

C H A P T E R

1

An Overview of the Kingdom Model

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave his final command to his church about their assignment during the interim between his ascension and his return at the end of the age. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20).

The importance of those words cannot be overstated. They express God’s revealed will for his church until he returns at the consummation of all things. The church’s mission is to make disciples by evangelizing and educating the believers. In turn, the believers are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, demonstrated by a life of Christlike service within the kingdom of God.

This survey chapter will present a vision for what I believe is God’s plan for disciple making, which I call the kingdom approach, but in that approach we need to understand the church’s role. Recent studies and trends suggest that making disciples is not being done with any great effectiveness; for example, less than 10 percent of professing Christians

self-consciously embrace a biblical world-and-life-view. So states George Barna in *The Second Coming of the Church*.¹ That statement is backed up by a host of others who have evaluated the church's effectiveness.

Among them George Gallup Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay summarize what they see as major trends in religious life in the United States:

- Widespread popularity of religion
- Glaring lack of Bible knowledge
- Inconsistencies of belief
- Superficiality of faith
- Belief in but not trust in God
- Failure of organized religion to make a difference²

Religion and religious practices are relegated to the private sector of life. The difference between the lifestyles of Christians and non-Christians is negligible. Gallup and Lindsay conclude that Christians are not making that much of a difference in society, but neither is religion in general.

Contrast the situation in America with the counsel the apostle Paul gives:

And so, dear Christian friends, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is. (Rom. 12:1–2, NLT)

A look at our culture reveals that a younger generation is coming along that is the most biblically illiterate generation in our history. We are living in a disconnected culture where people are experiencing more and more loneliness and isolation. Neither those inside nor those outside the church see the institutional church positively because it is not addressing the issues or offering substantive solutions to life's problems and chal-

lenges. Therefore, we may be facing the death of the institutional church as we know it. If not, then we may witness in the next decade an overhauling of the present institutional church that will make it look far different from the church today. Postmodernism, the overarching philosophy today, is a life-view paradigm that is seeking to remove foundations and redefine reality in nonfoundational, relativistic terms. Christians are not being equipped to be salt and light in this world, and many have either retreated or walled themselves off from the world and thus are viewed by the world as insignificant and irrelevant.

On the basis of observations as coordinator of Christian education and publications for my denomination, I conclude that the biblical model for making disciples is not being followed. At this point it is important to look closely at the word “disciple,” for it has various connotations. In this book I will define the term as follows:

Generic definition: A disciple is someone who accepts a set of beliefs, and embraces a holistic, total, and intentional approach to life based on those beliefs.

Kingdom definition: a kingdom disciple is someone who thinks God’s thoughts after him and applies them to all of life.

In the Christian sense, the aim of every disciple is to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), especially remembering the proverb, “As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is [or lives] he” (Prov. 23:7, NKJV; “he is like one who is inwardly calculating,” ESV).

In the late 1980s I was sitting in the office of my friend Norman Harper, dean of the Graduate School of Christian Education at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. During our conversation he remarked, “You know, Charles, one of our biggest problems is that our teaching elders do not have a vision for Christian education.” He had published a book several years earlier entitled *Making Disciples: The Challenge of Christian Education at the End of the 20th Century*. In that book he defined a disciple as “someone who self-

consciously strives to live all life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” He further wrote, “The making of disciples is the ultimate purpose of all true education.”

We talked further about those ideas in following years when Harper was serving on the Presbyterian Church in America’s Christian Education and Publications Committee before his departure for heaven. I have frequently recalled his comments since then. As the twentieth century drew to a close and I reflected on the trends and statistics, his words began to crystallize in a new way for me.

Jim Petersen, international vice president of Navigators, an organization that focuses on making disciples, made a similar comment. In his book *Lifestyle Discipleship: The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today’s World*, his very first sentence in chapter 1, which is entitled “Discipleship and Our Contemporary Culture,” is, “Thirty years of discipleship programs and we are not disciplined.”

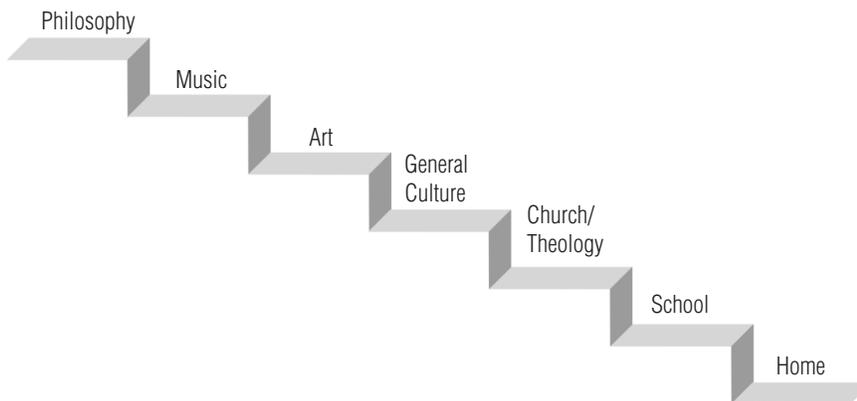
I could go on and on citing similar quotes leading me to conclude that both Harper and Petersen, from two slightly different perspectives, are right. As I have studied trends related to the church and the broader religious and philosophical scene, and as I have had much firsthand experience working with local church leaders, researchers like George Barna, George Gallup Jr., and Robert Wuthnow have convinced me that we are operating from a questionable, maybe even faulty, paradigm of making disciples. Actually, three of the four approaches that I will shortly describe are not totally wrong, but taken individually, or even combined with one another, they fall short of what I believe is the right one; therefore they are not producing the results that God intends. In that sense they are wrong, if used by themselves.

Simply put, we have been operating, often unintentionally, with more of a man-centered rather than a God-centered approach to making disciples, and it is not working. Although there may be much activity and movement that suggest otherwise, the statistics are real. I use “man-centered” to mean either man corporately or man individually. We must operate with the right paradigm—not a man-centered but a God-

centered model; not a narrow isolationist or separatist approach, but a “kingdom of God” approach. What is the difference?

The late Francis Schaeffer, to whom I am deeply indebted, suggested that there is an overarching philosophy that impacts every area of life. In his book *The God Who Is There* he diagrams a series of steps where philosophy, at the top of the stairs, begins to work its way down and impacts every area of life, even theology and the church. (See figure 1.1 for a slight variation of Schaeffer’s original.) This gives us a sense of the approach we must follow in making disciples.

FIGURE 1.1. STEPS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCE



Now the modernistic period, with its Enlightenment philosophy, was exacting. Everything had to fit somewhere. Logic and reason ruled the day until postmodernism, which began full force in the 1960s as the new model, was even more exacting with its disdain for words, logic, and reason. Barna may have sounded a bit like an alarmist when he said in 1998 that we have about five years to turn this ship around,³ but he had valid reasons to say that we need to do that. Maybe Michael Regele in his book *The Death of the Church*, speaking of the visible church as we know it, was also correct in his thesis that the church must die in order to live. Let us take a look at the ways in which the church is striving to make disciples today and then at what God actually has in mind.

Three Inadequate Approaches

For the sake of clarity I will say there are three main approaches being used today under the rubric of making disciples (see figure 1.2). I do not intend to communicate that the three approaches are wrong, but merely reductionistic and incomplete.

FIGURE 1.2. MODELS FOR DISCIPLE MAKING

APPROACH	FOCUS	CONTEXT	ORIENTATION	CHARACTERISTICS	
Model 1: Program-based	People-centered	Informational/ content	Person in community setting (large group)	Program, Activity	Fosters "Christian ghetto"
Model 2: Individual		Formational/ relationships	Person to person, one on one	Felt needs	Checklist for spiritual growth; may occur apart from church membership
Model 3: Small group		Formational/ relationships	Person in small group	Society	Focuses on formation in a small-group setting; may tend to down play the role of corporate worship
Model 4: Kingdom	God-centered	Transformational (includes infor- mation and formation) Content Relationships Application Service and ministry	Any or all of the above	Kingdom	Total trans- formation of life and thought; focuses on the big picture of God and his kingdom

The first approach is a program-based model and focuses on man as part of a corporate entity. The second approach focuses on man the indi-

vidual and his felt needs. The third places man in the context of small-group relationships and focuses more on society. These approaches zero in on man and his relation to God, with a secondary focus being man and his relationship to his fellow man.

Approach 1: The Program-based Model

The first model was primarily used before the 1950s. I call it an “informational or program-based model.” It emphasizes sharing the most information with the most people, focusing on man in his community setting and his activities. This model stresses profession of faith in Christ as well as church membership and attendance. When people participate in church activities, worship, fellowship dinners, Sunday school, and small groups, they find it easy to openly declare their Christian faith. That others are doing the same creates a plausibility structure or a safe environment. For that group, the church becomes almost like a little Christian Shangri-La.

In church the Bible is read and biblical themes are taught, but outside that group environment people tend to put their faith on hold. This model often becomes a programmed (informational) approach to making disciples. We have learned from people like Marshall McLuhan that the methods can easily become the message and thus alter the message’s original intent. That is why we must strongly insist that if our message is correctly defined, we must also use methods that will consistently enable us to communicate the message without changing its content or intent.

Approach 2: The Individual Model

During the early twentieth century, the church was divided between liberals and conservatives, with the liberals seeking to make a broad social application of its message at the expense of the proper gospel focus, and the conservatives reacting and withdrawing from the world and its challenges. This, along with the ineffectiveness of Approach 1, led to the development of a new model in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This second model was more of a “para-church” model. I call it the “individual model.”

The individual model focuses on man and his relation to God, stressing the one-on-one relationship of the disciple to the discipler. In this model people accept Christ, usually because of someone's witness, and then either that person or someone else comes along to help the new Christian grow in Christ. This model calls for the new believer and his discipler or mentor to meet one-on-one or in a very small group. The focus is usually on reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture, learning to share the gospel, and prayer. This approach generally encourages the development of a neat list of things that we have to do to be a disciple. The individual model's effectiveness depends on the effectiveness of the one-on-one instruction received. This approach is stronger to the extent that it overlaps the program-based model, weaker to the extent that it stands alone. People like Billy Hanks, Bill Shell, and others have talked and written about the need to integrate this method with the church's method. As a matter of fact, all of us know people who profess to be Christians but who see no need for the church in their Christian experience. This model easily reinforces that concept.

Approach 3: The Small-Group Model

The third approach works within small groups. Like the second approach, it is what Robert Pazmiño calls a formational model, focusing on people, either one-on-one or in small groups. This particular relational model began in the 1960s. During the 60s and early 70s there were a host of groups growing up everywhere. Somewhat out of a reaction to rugged individualism and the need for more intense interpersonal relations, the "groupie" mentality emerged throughout the culture. The movement developed with the emergence of sensitivity groups and transactional psychology. At the same time groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous were experiencing some success. Their approach was based on building intense relationships where people in a small group generally made more progress than people alone or in a crowd.

In the small group there are usually activities such as sharing, praying, and studying the Bible or discussing a biblical topic. Since much of

the Judeo-Christian history centered on small groups, this model naturally found a place in the life of God's people. House churches are well known to those who study early church history. As one writer expressed, "We have a need to belong, not to an undifferentiated mob, but to a handful of people with whom we can share our thoughts and feelings and with whom we can work to create something of lasting value."⁴

Robert Wuthnow writes that 40 percent of American adults currently take part in small diverse groups that meet regularly and offer care and support; two-thirds of them are connected to churches or synagogues.⁵ This small-group model (built around the "felt needs" in a person's life) focuses on relationships and caring much more than on program or content.

Approach 4: The Kingdom Approach

The kingdom approach, which more fully lends itself to what I call the God-centered framework, not only incorporates these three models, but places them in the context of God's kingdom. It is informational, formational, and *transformational!* Not until we reach the transformational stage will we be disciplined in the biblical sense of being transformed into a new person by changing the way we think, bringing every thought into captivity to obeying Christ, as Paul wrote in Romans 12 and 2 Corinthians 10, and not copying the behavior and customs of this world. This refers not just to our devotional or church life, but all of life. In the words of Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a square inch within the domain of our human life of which the Christ, who is the Sovereign over all, does not say, 'Mine.'"⁶ All of life is a religious activity to be lived unto God.

The primary objectives of the kingdom approach of disciple making include knowing, understanding, and applying God's Word to all life. It also involves living lives more obedient to God's commands. Transforming the way a person thinks and lives is a key in serving and ministering to those who are the image bearers of God both inside and outside the church community. Bringing all thoughts captive to Christ is also essential. This kingdom model produces Christians with a self-

conscious understanding of an all-pervasive philosophy of life. As Wuthnow emphasizes, the lordship of Christ will be reflected in how we use our money and other material resources for the kingdom.

The kingdom model does not separate faith and life (as though such were possible). It focuses on integrating God's truth into all areas of life, and because of that, it is not merely an academic, informational, or intellectual concept. The kingdom model applies to, serves, and ministers to all areas.

While Bible study is basic in the kingdom paradigm, we must also study all legitimate areas of life under the lordship of Christ—mathematics, science, history, law, psychology, and sociology. This model does not suggest that the church plays a lesser role in the process, for the church is the heart of the kingdom model. But the kingdom model paradigm is broader than the institutional church. (Chapter 3 will discuss the relationship of the church to the kingdom.)

Thus the kingdom approach is more comprehensive than the first three approaches above, although it should embrace aspects of all three. A God-centered or kingdom approach focuses on a right view of God, his relation to man, and man's to him, man's relationship to his fellow man, and to the world around him.

In the kingdom approach, Christian education not only deals with different institutions—home, church, state, and school—their relationships with one another and the world around us, it also deals with other spheres of life, such as science, history, mathematics, and law; therefore, *we are to have a Christian world-and-life-view.*

One thing that makes the kingdom framework important is its focus on the transformation of the individual, and its recognition of his or her uniqueness as an image bearer of God. There is no stereotyping in the kingdom, rather, we are to demonstrate our uniqueness as we minister and serve the Lord in our context. The kingdom model respects the individual's giftedness. Wherever we are in life, we are to serve the Lord's purpose; that is our reason for being.

Another thing that makes the kingdom focus important is that it offers a particular challenge to the rising generations to know the Word of God, to know the world around us, and to know ourselves. As we grow in that knowledge, we are reminded that Christian education is discipleship and discipleship is obedience to God in all things, because Christ is Lord of all.

While there may be a handful of colleges teaching from this kingdom perspective, such as Calvin College and Covenant College, not many churches in America, to my knowledge, are doing this. The approach used by Francis Schaeffer in L'Abri, Switzerland (though he also used the small group and one-to-one method) probably comes as close as any that I am familiar with to basing discipleship on the kingdom model (though that is my designation).

At this point I do not want to get into any how-to methods. Rather, I want to focus on understanding the kingdom framework or setting, which will in turn provide for us a way to develop our methodology. Parts 1 and 2 of this book will identify some necessary components of the method and describe some of the anticipated results, but in reality the kingdom framework will vary from individual to individual or group to group. I have evaluated too many programs that have attempted to create the impression that theirs is the right method of making disciples. There are many useful methods, but whatever way we choose to implement the process, we must not use a method that will compromise or alter the message of the gospel.

Also, I want to underscore that the kingdom model incorporates the gospel of truth. It starts and ends with the self-attesting Jesus Christ. "In him all things hang together." "In all things Christ preeminent." The kingdom model must not sacrifice the gospel, for without the gospel there is no substance to our efforts to make disciples. If one's world-and-life-view does not start with the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, then it will be an exercise in futility. On the other hand, the kingdom model involves more than Bible study, sharing, praying, and witnessing in the evangelistic sense; and it takes place within various settings. It is one thing to know the Bible content and another to know how to use that knowledge in everyday life.

I do not hesitate to refer to Christian education as disciple making. Contrary to the inadequate approaches we have described, Christian education is not merely program-centered or informational; neither is it only person-centered or formational; nor is it limited to any one institution or life area. It is God-centered, total-life-oriented, hence transformational. This is a process intentionally designed to help us think, act, and live differently. But the kingdom model does not produce stereotypes or cookie cutter disciples. As a matter of fact, operating within the kingdom model, we may reach different conclusions about many things, but there will be unity as regards the system involved. Christians may reach somewhat different conclusions on ethical issues. Some kingdom Christians may see things differently in the political arena, but all will operate with a world-and-life-view perspective as those options are dealt with. That's why my early quote from Jim Petersen is so important.

Transformation of life is our aim in making disciples. You cannot be disciplined within the kingdom framework and not have your life orientation changed. You will develop a biblical world-and-life-view that is constantly reforming your thinking and living because that is the aim of the kingdom model.

A Further Word about the Word

God intends for those in his kingdom to be people of the Word in all of life. He intends for us to use the Word as our infallible guide to finally evaluate the broader area of truth. As the psalmist said, "*In your light do we see light*" (Ps. 36:9). He intends for us to learn his truth in all areas, using the Bible as our guide.

While we must pay particular attention to the Word of God in Scripture, because it is his word written, we must also seek to understand God's truth in all of life. We must remember there is no dichotomy between God's general and special revelation.

Therefore, we define Christian education as *a process of transmitting a world-and-life-view built on God's truth. That is the kingdom approach that must center on Jesus Christ and his Word.* "Education is

the divinely instigated and humanly cooperative process whereby persons grow and develop in life, that is, in godly knowledge, faith, hope and love through Christ.”⁷ Norman De Jong holds that it is superfluous to use the adjective “Christian” with the word “education” simply because true education is education in truth and all truth is from God. Any education that is not Christian is not true education.⁸ Education is a religious exercise, but not all religion in this fallen world is Christian. That is why we need to use God’s Word as the foundation of all knowledge and education.

Recall here Paul’s words in Romans 12:1–2 about being transformed into new persons by changing the way we think. Sadly, if the statistics are correct, our models of making disciples may be making people more spiritually aware, but they are not changing the way people think and live. Remember Barna’s 10 percent—the number of professing Christians who have a self-conscious world-and-life-view. Also, James Engels and Will Norton suggest in *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* that there are converts to Christ whose worldviews have not changed at all since becoming a Christian. And following up on Charles Malik’s statement that evangelism has the twofold task of saving the soul and saving the mind, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig comment: “Our churches are unfortunately overly populated with people whose minds, as Christians, are going to waste. As Malik observed, they may be spiritually regenerate, but their minds have not been converted; they still think like non-believers.”⁹

The Bible states, “All things were created through him and for him”; thus in everything he [is] preeminent” (Col. 1:16, 18). It is legitimate for any institution (home, church, school) to study God’s truth and to engage in Christian education, both formally and informally. But individuals must also be involved. Not only is this legitimate, but it must be done if there are to be a restoration and reclaiming of all things to the glory of Christ.

The kingdom approach to disciple making is aimed at transforming all of life, including ours, to the Lord. It intentionally communicates a

lifestyle that is Christlike in every area, aiming at the sanctification process and the total transformation that Paul writes about in Romans 12:1–2.

Finally, we need to note a strategic point made in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19–20 (see appendix 1). In those famous verses, Jesus connects disciple making with baptism. Because baptism is one of the two sacraments belonging to the church, we believe that he is here connecting disciple making with the church. “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” is also clearly connected with the church.

TOPICS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the three inadequate approaches to disciple making is most familiar to you; how has it impacted your life, particularly your worldview?
2. Which of the models described in this chapter does your church use for discipleship? It may vary somewhat from our description. If so, can you see the difference?
3. We noted that the three inadequate approaches are either informational or formational in focus, while the kingdom approach aims at transformation. How can we integrate the other two concerns into the kingdom approach?
4. The kingdom of God is the subject of chapter 3. Be certain that you understand the differences and similarities between the kingdom approach to making disciples and each of the other three described. What are some of the real differences? Keep in mind that the kingdom model requires a different paradigm than do the other three models described.
5. At this point in your reading how would you design a discipleship program in your church? Keep in mind that it may require a paradigm shift. Refer to your design throughout your reading of this book and make corrections where necessary.

SUGGESTED READING

De Jong, Norman. *Teaching for a Change*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2001.

This book calls for education that aims for life transformation rather than merely transmitting information or content. Thus the purpose of De Jong's work is likewise making kingdom disciples, though in a school context.

Harper, Norman. *Making Disciples: The Challenge of Christian Education at the End of the 20th Century*. Memphis: Christian Studies Center, 1981. One of the key books on Christian education and disciple making within the kingdom. This book reflects a solidly biblical, Reformed view of the kingdom of God and the relation between the covenant of grace and the educational (disciple-making) process.

Pazmiño, Robert W. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997. Realizing that Christian education does not take place in a vacuum, Pazmiño discusses seven foundational issues. He understands the need to balance continuity and change. Without altering the foundation, the book challenges us to "consider the new wineskins" for Christian education. Too often to be contemporary means to forget the basics. Or fearing new trends, we often react with, "But this is the way we have always done it." Here is indeed a "foundational" book.

———. *Principles and Practices of Christian Education: An Evangelical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992. A good sequel to the above. Pazmiño elaborates on the transformational aspect of Christian education. He emphasizes the need for personal corporate transformation, as well as relating the process to specific people in their contexts.



C H A P T E R

2

*Epistemology:
What and How We Know*

Why a chapter on epistemology so early in this book? Francis Schaeffer states, “Epistemology is the central problem of our generation; indeed, the so-called ‘generation gap’ is really an epistemological gap, simply because the modern generation looks at knowledge in a radically different way from the previous ones.”¹ Epistemology is the study or theory of knowledge, particularly the how and what of the knowing process. God’s concern incorporates both the *hows* and *whats* of our knowledge. Both are so interfaced with how we live that we must have some general understanding in this area.

In this chapter we will focus on helping the people we are discipling in two ways: first, they must have a solid base for knowing what they believe and why; and second, they must understand, as John said in 1 John 1:8, that God’s truth is to be personalized “within us.” Therefore, in this chapter we will concentrate on truth and knowledge as they relate both to God, the source of truth, and to us, the recipients of it. Our ultimate desire in making disciples is not only that God’s truth be a part of our lives, but that we also practice it (1 John 1:6) faithfully and consistently.