

*My*

# Three Lives

GORDON FERGUSON



**A Story of One Man  
and Three Movements**

## Chapter Fourteen

### A Growing Disenchantment, Revisited

**M**y initial title for this closing chapter was “Growing Old, Looking Back and Looking Ahead.” That is pretty much what I want to cover in it. However, Toney had the idea of playing off the title of the last chapter in the mainline Church of Christ part of the book. I liked the idea and am thus using that title. However, my initial title is still true: I am growing old, I have spent the entire book looking back and I do want to look ahead. At seventy-three, most of my life is behind me, which gives me some unique perspectives that only age can bring. My experiences in three different but related types of churches has added to that perspective. I think I see things coming for my present movement because of what I saw in my past ones. I have some concerns that perhaps not too many others share, but in my opinion, I have good reasons for those concerns. You will have to make up your own mind about that as you continue reading. I am going to state my concerns in the form of questions, and you will have to decide if I am describing those concerns accurately and if so, how you are going to respond to them on a personal level. Ultimately, it is more about each of us and God than about our movement or another movement. I can’t change a movement, nor can I change myself—but God, the relentless pursuer of souls, can.

#### *What about Our Zeal Level?*

When Theresa and I joined the Discipling Movement, the zeal level was almost miraculous to us, compared to what our previous religious experiences had been. The focus on total commitment was a constant reminder that to claim that Jesus is truly Lord means that the top priority in our lives is him and his ways. It means denying self, taking up a cross daily and following him—no matter where that leads. We all embraced the belief

that disciples are willing to go anywhere, do anything and give up everything. We no doubt had a few fringe members, mostly in their hearts but not their actions. To be in a discipling church meant that everyone did everything asked of them. The zeal, commitment and activity level was quite something.

The Kriete letter and its immediate effects were highly alarming to me, as explained in a previous chapter. What I describe as the zeal and commitment level dropped off almost immediately for what seemed to be a majority. I kept preaching and teaching that danger lay ahead. Whatever level we settled into would become the new norm fairly rapidly, and changing it once it was entrenched would be all but impossible. As I observed the new norm being defined, I began preaching about my concerns but comforted myself (and others who shared my apprehensions) with the idea that at least we still had in our memory banks what it had been like and thus could be like again. The slowdowns were justified with rationalizations, such as that we had been too involved previously in church activities and had neglected our family in the process. So what did we do? Spent more time with our family doing things in the world around us rather than in God's world.

People began to pick and choose which church-related activities they would participate in and which they wouldn't. Leaders lost their prophet's edge and quit preaching strongly about what God's expectations were. In time, we became much like the religions around us. We had some members that continued to stay very involved and others who did their picking and choosing, and both were equally acceptable approaches in most churches by most leaders. Individual talks with those who were losing their commitment were no longer the norm. Perhaps from the pulpit the right standard was still being preached in many places, even most places, but what happened to the individual discipling that called people back to their own lordship commitment? For those of us who have been around for a long time, we know what it was like in earlier days and we know what it is like now and we know the difference, don't we? I have heard my little wife beg God in prayer many times to be able to live long enough to see us like we once were in our zeal level.

### *What about Our Discipling?*

People have asked me many times through the years what brought me into this movement of churches initially. My answer has always been the same: discipling, one-another Christianity put into practice. My first sermon after meeting the Discipling Movement was entitled, "The Missing Ingredient." Those of you who have heard me preach about the subject or read my writing about it know what my convictions are. At age seventy-three, I need discipling. The idea that we need it until we reach a certain level of maturity, and not after that, is so ridiculous that I refuse to address it. Christ, with his character and actions, represents the biblical level of maturity the Bible calls us to. If you think you have reached that, you have ended up in exactly the same place where one of my mainline elders was in 1984. In what proved to be our last discipleship time together, he actually said to me that he already was enough like Christ and thus didn't need discipling. That one comment convinced me that my resignation was a certainty, for with leaders having such a warped view of the Christian life and of themselves, no real changes in the church would be possible.

Another similar idea that I have heard espoused among us is that we don't need discipleship partners (or a triad or some similar structured, regular arrangement), but when we hit a place in our life or family where we need such an arrangement, then by all means go and seek it out. To me, that idea (along with the previous one), falls under the heading of stupid drivel. Do you find that offensive? Fine—be offended (but keep reading). It all boils down to a lack of some type of effective organized discipling plan through which we can follow God's directions for putting "one another" principles between Christians into place. The lack of such a plan, in my firm opinion, explains the highly increased levels of marriage problems, family problems, divorces, addictions (especially pornography among the men) and assorted other potentially soul-damning sins.

Theresa and I were asked to speak at a retreat for elders and elders-in-training a couple of years back for congregations in a certain part of our country. One or more of the lessons was to be on

some aspects of discipling. At one point, I asked representatives from each congregation represented to share with the group what was going on with discipling in their church. Very predictably, every last person said that they believed that everyone should be discipled and that the concept was biblical, but not a one of the churches represented had an organized program in which the large majority of their church was participating. I wasn't amazed and I wasn't shocked; but I was dismayed and saddened. It's the same story everywhere I've been for the past decade. At one point in our history, we boldly asserted that the Bible is not just full of nice ideals to sort of shoot for, but rather it is full of commands that God expects us to obey. We appear to have lost that conviction.

I met with a group of older leaders from the mainline church after moving back to Dallas, sometime last year. One asked specifically why I had left their group. I answered by describing my convictions about discipling. One of the men present, I suspect an elder and successful businessman, got a bit worked up and started preaching my sermon. He mentioned passages like James 5:16 and confession of sins to one another and said that they didn't come within light years of obeying passages like these (or something to this effect). He saw it clearly and quickly. He was so forceful in saying it that one of his friends gently censured him about his manner. I laughed and told him I understood, since my passions can cause me to say things pretty strongly and bluntly at times too. Right now is one of those times, if you haven't noticed it yet! I mentioned in a workshop fairly recently that I was old-school in that I practiced set discipleship times. An elder's wife came up to me privately and said that my statement sent shivers up her spine and weirded her out. Listen, I understand that many of our practices in the past, discipling being one of the foremost on the list, were implemented in hurtful and sinful ways. Plenty of practices, in and out of the church, have been implemented in bad ways. That does not invalidate the correct practice of those things. This business of dragging around the mistakes of the past on an individual or movement basis and letting them keep us from obeying God has got to stop, and it needs to stop *now*.

### *What about Our Personal Evangelism?*

The Great Commission is still in Matthew 28, the last time I checked it. Sadly, this is another key area that we implemented badly in many ways and turned people off to as a result. There was a time when we were in studies with non-Christians regularly and shared our faith even more regularly. I hate the fact that we turned it into a numbers game and an obligation rather than an opportunity and a blessing. Satan surely loved those distortions. But it is not about obligation and being pushed; it is about having the heart of God and imitating Jesus. We can no longer hide behind the bad motivations of the past in this area or any other area as an excuse for disobedience. We equally need to get back to the good part of our past history and refuse to tolerate the bad part of it. I had a mainline Church of Christ friend once who visited the church in Boston decades ago. He asked some young married woman if she shared her faith regularly (perhaps it was daily). She looked at him quizzically and didn't understand the question. Finally, she figured out what to her was a weird question and said something to this effect: "Of course I do; I'm a disciple." When was the last time you were in on a sit-down study with someone? How often do you share your faith?

To be candid, this is the one area I pray about most in confessing my sins of omission. I am not consistent. I share my faith pretty regularly overall, but I go in spurts. Sometimes I share several times in a day and sometimes I go several days without sharing. I'm not being legalistic here and I'm not saying that we have to share with a new person every day. But I am saying that evangelism is a consistent part of the lifestyle of a disciple. It is a highly important part of imitating Jesus, who came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). It is also a highly important part of imitating Paul, who asked us to do so (since he imitated Christ). Listen to his heart in this passage:

*And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation*

*be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:3–6).*

### *What about Our Group Evangelism?*

I enter this part of the discussion with some trepidation. I don't want to discourage you. I don't want to scare you by using statistics, but statistics have their place. In the past, we used them as motivation rather than for aiding in evaluation. My doctor uses statistics—lots of them. I'm glad that he does. When a test result is bad, we look for solutions together and I come back to be evaluated even sooner than normal to make sure my health isn't going in a downward direction. We have to look at ourselves in the area of evangelism, but we also have to look at what is happening in our group, our church, our grouping of churches in a geographical area, and then overall as a movement.

After the Kriete debacle, we lost thousands of members overnight. Most of them didn't leave us seeking another church. Rather, they left God. Some in both categories have come back; most haven't. I'm very grateful for the ones who have, but our restoration numbers are in steady decline during the past five years. It took some years for our movement to return to the point of positive growth. Truthfully, we were struggling with growth before the letter, although still planting churches. I mentioned in an earlier chapter the open forum at the ACU Lectureship in 2004. The oldest panelist was with the mainline group—Jim Woodruff. He is a highly respected preacher and author, a man with a very kind personality. When he made the comment about their group that they were in the last days of a dying movement, some of his fellow panelists didn't like what he said, and they spoke up. That didn't deter Jim in the least, and I remember his saying it three different times, in both our private meetings and in the public one. Why wouldn't he back off? He knew their statistics and downward spiral in growth, to the point of decline in membership and numbers of congregations. Are we prepared to look at ourselves that honestly? I pray that we are. I appreciate many things about our movement. I also appreciate a number of things about my mainline church background. But my appreciation doesn't tempt me to be sentimental. The facts are the facts are the facts.

So what are the facts about our growth as a movement through the end of 2015? Let me share some with you.

- Overall growth for our movement of churches in 2015 was 1.9%.
- Overall Growth for the US/Canadian church was 1.3%.
- Our 20 churches with over 1000 members grew less than 1% combined.
- In those largest churches, it took 1175 members to produce a growth of one person.
- Of these 20 churches, San Diego had the most percentage growth (6.1%), while 8 of the 20 actually lost members.
- No churches in our movement grew by 100 or more.
- 70% of our total churches are under 100 members.
- We have 667 congregations overall, 381 of which baptized between 1 and 10 people, and 122 had zero baptisms. Thus, of our 667 churches, 503 (75%) baptized between 0 and 10 people in a year's time.
- My home state of Texas shows a 5.5% increase in membership in the last year, from 2939 to 3101, an increase of 162 members. But we had 328 baptisms and restorations. Due to our increasing number of children maturing, we have been blessed with many teen baptisms (my grandson being one of them), but how many in our communities are being converted is an important aspect to consider. Texas also benefitted by having many Christians relocate here over the last decade because of a robust economy which has skewed the actual net growth numbers.
- As of the end of 2015, we had just over 100,000 members worldwide. Compare that with the fact that the global human population growth amounts to at least 75 million annually (well over 200,000 every day).



Church growth doesn't tell us all we need to know about church health, but it obviously tells us something – something vitally important. What do these statistics mean? That our fastest-growing churches are growing slowly; that many churches are stagnant in growth; and that some are shrinking. Overall, we are hardly making a dent in a world population that is increasing every day at more than twice the size of our total membership. Unless we begin reemphasizing and reimplementing the “multiplication principle” (every member converting one person per year) that we taught with such vigor in the past, we will do little to alter these results. When I preached for mainline churches, we grew. The other leaders were in fact quite encouraged by our growth, especially compared to many other congregations. My consistent comment was that if all congregations grew at the same rate we were growing, the huge majority of the world's population would still die without ever having heard the true message of Christ. We had a fatal flaw in our thinking, in that we were comparing ourselves with ourselves. Here is what Paul said about that practice: *“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise”* (2 Corinthians 10:12). My question to us is this: are we not starting to do the same thing to feel better about ourselves?

### *What about Our Unity as a Movement?*

A good minister friend of mine once told me that as a brand-new Christian, a leader told him that the biggest challenge for our movement was destined to be unity. He hit the nail on the head. A lack of unity guarantees failure; the presence of unity guarantees success. We all know that in our past history, we were too dependent on each other in leadership structure, and local churches that were mature with their own leadership were often controlled too much by leaders outside their congregation. We have repented of that but swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. Now many churches are very independent and pretty closed to outside involvement, even when they obviously need help. Interdependence is the right balance, with a genuine openness to get help from the outside when things are

not going well. And let me state the obvious here—when seventy-five percent of our congregations are baptizing between zero and ten people per year, things are not close to going well.

We are overly fearful of organizational structure that could help with our problems. In a nutshell, we are afraid of Big Brother (whoever that could possibly be now) coming back in to tell us what to do. Most of those with such fears, in my experience, have backgrounds in the mainline Church of Christ, who are known for, and take pride in, their autonomy. Having seen the fruits of that in two different movements, my mainline background moves me in opposite directions as I know their failures all too well. In our early days as a movement, we still had roots in that background and were clearly influenced by it in areas like the use of instrumental music in worship and in our views of the women's role, to name just two examples. We finally eradicated these traditions in our group, but it was neither quick nor easy. The more subtle elements that come from that background are harder to detect, but for many, they are still there and are hurting our unity as a movement. We already have a structure in place that is working to some degree and could work to a far greater degree. Our clearly identified geographical families of churches could be of tremendous help if we could embrace the right kind of interdependence and welcome an infusion of help from leaders within our own area. But for this to become a functional reality, we are going to have to discard our fears and restore a brand of unity that we do not now have, at least in some parts of this country and perhaps in other countries. If we don't, the concept of congregational autonomy is going to stop the progress that could be made. Cannot we learn that from the mainline churches?

### *How about Another's Long-Term Perspective*

Toney Mulhollan is the editor of Illumination Publishers International (IPI), and has been since its inception in 2003. He is not only my publisher but has been a special friend and coworker for decades. Toney, who has a background in the Church of Christ, made a visit to the Crossroads church in Gainesville, Florida when still a teen. He saw so much excitement and felt so much electricity in the air that he promptly moved there at age

nineteen. He served in the printing ministry there for eight years until moving to Boston in 1987. He moved to Boston to set up a printing ministry, which eventually became part of Discipleship Publications International, and lived there until 2006 when he moved IPI to Houston, Texas.

So why have I asked him to write his perspective to end this chapter? For several reasons: One, he has been with our movement through all of its various stages. He has traveled all over the country recording seminars and visiting churches. He has over 25,000 sermons in his personal library from leaders across our movement. Few others can claim his breadth of exposure. I cannot. Two, because of that, his perspective needs to be heard and his experiences have earned him the right to be heard. No one among us has published more of our books or listened to and produced more of our audio and video materials than he. Therefore, he knows us and what we teach in great detail. Third, in our many conversations through the years, via emails, phone calls and personal visits, we discovered long ago that our perspectives regarding where our movement has been, and now is, are extremely similar. In a word, we share many of the same concerns, especially now. Therefore, I thought he was the ideal one to have the last say in this chapter, and I pray that we are all listening with open ears and hearts. Help us see what we need to see, Toney!

### **Toney Mulhollan**

#### *Commitment Then and Now*

Though only my personal view, here are some disturbing trends that serve to illustrate the differences in what our movement was like in the early days compared to the present. These do not reflect the total situation in every church, but to some degree impact every ministry in our movement.

I vividly remember my introduction to the beginnings of our movement in 1979 when I moved my young family from Texas to Gainesville, Florida. I had no job and moved sight unseen to a church because of their teaching and the impact they were making. They were preaching “total commitment” to Jesus,

no matter what stage of life you were in—whether you were a campus student, single, married, married with children or a senior adult, that was the expectation you were called to. I was pleasantly surprised to find that with few exceptions this was reflected in the Crossroads church.

The young men who were being trained there and sent out to plant campus ministries in established churches found that was not the case in those churches. Preaching total commitment eventually proved to be the ultimate factor in unsettling these older churches. Older members felt challenged with the call to discipling, evangelism and in general, radical repentance and openness. It eventually became clear that the majority of the older church attenders were not going to accept this invasion into their settled and comfortable lifestyle (especially from young novices in the faith). They appreciated the baptisms, growth of the church and the general excitement of seeing lives changed, but felt that this was for the youngsters. Most members and even leaders (preachers and elders) became defenders of the status quo. I even remember one church conference where a panel discussed the implications of the “total-commitment” theology, and a preacher proudly and defiantly proclaimed, “We will not allow even one ounce of total-commitment teaching in our church.” And he didn’t.

Every year, *The Christian Chronicle* printed a list of the churches baptizing over 100 people. In 1980, at the height of the Crossroads Campus Ministry Movement, more than one-third of those churches had Crossroads-trained ministers. As discussed in this book as well as others, within a decade virtually all of these churches eliminated their association with the campus ministries. Looking back, I can say without exception that every one of these churches declined in growth, influence and commitment. Eventually, *The Christian Chronicle* no longer printed the yearly list of churches baptizing over 100 (for obvious reasons).

Now some thirty-five years later as our movement has aged, I’m hearing some of the same attitudes emerge. Recently, in a discussion with a minister of one of our churches, a brother talked about the need to call people back to “total commitment” to Jesus. The preacher said, “We can’t call the people back to

that kind of commitment; they won't stand for it." Upon hearing this, I thought to myself, "He's probably right." We have become our fathers. Some of the very things that disturbed us about the mainline churches and their lack of commitment we are now struggling with ourselves. Our growth has stagnated, our zeal level has diminished and our commitment to discipleship has become in practice something considered optional. And most disturbing, just like the mainline church, we now have defenders of the status quo.

### *Zeal Then and Now*

My first visit to a Crossroads Church of Christ service was overwhelming. I had never seen anything like it. The second I walked through the double doors of the auditorium, I could feel an electricity in the air. There was a "buzz" about the fellowship. It was as though a reunion of a loving family was taking place that hadn't happened in years. People were talking, laughing and encouraging one another, and there were numerous Bibles open as people shared with each other truths being learned from God's word. There were even groups of people praying together. And that was all before the service began!

When the service started the energy only increased. It felt like every member was in the choir. My eyes scanned the auditorium and I couldn't find anyone that wasn't singing. There were no part singers with microphones up front, or loud musical instruments to muffle the voices of the audience. There were no solos highlighting a few gifted singers, but an emphasis on every individual praising God. It was the first place I felt like I could sing loud (and sometimes off-key) without being noticed—because everyone was singing. You couldn't help *"speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit."* You just had to *"sing and make music from your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19).

The buzz didn't end when the final amen was said; it just got louder. The same actions that happened before the service began again. When the service was over, no one left. I was used to attending churches where most people made a beeline for the door, hoping to beat the Baptists to an enticing lunch at the local

steakhouse. But here, people stayed and fellowshiped. Finally, the janitors or the person responsible for locking the building had to kick everyone out. The same scenario played itself out at the Sunday evening services we had then. The only difference in the evening service was that it was typically only the Christians attending and not visitors like at the morning service. I quickly found out that Sunday or Wednesday services were not optional. They were just part of being a committed follower of Christ.

How does that compare with what we see now? Our services are markedly different now. In many places, Elvis has left the building...in other words, you don't walk into our services and feel that same kind of buzz. They are nice, but for the most part, pedestrian. To a degree, I don't sense that family-reunion feel; I certainly see few Bibles (or electronic versions of it) open and being used to instruct, counsel and disciple one another.

The singing definitely has a different vibrancy. More of the energy emanates from the stage than from the audience. There is more reliance on amplification, part singers, musical instruments, solos and even recorded musical accompaniment of songs to drive the worship. I recently attended a service where the power was out and I was shocked at the lack of spiritual energy in the singing. The lack of teaching the basics of singing and the expectation of every member to participate has become painfully clear. Our worship and singing have drifted slightly toward performances as opposed to every member speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

There is clearly a loss of commitment when it comes to attendance at meetings of the body. You see it reflected in many ways. People make it to church shortly before services and they don't have to be kicked out of the building because of too much fellowship afterwards. Survey it with your own eyes and your own experience. Also in more than a few churches, the length of the service has been reduced. Church leaders feel that people are busy and visitors certainly don't want to sit through a long service. That thinking is coupled with the fact that few churches have anything like Sunday school (which was a staple of the Crossroads church), nor do we have nearly as many meetings as we once did.

Midweek services are no longer planned for everyone every week, and if we have Bible talks at all, they are held sporadically. In practice, some church functions have become optional for people (midweek services, devotionals, Bible talks and special teaching days being among them). We've lost the power that comes when everyone is unified committed to advancing the cause of Christ. Another example of this problem is illustrated when I attended a HOPEworldwide walk to raise money for the poor (something I've done with my children for the last five years). It was sponsored by a church with 600 members. The walk had an attendance of only 110 members; it was very disheartening. All this reflects a diminished commitment to the body of Christ, which is a foundational pillar from which ministry effectiveness comes. We are teaching less than ever before and missing out on the power that comes from being in the Word and building family and all the one-another opportunities that are produced by it.

### *Discipleship Then and Now*

After our decision to die to ourselves and make Jesus Lord (Luke 9:23), discipleship (having a discipling partner or group) was the relationship tool that helps us put that decision into practice. It's how Jesus trained his twelve apostles and it is how Paul trained Timothy and others. In the early part of the book of Acts when the apostles were arrested, it was clear that they were not recent graduates of the School of Tyrannus or any school of theology. They were unschooled, ordinary men. What stood out and astonished Jewish leaders was the fact that these men had been with Jesus. Discipleship helps us to walk as Jesus did.

Both in Gainesville and later in Boston, I was set up with a discipleship partner within the first few weeks after arriving. In Boston, I vividly remember my ministry leader telling me, "You might be able to get into heaven without discipleship, but you can't get into this church without it!" Indeed, there was a deep and sincere commitment to discipleship. Whether it was peer-to-peer, group, or older-to-younger discipleship (all of which I benefited from in Boston), it was the catalyst that moved my faith, dreams and intentions into practical action. It was the tool that addressed my sins and weaknesses, reshaped my character into

Christlikeness and gave me vision for what I could become. I didn't always like it, but I always appreciated it. Though occasionally painful, it produced fruit in my life that was worth the sometimes unsettling nature of accountability that comes with discipleship.

Discipleship is the most important tool we have to help us carry out the difficult aspects of our Christian walk. Evangelism is a great example of that. For most disciples, evangelism is the most challenging aspect of their faith. Without the constant call, encouragement and accountability to share our faith, it quickly fades into obscurity and only those who are deemed to have the so-called "gift" of evangelism do it. Over the last decade as we have abandoned discipleship and the priority of evangelism (making disciples) has suffered along with it. We now struggle to attain even a 1% growth. If you subtract the number of baptisms that occur within families when teens are baptized (and those are important), the number of outsiders we are reaching is dismal. We are not nearly keeping up with world population growth. On average, the world's population increases by 210,000 every day (over 75 million a year), and our movement baptized barely over 7000 lost souls in all of 2015. Our evangelistic outreach and growth as a movement is dependent on discipleship. Without it, we will not reach our communities or the world.

The most disturbing aspect of our optional approach to discipleship is that we have created a double standard of membership in the Lord's church. You can be a totally committed and fired-up disciple of the Lord—and you will be encouraged, admired and accepted. You can also be half-hearted, uncommitted, disinterested or unevangelistic—and be accepted. Thus when new converts are made, Satan uses this dichotomy in a powerful way: he tries to convince young Christians that you can live either way and be accepted by God. When the church accepts what God doesn't, Satan rejoices. With the loss of a godly standard of biblical commitment, we become no different than the religions around us who have little or no biblical standards for membership. The entire body of Christ must be committed to the lordship of Jesus. Without discipleship, that simply will not happen.

Also because of the lack of discipleship in many ministries, about 20% of the congregation is doing 90% of the work. Those



whose hearts are totally committed throw themselves into the work. But it becomes a spiritual drag when you feel like everyone is not on board with the mission. Eventually, these goodhearted disciples burn out. It also impacts full-time workers. Many staff members not only provide spiritual leadership, but carry a heavy load of office work, website design and administration, flyer design, finding places to meet and the list goes on. With this divided interest, the advancement of the kingdom through prayer and the ministry of the word is compromised (Acts 6:4).

The loss of discipleship has also caused a flourishing of support ministries. I'm not marginalizing the good work that is being done (I publish a number of books in this very area), but many of these needs were met when discipling relationships were functioning. We now have recovery groups, including sexual identity and or sexual purity recovery, chemical recovery, divorce recovery, grief processing groups, anger management groups, and a cottage industry of psychologists with more patients than time available to counsel them. This only reflects the society at large. We have all become victims in need of recovery as opposed to sinners who need forgiveness.

I have a close friend, a strong disciple, who now regularly sees a psychiatrist. I asked him why he was seeing him. He said, "Honestly, I now have a relationship with someone who listens to me and helps me. It's what I used to get in discipling times, but that's no longer available." I think he's right. There will always be the need for professional Christian mental health experts to meet more serious needs, and that's important. But genuine and close discipling relationships can solve and provide the help needed for the majority of us to deal with life's challenges.

It's obvious that I have serious concerns for the direction of our movement. I'm not alone; there are many who know we have problems but don't have the opportunity or forum to address them: and many have given up doing so. Perhaps the present generation of leadership is past the point of rescue. Maybe a new generation of disciples will have to arise where we have compromised. But I do believe it can be turned around, and Gordon will suggest ways to do that in the following pages.