

Making Disciples Across Cultures: Missional Principles for a Diverse World

April 2015

\$18, 236 pages, paperback
978-0-8308-3690-1

Charles Davis, former director of TEAM, provides a framework for missional discipling across diverse cultural contexts. With on-the-ground stories from a lifetime of mission experience, Davis navigates such tensions as knowledge and behavior, individualism and collectivism, and truth and works to help Christian workers minister more effectively.

What Is a Disciple Anyway?

The word *disciple* means learner, and the object of the learning is obviously Jesus. But there is an important difference between learning “about” Jesus and learning “of” or “from” him. Paul said, “You did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20-21).

“Learn Christ . . . heard Him . . . taught in Him . . . truth is in Jesus.” If disciples are only expected to learn about Jesus, then we can satisfy this expectation through the development of discipleship curricula in the hopes that this process will make disciples. Sermon series, workbooks, Sunday school curricula and seminary programs are full of learning about Jesus. Unfortunately, we can learn a tremendous amount about Jesus and still not learn to know him. As James reminds us, the demons know truth about God, and they are not his disciples. We must also grow in our ability to learn “of” or “from” Jesus, which leads us to actually know him. . . .

I ran a search program on the Bible for the singular word *disciple*, and then the same search for the plural word *disciples*. With few exceptions I found the word overwhelmingly used in the plural. This should not surprise us. Jesus did not have meetings with each of his disciples separately, lining them up on his Outlook calendar and allotting each thirty minutes in a closed room. The disciples were learning to follow Jesus together, and generally when he spoke, he spoke to all of them. One notable exception to this pattern occurred when Jesus spoke to Peter on the beach after the resurrection, but generally each of them was learning of and from Jesus in a group with other disciples who were also learning of and from him.

If someone famous is in a room and everyone moves closer to him or her, they can’t avoid getting closer to each other in the process. The closer they press toward that person, the closer they draw toward each other. In the same way, the closer each of us draws to Jesus, inevitably the closer we draw toward each other. We learn from him together, we follow him together and we love one another together.

What is a disciple anyway?

Here again is a working definition:

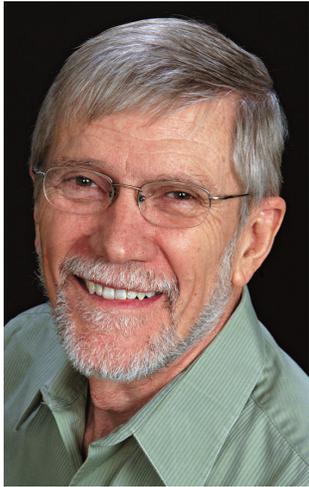
Learners. Followers. Lovers. Of Jesus. Together.

Learning draws us together into his heart to know him and to become like him.
Following draws us together into his work to obey him no matter what the cost.
Loving draws us into his people, which in turn can transform the world.

Up, out, in. This is what it means to be his disciples, the “living stones” Peter described: “As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to



BOOK EXCERPT



him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4-5 NIV).

– Taken from chapter one, “What Is a Disciple Anyway?”

Charles A. Davis (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is the former executive international director of TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission). He has over four decades of crosscultural experience in global discipling and missional church planting. He was previously president of the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas, and he is a member of the Global Leadership Council of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.