

# Crisis, cause, cure: Discipleship in the church

By Charles T. Crabtree

Jesus did not command His followers to merely share the gospel. He also commanded them to make disciples. Followers of Christ are to do far more than communicate the facts of salvation through Christ. They are to come alongside new believers and help them learn to live for Christ. Too often, however, churches stop with the proclamation of God's truth and fail to nurture the new life that results when people receive that truth. We have a crisis of discipleship.

The symbol for crisis in the Chinese language is danger with opportunity. There is a great danger in the church today concerning discipleship. There is also an attending opportunity to raise the level of discipleship in the church. To get beyond the danger to the opportunity, to find the cure for the crisis, we must first consider the causes.

### **A nice person, not a new person**

The primary cause for ineffective evangelism and discipleship in the greater American church is the preaching of another gospel — good news for the ego. It seems the American church says to those who pass through the doors, "You're a good person, and the church can give added value to your temporal life." And it will. But improving this life is not the primary reason

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# Crisis, cause, cure

the church exists. The church exists to get people ready for eternity, not for tomorrow. Ours is not a temporal gospel. It is an eternal gospel, and at the heart of that gospel is the Cross and true repentance.

Our cultural take on Christianity says, "If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, that is all we are going to ask. We are not asking for a behavioral change; we want a doctrinal change. We want you to believe the way we believe. How you act is up to you. When you come to church, we promise we will not confront you with sin."

In other words: Confess Jesus; God will take care of the rest. All you need to do is to be a nice person, not a new person.

In many parts of the world, you have to believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. You have to believe He is Lord and that He is the ultimate authority. If you do not believe it in your heart, it would be stupid to confess it with your lips because you will be persecuted or even martyred because of your faith in Christ. In America, however, it is popular to confess Jesus with the lips; it is not popular to live a holy life.

### Count the cost before carrying your cross

The second cause for a crisis in discipleship is found in Luke 14:26,27: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (KJV).

What is your cross? Your cross is living in a hostile world and standing up to the filth, rottenness and sin in homes, families and workplaces and saying, "I am a Christian; I will live as a follower of Christ."

The only way you can do this is to love Him more than your life, more than self. Verse 28 gives a stunning requirement of discipleship: Do not begin until you count the cost.

It is time to confront; it is time to challenge and offer an alternative lifestyle — a life of surrender to Christ — in such a way that people will realize it is a joy to follow Him. If we will lose our lives for His sake, we will experience a life full of miracles.

Repentance is not a negative concept. It opens the door to living a new life full of divine power and blessing, but for a reason — to live the Christian life, not just to hear about it. People are so desperately apathetic in church because they do not plan to do one thing about what they hear in church. They do not understand discipleship.

### Holy Spirit-empowered discipleship

A third cause for lackluster discipleship is found in our substitutes for the Holy Spirit. Too many Christians come to a building to hear people try to motivate them to live the Christian life — to give them spiritual tools. But if they do not plan to use these tools, why would they be interested in looking at them? In other words, if they do not witness, pray, reach the lost, or lay hands on the sick themselves why do they need the

baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Would you hire a bodybuilder to do your exercising? In a sense, many do that every Sunday. They ask professionals to do their discipleship. The church is not growing in America today. Why? Professionals are doing the work of the ministry that is supposed to be done between Sundays by Spirit-filled laity. Too many congregations have put Jesus under house arrest in buildings and time capsules.

It is time for the church to gird itself on Sunday night to rise up Monday morning and say, "We are going to be a strong, healthy church, and we are going to change this world through our faithfulness to God and our obedience to the Lord."

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### "If ye continue ..."

The fourth cause behind ineffective discipleship is a disregard for a basic requirement of discipleship found in John 8:31: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (KJV).

Often people experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and keep going back to church to receive additional blessing. But they are never productive. Why? They do not continue in His Word. They must continue in His authority. They must make Christ's Word alive in their lives every day through their actions.

After Pentecost, the New Testament church was effective

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because they continued. They continued in prayer, evangelism, fellowship, service, servanthood and in the apostles' doctrine.

### A new discipleship

So, what is the cure? The cure is to set the church up systematically for a new discipleship. When a church is prepared for revival, they have faith to prepare people for an influx.

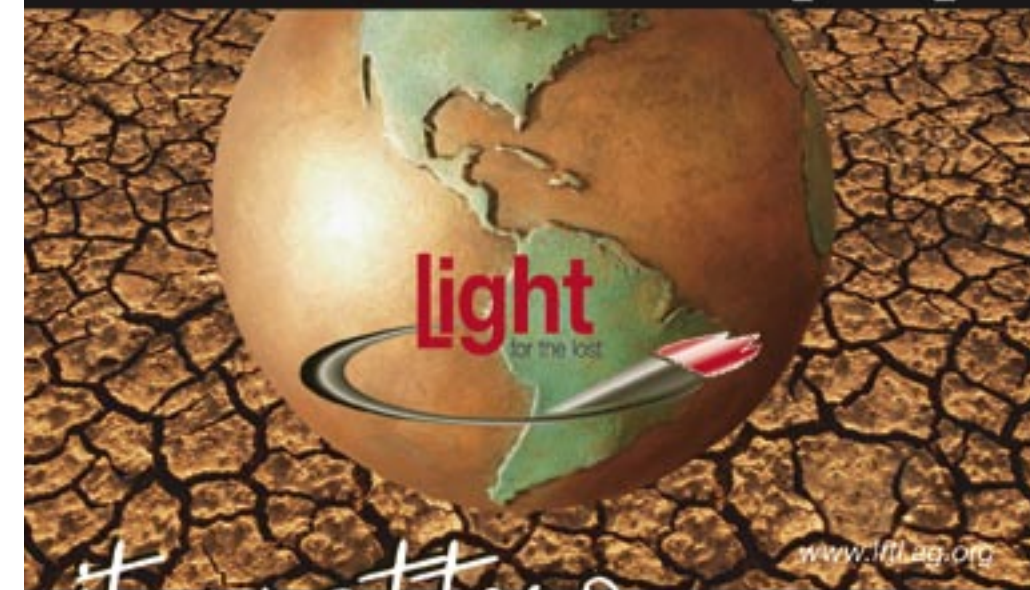
You must have enough faith to plan. You must believe that God will bring babies in Christ into your midst, then you must be prepared to disciple them into productive spiritual adults.

### A love that never fails

Babies can be a problem, but they are infinitely precious. My friend Jim Hall gives a haunting example. When a new baby is at a family gathering, everyone owns the baby. They pass the baby from one to the other. But when it is time to feed the baby, the mother will say, "Where is the baby? I'm responsible."

Too often, the church is only willing to love the new convert in a general way. But each follower of Christ needs to ask the personal questions, "Would I be open to loving a new convert? Could I join with my church as a spiritual mom or dad? When

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someone asks, 'Where's the baby?' would I be willing to step forward and say, 'He/she's in good hands?'"

Do you wonder what to do in discipleship? Love. That is the answer. New followers of Christ are dependent. They need someone to understand them, to care for them deeply. We would call it criminal for parents to say because the babies cannot come to the table, let them starve. But new converts are often told, "If you can't hold to our schedule and eat when and what we eat, you can die."

The greatest qualification for effective discipleship is love — love for Jesus, love for the lost and love for new converts. Love

will teach us what to do. "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

With God's help, we will change our world through churches filled with strong, Spirit-filled disciples. They will love souls enough to change nonproductive programs, self-centered traditions and meaningless activity to an exciting ministry of love for Jesus translated into a disciplined life of eternal purpose and spiritual productivity. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## ABCs OF SALVATION

**To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:**

**A. Admit you are a sinner.**

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

**Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.**

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

**B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

**Become a child of God by receiving Christ.**

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

**C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

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### Test your Bible knowledge

**1. Where did Jesus heal a blind man named Bartimaeus?**

- A. Bethsaida
- B. Jerusalem
- C. Jericho
- D. Capernaum

**2. How many books are in the Old Testament?**

- A. 66
- B. 27
- C. 39
- D. 23

**3. What king of Judah died from a painful bowel disease?**

- A. Jehoram
- B. Jehoshaphat
- C. Ahaziah
- D. Uzziah

**4. Which epistle declares Christians are "more than conquerors"?**

- A. Ephesians
- B. Galatians
- C. Romans
- D. 2 Corinthians

**5. Which of Joseph's brothers suggested selling him?**

- A. Gad
- B. Judah
- C. Reuben
- D. Simeon

**6. Where was Peter when Cornelius the centurion sent for him?**

- A. Joppa
- B. Caesarea
- C. Samaria
- D. Jerusalem

**7. How many times had the Samaritan woman at the well been married?**

- A. 6
- B. 8
- C. 3
- D. 5

**8. What gift did King Herod give to his stepdaughter?**

- A. A platter from the temple
- B. Jesus' coat
- C. Gold and spices
- D. The head of John the Baptist

**9. During whose reign did Zephaniah prophesy in Judah?**

- A. Joash
- B. Josiah
- C. Ahaz
- D. Abijah

**10. What is the shortest chapter in the Bible?**

- A. Psalm 117
- B. Amos 2
- C. Proverbs 1
- D. Psalm 16

Answers on page 30.  
(Some questions adapted from the Junior Bible Quiz program. For more information, visit [nationaljbq.org](http://nationaljbq.org).)



## Find a big berg

If you were to fly over the North Atlantic Ocean you would see majestic icebergs floating in the icy waters. If you were to look carefully, you would see a pattern develop: small icebergs moving in one direction and gigantic icebergs moving another direction.

Why? The surface winds drive the small icebergs, while the deep ocean currents drive the large icebergs.

Two forces drive our lives as well. When we rely on our own small strength, the surface winds of change, petty problems and difficult circumstances will drive us. Despair, disagreement and discouragement will easily overwhelm us. On the other hand, when our lives are built on a foundation running deep in immovable faith, the deep-running movements of a wise, loving and all-powerful God will guide us.

Jesus told a parable of two men building houses. One built on sand, the other on a foundation of rock. Like the largest icebergs, the foundation of rock could not be shifted. Jesus clearly stated His Word was that rock.

"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock" (Matthew 7:25, NIV).

So, in the seas of life let the winds blow! Those whose spiritual anchor reaches only shallow depths will be at the mercy of the winds. Those whose anchor reaches greater depths of faith will be unmoved.

Are you controlled and manipulated by the shifting winds of life because of the smallness of your "iceberg" of faith? If so, let me encourage you to get on a bigger iceberg — get involved in a spiritual journey that challenges you and pushes you to grow!

Doug Graham

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