

FEATURING ORIGINAL RESEARCH FROM **Barna**



How to Save the World

Disciplemaking Made Simple

ALICE MATAGORA

Disciplemaking has been an undercurrent of the research we do at Barna from the beginning. That's because disciplemaking was the original "last call" from Jesus to his followers—the thing we're each meant to do as we walk with Jesus. The research our team conducted alongside this book demonstrates the urgency of a renewed commitment and imagination for the basic Christian practice of inviting people into a life with Christ.

DAVID KINNAMAN, president, The Barna Group

With honesty and humility, Alice Matagora encourages believers to be engaged in disciplemaking in their everyday, normal lives. This is the need of the hour. Using helpful information from Barna and employing her training as a therapist, she shows how vital and yet how accessible it is for every believer. If you find yourself a bit hesitant to disciple others, this book will encourage and instruct you to be the disciplemaker you were saved to become.

ED STETZER, PHD, professor and dean, Wheaton College

A book on disciplemaking with sass. With groundbreaking research from Barna, *How to Save the World* helps us demystify the concept of disciplemaking for the twenty-first century. Alice Matagora interweaves case studies, statistics, and personal anecdotes to offer a useful introductory guide for Christians of all ages on how to create a lineage of faith from one generation to the next. Great for small-group study!

MICHELLE AMI REYES, vice president, Asian American Christian Collaborative; scholar in residence, Hope Community Church; author of *Becoming All Things: How Small Changes Lead to Lasting Connections Across Cultures*

Alice has masterfully condensed the practice of making disciples into an understandable, step-by-step process. Incorporating current Barna research data, she presents a practical and holistic worldview of discipling within cultural, ethnic, and non-majority people groups. I strongly recommend this book for all believers looking to put their faith into Great Commission action.

MARVIN CAMPBELL, US Navigators President

This practical and inspiring book demystifies what discipleship is and motivates people to start making disciples, no matter who they are or what they do. Whether you have been following Jesus for five months or fifty years, you will find helpful insights to help you get started, overcome barriers, or become more effective in making disciples. This easy-to-read book is a gem that you will refer to again and again, as you partner with God. Right where you are.

JOYCE KOO DALRYMPLE, pastor of discipleship and attorney

How to Save the World is a phenomenal resource for normal Christians who know and sense that more is possible in their everyday lives. It is a simple (not simplistic) primer on discipleship and discipling that is both a call to action and a how-to kit. It lays out not only the *why* of discipling (and how the church has lost its way) but also lots of practical insights into *how* to become a discipler. This book, quite simply, can radically change someone's Christian life. It is a phenomenal primer on discipling and a much-needed resource for a church badly in need of a discipling reformation.

BRANDON COOK, executive director of Named Ministries; author of *Learning to Live and Love Like Jesus*; coauthor of *The Cost of Cheap Grace*

How to Save the World



How to Save the World

Disciplemaking Made Simple

ALICE MATAGORA



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How to Save the World: Disciplemaking Made Simple

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CHAPTER 1

The Not-So-Great Disciplemaker

Then Jesus came to [his disciples] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

MATTHEW 28:18-20

You can always disciple one person.

A mentor first told me this nearly two decades ago when I was a college student. And then, when I started training as a campus ministry intern in my first job out of college, I heard it again and again. Of course! One person. How hard could that be?

In the years that followed, I parroted this phrase to countless college students who passed through the ministries I worked with.

You're studying abroad? *You can always disciple one person.*

You've got a full course load *plus* an internship this quarter? *You can always disciple one person.*

You plan to work full-time in the tech industry after graduation? *You can always disciple one person.*

You're getting married and having kids right away? *You can always disciple one person.*

You get the idea.

Fast-forward seven years. God called me out of full-time ministry to work as a marriage and family therapist at a mental-health clinic for the underresourced population in Los Angeles County. Suddenly I was spending more of my daily life with my coworkers than with my dear husband. (I blame my killer commute and LA traffic.)

A few of my coworkers were Christians, but the majority were not. *Ah yes, a ripe harvest field.* With all of my training and ministry experience, specifically in the area of discipleship, *surely* I disciplined tons of people and helped everyone come to know Jesus, right?

Nope.

In fact, I didn't disciple a single person during those years.

Me, a missionary so energized by the call to make disciples that I forsook the hopes of my Taiwanese immigrant parents to "just get a regular job" (a death wish in itself). Me, who instead chose to even *ask people for money* (the death wish of all death wishes for good Asian American kids) so that I could work for a Christian ministry that focuses *specifically* on discipling.

Me, armed with all the belief and conviction in the world that Jesus has commissioned *every single one* of his followers to make disciples of all nations.

Me, with all of my years of discipling training and experience.

Me, the not-so-great discipling maker.

I thought I'd been a great discipling maker. But maybe I'd been too idealistic as a young adult in full-time ministry. After all,

disciplemaking was the heart of my job when I was sharing my “You can always disciple one person” conviction with others.

Is a lifestyle of making disciples really only possible for pastors and people in full-time Christian ministry? But if *that’s* the case, why would Jesus call *all* of his followers to make disciples of every nation?

The Current Reality

It turns out I haven’t been alone in my struggle to make disciples as an everyday follower of Jesus. A lot of us are out there. How do I know? Well, in 2020, The Navigators (an international Christian ministry) commissioned the Barna Group (a Christian research firm) to conduct a study on the state of disciplemaking in the American church, surveying Christians and non-Christians of different genders, ages, ethnicities, education levels, regions, and incomes.

First, the encouraging news: When provided with a working definition of a disciplemaker, 67 percent of the Christians surveyed were at least somewhat interested in disciplemaking.

Not too shabby, right?

Now for the not-so-encouraging news: While a lot of people might be interested in making disciples, only 31 percent of *all* Christians surveyed reported that they have *actually* mentored or disciplined someone. A decent number of Christians—28 percent of those surveyed—have not done this but are interested in doing so.

A whopping 41 percent of all Christians are not interested in mentoring or discipling someone.

Oof. These are sobering statistics, and a ways away from Jesus’ calling for all of his followers to make disciples of every nation.

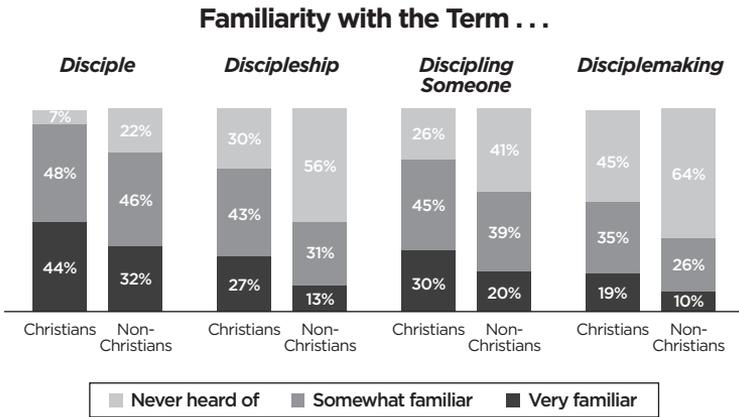
But this is the reality for the church in the United States right now.

How do we return discipling to the center of our collective life in Christ?

Are These Even Real Words?

Here’s something I realized when I started serving in discipling ministry sixteen years ago: my word processor didn’t even register *discipling* and *discipling someone* as real words.

Disciple. Discipleship. Discipling. Discipling someone. Though most of us have likely heard these terms in our Christian circles, it’s not as if we use them all the time—or fully understand what they mean.



n=2,930 U.S. adults, June 1–July 4, 2020. Research conducted by Barna Group.

So what is a disciple? The term *disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathētēs*, generally describing a student, apprentice, or devoted follower.¹ *Mathētēs* is used more than 240 times in the

New Testament, mostly referring to the twelve disciples and the earliest Christians in the four Gospels and the book of Acts.

Mathētēs generally described the students or followers of any teacher, not exclusively a religious teacher. For example, Aristotle was a disciple of Plato. Plato was a disciple of Socrates. I'm a disciple of Joanna Gaines. (Teach me your ways, Joanna!)

Simply put, *to be a disciple of Jesus is to be a follower or student of Jesus*. Being a disciple of Jesus means seeking to learn from him, to live as he did, and to become more like him.

Easy enough, right?

With Jesus no longer walking the earth among us, interpreting the Scriptures for us, and explicitly laying out for us what to do to live a God-honoring life, it turns out we all could use a little help with this following-Jesus stuff—which brings us to discipleship.

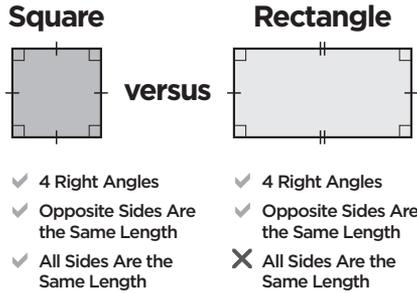
One way that Christians define *discipleship* is “the process of becoming more like Jesus.” Many churches have excellent discipleship courses or programs that facilitate this process. If you've been following Jesus for any amount of time, you know that spiritual growth and transformation are important. I am not the same person I was when I first started following Jesus, and that's a good thing.

But that definition doesn't quite capture the bigger picture of discipleship that we'll be talking about in this book. Here's a definition that better serves the purpose of this book: *Discipleship is a relationship where one person helps another as they learn from Jesus together and become more like him.*

This is where things may get a little confusing.

Do you remember the mind bender from grade school that all

squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares? The unique parameters of a square means that many rectangles just don't count.



In a similar way, all discipling relationships involve growing in your faith alongside another Christian, but *simply growing in your faith around other Christians is not the same as being a discipler*. As Christians, a lot of us use the word *discipleship* as a catchall term that describes anything from being mentored to being in Bible study to being counseled by a pastor.

These are all good things! We want followers of Jesus to grow spiritually. We want to be connected with other followers of Jesus and to be cared for by other Christians. We want followers of Jesus to learn the basics of the Christian life—how to read and understand the Scriptures for themselves, how to search out good Christian community and fellowship, how to practice the spiritual disciplines, how to pray, and how to share their faith with others. All of these things help us be disciples of Jesus and become more like him.

But mere connection and learning don't give us the full picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

To be a disciple of Jesus is not only to learn from Jesus but to live as Jesus lived. And one thing that is clear from what we see in the Gospels about how Jesus lived is that Jesus gave much of his life to *making disciples for himself*.

Multiplying Jesus' Reach

It's a beautiful July morning in the mountains of Colorado. My husband, RJ, and I are in Estes Park directing a Navigators summer training program (think Christian summer camp) for college students from all over the West Coast. (Fun fact: RJ and I met fifteen years ago at the same student program!)

I'm sitting by the pond enjoying an iced cold-brew coffee as I watch the ducks and geese mill around and continue my daily read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year plan. (Yes, I made it past Leviticus and Numbers!)

This morning's reading plan led me through Matthew 9—a small glimpse of Jesus' ministry here on earth. In this chapter alone, we see Jesus

- *heal a paralytic and forgive his sins (verses 1-8);*
- *call Matthew the tax collector to join him in his ministry (verse 9);*
- *dine with Matthew's tax-collector-and-sinner companions, much to the Pharisees' judgment and outrage (verses 10-13);*
- *spend time teaching his disciples (verses 14-17);*
- *heal a woman plagued with a long-term illness that isolated her from society (verses 20-22);*
- *raise a synagogue leader's daughter from death to life (verses 18-19, 23-26);*

- *heal two blind men (verses 27-31);*
- *cast a demon out of a mute man (verses 32-34); and*
- *teach and preach about the kingdom of God (verse 35).*

Whew! Can you imagine? If I managed to do all of that in an entire lifetime, it would be quite an accomplishment.

At the end of the chapter, we witness an intimate moment Jesus had with his disciples after this busy and fruitful spurt of ministry:

When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Matthew 9:36-38

Jesus had traveled through all the cities and villages in the region, healing diseases and casting out demons, preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God, and interacting with the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the esteemed and reviled of society, the sick and sinful, and even the self-righteous religious rulers. After all of this, he looked on the crowds with compassion and pointed out a huge problem: *there were too many broken, sinful, hurting people in need of a savior, and there weren't enough hands and feet to meet the needs of all these people.*

As a man, Jesus could reach only so many people. Even on that one day in that one place, he saw many more in need of salvation.

So what did he do?

- *He told his disciples to pray that God would raise up and send out more workers as his hands and feet (Matthew 9).*
- *He called, trained, equipped, and sent out his own workers—his disciples—to multiply his reach (Matthew 10).*
- *And then at the end of his earthly ministry, he passed on to his disciples the ongoing mission of making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).*

Jesus knew that to progressively reach all peoples throughout all time with the good news of his salvation, he would need his followers to multiply and continue his work next door to everywhere, from generation to generation. As the apostle Paul said in Romans 10:14-15 (NLT),

How can [people] call on [Christ] to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

This is why the Barna statistics on the current reality of discipling should get our attention. The number of people in the world around us who need a Savior is ever increasing; the number of disciplers is insufficient to carry out Jesus’ vision for all

peoples to be saved through him. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are still too few.

That's where you and I come in. As followers of Jesus, we're called to live as he lived and continue his disciplemaking work of

- *praying that God will raise up people in our communities for us to disciple;*
- *calling, training, equipping, and sending out those people to do God's work in their contexts; and*
- *passing on to them the calling to multiply Jesus' work by making disciples who make disciples.*

Being a disciple of Jesus means not just learning more about him. It also means being a disciplemaker *for* Jesus. Disciplemaking means we aren't just *being* a disciple and growing spiritually ourselves—we're purposefully *making* disciples, helping others grow spiritually, equipping them to go and make disciples in turn.

Being a Disciplemaker

Christians are notorious for using abstract terms—language that doesn't paint a concrete enough picture for what we're really talking about. *Disciplemaking* is one of those nebulous words. We can generally wrap our heads around what it might mean, but we may have difficulty picturing what it looks like in practice, let alone describe it to someone else.

“How do you be a disciplemaker?”

“You know . . . You just . . . disciplemake . . .”

A beneficial framework for understanding and living out disciplemaking today is The Navigators' Five Traits of a Disciplemaker.

We'll engage with this framework throughout the book to keep this nebulous concept of discipling simple and help us gauge where we are in our discipling journeys.

Here's what this framework looks like:²

1. JESUS

- **Demonstrates a passion to know, love, and become like Christ**
- *Philippians 3:8-10*

Disciplers are followers of Jesus who have a passion to know and love him. They are purposeful to deepen their intimacy with him. Their personal ministry to friends and family overflows from time alone with Jesus. The focus of this trait is more than just knowing about God; it's about knowing him personally and walking deeply with him.

2. THE WORD

- **Knows and lives from the Scriptures**
- *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Disciplers can accurately handle the Word of God. They know how to read it, study it, talk about it, and pass it on to others. A discipler understands the truth and sufficiency of the Word as a guide for all aspects of life.

3. COMMUNITY

- **Pursues biblical community**
- *Hebrews 10:24-25*

The Lord designed us to walk with him in community with others. Disciplemakers will be intentional to seek, pursue, and create community among believers to spur each other toward love and good deeds. Biblical community includes family as well as extended communities of followers of Christ. Biblical community also draws those without Christ to the Lord (John 13:33-34).

4. THE LOST

- **Lives among those who do not know or follow Christ**
- *1 Thessalonians 2:8*

Disciplemakers spend quality time among those who are without Christ. They will be purposeful to love, serve, and help them understand the gospel. They are marked by a strong commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and a strong compassion for the brokenness of those without Christ. Disciplemakers proclaim and affirm the gospel with both their words and their lives.

5. SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS

- **Advances the gospel through spiritual generations**
- *2 Timothy 2:2*

Disciplemakers are personally involved with helping others move closer to Christ as Savior and Lord. They meet life-to-life* to help nonbelievers understand who Jesus claims to be, and to establish young believers in their faith. Disciplemakers may lead groups of others in studying and applying the Word. Anything that helps others move closer to Christ is discipleship.

Disciplemakers help others catch a vision for investing in the spiritual growth of friends, creating a ripple effect of new spiritual generations who follow Jesus.

* Life-to-life is explained further in chapter 7; for our purposes here, it means discipling through the whole of your life into the whole of another person's life.

As disciplemakers, we intentionally help people learn from Jesus and live more like him by praying with them, spending time together in the Word, sharing in experiences of everyday life, and inspiring and equipping them to do the same with others. We not only have a vision for what God could do *in* and *through* their lives—in their families, communities, and workplaces—but we can also envision the ripple effect of discipling as generations are transformed to become more like Jesus.

We don't have the power to save the world ourselves. We don't even have the power to save our communities ourselves. But the extraordinary invitation of Jesus is that he gives us the opportunity to join him in his saving work—that we are the hands and feet of the Good News, the voices and friendships and tools that God uses to make disciples of all nations.

What if, in this very moment, God is reigniting his call for every one of his followers to join him in his discipling work? What if God is calling you (yes, you!) for such a time as this to partner with him in saving the world, right where you live?

Reignited

I'm going to be honest with you: a lot of people have way more expertise in discipling than I do. I'm just an ordinary

person—a therapist, a wife, a mom—who caught the vision for making disciples in the midst of my ordinary life, and I’ve failed as much as I’ve succeeded. (God sure has a way of working in the least likely ways through the least likely people!)

But I’m writing this book not just because I believe in the importance of Jesus’ call to make disciples, but because I truly believe *anyone* can do it. I may have fallen off the disciplemaking wagon when I stepped out of full-time ministry, but God didn’t leave me there. He continues to draw me back and propel me all the more deeply into this calling to make disciples who make disciples.

These days, I’m leading disciplemakers on a college campus and developing leaders in The Navigators as they mobilize everyday men and women to carry out their disciplemaking calling. I get to learn from ordinary men and women who are making disciples on college campuses, in their families, in their communities, in the workplace, in the military, with their friends, internationally . . . *everywhere*. God’s people are transforming the world around them through disciplemaking!

In this book, we’re going to demystify this superspiritual-sounding, uber-Christian concept of disciplemaking. We’ll keep things simple, just like Jesus did. I’ll share a bit of my own experience and training, as well as pearls of wisdom gleaned from the experience of men and women just like you who are making disciples right where they live, work, and play. We’ll also look at more of that Barna research, which will help us map out challenges and next steps on this disciplemaking journey, including what motivates those who are actively disciplemaking, the most common challenges and barriers to disciplemaking, helpful insights, and

focused starting points for growing as the body of Christ in the American church and bringing discipling back to the center of the Christian life.

We'll keep things focused and practical on this journey, and I promise you, by the end of our time together, you'll be able to envision easy, life-giving ways to start making disciples no matter where you are.

Maybe you're already making disciples and are looking for some encouragement as you continue your discipling efforts. Maybe you were once active in discipling but stopped for one reason or another, and now you want to get back into it. Maybe someone gifted you this book, and you have no idea what discipling even is.

Wherever you are on your discipling journey, this is the calling and the promise Jesus gave each one of us: no matter who you are or what you do, you can partner with God in saving the world—right where you live.

Questions for Deeper Reflection

1. How familiar are you with the concept of discipling? As you think about integrating discipling more into your life as a follower of Jesus, what challenges do you anticipate? What concerns do you have?
2. Jesus calls all of his followers to be disciplers. Which of the Five Traits of a Disciplemaker is your biggest strength? Which is your weakness? Which trait do you sense God calling you to grow in?



Everyday Disciplemaker Case Study

Name: Anna

Age: 25

Race/Ethnicity: White

Occupation: Director of hospitality
and catering at Chick-fil-A

Anna was first introduced to discipling in college, where she was discipled through her college ministry. She found herself so drawn to the vision of discipling that she went into full-time ministry for two years after graduation. After that two-year stint, she decided to move into a role as a director at Chick-fil-A.

During this transition, Anna discovered that staying motivated in discipling is much more difficult than she expected. One challenge she has encountered is that the pace of her job and the energy it requires means she doesn't have a lot of extra capacity in her life. In the busyness, she says, "it's easy to lose sight of what God has called me to do with my role and with my life. It's easy to get caught up in the to-dos or to be drawn to others' [life] goals."

Another challenge Anna has experienced is that though she is around other Christians, not all of them share her vision and passion for discipling. In previous seasons, she found that having a supportive, like-minded, mutually encouraging community made discipling others easier.

What motivates Anna to continue making disciples is remembering the freedom in Christ she experienced through being discipled. She has a deep desire for younger believers to experience that same freedom in Christ. These days, Anna disciples younger women at the local college campus, and as those she

disciples taste this freedom in Christ, she is encouraged and even more excited to keep making disciples for Jesus.

Anna says, “I can easily fall into the trap of believing that I am not enough to make disciples, that I don’t have enough, that I have to be perfect. But then I’m reminded that I don’t have to be perfect in it, that God is more than enough, and that God loves this person way more than [I do]. That takes so much of the pressure of disciplemaking off of me!”

What helps reorient Anna to a lifestyle of disciplemaking when life feels too busy is being mindful of maintaining healthy boundaries with work and other responsibilities. This awareness helps her protect her energy and time. She slows down to really encounter Jesus, reevaluates her priorities, and intentionally seeks the community of like-minded Christians who are making disciples.

As she does so, Anna is reminded that investing in people is the most important thing. From everyday moments with her employees to time discipling women on the college campus to the friendships with other Christians, she can influence others toward this vision for their lives as followers of Jesus.