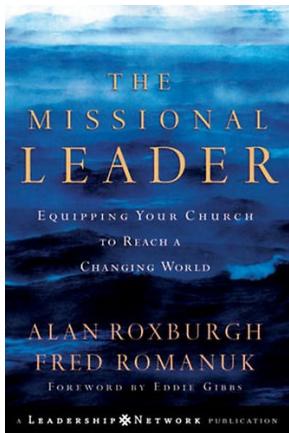


# MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter

by Charles Fleming



Recommended reading:

*The Missional Leader: Equipping your church to reach a changing world*

by Alan Roxburgh &  
Fred Romanuk

pages 26-35

In his well-known statement of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), Jesus made it clear that his will for his followers is that they actively "make disciples." Why then do we see so many churches today that separate mission and discipleship?

In *The Missional Leader*, Roxburgh and Romanuk suggest that the problem lies largely with the use of two flawed church leadership models: "The dominant metaphors of [church] leadership in our time have been either *pastoral* (caring for the flock of God, counseling and spiritual care) or *entrepreneurial* (the leader who knows where the church needs to go and has the vision, passion and strategy to take it there)" (emphasis added).

They note that the *pastoral model* "is not actually derived from the New Testament models of the pastor. In its current usage, the word [pastor] has been directly shaped (and redefined) by the fields of psychology and therapy as well as by modernity's focus on the self. The pastor is primarily a caregiver, a spiritual counselor who looks after the private, personal, inner spiritual needs of individuals." They argue that the *pastoral model* tends to lose sight of the church's missional "calling to participate in forming an alternative society of God's kingdom."

They go on to note that the *entrepreneurial model* is also flawed. It tends to call on pastors to be like "a CEO... , who takes charge, sets growth goals and targets 'turnaround.'" This model draws on a narrative that is "deeply rooted in the North American myth of the heroic, charismatic personality who, like some form of spiritual superman or superwoman, guarantees success through the power of personality or strategic skill."

Both of these models of church leadership tend to relegate mission to either an optional outreach ministry or a strategy for church growth. Both are far removed from Jesus' vision of the church as the people of God participating with him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Father's mission to the world (see Acts 1: 8).

## Disciple-Makers:



According to Jesus, the church is to be a called-out community with each member being formed into his image and inviting and challenging others to accept the reign of God in their lives.

So how do we church leaders contribute to that? We do so by being disciple-makers and cultivators; and by emphasizing people, not programs.

### Disciple-Makers

*You cannot teach what you do not know.  
You cannot lead where you will not go.*

This insight from an African-American pastor suggests a job description for church leaders that embraces Jesus' command to his followers to make disciples.

Without personally being on mission with Jesus—going where he goes; doing that he does—there is little chance that church leaders will actively disciple people who, in turn, will disciple others. An over-reliance on care-giving or entrepreneurial leadership falls short of Jesus' call to missional discipleship.

In churches with an over-reliance on care-giving leadership, it is common for members to act like consumers of religious goods and services and not servants of the Kingdom. Often they go “church shopping”—looking for better care-giving programs.

In churches with an over-reliance on entrepreneurial leadership (typically provided by a highly charismatic and otherwise gifted senior pastor), the congregation tends to be pastor-centered, and then falls apart when the lead pastor departs.

Neither approach is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—*fruit that will last*” (John 15: 16). Effective church leaders are committed to producing disciples who, in turn, are equipped to go forth and make disciples who are also equipped to make disciples. Though care-giving and entrepreneurial giftings have their place in effective churches, the core identity of a missional church leader is to be a maker of *disciple-makers* (not just disciples).



### Cultivators

Roxburgh and Romanuk note that effective disciple-making church leaders have learned to be *cultivators*. This type of leader is like the farmer in Jesus’ parable who had a significant role (“scatters seed on the ground”), but knew that it was the Lord who gave the increase. Seemingly “all by itself the soil produces grain” (Mark 4: 26-29)! This parable reminds us of the need for church leaders to recognize the reality that the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Son of God is already, through the Spirit, redemptively at work in the lives of all people—interacting with them, gifting them, teaching them, transforming them. As church leaders, our job is to recognize what the triune God is doing among these people, name and affirm it, and then equip and resource it.

Understanding the nuances of the verb “to cultivate” helps to focus our missional efforts:

- Farmers cultivate by “preparing the soil.” In like manner, we can create optimum conditions for the development of people through modeling, teaching and putting in place structures and programs that facilitate such growth.

- People cultivate a taste for the arts or good wine. Jesus told Peter he did not “savor” the things of God but then proceeded to teach and model for Peter how to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). We, too, are called to help others develop a taste for the ways and things of the Spirit.

### People, Not Programs

Jesus developed disciples and the church structure emerged to facilitate the work of those disciples. Too often we put our energy into nurturing the structure at the expense of the disciple-making mission. Our challenge is to be sure that structures and programs exist to equip people to be disciple-makers.

Disciple-making is about teaching and modeling what it means to be pioneers of a new way of living. It is about bringing people together into communities of faith that are outposts of Jesus’ Kingdom in a fallen world. It is about equipping and releasing people to go forth, inviting and equipping others to also become disciple-makers.

### Discussion starter questions:

- 1) What could be done to change an existing consumer mindset in a congregation; or to prevent it developing?
- 2) Do you agree the mission is to make disciple-makers who live a lifestyle alternative to the dominant culture? If you do, mention 2 or 3 specific things you could do to help people become *disciple-makers* in such a movement?
- 3) What are some specific things you could do to help people cultivate a taste for the things of the Spirit?
- 4) How would you include care-giving and entrepreneurial leadership in a model that focuses on leadership by cultivation?