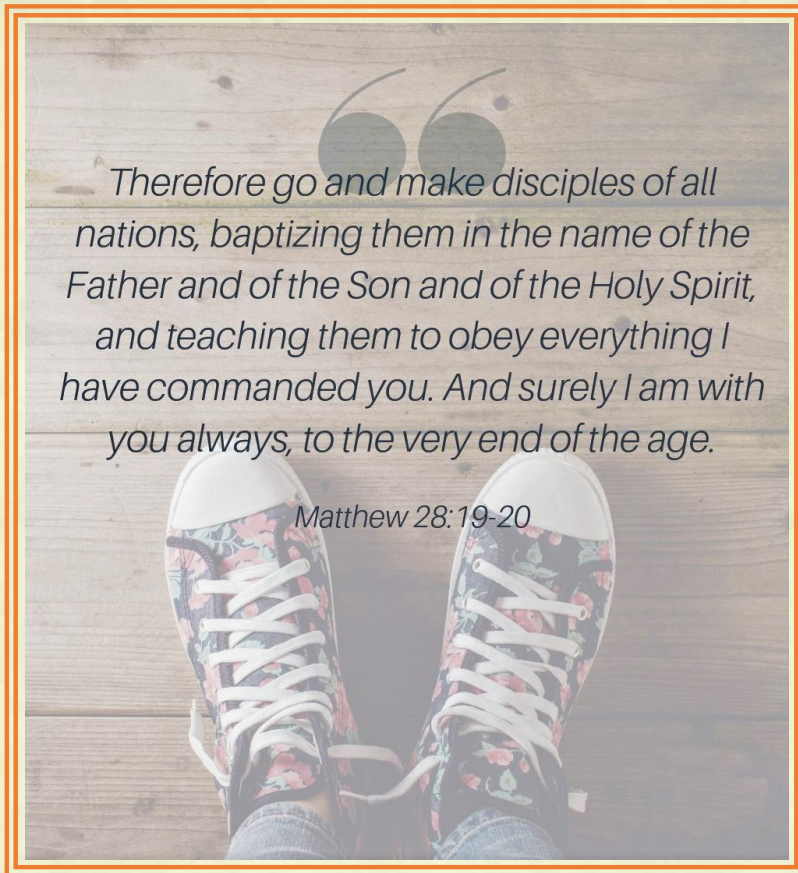




DISCIPLESHIP in the 21st Century: A Focus on Continuous Growth

Jesus left us with the Great Commission in Matthew 28 which established disciple making as the primary mission of the church and school. This mission (our WHY) requires an ongoing commitment to building a disciple-making culture of transformation in our institutions. But what does such transformation involve? In responding to this question, it is helpful to examine cultural contexts that inform our practice.

Parker Palmer (1993) asserts that historically there have been two ways of viewing the world—through the “eye of the mind” or the “eye of the heart.” However, our worldview should not involve an either/or proposition when it comes to mind and heart. What is needed, he says, is “whole-sight” where mind and heart unite.

During the early decades of the 20th century, the cultural movement of modernism dominated which promoted an objective, rationale, or “eye of the mind” interpretation of the world. Knowledge determined truth. Enter poststructuralism in the second half of the 20th century with a focus on a subjective, relativist, or “eye of the heart” interpretation of the world. What the individual or community thought determined truth. In either case, there was the absence of a grand narrative to provide depth and meaning.

At the dawn of the 21st century, there arose a new yearning for meaning and a sense of wholeness, a cultural movement sometimes referred to as metamodernism. Metamodernism focuses on the dynamic relationship between “the eye of the mind” and the “eye of the heart,” “whole-sight.” “Whole-sight” or “total truth” (Percy, 2008) for an individual emerges in the context of knowledge AND community.

Applied to discipleship, “whole-sight” (our HOW) begins by acknowledging God as the Master Designer, along with understanding the grand narrative He has provided as a foundation for discipleship—creation, fall, redemption, and re-creation. In addition to developing deep and meaningful knowledge of biblical truths, a disciple commits to a dynamic, lifelong process of spiritual growth toward wholeness in Christ and, in turn, disciples others as they commit to the journey (White, 1892). Although in many respects discipleship is a personal journey, relationships forged through community serve to help one another foster a balance among knowing, loving, and serving God.

The metaphor of the life of a plant is frequently used to illustrate transformation through discipleship. The process of transformation, involving sowing, cultivating, and reaping events, is an endlessly repeating cycle. Central to the process is the nurturing of growth; the plant is always in the process of change. As the metaphor implies, growth as a disciple is continuous; it is not a single event but an on-going journey.

More than ever, the time is right for us to accomplish the mission of the Great Commission—growing disciples. The present cultural context, focused on a more “whole-sight” approach to truth, is beginning to provide promising opportunities. Our institutions, therefore, must adapt their vision and methodologies (our WHAT) to transform the communities they are attempting to reach (VinCross, 2020). This does not mean that we change our mission. Eternal truth is changeless, but how that truth is packaged will vary and change as the culture changes. The continuous process of discipleship—with an emphasis on knowing, loving, and serving God through community—will be the thread that connects and unifies our practice.

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