

Making Disciples in Croatia – Part II

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Abstract

This project explores how the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) in Croatia is making disciples of Jesus Christ today. The goal is to demonstrate that despite the worldwide and local deficit in effective disciple making, the EPC has the resources and potential to live in obedience to the Great Commission. This has been shown by looking at the historical definition of a disciple, exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20, exploring the proper context of disciple-making, and interviewing several members of the EPC. Upon examination, while there are multiple causes for the lack of disciples in Croatia, the primary problem is that of what will be called naive disobedience. It will be argued that local churches in the EPC have not been taught how to properly make disciples. By presenting the importance of teaching, relationships, and practicing the spiritual disciplines, it will be demonstrated that a solution to the lack of disciple-making exists within the EPC.

Key words: *disciple, disciple-making, The Great Commission, obedience, church*

1. The Church: Where Disciple-Making Happens

Disciples are devoted to, and comply with, the teaching of their master. As shown in the first part of this article,¹ Matthew's Gospel is not only completely in harmony with this basic definition of a disciple, it builds on it in various profound ways. Jesus' Commission to make disciples of all nations is both the climax of Matthew's Gospel and the primary mission of the Church. But how can one follow Jesus today? Is the master present for his disciples to hear the call and follow him? If so, how? I will posit that Christ is present in his Church today. This has tremendous implications for how one hears the call to follow Jesus and grow as his disciple. Understanding how Christ is present in his Church offers a clear context for making disciples. In the second part of this chapter, I will explore three ways to be and make disciples: teaching, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and engaging in Christian friendship.

1.1 The Church: Where Master and Disciple are to be Found

Jesus no longer passes in front of people in bodily form in the same way he did when he called Levi. How then are potential disciples of his to see him, hear his call and follow Jesus today? Where are we to find Jesus today? German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959, 226), **author of arguably the most influential book on this topic**, believes that there is virtually no difference between Levi and the contemporary person who hears Jesus' call and obeys. In the same way, they *saw* their Master and believed in Christ, the present believer can *hear* the Word and believe in Christ. This is quite simply because to Bonhoeffer, it is through the preaching of the Word that Christ calls his disciples today.

Bonhoeffer (1959, 226) strengthens his argument when he shows how Jesus' first disciples did not recognize him as Lord before they received his commands. Rather, they first believed his word, and therefore acted in faith, then recognized him as the Christ. The same is true for disciples today. "We cannot know Jesus without at the same time knowing his will." There is therefore no advantage; both the first disciples and contemporary followers of Christ are able to hear Jesus' commands and either obey them or disobey them. That is why Bonhoeffer (1959, 228) can say, "All we have to do is to hear the word and obey the will of Christ in whatever part of the scripture testimony it is proclaimed." Jesus is present through the preaching and teaching of the inspired Word of God.

1 The first part of this article was published by name "Making Disciples in Croatia," in *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, Vol 13, No 2, 2019.

Baptist theologian, Stanley Grenz (1994, 483), agrees that clarifying the Holy Spirit has a mission distinct from Jesus Christ's mission. "The Spirit's function is subsequent and instrumental to that of Jesus, whom he glorifies (Jn. 16:14) and to whom he bears testimony (Jn. 15:26)." To Grenz (1994, 630), Jesus is made present to the Church through the Spirit. "As we share together in the Holy Spirit, we participate in relationship with the living God and become the community of Christ our Lord. Our fellowship is nothing less than our common participation in the divine communion between the Father and the Son mediated by the Holy Spirit." The Church is the unity of disciples with Christ and with one another through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christ's presence is not restricted to a building, specific denomination, or tradition. Rather, Jesus is present in the teaching and preaching of the Bible. He is present where two or three are gathered for prayer in his name (Mt. 18:20). He is also present where the Lord's Supper and Baptism are performed under the guidance of God's Word (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). It is through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in believers and in Christ's Body, that disciples of Jesus Christ are equipped to hear the call of their Master and to follow him in the same way Jesus' original twelve did.

This is not to say that Christ is *only* present when the church is gathered or when the sermon is preached. Because of the Spirit that lives within believers (Rom. 8:9-11), disciples are able to experience Christ's presence outside the corporate gathering. As I will argue below, the spiritual disciplines play an important role in assisting disciples to grow in their dependency on the Master outside weekly church services and fellowship with other disciples. However, I affirm Bonhoeffer's (1959, 242) claim that, "it is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual." By necessity, therefore, Jesus' disciples are part of Christ's Body—the community of "called out ones (the origin of *ekklesia*...)" (Guinness 1998, 30). No one can follow Jesus without being joined to Christ. Those who pursue Jesus, members of the Body of Christ, will by nature participate in the community of believers in order to worship, learn, and serve their Lord. Devotion to Christ demands faithfulness to the Church.

This has considerable ramifications for being and making disciples. Because their Master is in the Church, present in the teaching of the Word and fellowship of his people, disciples of Jesus Christ can be defined the same way today as the original twelve were. Disciples of Jesus Christ today adhere to their Master and endeavor to obey everything Jesus commanded. They are also called to make disciples just as the original eleven were. Finally, because disciples follow Jesus as a part of Christ's Body, "The Matthean Great Commission is *the* mandate for the Church" (Foley 2017, 13). Jesus' disciples are both called to be—and therefore grow as—disciples, while also making disciples. This is the nature of following

Jesus. Therefore, it is vital to examine some of the ways in which disciples are made.

1.2 How are Disciples Made?

Being and making disciples is a process. Some disciples are mature, experienced and tested; others are brand new followers of Jesus who just recently began following their Master in faith and obedience. Still others have not yet responded to the call of Jesus. Some who have been discipled before believing describe their experience as being “discipled into belief” (cf. Foley 2017, 88). Remembering Matthew’s emphasis on growing in understanding by encountering Jesus Christ and his teaching, growth, and development are inherent to being a disciple. Therefore, a disciple will, by definition, over time become a more mature disciple than they were at an earlier stage in their life. Wilkins (1992, 312) connects this with the New Testament theme of the “already/not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God. Peter, for example, was a disciple from the moment he obeyed Jesus’ call to follow him. However, he was *not yet* a mature disciple. The experience of following Jesus and the numerous encounters Peter had with his Lord added new understanding to the old (Mt. 13:51-52)—enabling him to grow into a mature disciple.

This is precisely what Paul was getting at in Philippians 3:7-14 where he was writing from the perspective of already being a disciple. In order to strain ahead, Paul had to be focused on the Master. Disciples lean forward towards growth and maturity rather than stagnating. I assert there are three fundamental ways in which disciples grow within the context of Christ’s church; through teaching and preaching, friendship and the spiritual disciplines. In the following, I describe each of these three categories arguing that they are crucial to disciple-making.

1.2.1 Teaching/Preaching

Following the observations made in the first part of the article, the “chief means of making disciples is teaching” (Witherington III 2006, 534). Where the Word of God is neither preached nor taught, disciples of Jesus Christ are not being made. This does not mean that the Lord’s Supper, liturgy, musical worship, prayer, fellowship and other aspects usually associated with congregational gathering are not part of disciple making. Rather, it means that corporate worship, while an essential part of *being* disciples together and living in response to God, is not the most important part of *making* disciples. Disciple-making can and does happen during corporate worship services, but it will certainly not only happen there. Teaching, in various contexts, is *the* vital part of making disciples.

Timothy Keller (2015, 4) identifies three levels of “Word ministry” in which various members of the church are involved. Level 3, the most formal, is the

public preaching and exposition of the Bible to assembled groups. Listening and hearing the Word preached in corporate worship is part of becoming and making disciples. The Word of God is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12). Therefore, biblical truth is not simply “a passive object for examination and presentation. The Word examines us . . . Christ remains active in his Word, performing divine tasks that one presenting the Word has no right or ability to assume” (Chapell 2005, 28). Hearing the Word of God preached, and therefore encountering Christ’s teaching on a consistent basis, is a vital part of understanding and obeying everything he commanded (Mt. 28:20). Level 2 refers to disciples of Jesus who have one of the various verbal gifts of counseling, instructing, teaching, or evangelizing. These can come in different forms; such as lessons, talks, and conversations in which the Word of Christ is being presented. Finally, the least formal of the three levels is level 1 in which the Bible is communicated usually through one-on-one conversations. Paul calls all believers to “Let the Word of Christ dwell among you richly” and to “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col. 3:16).

The point in making distinctions between these different forms of teaching is that there should be no expectation that life transformation comes only through preaching. “We must beware of thinking the Sunday sermon can carry all the freight of any church’s ministry of the Word” (Keller 2015, 5). It also alerts disciples to the fact that they do not have to be a pastor, preacher, or even leader to engage in disciple making. Teaching is indispensable to making disciples of Jesus Christ.

1.2.2 Spiritual Disciplines

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumed that his listeners practiced the spiritual disciplines. Rather than saying, “if you pray” Jesus repeatedly said “*when* you pray” (Mt. 6:5, 7) and “*when* you fast” (Mt. 6:16, 17) (emphasis mine). As Foster (1988, 3) notes, the disciplines were so frequently practiced that it was not even necessary to give instruction as to how to practice them. Following the observation in chapter 3 that Jesus’ words are proved by his deeds, Jesus’ teaching on prayer and fasting were demonstrated by his action (Mt. 4:2; Lk. 5:16; Mk. 1:35). Just as Jesus was dependent on his Father during his ministry on earth, Jesus’ disciples ought to imitate their Master’s reliance on God through prayer, knowing Scripture and engaging in the other spiritual disciplines.

It is perhaps a happy coincidence that the words *disciple* and *discipline* are closely connected in English. “Discipleship means ‘discipline!’ . . . Without discipline we are not disciples” (Edman 2012). Considering Jesus’ command to “teach them to observe *all that* I have commanded to you,” Jesus’s disciples understand that there is a gap between their actual obedience and their expected obedience. This is where the disciplines come in. Dallas Willard (2006, 150) defines a discipline as “an activity within our power—something we can do—that brings us to a

point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort.” The spiritual disciplines are intended to be an active way for the disciple to learn, grow and progress in their relationship with their Master. Devotion to Jesus Christ and obedience to his commands demands discipline.

Despite the fact that engaging in spiritual disciplines can be difficult, their purpose is to produce greater fulfillment in our Master. “Joy is the keynote of all the disciplines. The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. . . Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the disciplines of the spiritual life” (Foster 1988, 2). In the end, the disciplines should not be practiced in order to make one more disciplined or even a better person. Their designed purpose is to help disciples mature in their pursuit of their Master. “The alternative is a stagnant, immature Christianity that produces little fruit” (Foley 2017, 106). Those who have thought and written extensively about the spiritual disciplines advise disciples to use discernment to discover which disciplines are more proper for their devotion to Jesus.

1.2.3 Friendship

Jesus was constantly with his disciples. Besides being the objects of Jesus’ teaching, the disciples ate, walked, fished, prayed and ministered with their Master. Just as the times Jesus withdrew and prayed to the Father are instructive, the amount of time he was in contact with his disciples should be emulated by those who follow him today.

As Paul opens his second letter to Timothy, it is obvious the elder cares deeply for his brother: **“I thank God whom I serve. . .with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy”** (2 Tim 1:3-4). Theirs is a friendship based on family connections, travel partnership and mutual suffering for the Gospel. Although Paul had the authority to preach (and often did), his communication with Timothy is at a level 2 or even level 3 type of Word ministry, demonstrating the importance of friendship for making disciples.

Friendship is the ideal context for personal disclosure. In his book *Anatomy of the Soul*, Curt Thompson (2010, 24) argues that being known by God is closely connected to knowing and being known by friends: “Your relationship with God is a direct reflection of the depth of your relationship with others.” This does not mean that all disciples are close friends with each other. But it does mean that disciples have one or several other disciples with whom they can be vulnerable. Bonhoeffer (1954, 116) demonstrates the importance of a brother (or sister) in *Life Together*:

Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-

deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.

Though Bonhoeffer is specifically addressing the discipline of confession, his point about experiencing the “presence of God in the reality of the other person” is valid for any activity Jesus’ disciples engage in together. Nor does the necessity of close friendship apply only to a certain season of being a disciple. Friendship is the most comfortable environment for those who have not become disciples of Jesus to be disciplined into belief because it offers a safe environment to ask questions. It is also necessary for the most mature of disciples. Many of the respected thinkers and writers on the topic of disciple making have had strong friendships; Dietrich Bonhoeffer had Eberhard Bethge, C.S. Lewis confided in Tolkien, Dallas Willard had Richard Foster.

Of the three predominant aspects of disciple making emphasized here, friendship connects teaching and the disciplines. Teaching often takes place in groups (large or small), the disciplines at an individual level. Friendship helps the disciple understand the teaching and be vulnerable about how the disciplines are (or are not) being practiced. It also provides a comfortable context for asking and answering questions. Becoming and making disciples, while always done in the Church, is often aided by close friendship.

1.3 Conclusion

Disciples of Jesus Christ adhere to their master. Their devotion is shown through obedience to Christ’s teachings. Therefore, disciples are conscious of the object of their allegiance and intentional about following the instruction they have been given. Disciples are united to one another and to Christ through the Holy Spirit. Because of the fact that Christ is present in His Church, rather than *going to church*, disciples of Jesus Christ are inherently *part of* the Body of Christ. As such, disciples hear the call to follow Jesus Christ, learn and grow in maturity. It is also within the Church that disciples make other disciples. Three fundamental ways that disciples are made are through teaching, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and engaging in close meaningful friendships. **These components are essential factors in the process of learning, growing, and obeying everything Jesus commanded.** In order to incorporate this knowledge into a response to the challenge of making disciples in Croatia, I will explore the specific context in which this project is concerned.

2. Assessing the EPC's Response to the Great Commission

Having gained a fundamental understanding of the Great Commission recorded in Matthew and having affirmed that disciples can and ought to follow their Master today, I now turn to the state of disciple-making in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) in Croatia. In order to determine whether disciples are being made, I conducted interviews with eight members of the EPC; men and women from various generations and geographic regions throughout the country. What follows are the accounts and anecdotes from church members who offered their own positive and negative experiences in this area.² These words, thoughts, and convictions reveal vivid accounts of what it means to be and make disciples. This chapter is comprised of these comparative insights.

Although my own experience is woven throughout the text, my interviewees speak for themselves. Unless noted, the views expressed here are their own. In order to preserve anonymity, I have given each of the interviewees pseudonyms. The brief descriptions of their gender, age and/or position in the community are true and are intended to give flesh to the words they provided. By the end, a picture will emerge which will contribute to evaluating how the EPC movement can more faithfully respond to the Great Commission. My goal in this chapter is to plainly present the thoughts, convictions, and stories of these church members so that the solutions in the last chapter of this article will be based on a realistic understanding of the situation. I begin with a brief history of Pentecostalism and the EPC which is necessary for understanding the context of the interviews.

Pentecostalism began in the United States in the early 20th century. It sprang out of the Holiness Movement—a nineteenth century American Methodist phenomenon—and quickly spread throughout the U.S. and became a worldwide movement (cf. Synan 1984, 836). What is considered the “cradle of Pentecostalism” was led by William Joseph Seymour on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 (cf. Hollenweger 1997, 20). As Pentecostalism grew quickly and spread globally, various schisms arose over theological controversies and personality clashes producing various branches of the Pentecostal church (cf. Synan 1984, 838). Although a full history of the movement in Croatia has not been written yet, some of the most important details of its relatively short history have been preserved. By 1939, there were Pentecostals in the eastern-Croatian city of Osijek where the first baptism took place in the Drava River and several churches were opened (cf. Kolarić 2005, 599). Today the EPC is one of the largest Protestant denominations in Croatia—a predominantly Roman Catholic country. Throughout its approxi-

2 These interviews were conducted anonymously. Therefore there are no individual citations.

mately 80 years of existence, the EPC has grown from a few German believers who were dismissed from their local churches to a movement recognized by the government with churches and communities all over Croatia.

2.1 “Učenik”

We began each interview by discussing the word “disciple.” This proved to be challenging as some of the conversations were predominantly in Croatian while others were in English. I soon realized I would need to clarify whether we were using the English translation for the Greek word, μαθητής, or the Croatian word, *učenik*. As in Greek, the Croatian verb *učiti* are closely related. This relationship is shown in the definition of *učenik*: “one who learns, goes to school” (Hrvatski jezični portal). Unlike ‘disciple’ in English, both *učenik* and *učiti* are used frequently in everyday Croatian. A simple Google search yields “apprentice,” “learner,” “pupil,” “schoolboy/girl,” “student,” and “disciple” as English translations for *učenik*. These ideas were consistent with the definitions I received from the interviewees. Some responded that an *učenik* is someone who learns; others said an *učenik* always has a teacher. Several used the words “process” and “progress” in their definitions. Others placed emphasis on obedience and living according to the Bible or the local church they attend.

Pentecostals generally place a high value on the Bible. Some are known for reading Scripture consistently and studying vigorously (Kolarić 2005, 590).³ Because of their belief that the experience of the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost should be normative for all Christians (cf. Synan 1984, 836), after conversion, Pentecostals are encouraged to seek the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and are often prayed for toward that end. Communal prayer and Bible study set the structure of most Pentecostal weekly meetings in Croatia. A worship service is typically held on Sunday mornings or afternoons while mid-week gatherings include a prayer meeting and Bible study. It is during these meetings that the practices of worshipping God, praying for others, and studying the Bible are emphasized. Even in local churches with dwindling congregations, the three main gatherings are typically honored even if the prayer meeting and Bible study are combined into one meeting. In my experience, it is not uncommon for two or three believers to come together for prayer, and Matthew 18:20 to be recited as a basis for the spiritual nature of the meeting. As predictable as this may be, it reveals that fairly

3 This should be qualified by admitting that many Pentecostals do not read or study Scripture as passionately as Kolaric states. Still, the high emphasis on the Bible as shown in how the weekly services are organized demonstrates that reading and studying Scripture are true Pentecostal values.

universally, EPC members throughout Croatia place an emphasis on gathering around Scripture while praying together in the context of the local church. These meetings take place whether participants speak in tongues and seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or not.

Therefore, the Bible and local church leaders define how the church community and individuals within the church conduct themselves. Several interviewees said that being a disciple means submitting to the local church's understanding of the Bible. As autonomous local churches, **this means that biblical interpretation and theology can—and does—fluctuate among communities.** This does not mean there are not shared core values, vision, and mission throughout the movement. However, within local EPC congregations, different doctrinal understandings, styles of worship, and ministry opportunities are emphasized. Submitting to the church's leadership, then, is often key to being part of the community. As some interviewees pondered the question of what it means to make disciples, they consciously thought about how their local church defined and reacted to the Great Commission.

As a movement, the EPC defines *učenik* as “A follower who desires to become similar to his/her teacher in word and deed” (Balog 2009, 169). This is found in the *Fundamental Truths of the Holy Bible*, a handbook that states the general beliefs of the EPC movement. Throughout this handbook, evangelization is emphasized. In the longest section dedicated to the church's mission, the *Lausanne Covenant* is translated word for word.⁴ The introduction to the Covenant states that, “We are determined by [God's] grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim [the Gospel] to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation.” In Article 4, “The Nature of Evangelism,” it states that evangelism means “to spread the good news . . .” Towards the end of the article it says, “In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship . . . The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.” This handbook is by no means on everyone's bookshelf. It is more of a handy resource than required reading and is certainly not considered a catechism to be memorized.

2.2 Responding to the Great Commission

Early on in our conversations, I asked the interviewees what they thought it meant to be obedient to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. **Their an-**

4 The original English version can be found on the Lausanne website: <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

swers can be divided into three main categories: evangelization, discipleship programs, and one-on-one relationships focused on helping disciples grow together. Some felt that disciple-making included more than one of these ideas at the same time. Generally, whichever category the interviewee affirmed at the beginning influenced their answers throughout the interview. For example, one felt that disciple-making meant to help a non-believer become a Christian (evangelism) and therefore bemoaned a reduced emphasis on street preaching today as compared to ten years ago. Another interviewee discussed the past success of a discipleship class held in his local church for new believers who would be baptized. But he was disappointed that his church is unable to continue the classes after baptism because it is short-staffed. When all the interviews were compiled, obeying the Great Commission generally overlapped with the official statement quoted in the *Fundamental Truths of the Holy Bible*. Making disciples, in the minds of those interviewed, includes evangelism and teaching which thus produces the result of obedience to Jesus.

As our discussion turned from defining *učenik* and understanding the Great Commission to assessing how the EPC is doing, it became obvious that we were addressing a complex issue. Generally, everyone agreed that disciples are being made in Croatia, but disciple-making is not happening as it should be. This was the greatest consensus among the interviewees. In fact, each named different things they were aware of that demonstrate that the EPC is consciously encouraging disciple-making. No one felt that the local church had completely missed the mark. Several examples include a recent initiative aimed at equipping young people to become disciple-makers; new preaching clubs, “discipleship” classes for new believers to take prior to baptism and street evangelization in various parts of the country. Some people pointed to mentoring relationships in their own lives that helped them become more mature disciples. One interviewee interpreted the church’s efforts as a whole to be centered on making disciples. As the interviewees began sharing their personal experiences, the theme of “relationships” emerged.

2.3 A Common Denominator: Relationships

One particularly vivid account came from a college student, Matko, who shared that his journey as a disciple began at home. Matko’s family was very involved in church events, but it was their regular time of reading Scripture and praying at home that made the greatest impression on him as a young boy. As he grew older he was able to trace a line through the various important relationships he had with those who discipled him. Often the distinction between friend and mentor was blurred. Several of these key people influenced his decision to follow Christ as a teenager when he was baptized. At various times, when he went back to visit

his family, Matko would lead the devotions his parents had led when he was a child. He also initiated several sessions for new believers who were preparing for baptism. Throughout these events, it was not the weekly church meetings that were most important to his growth as a disciple nor was it within the walls of the local church where he began discipling others. It was informal conversations with people he trusted, many times late at night, that most influenced his decision to follow Jesus. Often these conversations included questions. Indeed, as we finished our conversation he noted how having a trusted person who asked him questions that led to introspection and further conversation was vital to the disciple-making process.

For Noah and Tamara, a married couple, it had been observing others' lives, learning from their mistakes and successes, and talking about their struggles that sparked changes at critical points in their lives. They, in turn, want to offer that sort of example for others—not perfection, but a genuine desire to follow Jesus faithfully. They often have young people over for lunch or coffee in order to get to know them better. Although they serve as church leaders, they increasingly see their role as informal mentors—examples of love for others to grow in their desire to love Jesus and others. They have a lot of experience working with teenagers and college students and have seen both positive and negative results of their work. It is difficult to gauge what exactly has worked and why. Part of the reason is that, though they were able to look to others with more experience, neither of them had someone to intentionally guide them. As disciples who have grown and matured, they have had to learn by themselves.

Luka, a young professional, views disciple-making as beginning with a relationship. Making disciples of those who are not believers begins with imitating Christ. Once that person becomes a disciple, the local church must become the predominant context for making disciples. The disciple should learn to process everything he experiences in life through the perspective of the church—rather than just their own opinions or the viewpoint of their parents. This means that the church should be in tune with the everyday life of its culture. To Luka, just as the disciple needs to be more church-oriented, the church needs to be more in tune with everyday life so that the disciple finds his place in the church. If the church is only organized around the Sunday morning sermon, then the disciple will fail to contribute to the church in those situations he or she is going through. Luka believes that this also requires the church to be Bible-oriented. There must be an emphasis on teaching and learning if disciples are to grow. An understanding of the Bible, the church and one's position in the church are key to becoming good disciples of Jesus Christ and also a good disciple-maker. In his opinion, the EPC in Croatia falls short. It does not have an up-to-date understanding of its culture, nor does the EPC display a strong universal disciple-making effort.

Matko, Noah, Tamara, and Luka all highlighted the importance of relationships. They all believe that genuine friendship is important for asking questions, modeling Jesus, and guiding another disciple through everyday life. Yet, as mentioned, much of the emphasis in the EPC is put on the three weekly corporal gatherings. In an informal conversation I had outside of the interviews, several EPC members discussed the fact that many pastors and leaders who are ready to pass their ministry or church to the next generation do not have close friends. A young pastor nodded in agreement, stating that it is an unwritten rule in the Pentecostal church not to allow another person too close so as not to show your weaknesses as a leader. How would it work to preach, the pastor reasoned, if people in the congregation know about the preacher's imperfections? It seems there is a conscious turning away from close friendships among the older leaders of the church.

2.4 Solutions

As my interviewees thought about solutions to the problems they had mentioned, friendship was one of the first things that came to mind. Matko remembered that he had rejected an offer to read the Bible consistently with a relative stranger who initiated the meetings. He was turned off to the idea, not because he did not think he should be involved in that kind of relationship, but because they were not friends. He felt this way despite the fact that he had initiated times of prayer and devotion in his own family and local church. For him, an established friendship is fundamental for one-on-one disciple-making relationships. Several others mentioned that in Croatia, friendship is the best context for evangelization.

Luka emphasized the importance of understanding that disciple-making is a process. From his perspective, the emphasis in the EPC is on quick results. He feels strongly that the church must gain an awareness of the longevity inherent in making disciples. This is also strongly connected to the teaching of the local church. Prosperity theology, and a works-based gospel—among other doctrines sometimes found in charismatic circles—can promote instantaneous, visible results. The EPC is not immune to these influences. As mentioned above, there were those who felt that consistent biblical preaching could produce a wealth of positive changes throughout the EPC to view disciple-making as a process.

There are also some unused resources. As mentioned above, Ivan suggested a certain lack of cooperation between the local churches and seminaries. Tamara lamented that those leaders who are approaching retirement are not used enough. As she reflected on the situation she mentioned that we have a wealth of experience that is being wasted when we do not ask for the advice of veteran EPC servants. One pastor noted that there are a lot of books translated that are not be-

ing read. Several talked about how the relatively small country we live in means that EPC members are fairly close and can get together often. Luka mentioned the resource of people in churches. His point was that there are people waiting to be taught what they ought to do and how they should do it. Croatian EPC communities then are not without resources.

2.5 Conclusion

Noah and Tamara, who offered some of the most vulnerable perspectives, shared some of their struggles and doubts at the end of our discussion. Despite their misgivings, they were positive. Yes, the picture is gray. But they have experience, they are growing, and they have a passion to see others follow Jesus and grow in obedience. Their transparent tone and passion to see others grow closer to their Master convinced me of their devotion to Jesus Christ. The three of us left the conversation feeling optimistic. Indeed, there are grounds for hope. Many are found in genuine disciples who have sought the Spirit's help as they grow and endeavor to make other disciples. As I turn to the final chapter in this project, I believe that we can learn from the positive elements; the Croatian EPC is indigenous, growing and has young leaders who care deeply about making disciples of Jesus Christ. But we can also take a step forward by addressing the weaknesses and finding biblical, theological, and even cultural solutions to the obstacles that are keeping us from making disciples as we should.

3. A Way Forward

The Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) in Croatia is generally failing to respond properly to the Great Commission through disciple-making. As I mentioned before, this is a global problem. Many within the EPC believe that our local movement is no exception. That is not to dismiss various encouraging examples of disciple-making within the movement. In the previous part of the article, I cited several positive signs that local churches and individuals are responding to the Great Commission. Yet all of the people I interviewed admitted that there is work to be done. The problem is clear: throughout the EPC in Croatia, local churches are not responding effectively to the call Jesus Christ gave his disciples. Making disciples is the fundamental mission of the Church. This chapter is devoted to developing an approach to foster disciple-making in the EPC.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are devoted to their master and endeavor to obey everything Jesus commanded. According to Matthew, making disciples means imi-

tating the way Jesus related to the twelve. It is a mission that involves responding to Jesus' commission by calling, teaching and baptizing. All of this must be done within the context of the local church, but much of the work will certainly happen outside the walls of a church building. As I demonstrated previously, Christ is present to the community through the Holy Spirit. When potential disciples hear the call of Christ by listening to His Word, they have the opportunity to respond to the call. There are three predominant ways in which disciples grow and help others mature. These three ways are the practical solutions to the problem I described at the beginning.

3.1 The Diagnosis: “Naïve Disobedience”

In the first part of the article, I described the problem as disobedience to the Great Commission. Where and when disciples are not being made, it is a problem of disobedience to Jesus' command to make disciples. However, I do not believe this is the complete picture. Based on the interviews and my own experience, there is very little emphasis placed on this command in local EPC congregations. The problem is not that the Commission is not read or preached, but more often the act of “go” is the most emphasized part of the text. Seldom, if ever, have I heard a preacher or teacher talk about teaching new disciples to observe, or be obedient to everything Jesus commanded. Rarely are there other teachings in Matthew brought up as examples of what we should teach disciples.

If a congregation does not know what Jesus meant when he said, “make disciples,” it is difficult to claim disobedience as a complete diagnosis. Therefore, the problem is that of “naïve disobedience.” That is, most congregants simply have not been taught what it means to *be* or to *make* disciples, thus they are unequipped to do so. Any solution to helping them do both must start by acknowledging this fact. I offer “naïve disobedience” as a more precise identification of the problem. As I address this challenge in the following, both learning and obeying will be crucial parts of the solution.

3.2 The Solution: “Making Disciples From Below”

During his interview, Ivan told me something I have noticed about the EPC: the fact that there is a “generation problem.” Pastors did not learn how to make disciples from their pastor, who had not learned from their pastor. It is easy to say, “I never learned how to do that.” This is a significant factor in the diagnosis of naïve disobedience. In fact, we cannot change pastors who have not been equipped to make disciples. Therefore, it is not wise or prudent to expect our pastors to adjust

to what they have never been taught. Nor would I advise any change in how the EPC presbytery functions.

Instead, I propose we begin ourselves. As young members in the congregation with a desire to become and make disciples, we should begin learning and obeying the Great Commission “from below.” I propose that young leaders and ministers intentionally begin making disciples in our own context. This means being fully engaged in the Body of Christ in local EPC congregations for to be devoted to Christ means to be faithful to his Church. Our response to the Great Commission ought to be that of “informed obedience”—the opposite of “naïve disobedience”—to Jesus’ command.

My interviewees have already shown a glimpse of what this means. Throughout the interview, Marta consistently talked about how she is falling short of the mark—admitting that she was being disobedient. She noticed the need to begin obeying the Great Commission. Matko talked about how his path toward becoming a disciple began at home and continued when he met older friends and mentors in high school who taught him, answered his questions and engaged in long, meaningful discussions. These relationships prompted him to initiate family devotions at home and meaningful gatherings for those preparing for baptism. Luka, despite the fact that he has a job and is not involved in full-time ministry, has been taking evening classes at the local seminary for years. Noah and Tamara have been initiating relationships in which they can pass on what they have learned to younger generations.

To a certain extent, these disciples are already aware that they need to be obedient regardless of the direction the local church is headed in or the emphases of the pastor. In all of the cases in which they stepped forward, I did not get the sense that they were inappropriately acting against the authority of the pastor or the EPC. My call is primarily for EPC members to learn and grow in understanding of what it means to be and to make disciples as we endeavor to obey the Great Commission together. Below, I offer three definitive ways to do so.

Recalling the fact that making disciples means imitating Christ’s interaction with his followers, the resolution must begin by looking to Jesus. The Master must be at the center of all disciple-making efforts. As I offer a practical response to how we can be more affective in making disciples in the EPC, I will also provide positive examples within the EPC to show that what I am proposing exists and can work to help EPC congregations be faithful to the commission we’ve been given. Evoking the ideas in chapter 1, I propose that the solution is a three-pronged approach including teaching, the spiritual disciplines and friendship. These three components are in harmony with each other and offer a multifaceted resolution to the complex problem discussed at length above.

3.3 Three-Pronged Approach

3.3.1 Teaching

Jesus' Commission calls us to teach disciples to observe *all that* he commanded (Mt. 28:20). This means the teaching aspect of our ministry can never be exhausted. There is always work to do. This also follows Bonhoeffer's conviction that Christ is present in the teaching of his commands, as well as in preaching all of scripture. Preaching is indispensable to the ministry of the Word, but it is not the only way teaching benefits the Church. Recalling Keller's three levels of Word teaching, the EPC can and ought to be engaged in teaching members of the Church at every level and in every congregation. A culture of teaching sound biblical doctrine must intentionally be planned, developed and begun throughout the EPC. I appeal to the presbytery and church leaders to initiate and establish a plan for strengthening the teaching in every congregation throughout the EPC. But the strategy I advance here begins "from below." I believe we can make disciples without the explicit initiative of the EPC presbytery.

Ideally, stronger, deeper and better biblical preaching should start with the pastor of a local EPC congregation. My conviction is that the pastor's first priority should be preaching Scripture. As the most important part of making disciples, the pastor ought to lead the way. As Paul exhorted Timothy, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). This must be the pastor's primary concern. To be clear, I am not referring to just any teaching, but rather an expositional presentation of the Bible. Over time, consistent biblical preaching does the heavy lifting of building up a church (cf. Helm 2014, 12). This is not to say that having guests preach on occasion is wrong. But if the pastor is not preaching regularly, it is very difficult for the vision of the church to be understood, much less carried out. My observation within the EPC is that the churches in which the pastor preaches consistently are likely the most healthy and vibrant churches in the movement. Our goal as members of the EPC should be to encourage our pastors to take time to study the Bible deeply in an effort to provide the congregation with sound teaching—from the pulpit and in various conversations with church members.

Thankfully, practical solutions are available. Pastors and lay leaders can be better equipped by engaging in the *Langham Partnership* for biblical preaching in Croatia. With John Stott as its visionary, *Langham* is designed to train pastors who do not have theological or seminary education, with the proper tools for studying and preaching expository sermons and teaching biblical texts in other capacities in the local church. Currently, there are three preaching clubs that exist in three regions of Croatia—Dalmatia, Slavonija, and Zagreb. The informal at-

mosphere also provides a safe place for pastors to share their experience in other aspects of ministry. By promoting the practice of biblical teaching, Langham will further the efforts of making disciples in Croatia.

In my interview with Ivan, I heard bewilderment that there is not a stronger connection between local churches and the seminaries. It would be beyond the reach of this project to explore the reasons for this. However, as I am proposing a solution “from below,” I suggest that seminary or Bible school education begin with the student. If potential students begin to strive towards theological education, there will naturally have to be a response from the various existing institutions. Luka is a good example of a young professional who has taken advantage of everything a local Bible school offers—whether or not it is accredited. This is certainly not a perfect solution. But in the context we are in, I suggest there is no better way than for the student to show initiative and believe that the Lord will provide opportunities within existing institutions for them to learn.

Given my suggestion that we begin promoting disciple-making from below, level 1—the least formal of the three levels of Word ministry—is also extremely important. One-on-one relationships are crucial for admonishing one another with biblical wisdom (Col. 3:16). It is vital that within these informal conversations both parties intentionally question each other and thoughtfully allow Scripture to speak to the needs of both individuals—whether it is a mentor/disciple relationship or a friendship in which both individuals are spurring each other on in good deeds (Heb. 10:24). At times they will simply ask questions and wrestle through issues as friends. Sometimes it will be presenting a passage of Scripture that speaks to one’s need. In any case, intentional disciple-making must have a teaching component.

Disciple-making also happens in the home. “Instructing and raising children (Prov. 13:24) in the Word of God should be for the benefit of the family and the nation (Deut. 6:2-3,24-25)” (Jambrek 2009, 103). The Old Testament is full of examples of exhortations for parents to “diligently” teach future generations the Lord’s commands (Dt. 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; Prov. 5:1; 23:19). Matko’s anecdote demonstrated that it is both possible and important for families to be engaged in disciple-making. His story is also representative of many other dedicated EPC members who have been disciplined within the household. When fathers and mothers teach their children to observe everything Jesus commanded, they are effectively making disciples of their own children. This is another example of a level 1 sort of Word ministry and exactly what I promote in disciple-making from below.

The first solution to the challenge of “naïve disobedience” is teaching. Proper teaching leads to transformation from “naïve” to “informed.” Once a disciple understands the essence of the Great Commission, and what it means to obey Jesus’ teaching, their obedience or disobedience will at least be informed. The disciple

who has been taught no longer has the excuse of not knowing. Of course this does not mean that learning ends. The process of being and making disciples is a lifelong journey.⁵ In fact a hallmark of a disciple of Jesus Christ is study, growth and maturation. Just as being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a process, promoting biblical teaching in the EPC will also happen only over time.

3.3.2 The Spiritual Disciplines

In my conversations with EPC members, not one of my interviewees mentioned the phrase “spiritual disciplines.” And if one or two of the disciplines were mentioned (like reading the Bible or prayer) they were never the main point of the answer they gave me. This was not surprising given that in my experience the disciplines are rarely talked about or taught in EPC churches. Of course this does not mean that EPC congregants never engage in the spiritual disciplines. As I mentioned in chapter 2, prayer meetings and Bible studies are a regular part of a typical EPC week. Additionally, many congregations spend a portion of the Sunday morning service in prayer. It would be wrong to suggest that prayer and reading the Bible are not taught and strongly encouraged both as a community and individually.

Usually these two practices are the only disciplines discussed. Typically, they’re used in a routine kind of manner. However, if one reads and prays every-day simply out of tradition, this severely diminishes the point and effectiveness of the spiritual disciplines. Recalling what I wrote in chapter 4, the disciplines are “an activity within our power—something we can do—that brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort” (Willard 2006, 150). In other words, disciplines are not to be done simply to maintain our relationship with the Lord. Rather, by design, they are meant to stretch disciples to a point in their relationship with Jesus that they otherwise could not achieve.

In order to more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ, we must emphasize the importance of growing through the spiritual disciplines. Despite my call for “making disciples from below,” I believe this is one aspect of disciple-making that could easily be promoted from above. Pastors and presbytery members could organize a conference around understanding the spiritual disciplines. There are multiple ways in which the EPC could support a greater understanding of the disciplines, but it will most certainly begin by practicing them. I am not proposing that EPC members immediately begin exercising spiritual disciplines just for the sake of doing them. This sort of mindset is counterproductive: “Law-bound disciplines breathe death” (Foster 1988, 9). Rather, a disciple should pick one

5 Daily decisions are part of the journey. See Stanko and Ljubinka Jambrek, “The Role of the Bible in Daily Life.” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 159–80.

discipline, trust the Lord to use that discipline to help as they grow and engage in that particular discipline with the singular goal of imitating Christ.

This is the area that is most easily carried out individually. No one else is needed. By definition, biblical solitude and fasting should be done by oneself. Any disciple of Jesus Christ has the materials they need to begin practicing a spiritual discipline. Indeed, this is part of the simplicity and beauty of the various practices. At a time of many distractions and in a culture fond of conversations, the spiritual disciplines are difficult to carry out. But they are essential for any disciple who desires to be more like his/her Master. Whereas teaching can transform one's understanding from "naïve" to "informed," the spiritual disciplines have the greatest influence on converting "disobedience" to "obedience."

3.3.3 Relationships

Making disciples—calling and teaching others to emulate Jesus Christ—cannot be achieved without meaningful relationships. This is an area where the culture in Croatia can lend a hand. Croatians generally place a high priority on drinking coffee. Cafes are where business deals are done, agreements are made and relationships strengthened. It has therefore been puzzling to see many EPC members completely dismiss this cultural practice. In my opinion, the Croatian tendency to socialize over coffee and their natural gift of hospitality are consistent with New Testament values. If incorporated appropriately these would be effective tools of disciple-making. Regardless of where it is done, deep relationships must be pursued if disciple-making is going to happen. Recalling chapter 4, friendship is the most natural context for being vulnerable, asking questions and the level 1 (least formal) type of Word ministry.

There are many positive examples of friendships throughout the EPC. One of the events several interviewees mentioned is annual camps that take place in Orahovica, a small town in the eastern part of Croatia. I have personally observed that many lifelong relationships began and grew at these camps. There are numerous deep, vulnerable relationships both within local churches and extending beyond city limits. The tendency to build strong relationships, I believe, is the EPC's strongest area, perhaps due to the culture's emphasis on family and friendship. There is so much potential for calling unbelievers to become disciples through close relationships. Similarly, these strong connections offer the best context for continued disciple-making.

As mentioned above, intentionality is a crucial part of disciple-making. Whether through a more formal ministry training relationship or in an informal friendship, kindness, openness and friendly conversation alone will not achieve the goal of growing as followers of Christ. Purposive teaching must be part of any successful disciple-making equation. Matko offered several examples of deliberate teaching within existing relationships: leading family devotions and initiating

teaching sessions for believers planning to be baptized. His own acknowledged resistance to an intentional disciple-making relationship with someone he hardly knew illustrates that in Croatia, friendship and intentional teaching go hand in hand. This shows how each of the three separate aspects of disciple making I am arguing for can also be very closely related.

Conclusion

Disciples of Jesus Christ are utterly devoted to their Master and endeavor to obey everything he commanded. Jesus himself modeled complete obedience as he lived his life on earth in submission to the Father (Jn. 17:4; Phil. 2:8). Therefore, following his commands is the primary way to imitate Jesus Christ. Making disciples is a continued reflection of Jesus' ministry. Simply put, obedience to the Great Commission is the biblical solution to the problem in Croatia. Contextualized, members of the EPC will study and teach others to live in submission to Jesus' commands, be intentionally engaged in meaningful relationships with other disciples and practice several of the spiritual disciplines. Congregations full of disciples living out each of the three elements will undoubtedly bear fruit in their disciple-making efforts.

I am not suggesting anything new. If making disciples the way Jesus commanded the eleven to do is unfamiliar, that is because various programs, ministries and projects we are involved in have made it a foreign concept. The call is to observe everything that Jesus commanded. When obedience, rather than results, becomes our primary focus, the intended product of making disciples will emerge. My proposal is not a shortcut. It is in harmony with how Jesus taught his followers to make disciples.

There are several things I am not calling for. First, I am not proposing that any of these three elements—preaching, relationships and the spiritual disciplines—take the place of any of Jesus' teaching. Taking up one's cross, a hunger for righteousness and turning the other cheek, for example, are part of everything Jesus taught. The goal is to regain an understanding of what Jesus was calling his disciples to, not navigate around his commands. The three-pronged approach is a contextualized method of doing what Jesus originally taught his disciples to do. Secondly, I do not think a change in Pentecostal theology is in order. I am in no way promoting a deconstruction of the doctrine the EPC holds to. Instead, the core beliefs should continue to be taught and explained in a balanced way. Great lengths should be taken for pastors to understand the Statement of Faith and for church members to be familiar with the core tenants of the Christian faith and Pentecostal doctrine. Finally, I am not calling for a shake-up of EPC leadership. I believe these three components of disciple-mak-

ing are beneficial at any level. But these ideas are not dependent on any initiative from the leaders of the EPC.

What I am calling for is for my generation and younger generations to begin to put a high emphasis on the three components of teaching, spiritual disciplines, and friendships. As in the example of Hrvatovci, without any of these, a local church will wither away. A Christian community that engages in two of the three components can be maintained, and perhaps even grow. I believe that a local EPC congregation in which all three of these components exist will flourish as a disciple-making church. My proposed solution may not seem revolutionary. But I do believe it is life-changing—both to the individual disciple of Jesus Christ and to the community of disciples in Croatia.

This demands that our eyes always be fixed on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). “Our desire to fulfill the Great Commission mandate to make disciples . . . grows out of our passion to know Christ” (Borthwick 2015, 179). Disciple-making will not happen outside of a genuine longing to know Jesus and live in obedience to his commands. My call is for a return to the hill in Galilee where the eleven encountered their risen Master. As shown, I believe we have all the resources and capability to obey the Great Commission as Jesus’ original disciples did. May our Master’s absolute authority, ultimate calling and everlasting presence motivate the church in Croatia as we joyfully endeavor to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Jeremy Bohall

Podizanje Kristovih učenika u Hrvatskoj

Sažetak

Ovaj projekt istražuje kako Evanđeoska pentekostna crkva (EPC) danas u Hrvatskoj podiže učenike Isusa Krista. Cilj je pokazati da unatoč smanjenoj učinkovitosti stvaranja i slanja Kristovih učenika, kako u svijetu tako i na lokalnoj razini, EPC ipak raspolaze znatnim resursima i potencijalom da i nadalje poslušno ispunjava Veliko poslanje. To se ovdje pokazuje kroz razmatranje teksta Matej 28,16-20 i pripadajuće povijesne definicije Kristova učenika, istraživanjem izvornog konteksta učenništva te kroz razgovor sa nekoliko članova EPC-a. Kao rezultat ovog istraživanja, prepoznajem nekoliko razloga za značajno smanjen broj novih Kristovih učenika u Hrvatskoj, no kao primarni problem se ipak ističe pojava koju ćemo ovdje biti slobodni nazvati naivna neposlušnost. Ustvrdit ću da lokalne crkve u sustavu EPC-a nisu primjereno poučene kako na pravilan način podizati Kristove učenike. Ukazivanjem na važnost kvalitetnog poučavanja, gradnje odnosa i prakticiranja duhovnih disciplina, namjera mi je pokazati da unutar EPC-a postoji rješenje za problem nedovoljno učinkovitog učenništva.