

THE URGENT CALL FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN THESE TIMES

J.F.K Mensah

A disciple is anyone who is committed to the process of obeying and imitating Jesus until one is like Him. I take that from Luke 6:40: it says, 'a disciple is not above his teacher or master, but if he is fully trained, he will be like his master'. 1 John 3:2 says, 'when we see Jesus, we shall be like Him, for anyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure'. So, discipleship is the process of being discipled, and a disciple is a student, an apprentice; a learner (from the Greek word, 'mathetis'). Mathematics and 'mathetis' come from the same 'root word'.

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With that definition, it is clear that when we say we are producing a disciple, it means we are in for a person that, at the end looks like Jesus, lives like Jesus, talks like Jesus, and ministers like Jesus. This now brings us to what I call 'checklists for discipleship'. My first one (and you would have guessed by now) is the goal of discipleship. In discipleship, unless the person arrives at permanent, stable and consistent Christ-likeness in character, in doctrine, in ministry in fruitfulness, and in intimacy with God, your job is not done.

It is important to check the following five points.

1. The selection process.

You can see in John 1:39 that the first disciples of Jesus who early on were disciples of John met Jesus after John pointed to Jesus and said, 'this is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. Jesus asked them, 'what do you seek?' And they answered, 'Rabbi, where do you live?' Jesus said, 'come and see'. So they went to Jesus, it was about 4:00pm and they stayed overnight. The next morning Andrew found his brother, Peter and said, 'we have found the Messiah', and brought him to Jesus.

But in Matthew 4:19, when Jesus met them fishing in Galilee, he told them, 'follow me and I will make you fishers of men'. Finally, in Mark 3:14-15, which agrees with Luke 6:12-13, we are told, 'in those days, Jesus went to the mountains to pray. He continued the whole night in prayer to God and when it was day, He called his disciples to Him and He chose twelve, whom He named apostles, that they should be with Him'. So the selection process was not haphazard. Jesus took a period of over one year before He finally selected His 12 disciples.

When you look at it, Jesus' ministry was side-by-side with John the Baptist's ministry up to the time He chose the twelve to be with Him. You can see that He observed them, and He prayed all night about them. When you read John 17, three times, Jesus told the Father, 'the men you gave me, these men you gave me, they were Yours, You gave them to me'. He was sure that it was God who

handed those people to Him, and He gave account of that, because he said, 'those you gave me I have kept them. None is lost except the son of perdition'.

For many of us, we choose disciples haphazardly, and we are surprised that they are not faithful. We are surprised that they don't last. We are surprised

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that they are not fruitful. The number one place we need to watch is the selection process.

2. The content of our discipleship.

If we do not have the end in mind, we will expect our disciples to produce fruit which we never put into them. When I left secondary school and came to the university, some of my friends branched into the Medical School, others into the Law School, and some went to KNUST and studied Architecture.

After the years, those who went to Medical School became doctors. Those who went to the Law School became lawyers, and those who went to the School of Architecture, became architects. Why? The content of what is taught in those schools produced the results of a doctor, a lawyer, and an architect. One of my classmates, our school prefect, flew one of the flights. When they mentioned his name, I thought, I think I know this guy. When the plane landed at the Kotoka International Airport and he got out, and here was my school prefect. He flew the airplane just because when we all left school, he went to a place where the content of the school made him a pilot. Many times, we are surprised, ‘this disciple of mine cannot cast out demons, he cannot heal the sick, he is not able to overcome pornography’, etc.

The question is, what did you put in them? The content or curriculum for discipleship is what gives you the end-product. Our churches and members are like this because of the kind of sermons we preach to them. In computer language, they say garbage in, garbage out—what you put in is what comes out.

3. The kind of training, character building and knowledge that we model before them.

This is important because, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, ‘be imitators of me just as I am of Christ’. In Galatians 4:19, he says, ‘my little children in whom

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I travail till Christ be formed in you.’ The disciples we produce look at our character and the kind of coaching and training we model before them. This is why it is called discipling. If you want your disciples to pray, you must pray. If you want your disciples to memorize Bible verses, you must memorize Bible verses. If you want your disciples to win souls, you must actively win souls. The discipler is the model for the disciple.

If you tell them to memorize Bible verses while you comfortably do not partake of any memorization, you are shooting the message in the leg because in Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus said, ‘the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat therefore everything they tell you do, but don’t do what they do for they say and do not do’. In Acts 1:1, it says, ‘Theophilus, in the last treatise, I told you what Jesus begun to do and to teach’. So the model we hold before the disciples is critical because it speaks volumes, it shouts louder than what you are telling them.

4. The duration of our discipleship.

I have interviewed a lot of churches and church members and for most churches, a discipleship class is like one month, two months, three months, then afterwards, you leave the discipleship class and join the main church—discipleship is done. They treat discipleship as if it was a new converts’ class. Now let me ask you, if you finish discipleship class in three months, then what is the main thing you have now come to do? A disciple is not above his master. If he is fully trained, he will be like his master. Discipleship does not end until you are like Jesus. So, with the way we have given one month, two months, three months to discipleship, in order to continue with the main church activity and more mature things, what is the more mature thing than discipleship?

Jesus said in Luke 14: 25-26, when the great crowds were following him, that, ‘if any man follows me and

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cannot hate father, mother, brother, sister, wives, children, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple'. He said in Luke 9:23, 'if any man wants to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily'. In Luke 14:33, He says, 'if a man cannot forsake all he has, he cannot be my disciple'. The kingdom of God, according to Matthew 13:44-46, is like a treasure somebody found in the field and afterwards went and sold everything he had to buy it. The kingdom of God is like a merchant searching for precious pearls and when he found one of great price, he went and sold all he had to buy it. God's kingdom will cost you all. Jesus will not accept a Lordship which is 90%, He doesn't even take 99%, and He demonstrated it in the rich young ruler.

So, in allocating a month, two months, three months for discipleship so that we can go on and do other things, we are making the average church member think that, discipleship is kindergarten, but according to Acts 11: 26, when Paul and Barnabas gathered the church in Antioch together, for a whole year, they taught them. It is in Antioch that the disciples were first called, 'Christians', because they were looking like Christ.

5. The issue of reproduction.

I read the 20th anniversary reprint of Dr. Bill Hull on the discipleship movement in the United States of America and he was saying that the failure of discipleship in America is that, disciples are not reproducing. Discipleship is going on but reproduction is not going on. When there is no reproduction, there is no discipling because Jesus said in Matthew 4:19, 'follow me, I will make you fishers of men.' In Mark 1:17, He said, 'follow me, I will make you become fishers of men.' In John 15:16, He said, 'you did not choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and bear fruit that your fruit should abide'. In John 15:2, He says that, 'any branch in me that does not bear fruit, my father cuts it off and any branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it can bear more fruit'.

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul says, 'the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also'. If there is dis-

cipling going on, reproduction must happen. Jesus said, in the John 17 high priestly prayer, 'I'm praying for them and I'm praying for those who will believe on me because of their word'. Jesus saw multitudes believing on him through the message of those he had disciplined. There is nothing like a disciple who is not reproducing, and we need to watch it. If your disciple is not standing, if your disciple is not reproducing, it means that there's something wrong in your discipling process.

Why is discipleship critical in missions and particularly for Africa?

1. The language and culture problem in Africa is a big issue.

Africa is still just about 17% of the world's population, at most 20.5%, depending on which statistics you are leaning on. But 30% of all the languages in the world are in Africa. This means that in a nation like Ghana, taking the ethno-linguistic people groups, plus the foreigners who are in the country, we are already up to about 110 different ethno-linguistic people groups. You're talking about the Basare, the Frafra, the Nzema, and the Akpafo, name them.

Nigeria alone has over 500 ethno-linguistic people groups. With so many languages, it is difficult in Africa to just decide that you are going to use the traditional missionary method of going to live five, ten, fifty years among the people group and learn the language before you start preaching and teaching and discipling. The whole of the USA, with over 230 million people is using only English. You cannot do that in a typical African country. You cannot use any of the tribal languages to speak for the country.

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From my own experience, when the Navigators missionaries came to Ghana, I was one of the first people they disciplined because the University Christian Fellowship, donated myself and the team to the missionary, Dave Hall and his wife, Sherry to disciple. We met with him for one whole year, week after week. He taught me my first 60 Bible verses which I memorized. During that time, he could not speak Twi, Ewe and any of the Ghanaian languages. The common language was English between me

and himself and the other students who were with him. But you know what? When I left the university, it wasn't long before I became the Volta regional pastor for our church. I speak my native language, Ewe fluently. I read Ewe fluently. So with the 60+ Bible verses memorized in English, I travelled from Aflao and Denu to Kpasa, and I organized over 77 crusades. I pastored in Hohoe for twelve years and spoke my native language.

This is critical because after being discipled, you are in a position to carry Christ to your culture and to your language. This is different from when the person is just a church member. I have gone to many places to preach and I call people who have been going to church for 20 years, some of them for 30 years. I call them to the front and I ask them to give me 20 Bible verses and they are not able. After 20 years in church, when such a person goes back home to his village, he cannot transform the village because he does not have enough of Jesus's words in him to make a difference.

2. Missionaries don't last in the field forever.

Even Jesus, after three and a half years, he went back to heaven where he came from. So, the missionaries will go. One of the reasons why our churches in the North close up and die is because a banker, a teacher, lecturer, a nurse from the southern Volta region was transferred to Nyankpala or Savelugu, and among other things planted a church, but did not disciple anybody. So by the time they are transferred back to the South of Ghana, there is nobody to handle the church and the church dies. I was very saddened when the first headcount of Christians in Ghana was done in 1989. I was at that conference and they said over 5,000 villages in Northern Ghana, Upper East and Upper West did not have any evangelical church.

So all the churches, all of us who were pas-

sionate for church planting, the gospel and missions started moving out to the North and churches were planted. Over a five-year period, the statistics came back, that over 1000 churches had been planted and several of them had closed up. It was closed because the Southerners who went to open the church did not disciple anybody and they were transferred back

home and that was it. We need to disciple the people in such a way that when you are with a Frafra, a Dagomba or you are in an Nzema land, when you are leaving, there is somebody there who has been so discipled that he too can pass on the discipling process to another person. He can make disciples who make disciples, who make disciples.

3. Disciple-making is critical for missions because there are certain philosophical issues, theological issues and challenges in every culture that only discipled sons of that culture can unlock.

My father's brother was the Paramount Chief of our hometown for 60 years and then he died. For 20 years, they could not find a Paramount Chief to replace him. They grabbed my brother's son and he became the Paramount Chief. There are things around the throne of the paramount seat, which no foreign missionary will ever be told because they are tribal secrets and gems, which are guarded almost with the lives of those who know them. Only the sons of the soil, only the indigenes, those who belong to the tribe can analyze those things and know whether this kind of drum is a social drum, a demonic drum, a drum for fornication or a drum for executioners. Sometimes, some of our white missionaries even go and buy necklaces made of cowries and put them on and they think it is African

culture, but you and I know what cowries are used for. Certainly, no pastor in Ghana will put on a necklace with cowries because we understand our culture and once we are discipled, we can easily discern what is not Christlike. Therefore, if the missionary makes a mistake of just churching the people and not discipling the people, he cannot break into the culture. This is the reason why after almost 200 years of Christianity in Ghana, our chiefs, our linguists and the whole chieftaincy body is untouched by

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the gospel.

Also, I want to raise the issue of poverty in Africa. The disciple-making method we use, the church planting methods we use, the evangelism methods we use must take cognizance of the fact that the average African lives below \$2.00 a day. How much

are our pastors paid? If we want to use expensive methods of evangelism, disciple-making and church planting which have failed because we cannot raise up chapels and expensive clergy to man the influx of new souls that are coming to the church in Africa, we cannot handle it. The church in Africa will continue to remain a baby church if we don't change the way we are doing missions, because multitudes are entering the church, 50 million in one year. How do you handle that? If there's no discipling, you can just gather them in a church and there is very little change.

I don't want it to be said aloud, but as a Ghanaian, even though we all champion the fact that we are 71.2% Christian, 50% of Ghanaians are nominal. On the average, only about 20% of Ghanaians actually go to church. And of those who do go to church, Monday to Friday in the offices, they are the same as people who don't go to church. Bribery, corruption and the evils of society are not being caused by Muslims. Let us be honest about it. If there are ten people in the village and seven are Christians and three are Muslims and that village is full of bribery and corruption, full of social evils, exam malpractices and etc, is it the three people who are causing it or the seven people who are in the village? The church in Africa is receiving the gospel and growing but the personal character of the average Christian is lamentable. I doff my hat for the Africans here and there who are men and women of integrity. You cannot challenge the fact that they know Jesus, but the great majority of church-going Ghanaians are nothing to write home about—I can tell you story after story.

I normally go casually to places and when they later find out that I am a pastor, their attitude towards me changes. I am ashamed of that type of hypocrisy. Without discipling the people, we are doing African Christianity a great disservice. Now that the whole world has to look up to Africa for Christian leadership because we are in the majority, and the church here is growing while it is dying in the West, we must give them a Christianity that is truly Biblical and truly African.

This is why we need to disciple. I won't spend time on Islamic militarism. Militant Islam can make all our Christianity nonsense if we don't disciple the people for them to know that, to suffer for Jesus, to

die for Jesus, to endure for Jesus is what is required of a disciple. This is why the missionary and missions must major on discipleship and disciple-making.

I will conclude with a few of the challenges that the 21st century is introducing.

1. The hatred for absolute truth.

Society is becoming more and more accommodating, so the socio cultural landscape cannot see why Jesus says in John 14:6, 'I am the way the truth and

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the life, no one comes to the father, but by me.' Why do you say that? Do you want to eliminate every other religion? They cannot bear it that, the Christian says the Bible is the only word of God and that certain things are bad before God and certain things are right before God, because the Bible says so. The recent release by the United Nations is that, the church is its worst enemy as far as carrying out the freedom and human rights they want to propagate is concerned.

These are the times we live in. If we don't produce disciples with conviction, people who know the truth, stand for

the truth and are ready to die for the truth, we shall lose the market. 1 Timothy 3:15 says, 'the church is the pillar and ground of truth in the universe'. In John 17:17, Jesus says 'sanctify them in Thy truth, Thy Word is Truth'. In John 8:31-32, He says, 'if you believe in me and you continue in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free'. Today's generation doesn't want to hear that.

If you are coaching a disciple in these times, and you don't build people of conviction, people who are persuaded by truth and prepared to stand for the truth, like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel, your disciple will be washed away in no time.

2. We have come face to face with gay pride.

The LGBTQ fraternity is calling us people who have

homophobia, because we are saying it is wrong for you to be a homosexual, to be a lesbian, to be involved in pedophilia and to be queer or bisexual.

We are saying no, that is an abomination to God, and society doesn't want to hear that. In fact, as for the US now, if you will not allow LGBTQ, you can't win their votes. This is where society has come. These are the times we live in, the reality of the times that we are in.

3. The rise of atheists and agnostics

These people say, 'I was a Christian, I was born in a Christian home, I was bred in a Christian home, but I don't believe in God again. I don't believe there is any God, even if He is there, I don't know. I choose to believe in evolution and I don't believe in judgment, eternal life and resurrection.' Europe is filled with them, not to mention China and all that is going on around us from Japan to even the U S. The George Barna report, from the Pew research doesn't have a good story to tell us. Even for those who go to church once a month, some of them responded that Sodom was the wife of Gomorrah when they were asked, what is Sodom and Gomorrah? The church is in a very sorry state. What used to be a mission sending force has become a place in need of missionaries.

Now, Proverbs 24:10 says that, 'if you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small'. And Jesus has told us about the two men in Matthew 7:24-27, who built their houses; one on the rock, one on sand. The rain came down, the storm, the flood, and the one on the sand fell. We need to pay a little more attention to our children. Many times, I included, many parents do not know their children. Character is not built overnight. It is a set of habits that become character. Therefore, you cannot have a child who will fall over night. It never happens. Even for Judas Iscariot, John 12 says he was already stealing money from the money bag, which Jesus entrusted to him. We need to do a lot more thorough work on our Christian children. If after that, something happens, we are not surprised because we can already begin to see the trends, and in all grace plus parenting, that's all we can entrust ourselves to. Jesus himself took time with His disciples. He worked on them.

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So even after Satan shook them and they all run away, when they came back, they died for Him.

A Christian can be a believer in word and an atheist in action because we see Christians who speak boldly but when it comes to acting their faith, they act differently from what they speak. This is the reason discipling is critical. The fallen man, even after accepting Jesus as his Lord and personal Savior, has his heart operating

at two levels. In Romans 7, Paul was saying that, 'I know that no good thing dwells in me. The good I want to do, I am not able to do. The evil I don't want to do, I find myself doing. I know that it is no longer I; it is sin dwelling in me'. Even for myself (I use myself because I have been a Christian for about 47 years now and by the grace of God, I have not backslided) but any time I relax on myself, I am still tempted by girls.

This means everlasting watchfulness. If you cannot do this, you will be a Christian for a long time, but you will fall to your own dismay. Luke 4:13 says, 'Satan left Jesus for an opportune time'. Even with Jesus, after 40 days of fasting, Satan got near and tempted Him. When he didn't succeed after three attempts, he left Jesus, not forever, but for another opportune time to engage him. Every Christian is vulnerable. Jesus says, 'he that endures to the end will be saved'; Matthew 24:13. Nobody should take anything for granted. None of us is beyond being tempted. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 says, 'anyone who thinks he stands should take heed, lest he falls'. We are all are vulnerable. We are depending on the grace of God, we are depending on the Holy Spirit, we are depending daily on God's promises and putting in all the hedges and things we need in order that we will run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. May it be that, none of us will relax and get home safely. Amen.

For the African Christian, if there is no Holy Spirit fellowship and empowerment in their discipling process, you are joking. Africa is full of 'Mami Wata', witches, 'Chakpana', 'Lebiezo', 'Nana Tungu', 'Antoa Nyamaa' and you name them. The evil spirits are not dreams in Africa. They are realities we live with in Africa. Till today, the world president for Voodoo is from Benin. Benin is the only country in the world that has a voodoo national holiday. So, if you are

discipling somebody in Africa and you do not bring in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, fellowship with the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you are joking, because so many things happen, and the disciple is not able to face them because they are spiritual issues. If you are not able to handle them, he leaves the faith and he goes to pour libation. That is the place of the Holy Spirit in discipling. He must be included and have His place.

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to bend it, it is easier than an old adult oak. If you want to bend a twisted adult oak, you will just break it. Fortunately for us the Scripture Union, GHAFES, The Navigators, the Campus Crusade and various groups are working on campuses and it is time to highlight discipleship and disciple-making in such a way that even if the churches are not prepared to embrace it, the para-church organizations will capture our youth for us. If they can get a good enough

The best time to disciple a human being is in his youth. Our Junior High Schools, Senior High Schools, and the Universities are critical because, if they are not disciplined by that time, they grow up to be caked adults who hear the gospel but find transformation very difficult. Just like a young tree, if you want

curriculum to work on them, we shall not lose them because they will be the oaks for the future of the church, but with undisciplined youth, when they get into position of power...

If Ghana needs doctors, we have the Medical School. If Ghana needs lawyers we have the Law School. If Jesus says, go and make disciples, the church must set up discipling schools, which can produce disciples, who will make disciples. Amen.

Rev. JFK Mensah and his dear wife Georgina have been in ministry together for more than thirty years.



Their greatest passion is working to produce fully functional Christlike disciples. JFK serves as General Overseer of the Great Commission Church International, headquartered in Ghana, and recently ended a term as the Area Leader for Northwest Africa in Pioneers Africa, a missions organization.

JFK is also the President of the Christlike Disciplemakers Movement, an interdenominational initiative for making Christlike disciples worldwide. The disciples he is raising use their calling and gifting for finishing the task of the Great Commission and preparing the body of Christ for His Second Coming. He is also the Rector of the Movement's accredited Bible School, which offers Certificate and Diploma courses in Missions and Discipleship.

He shared this message at GEMAFEST 2020.