

**For this edition of GO we decided to reflect on the crucial yet (at least in our parts) underdeveloped theme of discipleship – one of those key Crossroad Challenges Interserve has identified as we look at the next generation in mission.**

What is discipleship? How can it be done? How is it being done? As Rachel points out in the introduction of her article on page 6, those famous last words of Jesus in Matthew 28 – words we know as The Great Commission – have been somewhat misread by us. Where we have so often stressed the ‘GO’ of mission, the true emphasis and the main verb Jesus commissions us with is ‘make’ – as in ‘make disciples’. A better translation would consequently read: “Therefore, going, make disciples of all the nations...”

The key to Jesus’ earthly ‘ministry success’ was certainly discipleship. He called and then spent three years investing into his little band of followers. He hung out with them, related to them, ate with them, taught them, modelled for them, loved them, healed and liberated them.

Not really the grand, programmatic strategies we would imagine from the greatest CEO who ever walked the earth. Not the Key Performance Indicators and strategic outcome projections we would want in our efficient modern organisational machines. Yet Jesus knew that if He got this one thing right, then the organisational

outcomes would follow quite naturally. He understood that – as Mike Breen puts it in his book *Building a Discipling Culture* – if you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.

As the church we have so often put our efforts into planting churches and then creating great programmes. As humans we love to build grand schemes and see success in numbers. We tend to think that by bringing people into the church they somehow, by osmosis, become followers and disciples of Christ. However, Jesus’ words – and practical experience – challenge those approaches at their roots. Discipleship has to be intentionally pursued, first and foremost, in order to see the church community of Jesus Christ grow and develop.

The early disciples would have understood exactly what Jesus meant when He left them with those final words. ‘Going, do the very same things that I have modelled to you for these last three years. Do it in Jerusalem, all of Judea, in Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth – hang out, relate, eat together; teach and model this new life for people, love them, heal and liberate them.’

And as the early disciples did this they saw the church explode into existence – just as Jesus had promised. He had told them, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18);

church-building was never meant to be the disciples’ primary focus – Jesus had made it clear that He would take responsibility for that part of the process.

A speaker at a recent conference I attended put it to us that, in discipling, the key and foremost question always has to be: Why is this particular person in front of me? That is, what is it that God wants to accomplish in this relational encounter? This contrasts with my usual question: How can I get yet one more task crossed off my over-long to-do list?

People versus a task focus – I am guilty as charged, and I want to allow these words of Jesus to challenge and change me afresh. “Therefore, going, make disciples of all the nations...”

*Jonas*

