

# The Disciple Dilemma

V211005

Intro

## We (disciples) have been [metaphors in the book]

- Hacked
- Infected
- Bankrupted
- Genetically modified / evolved

## What motivated you to write the book?

“OCCA [Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics] made me do it”. Why are so many friends and friend’s children walking away from their faith, or uneasy (unwilling) to talk about God’s reality? Why do Christians doubt Christ’s role and His exclusive answers to mankind? Why the acedia in disciple’s lives? Why are Christian communities struggling to discern the difference between being successful and being purposeful?

## This is the crux of our discussion:

- Discipleship – is being bankrupted
  - o by old traditions inside the Church, inside Christian community
  - o Bankruptcy is an accumulation of liabilities that stifle operations
  - o Discipleship is literally becoming non-viable under the weight of these liabilities
- No one in Christ is exempt from being a disciple
- Credible research says that less one-in-five believers serve unencumbered by these liabilities
  - o And the fragility and brittleness of disciples continues to replicate and grow
  - o These symptoms cannot be fixed by addressing them directly
  - o We have to go beneath the surface, to the root cause
  - o A cause over 1,800 years old
- The book argues the dilemma’s solution is biblical, and it is only with leaders
  - o Only leaders of Christian community, whether one or thousands, can address the cause

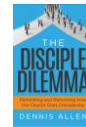
## Information from Pew, Barna, PRRI and Lifeway that make a point

- 45-60% of Protestants say they’re anxious or unequipped to discuss the Gospel
  - o or it’s not in their job description; or it is immoral
- 80% of church attending Protestants have no spiritual development outside worship service
- 65% of Protestants believe their discipleship is going well
  - o 60% of their Pastors disagree
- Trend: 59% of Protestant adults born after 1975 will leave the church without returning

## What does this tell us? *The state of discipleship is not good.*

## Material to our mission in Christ:

- Disciples are the engine of the church in mission, service, love and of course in worship
- Disciples are the critical mechanism in evangelism
- Clergy alone cannot execute on Christ’s directives
- No church service or program can make disciples – only disciples make disciples



### **The temptation is to run when you hear people (like me) say**

- "Here's the One Big Thing"
- "The sky is falling - God demands that we do that and this"
- "Save the universe - here's the single most important thing you gotta do"

### **Yet here I am, dishing this up for you today...**

- You deserve to be skeptical...and no, this is not a coy play to back door your sympathies
  - o I mean honest skepticism
  - o I have NO academic credentials to bring to you (It worked for Bunyan didn't it?)
- If you come in skeptical, I get better, and you decide to junk or track this
  - o If you leave unconvinced there's an issue, coach me - or let the silence coach me
  - o But if you get more skeptical, or curious, can we talk?

### **I'm trying to haunt you with a proposition**

- Western discipleship is in an ominous place - hobbled by 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Christian traditions that are bankrupting discipleship today – traditions that only YOU as leaders can change

### **I work as a turnaround CEO - helping distressed companies to, literally, 'repent'**

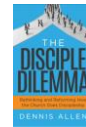
- The title of CEO is an acronym of course, in NT Greek means "last to know, first to be blamed" (maybe that translates for Pastors too?)
  - o It's a people-centric job....assessing, re-organizing, coaching, changing, relating
  - o In a nutshell, seeing which hill we need to take and getting great people there
- Before my business career I was in military evangelism
  - o "What?" you wonder. Do you mean as a chaplain?
  - o No, my job was introducing enemy fighter pilots to Jesus.....wait for it.
    - Hey, it's a people skill too

### **Distressed businesses of all types have an eerie set of similar symptoms**

- Significant work to recruit, little done to sustain employees
  - Helping employees see their roles and worth is lost to quotas and metrics
  - Employee "churn" (turnover) increases, experienced people leave
  - Nobody on the floor, or in the market seems to really understand their job
  - Employees talk about the paycheck or benefits instead of purpose
  - Executives are oblivious to the plight and travails of employees
  - Employees stop trying and simply wait for the boss to tell them what to do
  - Employees seen as utilitarian assets versus real people
  - Senior leadership is NOT to be questioned
  - Leaders are captivated by meetings, branding and programs
  - A lot of employees understand your problems, but they keep their heads down, stay quiet
  - Relationships driving development get lost in admin priorities, budgets, recruiting
- Business traditions are often the root of a company's downturn*

### **I realized there was an echo! An echo as I participated in church leadership - Why is it:**

- 60% of people born after 1975 are bailing from organized churches and denominations?
  - o The visible church is greying out
- Most of the Christians (>80%) that stay aboard are on mute publicly about who they are?
- North of 75% have no discipleship outside worship service



- More than 50% have no confidence/willingness to talk about their faith?
- Almost 50% feel it is immoral to foist their religious views on other people?
- Half of Protestants attending today worship in just 10% of the churches?
  - o Roll that back 50 years: it was 5% attending the biggest 10%
- Schisms in Methodist, SBC, Presbyterian bedrock widening?
- Sources & Uses of church cash are going negative?
  - o “We built our buildings and we’re debt free! Giving is up!” Well, think about that...
- With such evangelical and social effort, the visible Church is shrinking

### **What’s going on?**

- These are SYMPTOMS – The tip of an iceberg called The Disciple Dilemma
  - o To try to frame the issue: Discipleship is being hijacked
    - diverting disciples from Christ’s teaching
    - And we’ve been talking about the cause since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century!
- What caused the symptoms?
  - o Is it lack of personal commitment?
  - o Is it the culture and times we live in – a societal problem?
  - o No. It’s church traditions
    - traditions that displace Christ’s model of discipling for “A Better Way”
    - grappling to stay relevant, and powerful
- Why are old traditions still affecting us 1,800 years later?
  - o They’re part of our Christian culture now...traditions have a way of sticking around
  - o And we often do not recognize their influence, hiding in plain sight
    - “Good, right, normal”

### **Who’s responsible?**

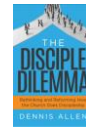
- To play off Chesterton: “I am”. Leaders own this.
  - o You mean we aren’t running enough programs, or preaching the right stuff?
    - No
  - o I mean (many) leaders are enabling and supporting a machinery that starves discipleship
    - Not maliciously, usually, though some leaders are not naïve nor innocent
    - Most of leaders are simply not aware of their connection to discipling’s vitality

### **What do we do about it?**

- Do you really mean that? Are you sincerely asking what to do?
- Is the dilemma real?
- Does it matter? Will it matter to your children and grandchildren?
- How much is it worth to you? (time / credibility / endurance)

### **The Echo Continues: Modern (evolutions of the old) traditions – not universal – but pervasive**

- Priorities
  - o Conversionism, intellectualism or social programs
  - o Administrative duties supplant relationship
- Size of church = better discipleship
  - o That size has no downside on discipleship
  - o Programs get better as size grows



- That church power/influence is a force for good in advancing God's disciples
- Clergy
  - Are responsible for connecting with the public : evangelism, programs and discipling
  - Are the only qualified people to lead the worship body
  - If you want anything done right, staff has to do it
  - Concierge Christianity: People in the pews sit, listen, tithe, pick-up-the-kids, leave
- Discipleship
  - Optional
  - Too many spiritual expectations will run people off
  - Membership is parity
  - Disciples, Martyrs and Missionaries are on a different plane of existence...(not my job)
  - Programs and sermons generate disciples better than old (Bible verse) methods
  - Is adequately met in membership, a small group and maybe a mission trip

### **Back to the crux:**

- Discipleship is in trouble
- Only leaders can address the root causes

### **How did you organize it?**

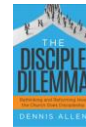
Three sections: defining the dilemma from a leadership perspective, unearthing causes and effects, and a leadership path forward.

The book begins by describing the decline of Western discipleship. Not universally, but demonstrably in decline. The first half of the book argues that the decline in discipleship is the result of old and now-beloved traditions (reactionary, or ill-conceived or malevolent practices) emerging in the Second and Third Centuries that wrecked discipleship. The second half of the book looks at the Biblical and structural things that flourish strong discipling, and how a leadership team might approach that kind of discipling culture. So the objective of the book is to totally demoralize pastors by invoking shame and blame about their screwups. Oh, wait a minute, that's not it. The purpose of the book is to ask how, as leaders, both professional Pastors as well as lay people leading large and small groups, we should think about the culture of our churches based on the purposive directive of Christ. The purpose of the book is to suggest that until we get our "community" culture set right to Christ, untangled from these traditions, discipleship will continue to entropy – to burn out. And the back end of the book is a journey starter if the front end of the book makes sense.

It used to be that societies were scornful of Christianity's contrast against the rest of humanity. Think about Pliny's perplexed letter to Emperor Trajan about Christians for example. But something happened among the believers. So much so that the scoffing today is much more about the conformity of Christ's people to the rest of the world than differences.

### **What are you trying to accomplish?**

My hope is that 1% of church leaders will give the book a read. Not so much that want them to blindly buy everything I bring up, but more that they can see the possibility that discipleship is deeply compromised and that likely, only leaders can take up the cause to rebuild discipleship, and a path to do that. Now to be honest, I'd be delighted if someone comes along behind me to say "You missed it entirely. The problem is not there, it's here..." Or even "There is no problem and here's proof." Yet



I've had enough exposure living in numerous national and international assignments to see the numbers, hear the stories and see the effects. We have a dilemma to address in Christian community.

**What do you mean by the term “traditions”?**

Non Biblical things that were used to deal with crises, or advance the power of the churches. Routines, habits and customary things that wreck discipleship. The book details six big ones.

**Isn't discipleship a fairly well trafficked topic already?**

It is! There are loads of terrific books on being a better disciple and on making disciples. The question behind the question might be “So why another discipling book?” And the answer is that this is not a book about discipleship. It's a book about the things that cripple discipleship and what must be done to right causes, in line with Christ's model.

**What Makes TDD unique?**

The book is written for Christian leaders and about culture change for discipleship. The traditional route in discipling is akin to planting a flower in a pot, watering it to sprout, then transplanting it to the desert and walking away. There are lots of books on being a good disciple. Plenty of books about running a discipleship program. Those are production-centric approaches. Clever, but not Biblical. The book is an attempt to return to Christ's one-on-few model, deep relationships, personal life together, through the culture of Christian community, rather than the productions systems of mass-development.

**What, exactly, are you saying is wrong with discipleship today?**

I'd say there's nothing wrong with discipleship. I would argue that the unimportant is often eclipsing the important in Christian community in terms of discipling – the real life relational stuff of discipleship, which is a cultural problem.

**What do you mean when you say culture?**

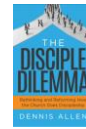
The operational delivery of true purpose – what we are supposed to be doing. The warp and woof of the daily lives of the believers in a community of Christ. Purpose which must be defined, reinforced and lived out by leaders who put the Biblical mission of making disciples and going as disciples ahead of the normative stuff institutions get lulled into thinking are more important than that purpose. An example, and this will generate some heat when I say it, is to mistakenly think every person's job is to convert people.

**When you say leaders, who does that involve?**

Pastors of course, but lay leaders of all stripes, from small group leaders to Sunday School teachers to Elders, Deacons, Trustees, Committee leaders. And especially mature believers in Christ, who are to be out there inviting, living alongside, coaching discipleship.

**What is it you're asking us to do?**

Change contemporary Christian culture. From mass gathered member-based systems into relational one-on-few intentional relationships. Sermons, mission trips and membership are all nice, helpful even, but not the model Christ gave us in discipleship.



### **Do you tell readers how to solve TDD?**

The answer is a definitive “It depends.” If someone wants a recipe or three step fix, this is not going to be a satisfying read. On the other hand, if the premise in the book makes sense, the journey to begin a culture change suggested in the book will likely seem quite practical – in many ways not unlike strategic planning (counting the cost before you go all in) . But it is not an overnight thing. TDD’s timeline and process is more like growing an oak tree, not so much like a microwave dinner.

### **Where does conversionism end and discipleship begin?**

Well, we have to be sure we understand each other when we use terms like conversion and discipling. Some people, like John Piper, use the term conversion to mean the whole nine yards - regeneration, sanctification, vigorous continual pursuit. Piper speaks of that deeper meaning, his definition of conversion being very comprehensive (Oct 2009 Desiring God Podcast). But that’s the exception. Most people think about conversion as the endgame. Getting saved. Then it’s done, back to the regular stuff. If that’s the meaning, conversion is spiritual orphaning. And it often takes up all the air in the room in a church discussion about Christianity – that we’re all supposed to be evangelists, which Biblically we are not, and that we’re all to go to foreign lands as missionaries and save people, which is romantic, but not Biblical, and that saving people is what you do. Maybe the Lausanne Conference pressed that on our Christian culture, I don’t really know. But the concept of simply getting people saved is far afield from Christ’s discipling. You can even see examples of that kind of shallow discipleship across not only the modern age, but in the New Testament when John the Baptist’s followers had no idea what they were doing as believers until the Apostle Paul confronted them, to show them the fuller way of disciples (Acts 18 & 19).

### **So are you saying churches do a poor job of making disciples?**

What the data tells me is the same kinds of trends we see in the corporate world – hiring (making disciples) gets a lot of attention, a lot of capital investment, a lot of professional staffing to work on recruiting people. Developing and sustaining new people does not get much investment – take a look at church statistics in both corporate and church environments. People usually come to work to meet needs - they want compensation or status or gratification or community. People often come to Christianity because of needs too – whether life trauma, or seeking something larger than themselves or for its community. I am suggesting these institutions, commercial and Christian usually have high investment costs in attracting and recruiting, but very little relational connectivity with these new people to anchor commitment and development – in a word, discipleship. Education, yes, lots of new member and new employee training, yes. But life-on-life discipleship (or employee relational development) is rare.

### **What was the hardest part about writing TDD?**

### **Will there be a sequel?**