it is a central theme of Bonhoeffer's, and a key perspective in the call to authentic discipleship that incorporates the priorities of following, becoming, and reaching others. "The church is the church only when it exists for others...It must tell people of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."<sup>97</sup>

Volf underscores this perspective on the meaning of "living in Christ is to exist for others" by drawing attention to the two fundamental rituals of the church: baptism and communion. "Baptism, which marks the beginning of the Christian life and therefore determines the whole of it; and the Lord's Supper, whose reiterated celebration enacts ritually what lies at the very heart of Christian life. Baptism is an identification with the death of Christ (Romans 6:3); "crucified with Christ" through baptism, Christians live "by faith in the Son of

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<sup>96</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 381.

<sup>97</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 104.

God, who loved them and gave himself for them" (Galatians 2:20), and the Lord's supper (when) Christians remember the One who gave his body "for them" so that they would be shaped in his image (1 Corinthians 11:21, 24) and love others as he had loved them.

Participation in suffering is central to Bonhoeffer's account of conformation to Christ. In suffering, one realizes the true image of God in Christ within the world, imitating God, following Christ in a life lived for others, bearing their burdens.<sup>98</sup> Bonhoeffer goes so far as to say that, "God even lets God be pushed out of the world on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and this is precisely the way, the only way, in which God is with us and helps...Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering."<sup>99</sup> McBride adds her voice to those who would draw our attention to the nature of the One whom true disciples are called to imitate: "The witness of Christian Scriptures is clear that the God who incarnated himself into this world in Jesus Christ knew suffering, was a friend of the poor and broken, confronted empire in his own day, loved justice, and cared for the good creation God made." McBride summarizes where a church that denies the centrality of this revelation of God is heading: "Christians who intend to witness to the risen Jesus who is victorious over sin and death, yet whose witness is not definitively shaped by the crucified Christ, will not reflect a God who made himself sin to exalt the downtrodden. This witness is unfaithful to the full identity and mission of the incarnate God, harms those outside the

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<sup>98</sup> Clark Elliston, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and The Ethical Self*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 45.

<sup>99</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 264.

Christian fellowship, and effectively draws people not closer to, but further away from Christ.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology for Public Witness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 5.

## Chapter 4.

### Dying as A Way of Living

In the final volume of his classic Narnia series, C.S. Lewis' "The Last Battle"<sup>101</sup> things are not looking good for the story's protagonists – King Tirian of Narnia and children Eustice and Jill from Earth. They had daringly rescued about 30 dwarves from being enslaved by Narnia's enemies. Instead of responding with gratitude, all but one of the dwarfs refused to fight for Narnia alongside Tirian, Eustice, and Jill. The dwarfs' main complaint was they no longer trusted in Aslan after Narnia's enemies set up a false Aslan, whom they used to perpetrate atrocities. These feelings of "being taken in" and being taken advantage of eventually lead to a scene where even Aslan's most generous expressions of goodness are received with suspicion and unable to be enjoyed. Blessed by the Great Lion with an abundant feast of exotic food and drink, the dwarfs, "began eating and drinking greedily enough, but it was clear that they couldn't taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a stable. One said he was trying to eat hay and another said he had got a bit of an old turnip and a third said he'd found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said, 'Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey's been at! Never thought we'd come to this.' But very soon every Dwarf began suspecting that every other Dwarf had found something nicer than he had, and they started

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<sup>101</sup> CS Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984)



grabbing and snatching, and went on to quarreling, till in a few minutes there was a free fight and all the good food was smeared on their faces and clothes or trodden under foot. But when at last they sat down to nurse their black eyes and their bleeding noses, they all said: 'Well, at any rate, there's no Humbug here. We haven't let anyone take us in. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs!'"<sup>102</sup>

Commenting on this poignant scene, Catholic blogger Henry Karlson writes:

They had separated themselves from everyone and wanted to be kept to themselves, and this is what they got. Their actions in the world affected them so much that their ability to interpret and understand the world was changed. They had many chances to overcome this self-centered interpretation of the world, and to *give themselves over to the help of others*; but they did not. All they had in the end is an egoistic interpretation of the world, one which looked even at blessings being given to them as things of ill-value, and yet even those things, they decided, were worth holding onto and fighting over, because they knew that what was in them would not be enough to keep them alive and survive. They had to struggle to keep to themselves as they are, and this meant they had to horde what was around themselves as a means of keeping themselves in the comfort of their immobility. The self preserving orientation of the dwarfs found ultimate expression in their sad declaration, "From now on, the dwarfs are for the dwarfs!"<sup>103</sup>

It's been said, "If I don't have a purpose worth dying for, I really don't have one worth living for."<sup>104</sup> Certainly to live well and with any sense of virtue, we need a purpose greater than our own self-preservation. Unfortunately, many of Christ's followers whose original summons (at least according to Scripture) was to a life of great purpose, find themselves living

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<sup>102</sup> CS Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984)

<sup>103</sup> Henry Karlson, *C.S. Lewis and the Mind Only Prison*, September 20, 2009 Vox Nova.com

<sup>104</sup> Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002)

in the disposition of the dwarfs, ultimately coming to the conclusion that it is more prudent to protect what one has than risk it for the sake of unfamiliar others. One might just as easily say, "The Pentecostals are for the Pentecostals", or "The Baptists are for the Baptists!" Or worse yet, "The Christians are for the Christians!" But as we've established, the cross is a scandalous concept. That the righteous should suffer violence and abandonment from God on behalf of those who (at the time) may despise God strikes against all our notions of justice. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>105</sup> That someone entirely good would lay down his or her life for someone who is entirely bad is a scandalous notion in any society! But as Volf reasons:

Is the scandal of the cross good enough reason to give up on it? Let me respond by noting that there is no genuinely Christian way around the scandal. In the final analysis, the only available options are either to reject the cross and with it the core of the Christian faith or to take up one's cross, follow the Crucified-and be scandalized ever anew by the challenge. As the Gospel of Mark reports, the first disciples followed, and were scandalized (14:26ff.).<sup>106</sup>

Being a child of the 60's and the Viet Nam war era, I am well acquainted with the angst created when a young man or woman is drafted in the prime of life, and expected to give up their life with no compelling reason for doing so! Perhaps you're familiar with the popular song of that era by Country Joe & the Fish titled simply, "Viet Nam Song":

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<sup>105</sup> Romans 5:8 NIV

<sup>106</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 26.

*So its one, two, three what are we fighting for?  
Don't ask me cause I don't give a damn  
Next stop is Viet Nam  
And its five, six, seven open up the Pearly Gates  
Well, there ain't no time to wonder why  
Whoopee! we're all going to die.<sup>107</sup>*

No doubt many draft worthy folks who heard that song decided Canada was a better option! Sacrificing everything, with no real compelling reason to do so, seemed to me one of the greatest atrocities of a conflict defined by atrocities. In some strange way, the Christian call to "deny yourself, take up your cross, lay down your life, and follow me" can come across just as lame and unconvincing. Oh, we may not admit it openly, but we certainly demonstrate our "not convinced why this is a good idea" response by not really doing anything with it, most likely because we don't have a clue what we should do with it.

Questioning the way of the cross was familiar to the first disciples as well. "Let us also go, that we may die with him"<sup>108</sup> Thomas deadpanned as Jesus led the disciples towards obvious danger. As Jesus spoke of the necessity of the cross and his suffering "Peter took him aside and begin to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you.'"<sup>109</sup> The cross has always been a scandalous concept, yet the first disciples overcame their hesitancy:

They continued to tell the story of the cross, including the account of how they abandoned the Crucified. Why? Because precisely in the scandal, they have discovered a promise. In serving and giving themselves for others (Mark 10:45),

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<sup>107</sup> Country Joe and The Fish, *The Viet Nam Song*,  
(<https://www.stlyrics.com/songs/c/countryjoeandthefish6021/vietnamsong>)

<sup>108</sup> John 11:16 NIV

<sup>109</sup> Matthew 16:22 NIV

in lamenting and protesting before the dark face of God (15:34), they found themselves in the company of the Crucified. In his empty tomb they saw the proof that the cry of desperation will turn into a song of joy and that the face of God will eventually "shine" upon a redeemed world.<sup>110</sup>

What exactly is "my cross" that Jesus calls me to take up? Why is it necessary and what is accomplished by taking up my cross? For insight, we look to Paul once again and his journey toward Christ:

*For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.<sup>111</sup>*

For the Apostle, his very real sufferings had a very specific end in mind: Bringing others into the knowledge of Christ and the eternal family of God. His was no "denial for the sake of denial" asceticism. "We are daily being given over to death so that others might live"<sup>112</sup> was Paul's understanding of sharing the sufferings of Christ so that others might be brought into an experience of his life. There is the reason for his personal sacrifice: So that others might live. "I want to know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings" for the Apostle meant bearing the cost of bringing unreached people into relationship with Christ.

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<sup>110</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 26.

<sup>111</sup> II Corinthians 4:5-12 NIV

<sup>112</sup> II Corinthians 4:11 NIV

Paul alludes to this self sacrifice for the sake of others in his letter to the church at Colossae: "I fill up in my own body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ"<sup>113</sup> was how Paul interpreted his cross. For the apostle, this was no hollow asceticism, this was pouring himself out in service to those far from God so that they might experience the generous self-giving love of God. According to Jesus, a willingness to join him in this noble work, to put ourselves and our interests aside for the sake of bringing others into the knowledge of God, is an essential step on the road to discipleship, and consequently, an essential step in finding our own best lives. Apart from a growing understanding of the essential nature of self-giving for others who are separated from God, and apart from learning how to grow in this sort of love "with knowledge and all discernment"<sup>114</sup>, discipleship efforts are misguided, and should rather be called something else. Religious instruction about God perhaps. Education about Christ that I have no intention of ever doing anything with perhaps. But discipleship? No, not according to the One who summons his disciples to follow him in giving our lives for those living distant from and unaware of God's mercy.

Again, I return to the trajectory we must establish at the outset of our disciple making, and the true aim of our teaching: Instructing believers how to follow the model of the incarnated Christ, and empowered by him, each of us embodying the compassionate generosity of God toward a humanity living in isolation from his redemptive love. In short,

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<sup>113</sup> Colossians 1:24 NIV

<sup>114</sup> Philippians 1:9 NIV

joining Christ in reaching lost people. This is our vocation. This is our cause. This is what we are fighting for and daily in Paul's experience, dying for. There is no ambiguity or uncertainty here. Our sufferings have a purpose and an end in mind. Demonstrating the self-giving of Christ toward those who have yet to experience the grace of God is what we are called to do. Filling up in my own flesh "what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" and discovering what it means to really live in the process. As Walters surmises:

The church becomes 'a church for others' through participating in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These stages provide a framework for a vision of the church: the incarnation prescribes the location of the church; the life of faith, its actions; the death, its orientation to suffering and forgiveness; and the resurrection, its mission in the world.<sup>115</sup>

### **Seeds that Grow**

*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."*<sup>116</sup>

Jesus wanted his followers to be absolutely clear on why he was going to the cross: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it

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<sup>115</sup> Daniel Walters, *A Church for Others: A Vision of the Church Inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Academia.edu).

<sup>116</sup> John 12:20-26 NIV

produces many seeds."<sup>117</sup> Jesus was not content to retain his unbroken fellowship with God alone. "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (clung to), but emptied himself..."<sup>118</sup> Not content to live intimately with God while others perished, he was compelled (by love) to empty himself to bring others, even the others who would nail him to a cross. Then he had the audacity to call his disciples to do the same! "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."<sup>119</sup>

Christ's call to discipleship is a summons to his followers to a lifestyle of other worldly generosity. Not a generosity of material goods, though it may include that, but in following his immense generosity, a sacrifice of themselves into the lives of the least deserving so that they too might have the opportunity to personally encounter a God who is love. This is the one great reason for self-sacrifice; to demonstrate in unmistakable fashion the matchless love of the Creator for those creatures formed in His image who've drifted far from his care.

In Bonhoeffer's theology, God's desire to reconcile the world to himself is already accomplished in Christ; the church is called to participate in that reality.<sup>120</sup> Thus, "I fill up in

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<sup>117</sup> John 12:24 NIV

<sup>118</sup> Philippians 2:6 ESV

<sup>119</sup> John 12:25 NIV

<sup>120</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1959)250-4.

my flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's afflictions"<sup>121</sup> is a summons for me to carry out my own tangible re-enactment of the love of God that has been demonstrated to me on the cross of Christ. "In being for another rather than oneself, the self potentially becomes a Christ to the other"<sup>122</sup> Bonhoeffer insightfully wrote. "Only this conforms to the image of Christ, the one who, in obedience and freedom, bore the guilt of all human beings. In conformation to Christ, the self in Christ inclines toward all others, including those who do not consider themselves part of the church community".<sup>123</sup> Simple obedience (to Christ) leads to concrete responsibility for others, in conformation to Christ.<sup>124</sup>

Those who of us who consider ourselves in the fold of salvation love to sing of that old rugged cross, and as the familiar hymn proclaims, we look forward to the day when we will one day "exchange it for a crown", supposedly being commended for our selfless service to God.<sup>125</sup> For any who want to honor the matchless sacrifice of the cross, Christ has clearly shown us how that is done. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."<sup>126</sup> We can either embrace that as the pathway to authentic discipleship, or, we can reject it, and like the rich young ruler who considered the cost of following too great, sadly go our way. There is no neutral ground. Authentic discipleship is

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<sup>121</sup> Colossians 1:24 NIV

<sup>122</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, (New York: Harper Row, 1998) 83.

<sup>123</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 63.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>125</sup> George Bennard, *That Old Rugged Cross*, Public Domain, 1913

<sup>126</sup> Matthew 16:24 NIV



first and foremost a commitment of simple obedience to Christ, and that simple obedience always leads to concrete responsibility for others in conformity to Christ. His is a path of radical self-giving for the undeserving, and that disposition was his primary means of demonstrating the love of a reaching and embracing God. He calls his followers to follow him on that path. Here is genuine evangelism and transformational discipleship inseparably merged onto one clearly marked road that leads to the cross.

In the ongoing training of that original fisher of men, Jesus asked Peter yet a third time, "Do you love me?" Then, "Feed my sheep" he said.<sup>127</sup> This glimpse into the discipleship of Peter reminds us of Bonhoeffer's truism that "simple obedience (to Christ) leads to concrete responsibility for others, in conformation to Christ."<sup>128</sup> Christ continues, "Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"<sup>129</sup> When we demonstrate our love for the Savior by giving ourselves to the unreached others in our world in the manner that he has given himself to us, we enter into the real business of discipleship. According to Jesus, everything else we do in the name of discipleship is secondary to this noble act of self-giving for the unredeemed others in our lives. Discipleship in the absence of this willingness to donate our selves to

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<sup>127</sup> John 21:17 NIV

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 64

<sup>129</sup> John 21:18-19 NIV

communicate and authenticate the Gospel to others is an attempt to sidestep the very cross we affectionately sing about. In the eyes of Jesus, this sort of discipleship is an expression of "in Adam" humanity at its worst, and cause for his sternest rebuke. "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him." "Never, Lord!" he said. "This (the cross) shall never happen to you!" "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."<sup>130</sup> Discipleship efforts that do not orient toward the concerns of God; toward the giving of ourselves in tangible demonstration of the love of God to unreached others, are in danger of inviting a similar rebuke.

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<sup>130</sup> Matthew 16:22-23 NIV

## Chapter Five

### The Freedom to Be For Others

Bonhoeffer called Christ "the man for others," and since the church is the body of Christ, he concluded that the church is the church only when it exists for others. "The church community can never consent to any restrictions of its service of love and compassion toward other human beings. For wherever there is a brother or sister, there Christ's own body is present; and wherever Christ's body is present, his church community is also always present, which means I must also be present there."<sup>131</sup> Bonhoeffer's image of the self oriented toward Christ is one that is a self also oriented toward other persons. "The self in Christ finds its ground in a person outside of itself, and finds its meaning in ethical relation to others. In conformation to the new human, Jesus Christ, human beings in Christ are called to live on behalf of others."<sup>132</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, "I am never set free to act in genuine responsibility by looking at myself, but only by attending to Christ's call."<sup>133</sup>

If the self in Christ, conformed to Christ, is responsible for others, of what does this responsibility consist? "*Stellvertretung*", or vicarious representative action, is the pinnacle of creaturely responsibility in conformation to Christ. For Bonhoeffer, vicarious representative action is "standing where others cannot and doing for them things they cannot do for

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<sup>131</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1959) 236.

<sup>132</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 65.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

themselves.<sup>134</sup> Vicarious representative action entails loving participation in the concrete lives of others. Bonhoeffer writes, "This being for each other involves giving up the self for my neighbor's benefit, with the readiness to do and bear everything in the neighbor's place, indeed, if necessary, to sacrifice myself, standing as a substitute for my neighbor. Even if a purely vicarious action is rarely actualized, it is intended in every genuine act of love."<sup>135</sup> In this extraordinary description of being "free for others" we have come, I believe, to the pinnacle of Christian maturity, and have described people who are beginning to live as Christ in the world. It is my contention that this sort of freedom to be for others is what Christ had in mind all along when he called the very first disciples to follow him and in authentically, radically doing so, they would like him, become those who catch people. The kind of "otherness" that Volf and Bonhoeffer describe with such rich dimension gives expression to a heart that has been turned from only an inward contemplation of self to an outward toward others orientation. Is it any wonder that in doing so, in spite of the costs incurred, that Jesus said his followers would find their lives? These descriptions of "being for each other" and "giving up self for my neighbor's benefit" and "standing where others cannot and doing for them things they cannot do for themselves" and "the self in Christ finding its ground in a person outside of itself, and finding its meaning in ethical relation to others" and "loving participation in the concrete lives of others" are not only descriptions of the kind of love that satisfies all the

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>135</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, (New York: Harper Row, 1998) 184.

commands of a just God<sup>136</sup>, but offer glimpses of the kind of Christ we worship, and what he had in mind when he summoned those first rough cut men of the sea to follow him and become fishers of men. Ones who touch people through Christ authored and Christ empowered and Christ mediated sacrificial self-giving with one intention: Expressing to others the limitless, scandalous, gracious and unmerited expression of love we ourselves have received from the One who lived entirely free to be for us. Living for others in these ways, vicariously suffering with them and for them if that is what is called for, prepares the way for the others in our reach to experience the Christ who has reached us. Bonhoeffer writes, "Preparing the way is a commission of immeasurable responsibility given to all those who know about the coming of Jesus Christ. The hungry person needs bread, the homeless person needs shelter, the one deprived of rights needs justice, the lonely person needs community, the undisciplined needs order, and the slave needs freedom...to bring bread to the hungry is preparing the way for the coming of grace."<sup>137</sup>

With our eyes fixed on Christ, how we 'prepare the way' will be as unique as the people we encounter along the way. I will close this look at authentic discipleship by suggesting some directions our other oriented expressions of love might take us in as we join Christ in catching others for God.

In her entries for a yet to be published book, "On Knowing: Insights from Theology for

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<sup>136</sup> Luke 10:27 NIV

<sup>137</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 163

Anthropology,<sup>138</sup> theologian Kerry Dearborn writes on the Biblical concept of "the stranger". Tracing the concept from the patriarchs through the law and the prophets and into the teachings and life example of Jesus, Dearborn makes a strong case that undeserved care for the stranger (the essence of Biblical hospitality), is at the very heart of God's self-revelation. She writes:

It is not surprising in the New Testament that Jesus would make this identification with the stranger even more obvious. He was willing to come as an outsider, in vulnerability and dependency. He assumed an incognito identity, and worked to retain that veiled identity as long as possible. "He came to his own but his own knew him not" (John 1:11).

Dearborn draws attention to the fact that Christ was a stranger and outsider to the religious leaders and unknown by most political leaders during the whole of his life, that he cared deeply about how strangers were received, and encouraged his followers to invite outsiders rather than friends to dine with them. In fact, Dearborn observes, Christ described the final judgment in which those who have welcomed strangers from among the least of these will have welcomed Jesus, himself. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35).<sup>139</sup>

Building on the foundation of Christ's high regard for strangers, Dearborn outlines four compelling reasons why the care of strangers is presented as a Scriptural priority: First, it is connected with the esteem placed on all humans as those who are created in God's image. A

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<sup>138</sup> Eloise Meneses and David Brokema, *On Knowing, Insights from Theology for Anthropology*, edited by Eloise Meneses and David Bronkema, (New York: Routledge, 2017)

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

second basis for prioritizing care for the stranger is rooted in God's compassionate love and care for all humans, particularly those most vulnerable. Third, God established laws of covenant faithfulness to embed his care for those most vulnerable into the very structure of community life. Fourth, the inspired vision given to Israel for its eschatological future was of shalom for all of creation, including strangers.<sup>140</sup>

The process for moving toward that end included the invitation for Israel to be God's vehicle of blessing for all people. The vision was one of shared destiny and even more profoundly of being part of one human family with one Father. Certainly, Jesus modeled and taught his disciples this sort of love for those whom the religious elite scorned as "unclean" and "sinful" as he touched the lepers, ate with the tax collectors, was touched by prostitutes, and as he cast his gaze over a crowded room proclaimed, "Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers!"<sup>141</sup>

Dearborn suggests three tangible ways we make room for the strangers in the midst of our own busy lives. The first has to do with "seeing the stranger." "Seeing the stranger, because the stranger is by nature unknown she may also seem somewhat invisible. Whether through being unvalued, easily categorized, or unimportant to the tasks and preoccupation at hand, the stranger can remain something of a nondescript presence in the background of one's

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>141</sup> Luke 8:21 NIV

experience or context."<sup>142</sup> There are many reasons why we might not see the strangers in our world, among the ones Dearborn highlights are, "perhaps the demands that might arise in noticing strangers, the temptation may be to ignore and actually structure one's experiences to avoid really seeing or being interrupted by such outliers." Jesus addressed all of these facets of seeing and making room in our lives for strangers in his already mentioned story of a Good Samaritan. My good friend Jerry Cook spoke of the ways we often depersonalize and therefore excuse ourselves from the "obligation" to love strangers by viewing them as "Interruptions" to be tolerated and avoided, "Functions" to be used and discarded, and "Symbols" to be categorized and dismissed. Seeing the stranger implies looking beyond these 'in Adam' tendencies and choosing to walk in the way of Christ toward all others. "To see the other is to move beyond the mischaracterizations of fear, indifference, or hate in which the other remains an it, to a kind of seeing in which the other is considered a Thou, worthy of love and care."<sup>143</sup>

Seeing the strangers in our world opens the door to the second way Dearborn advocates that we care for them: Making space for the strangers in our world. "Seeing strangers in a way that obviates against reducing them to a category or an It opens the way for a second aspect of knowing the stranger, and that is making space, or welcoming that person into one's life."<sup>144</sup> In Dearborn's perspective, this requires adequate preparation and an approach that includes both "openness and boundaries to avoid violating the other or one's own core commitments." To

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 14.



see the stranger requires openness to the promise of the gifts they bring not merely the problems of who they are and what they may need.<sup>145</sup> In my view this willingness to "make space for the strangers in our world" expresses the essence of hospitality as revealed in the Scriptures; a concept which goes well beyond serving tea in our homes, but rather involves making room in our relational world for new friendships. "Real encounter and real knowing requires authentic openness to the other and thus a sense that the other is someone without whom I am incomplete. Biblically the stranger is someone to whom I am bound, as a member of my extended family and a co-heir of my future."<sup>146</sup>

Seeing and being willing to make space for the others in our lives then leads to the third and highest aspect of care for strangers: Solidarity and shalom with the stranger. In Dearborn's words, "The biblical wisdom for knowing the stranger does not result in mere theoretical understanding accompanied by mild indifference, stoic tolerance, or resignation to parallel existences."<sup>147</sup> Moving beyond "stoic tolerance or resignation to parallel existences" introduces the elements of compassion and authentic empathy and is reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's vicarious representative action that entails loving participation in the concrete lives of others, a being for each other that involves giving up the self for my neighbor's benefit, with the readiness to do and bear everything in the neighbor's place, indeed, if necessary, to sacrifice

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 23.

myself as a substitute for my neighbor.<sup>148</sup>

All of these attributes give expression to what Christ is fashioning in disciples who would join him in his mission of catching people in the sense this paper has defined. As one current voice articulating this inclination toward "being for others", Andy Stanley, the leader of the Northpoint Church movement, has the stated ambition, "To create churches unchurched people love to attend."<sup>149</sup> While this mission has opened the door for all sorts of criticism (i.e. "You are just recreating environments that cater to sinful people who want nothing to do with real discipleship!"), Stanley's contention is that Jesus apparently liked people, and from the crowds that always followed him, people liked him back! "Well, that's just because Jesus did things for them that no one else was willing to do!" Exactly my point! One has only to do a quick read through the gospels to make two obvious observations about Jesus: He made room in his life for people who didn't share his devotion to God (grand understatement!), and his acceptance of them and benevolence toward them made them want to spend more time with him (a second grand understatement!). In the economy of Jesus, he saw no more worthwhile investment of his divine attributes than in sacrificing them completely so that the undeserving 'others' in his world might experience the gracious and forgiving heart of their Creator. In looking upon multitudes of desperate people who no doubt

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<sup>148</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 65.

<sup>149</sup> Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2012) 11.

carried all kinds of brokenness in their frazzled lives, what Jesus saw was not "Interruptions" that threatened to divert him from his busy, important and serious life, nor did he see "Functions" or people to be used to accomplish his own goals and objectives, nor did he see "Symbols", people representing all that was wrong in the world. No, when Jesus looked upon the multitudes of humanity, he saw people who were troubled and in need of assistance. And when he saw them, Matthew tells us, he was moved with compassion. "Turning to his disciples he said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."<sup>150</sup> He might just as well have said, "The fishing is really good, but there aren't that many good fishermen!"

The trajectory Jesus established by calling his first disciples to become fishers of men was quite different than the trajectory that is established by many who are invited to learn about Christianity or to pursue Christian virtues. While some may view it as semantics and a different path to the same end, my contention is that the end is blurred entirely when the summons is not clear from the start. Jesus knew what was in the heart of man<sup>151</sup>, and knew that the call to join him in his mission would have a much different influence on the trajectory of his followers than would the call to develop godly virtues or to become righteous people. Without the clear and compelling call to follow the teaching, example and influence of His lordship into the other oriented vocation of reaching lost humanity, the foundation of

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<sup>150</sup> Matthew 9:37 NIV

<sup>151</sup> John 2:24 NIV

discipleship is built upon "in Adam" perspectives, and the result is anything but a spiritual person who embraces the broken people God wants to redeem.

Our secular culture and the growing divide between the left and the right that is finding its way into the church bears living testimony that the church does not embrace what it means to be called to live for all of the unreached others of our generation. Attempts to hunker down and protect our own, to guard the truth against the impurities of a "secular (insert despicable, sinful, sensual, or any other adjective of disgust!) are in fact leading the church further and further away from the call of Jesus to follow him and become fishers of men. Convinced that loveless Christianity is the best option, churches that have grown cold in their compassion for sinners lose their influence in our culture. This paper is a summons to return to the call that Jesus issued and still issues to those with ears to hear: "Follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people."<sup>152</sup>

When looking at the bulk of Jesus' own words wherein he issues the call to become one of his disciples<sup>153</sup>, the most common theme is plain: to follow Jesus means joining him in his task of reaching others through self-sacrifice. To minimize or even place this clear hallmark of discipleship among other good priorities, is to cloud the vision of the work Jesus is calling his followers to do, the way in which he is calling them to do it, and the way in which doing his

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<sup>152</sup> Matthew 4:19 NIV

<sup>153</sup> Matthew 4:18-19, Matthew 16:24, Mark 1:16-17, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 14:25-35, In each of these passages the call to follow Christ is coupled with the summons to take up the cross and to lay down one's life for Christ, for others, and for the Gospel.

work his way transforms people into his likeness. This, in its most primitive form, is the essence of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I have sought to give dimension to this clear summons to make discipleship deeply rooted in the business of reaching people through radical self giving by exploring the rich perspectives of Bonhoeffer, Volf and others, but the point of the matter is that discipleship according to Jesus is a straightforward proposition: You can find your life by giving it up for the Gospel and giving it away for sinners. I have sought to demonstrate throughout this thesis that the human heart does not naturally lean in the direction of Christ's call, nor, consequently, do many expressions of his church. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few"<sup>154</sup> is Christ's announcement of this reality. Reflective of the "in Adam" orientation I've drawn attention to in this writing, the natural trajectory of humanity (and of many forms of discipleship) is away from self-giving and toward self-preservation. In his annual vision speech to the North Point congregations, Andy Stanley reminded their constituency of the church's historical tendency to direct the majority of its resources (and interest) toward those who are already in the church, rather than toward reaching those who've yet to be included:

The truth is, for most churches, sustaining the current model (of congregational life) is the mission of the church. Ministry models that don't support the mission of the church (to reach people with the Gospel) eventually impede the mission or become the mission. One of the primary reasons churches are empty is because church leaders love their models more than they love (reaching) people. Both modern as well as ancient church history is filled with tragic examples of what happens when church people fall in love with a model or an approach to church

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<sup>154</sup> Matthew 9:37 NIV

and lose sight of why the church was instituted to begin with (to carry on the mission of Jesus). It's this dynamic that's currently keeping thousands of churches in a holding pattern. They can't advance. They can't reclaim their mission. They're bound to a model that no longer serves their original purpose. And if you are in one of those churches, you know the severe frustration of watching it become less and less appealing while insiders turn their backs on the market (harvest field) and curse our irreligious culture. It's a shame that so many churches are married to a designed-by-Christians-for-Christians-only culture. A culture in which they talk about the Great Commission, sing songs about the Great Commission, but refuse to reorganize their churches around the Great Commission.<sup>155</sup>

These are strong words, but really not essentially different from the words of Jesus proclaiming that, "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be."<sup>156</sup> Stanley is essentially giving voice to the slow and steady loss of spiritual vitality that Jesus said would take place in the absence of all out (and joyful) self-giving for the unredeemed and un-reconciled people of the world. When the scandal of the cross (self-sacrifice for outsiders) is not at the center of being a follower of Christ and is not the pervasive ethos of congregations, congregations wander from the path of authentic discipleship and transformation.

I hope the perspectives I've set forth in this thesis will provoke Christ followers, particularly those who lead and teach others, to reconsider the essential outreaching call of the gospel and the self emptying nature of Jesus for the unreached when it comes to their own

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 96

<sup>156</sup> John 12:25-26 NIV

efforts to be and to make mature disciples. In this paradigm, my ability to lovingly incarnate the Gospel and influence others toward a relationship with their Heavenly Father becomes one of the core measurements of my progress as a Christ follower. I am calling leaders to put away the notion that Christ like maturity can be attained apart from engagement in his mission of sacrificially reaching others. We will never be the movement Jesus imagined unless we first embrace and attempt to express discipleship in its authentic Jesus-imagining form. As I have demonstrated, disciples and congregations of disciples that do not have their focus on the harvest of humanity as Jesus described it easily and naturally turn inward upon themselves. On the hopeful side, the types of disciples we are reproducing will change dramatically simply by understanding that the call to salvation in Christ is at the same time a call to learn from him how to find our lives by giving them away for those not yet in the faith. This more Biblically grounded call to follow Jesus in his death to self interest, coupled with the expectation of being changed into someone who is made capable of reaching others in need of reconciliation, will establish a trajectory that leads to authentically sharing his resurrection life. " This is the normal pathway to maturity described by the Apostle Paul: "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."<sup>157</sup> This is the primitive call to discipleship first announced by Jesus and incarnated in his original followers. This is the trajectory the Risen Christ fixed in the heart of Peter, his first apprentice fisherman,

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<sup>157</sup> Philippians 3:10-11 NIV

when, after the second miraculous catch of fish, the nets were apparently more up to the task of bringing in the abundant haul: “Very truly I tell you, when you were younger (in Adam) you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old (mature) you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”<sup>158</sup>

This transformational call of Jesus that embraces the unified purposes of following, becoming, sacrificing and reaching, compels us to be made into new creatures in Christ who are able to be sent into the world just as he was, incarnating his life, embodying his death, and demonstrating afresh the love of God who gives himself for those who are dead in their sins and trespasses. According to the example and teachings of Christ himself, leading our congregations into the work of Jesus in the way of Jesus is the pathway to our greatest good. The summons to follow and become a fisher of men sovereignly meets our greatest need in that it directs the disciple toward Christ and at the same time, towards humanity, a crucial two-sided focus if authentic transformation into the *Imago Dei* is to happen in people.

Looking objectively at the nature of Who we are called to follow, and reflecting on the example of self-giving he set transforms our thinking about Christian maturity if we allow it to. This sort of reflection is certainly near to what Christ had in mind when he instructed his disciples to talk to God about the abundant and ready harvest and the need for more workers.

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<sup>158</sup> John 21:17-19 NIV



Under the mentorship of the Master fisherman, this sort of reflection leads to the understanding that authentic discipleship is about becoming committed to and effective at sacrificially reaching people. It's about becoming compassionate toward those who are living without hope in the world, and having others see in our witness the self-less Savior who ever gives himself to mend their brokenness. It's about solidarity with the world for the sake of reaching the world. It's about seeing and making space for those who know little or care nothing for the God whom we serve. It's about undergoing a radical reformation of our own selves that is set in motion by a God awakened interest in reaching others. It's about following Jesus and becoming, like him, fishers of men.

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