


DISCIPLE-MAKING: GOD'S STRATEGY FOR WORLDWIDE MORTAL COMBAT?

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THE DECADE OF
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We're in mortal combat. It's hard for the majority of us who have never served in the army, lived through a world war or even been in a war zone to grasp mortal combat. COVID19 brings that closer to home. It has brought a war climate to every country. It has heightened life and death issues. Many people have died and in certain countries, many pastors.¹

Satan came with a triple purpose: rob, kill and destroy. We can't know if he was behind COVID19 being created; yet that's a real possibility. His fingerprints of confusion, fear, anger, hubris and blame are everywhere.

It's not a new thought that Satan is in mortal combat against us, an overwhelming threat were it not for Jesus, What may be new for many of us is that we too are an overwhelming threat to him, specifically if we are disciple-makers.

¹Especially in Bolivia and Peru and probably other Latin American countries.

Satan was challenged and concerned when Jesus invaded the silent planet. He was way more troubled when Jesus multiplied in twelve apostles. When Jesus sent out the seventy, he realized his problems were far bigger than he had thought. He realized Jesus' strategy was multiplying apostolic messengers. If Twelve was bad, seventy was much worse. And what would he do next? Satan went for the jugular and brought every force available into one single focus - kill Jesus. Kill the shepherd and the sheep will scatter.

Things only got worse for Satan. Jesus came back from the dead, now immortal. Satan's Plan A was busted. But much worse for Satan was that Jesus commissioned the Eleven to be multiplying disciple-makers. He promised to be with each of them as they did this. And then he fulfilled his promise by sending the Holy Spirit to anoint and fill each of his disciples.

Satan moved into high gear. He brought the whole weight of the religious establishment against these dangerous people. They kept on witnessing and disciple-making. Ramp it up to persecution and imprisonment. Not enough. Ramp it up to death. But as one seed dies, many more are born. Ramp it up so that the whole weight of the Roman Empire comes against God's people, destroying Jerusalem and the nation of Israel that birthed Christianity. And hunting and killing Christians everywhere. But martyrdom continued to be the seed of the church.

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New strategy. Make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Official religions quickly become nominal, hypocritical; all kinds of terrible things were done in the name of Christianity.

But the decay of the Holy Roman Catholic Church birthed new orders of genuine disciples and eventually birthed the Reformation.

Fast forward to today. How can Satan stop the church? The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia”, the assembly. So how about stopping the church from assembling or meeting? And for good measure, stop all pastors from gathering with their churches. Empty the buildings, leaving hollow shells as memorials of a church that once was. Isolate pastors. In many countries, wipe out their financial base.



God's counterattack: a worldwide movement fostered by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), calling the Church to disciple-making. Is it a coincidence that COVID19 and that movement were birthed less than two months apart? Not at all! Both started in Asia - in China and Indonesia respectively.

COVID19 has spread far faster and with more deadly effects than anyone could have imagined. No country is immune. Worldwide casualties are huge and vastly underreported in many countries. At last count we've passed 30 million confirmed cases and are reaching one million deaths worldwide. The economic effects are huge. And it's still not clear if COVID19 has peaked.

God is at work in everything, including COVID19. One of the things he has done is radically prune every pastor and leader, cutting off most of what we used to do pre-COVID. His purpose in pruning is that we would be far more fruitful. And what could be more fruitful than for us to change our priorities and focus on multiplying authentic disciples and disciple-makers?²

² See article by David Kornfield, "COVID 19 and Disciple-making - Binding the Strongman"

To continue to gain momentum for the Decade of Disciple-Making any given country needs three key things³:

- 1 A national platform - commonly through the national evangelical alliance.
- 2 A significant collaborative team led by a called and anointed leader committed to motivating, equipping and mobilizing the whole church to disciple the whole nation.
- 3 A growing dedicated network of leaders of church networks (denominations and associations⁴) and disciple-making ministry leaders.

³With some adaptations these same three criteria can be adapted to a denomination or even a local church. These three initial keys can be expanded with another five: 1) a starter motor core group (later transitioning into a team), 2) a consultation or retreat to birth the vision and team, 3) sowing the vision and values, 4) training for disciples, disciple-makers and disciple-making movement leaders; and 5) disciple-making model churches.

⁴Research indicates that about 70% of churches are independent and that the number continues to grow. A countrywide disciple-making strategy will need to include working with city-wide pastoral associations if this majority of churches is to be included in the disciple-making force

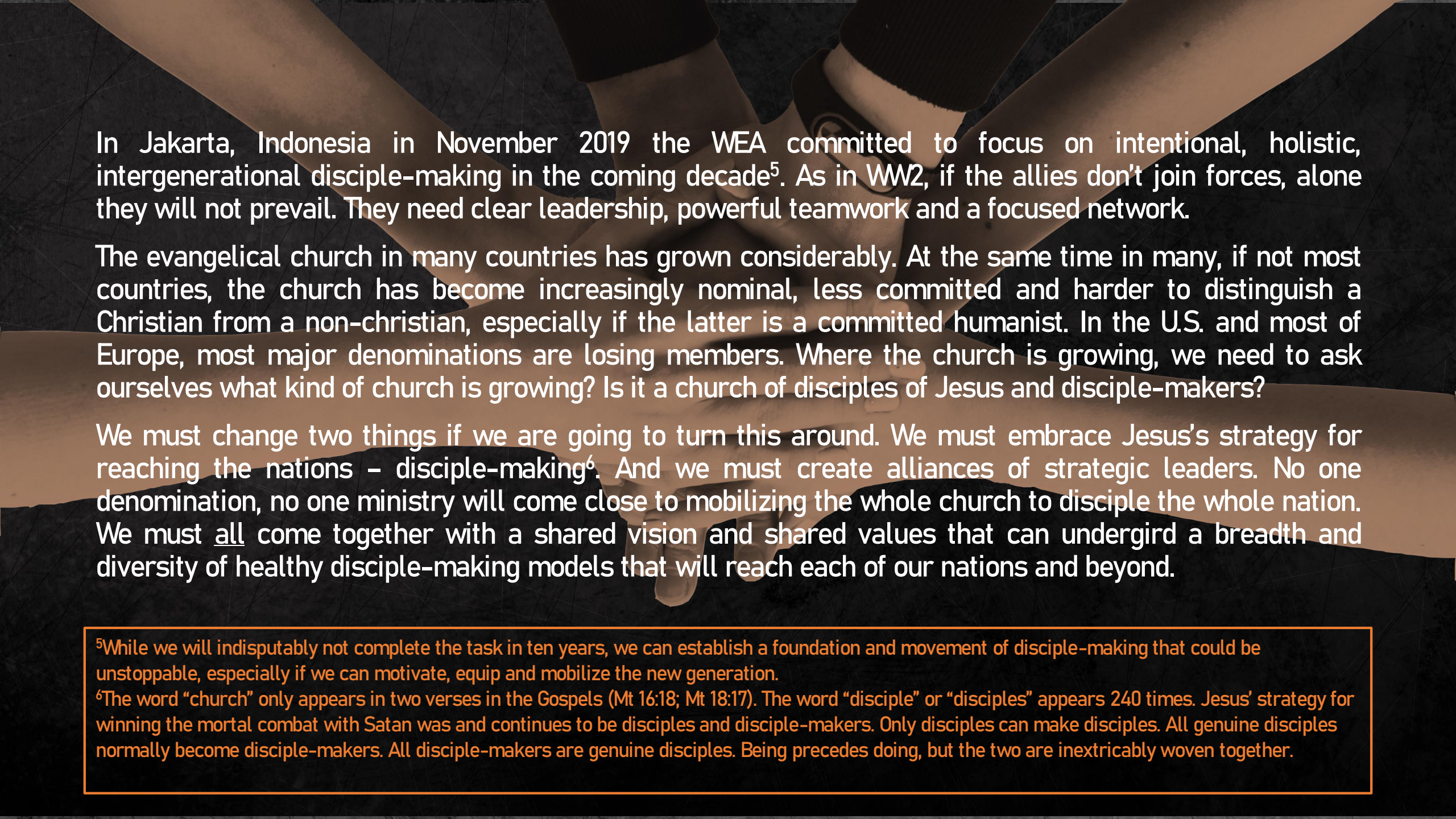




The Americas have been hit especially hard by COVID19. Eight of the fifteen worst countries in terms of per capita deaths are in Latin America. In rank order, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, Panama and Colombia. Amazingly, the two countries that have birthed national disciple-making movements under the umbrella of national evangelical alliances are also in Latin America: Brazil and Venezuela. While these two movements are embryonic, they give us some key lessons for how such movements could happen in other countries.

What could catalyze a disciple-making movement in your country, denomination or city? Along with the keys or components listed above, two events can be critical. The first is a major consultation or retreat that brings strategic leaders together and births a disciple-making team, network and movement. This moment is visionary and plants the seed. It could be likened to making a declaration of war.

The second is strategic leaders coming together with their teams to move from inspiration to action, identifying how to develop the keys for a disciple-making movement in their context. This could be likened to D-day in World War Two. This can happen when all the major players and many of the minor ones become allies, coming to the table for one reason: to lay out projects and concrete steps for each of them to forge ahead in disciple-making in their sphere.



In Jakarta, Indonesia in November 2019 the WEA committed to focus on intentional, holistic, intergenerational disciple-making in the coming decade⁵. As in WW2, if the allies don't join forces, alone they will not prevail. They need clear leadership, powerful teamwork and a focused network.

The evangelical church in many countries has grown considerably. At the same time in many, if not most countries, the church has become increasingly nominal, less committed and harder to distinguish a Christian from a non-christian, especially if the latter is a committed humanist. In the U.S. and most of Europe, most major denominations are losing members. Where the church is growing, we need to ask ourselves what kind of church is growing? Is it a church of disciples of Jesus and disciple-makers?

We must change two things if we are going to turn this around. We must embrace Jesus's strategy for reaching the nations – disciple-making⁶. And we must create alliances of strategic leaders. No one denomination, no one ministry will come close to mobilizing the whole church to disciple the whole nation. We must all come together with a shared vision and shared values that can undergird a breadth and diversity of healthy disciple-making models that will reach each of our nations and beyond.

⁵While we will indisputably not complete the task in ten years, we can establish a foundation and movement of disciple-making that could be unstoppable, especially if we can motivate, equip and mobilize the new generation.

⁶The word "church" only appears in two verses in the Gospels (Mt 16:18; Mt 18:17). The word "disciple" or "disciples" appears 240 times. Jesus' strategy for winning the mortal combat with Satan was and continues to be disciples and disciple-makers. Only disciples can make disciples. All genuine disciples normally become disciple-makers. All disciple-makers are genuine disciples. Being precedes doing, but the two are inextricably woven together.

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