

CHASING
I N F I N I T Y

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Introduction

THE CHASE

“You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”
Psalm 16:11

Discipleship is not about winning, building, and sending people. Discipleship is about worshipping God.

Now—of course—it involves winning, building and sending, but because God is the center point of reality and the most stunning being that exists, everything else is secondary to our ordering all things unto Him for His glory. Simply put, discipleship is *not* about methods. It is about bringing to God all

Discipleship is about worshipping God.

the praise, glory, and honor we can muster from the entirety of the created realm.

From the first words of the Bible to the last, God is concerned that humankind recognize and honor Him as the creator of the universe as well as the one to whom every person, at every moment, in every square inch of the universe should seek to order every choice to His glory and praise.

God created humans for this purpose. From start to finish the Scriptures bear witness to His desire to teach us how to maximize that for which He created us. Because discipleship involves learning from and following hard after God (we will make this case later), it follows that the central point and focus of discipleship is the proper worship of God.

Discipleship is not only about worshipping God—it is also about the mission of God.

But discipleship is not only about worshipping God—it is also about the mission of God. Once it is understood that the central focus of discipleship is God and His glory, then the pursuit and proclamation of Him and His glory for the good of each human being (and the entire created order) naturally follows. God desires that the knowledge of His glory would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). Indeed, if discipleship is not on mission to maximize the worship of God throughout the entire created order, then it is not Christian.

One could define discipleship, then, as *missional worship*. It is centered on Christ and in motion to see the greatness of God magnified

in every corner of the world as well as to see every corner of the world return to God the praise and glory He is due.

But even then, when we have done our utmost for His highest, and we hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of thy master” (Matthew 25:23), we will discover that even in heaven the very best that we have to offer God—the sum total of all that we have mustered from the entirety of creation—will still fall desperately short of the praise, honor, and glory of which He is worthy.

This truth, then, leads us to the place where the adventure gets really interesting. For not only is discipleship about missional worship here and now, it is also about an eternal journey in pursuit of an infinite God. Beholding the nature and beauty of God, investigating His awesome and splendid character, and rendering to Him the worship He deserves will take eternity to explore _____ and accomplish.

**In heaven we run after
the One who wants to
reveal to us the fullness
of pleasure He holds
out to us in His hands.**

Heaven will not be wondrous to us because we will have arrived into some static existence of contentment. Rather, it will be wondrous to us because we will finally be free to run hard down the path of life that _____ God lays out before us without all the encumbrances we stumble over here in these shadowlands. It will be wondrous because in heaven we run after the One who wants to reveal to us the fullness of pleasure He holds out to us in His hands. It will be wondrous to us because in His presence we will know fullness of joy.

It will be wondrous to us because
It will be wondrous to us God is there.

because God is there. In His kindness He will allow us

to see Him and become like Him. The
 eternal privilege and adventure of discipleship will always involve us
 chasing His infinitely wondrous, perfectly good, beautifully loving,
 just and holy, mercifully gracious Self. This was God’s design and
 desire for Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall, it is His desire
 for every believer today, and it will continue to be the privilege of
 every sinner saved by grace forever into the
 eternal future.

Discipleship is meant to be a chase of
 the infinite One forever. It is an *eternal mis-*
sion of worship!

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infinite One forever.

The Purpose of This Book

While there are many great books available that focus on discipleship methodologies, the number that develop the rich biblical and theological underpinnings of discipleship are far fewer. Indeed, scarce are the books that trace out a theology of discipleship through the entire metanarrative from the first pages of Scripture to the last. Instead, most discipleship books will assume an underlying theological context, begin with a brief discussion of the Great Commission in which Jesus commands His followers to “make disciples,” and then

move on to develop methods and patterns of disciple-making.

Nothing is wrong with such an approach. Indeed, I fully affirm any appeal to obey God's command to make disciples as entirely appropriate and good. But my concern here has to do more with motivation than method. I am concerned that if we are not careful to understand how the Great Commission fits into the rich biblical themes of discipleship that magnify the greatness of God and which trace all the way from the first words of Scripture to the very last, then the motivation to make disciples may default to a raw obedience to Christ's command while the grand vocation to maximize the worship of God is left out of the discussion.

But what if, beyond mere obedience, we could discover that by pursuing our own discipleship we are actually engaging in the very things for which we were created? And what if, by engaging in discipleship, we discover that we are aligning ourselves with the very grain of the universe? What if, by joining the task of discipling others as a way of life, we discover that we are doing what we were created to be and do? Maybe our duty would shift into delight!

Perhaps the lack of fervency in evangelism and discipleship common among Christ follow-

Perhaps the lack of fervency in evangelism and discipleship common among Christ followers is not primarily one of methodology but of *theology*.

ers is not primarily one of *methodology* but of *theology*. On this point, Leroy Eims is correct when he states that the reason Christians do not

thrive in discipleship or disciple-making is not because of a “lack of know-how in the area.”¹ Something deeper is at play: our theology is too shallow. Consider the words of A.W. Tozer:

*A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse.*²

Following Tozer’s reasoning, if there is a deficit in our evangelism and discipleship habits and practices, then likely there is a weakness in our conception of God and the passions we have (or don’t have) regarding His grand design.

Chuck Lawless, in his book *Discipled Warriors*, affirms this idea by stating that because so few evangelical churches “offer solid biblical and theological training, we have produced generations of believers who have a weak foundation for their faith.”³ He goes on to point out that because we have done such a poor job of building biblical foundations, we have little to offer a world that is searching for purpose.⁴

My concern, then, is not to criticize books that focus on strategies and methods. The Lord knows we need them and I have greatly ben-

¹ Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 9.

² A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1961), 2.

³ Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2002), 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

efited from them! Rather, the concern here is to *undergird* them with a readable, accessible, transferable, and foundational theology of discipleship. My desire is to provide a clear and concise depiction of the biblical and theological foundations of discipleship so that these other greathearted efforts to develop and impart strategies of discipleship might be understood with more depth and richness, employed with great staying power, and owned as a lifestyle by all who claim to be followers of Christ.

In a culture that is losing its “Christian memory” and in an era when there is an increasing biblical illiteracy even amongst the average church member, it becomes imperative to “re-teach” the basic building blocks of Christian worship and mission. The people of God must be re-taught that the commands of God are proper expressions of the worship of God in the grand narrative about God that encompasses all of human history. And in so doing, I hope to bolster both the theological underpinnings of discipleship strategies as well as embolden the motivation for, and perseverance in, those strategies and methods.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once argued that theology must give priority to the question of *who* over *how*, and that the best and most proper way to understand *how* must be determined in light of *who*.⁵ This book largely centers on exploring the *who* of discipleship in hopes of undergirding, orienting, and motivating the *how*. My desire is to paint

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology* (London: Collins, 1971), 37–39.

the picture of God and His magnificent design for the universe as He reveals it in the grand narrative of Scripture. My hope is that as this picture unfolds from the pages of Scripture, the reader's understanding of, and motivation for, discipleship will deepen, resulting in still greater, more fervent application of discipleship methods learned here and elsewhere.

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The Outline of the Book

To accomplish this goal, I will follow the grand narrative of Scripture through the four-fold paradigm of creation/fall/redemption/restoration, with the section of restoration divided into two parts: sanctification and glorification. To do so, we will ask and answer five key questions:

1. Did God intend for discipleship to take place before the Fall?
2. How did the Fall affect discipleship?
3. How can human discipleship be rescued and re-oriented?
4. What does re-oriented discipleship involve?
5. Will there be discipleship in heaven?

Of course, asking these questions requires a basic working definition of discipleship, so prior to addressing these questions, we must begin with a Bible study centered around Jesus' Great Commission found in

Matthew 28:18-20. The purpose for doing so is to provide a working understanding of Jesus' command to "make disciples" as well as working definitions of key terms related to our discussion: *disciple*, *discipleship*, and *disciple-making*. Having done so, we can then walk through the grand narrative of Scripture to answer these five questions.

In terms of an outline, **Chapter 1** will provide a baseline definition of discipleship through a word study focusing on Matthew 28:18-20. **Chapter 2** focuses on God's character as it is revealed through His creative act and the role of discipleship for Adam and Eve prior to the Fall as they pursued God in whole-life worship. **Chapter 3** then explores the devastation that results from human sin and the Fall and the implications this has regarding the disordering of worship, mission and discipleship. **Chapter 4** looks at God's redemptive work on our behalf and how the great atoning work of Christ on the cross not only rescues God's people but also reorders and establishes them as His disciples such that they can once again pursue that for which He created them. Following this, **Chapter 5** begins the discussion of how God uses the process of progressive sanctification to grow virtuous disciples who worship God in spirit and truth and engage the mission of God to call others to saving faith. Finally, **Chapter 6** explores the wondrous conclusion of God's restoration of all things through a discussion of what discipleship looks like in the ever-expanding pursuit of God that is the treasure of heaven.

The chase is on!

C H A S I N G I N F I N I T Y