



**Slide #1**

This article delves into the question, “If the commission of the Church is to make disciples, why didn’t any writers of the Epistles use the term *disciple* in their teachings to the Church?” Did something change? Are we to make disciples today?

## Transition in the Making-Disciples Process

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**Slide #2**

A year from the time Jesus began His ministry, He chose the Twelve from a crowd of many disciples that followed after and learn from Him.<sup>1</sup> Mark 3:14 states that Jesus appointed the Twelve to be His intimate companions and learners so that they would be prepared to be send out for ministry.

He appointed Twelve  
that  
They might be with Him  
and that  
He might send Them out.

Mark 3:14

2

Slide #3

Jesus selected them to prepare them through an on-the-job-training program to become like their teacher (Luke 6:40). They were to learn what it meant to become servants. Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). This group of twelve became the very ones who Jesus sent out as servants (Mark 6:7).

SELECTION

PREPARATION

He appointed Twelve  
that  
They might be with Him  
and that  
He might send Them out.  
Mark 3:14

SERVANTS

3

Slide #4

The timeline of Jesus’ three-and-a-half-year ministry shows the growth in the number of disciples over time (see bottom portion of chart). The Gospel of John gives the most information concerning His early ministry and the increasing number of followers, beginning in the first year with Andrew and Peter (John 1:37). Later at the start of His ministry in Galilee, “Jesus said to [Andrew and Peter who were already followers], ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fisher of men’” (Mark 1:17). Immediately leaving their fishing business, they became committed followers. A short time later they were selected [red 1] to be among the Twelve, who would spend the next year-and-a-half years with Jesus, learning to be like their Master (Mark 3:14). It was during the latter part of Jesus’ Galilean ministry that He sent out [red 2] these men as servants for ministry (Mark 6:7).

MAKING-DISCIPLES PROCESS  
(Gospels)

Timeline

Early Ministry (12 Mon.)	Galilean Ministry			Later Ministry	
	1st Tour (5 Mon.)	2nd Tour (12 Mon.)	3rd Tour (6 Mon.)	Judea (3 Mon.)	Perea (3 Mon.)
First Disciples Andrew & Peter (Jn 1)	"Follow Me!" Andrew & Peter (Mt 4 Mk 1 Lk 5)	Twelve Selected* (Mk 3)	Twelve Sent Out (Mt 10 Mk 6 Lk 9)	Warns Disciples (Mt 16 Mk 8 Lk 9)	Cost to Disciples (Lk 14)
First Miracle Disciples Believe (Jn 2)			Some Disciples Depart* (Jn 6)	Abiding Disciples* (Jn 8)	Servant Follows (Jn 12)

\*Distinction in Disciples

DISCIPLES

Following

Departing

Fishing

Adapted from: *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*  
A.I. Robertson/Harper & Row

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Slide #5

Jesus' discipling process involved two steps. Step one: Jesus selected twelve followers who would experience intimate fellowship with Him to prepare for ministry. Secondly, these disciples were then sent out to perform in ministry. Over time, they were transformed from immature followers to Christ's Apostles (sent out ones). This was the pattern for making disciples in the Gospels.

**MAKING-DISCIPLES PROCESS**  
(Gospels)

STEP	EVENT	TEXT	PARTICIPANTS	QUALIFICATIONS	PURPOSE
1	Jesus Appointed 12 Disciples	Mark 3:14	Multitude of Disciples	Intimate Fellowship "With Him"	Prepare for Ministry & Leadership
2	Jesus Sent Out 12 Apostles	Mark 3:14; Mark 6:7	The Twelve	Intimate Followers "Sent Out"	Perform in Ministry & Leadership

**5**

Slide #6

When we come to Acts and the Epistles, we are confronted with a dilemma. Notice that while Christ's commission to the Church was to "make disciples," the term *disciple* is not always used in Acts and not used at all in the Epistles. Rather, the term *brethren* takes center stage. So are we to "make disciples" or not? Did the Apostles not follow Christ's command and not make disciples?

**TRANSITION IN TERMS**  
(Usage)

Term	Matt	Mark	Luke	John <sup>1</sup>	Acts <sup>2</sup>	Paul	Others
Disciples	74	45	37	81	30	—	—
Brethren <sup>3</sup>	—	—	—	—	32	133	57

<sup>1</sup>—Disciple usually refers to the Twelve  
<sup>2</sup>—Disciple never refers to the Twelve  
<sup>3</sup>—Not a physical relative

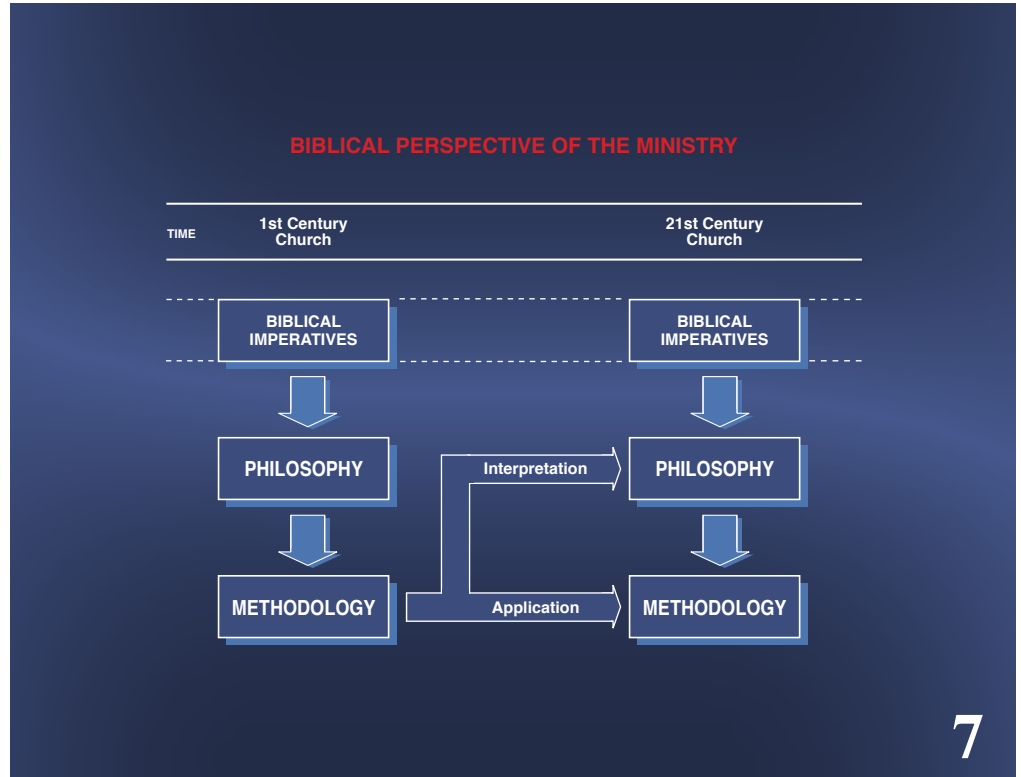
**6**

Slide #7

To form a biblical perspective of the ministry, we must consider the implications when something doesn't fit our predetermined understanding of the ministry. In the article *Adopting a Biblical Ministry Perspective*, we said that one's philosophy is the result of serious study that considers the various principles and practices of the New Testament church. Then we discussed that your philosophy of the ministry (what you think), like sand in an hourglass, flows to determine your methodology in the ministry (what you do). Slide 7 points out that biblical imperatives determined the first-century philosophy, which then resulted in the methodology of the first-century church, the day-to-day life of the church. This methodology is provided in Acts and the Epistles. While not specifically given, the first-century philosophy is implied.

When we come to the twenty-first century, the biblical imperatives remain the same. They are timeless and should lead to the formation of one's philosophy of the ministry. Obviously a twenty-first century philosophy should be similar to the early church. Today we have the same directives and we have the first-century methodology to help us interpret and apply them in our twenty-first century setting.

With that said, "What was the process for making disciples in the early church if the term *disciple* was no longer used?" We must again ask the question, "Did something change?" "Are we to make disciples today?"



7

Slide #8

A timeline study of the early church offers insight. The five instances designated in red show the pattern in which church leadership was selected or appointed for ministry. Within the first two years following Christ's death an Apostle to replace Judas was selected [red A]. Notice that the Apostles' responsibility was to teach the Assembly (Acts 2:42). Seven deacons were also selected [red B] in order to allow the Apostles to "devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Acts 8:1 tells us "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." There was an exception—"except the apostles." They remained to minister to the new generation of believers in Jerusalem.

Fourteen years later another leadership selection is brought to our

**MAKING-FOLLOWERS PROCESS**  
(Acts & Epistles)

		Timeline											
		Jerusalem (2 yrs)		Judea & Samaria (13 yrs)		Remostest Part of Earth (14 yrs)					Church Expansion (33 yrs)		
						Paul's First Journey	Jer. Council	Paul's Second Journey	Paul's Third Journey	Paul in Prison (First)	Paul Released	Paul in Prison (Second)	Church Growth
Yr.	Ch.	33	35	48	49	49	50	53	57	62	67	68	95
						12	13	14	15	15	18	21	28
	<b>A</b>	Selected Twelfth Apostle (1:23)											
	<b>B</b>	Apostles Teaching + Fellowship in Assembly (2:42-47)		Selected Seven Deacons (6:5)		Persecution Caused All to Leave Jerusalem, Except the Apostles (8:1)							
	<b>C</b>					Paul Appointed Elders in every Assembly (14:23)		Paul meets with Apostles & Elders at Jerusalem Council (15:4)					
	<b>D</b>									Qualifications of Elders given to Timothy (1 Tim 3)			
	<b>E</b>									Titus to Appoint Elders in every Town (Tit 1:5)		Timothy to Entrust to Faith-fill Men (2 Tim 2:2)	

Adapted from: *A Chronological Table of the Apostolic Age*, Doc. Diss., 1964, Revised 1972  
Dr. H.W. Hoehner/Dallas Theological Seminary

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attention. Paul appoints elders [red C] in every assembly he established in his first missionary journey (14:23). In the same year when Paul and Barnabas arrived at the Council at Jerusalem, “the apostles and the elders” received them (15:4). Seemingly, the Apostles had appointed these “elders” in Jerusalem for the same reason Paul did on his first and later missionary journeys—for church leadership. This was the very reason Paul left Titus in Crete [red D] and Timothy in Ephesus [red E].

Slide #9

Qualifications for the selections or appointments pertained to leadership responsibilities. The new Apostle obviously would need to perform the same responsibilities as the other Apostles, devoting himself “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Acts 1:21-22 required this person to be associated with Jesus throughout His ministry and a witness of Christ’s resurrection because these men were *eyewitnesses* of Jesus’ ministry (1:8). Further, the responsibilities of deacons were to serve tables for the widows. They were selected to take that task from the Apostles so that they “not... neglect the word of God” (6:2). The requirement was that the deacons were of good reputation and full of the Spirit and of wisdom (v 3).

The qualifications for elder were stringent, relating to qualities, abilities, and knowledge. Twenty-one qualities are delineated, indicating the required characteristics that

someone must possess. The two abilities or skills were being able to teach and to manage one’s own house well. While some understand “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2) to refer to being “teachable,” the Greek word selected actually indicates being “skilled at teaching.”<sup>2</sup> Paul explained the reason that an elder “must be one who manages his own household well” (v 4): “If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?” (v 5). These skills correspond to the responsibilities of elders in First Timothy 5:17: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching [in word] and teaching [in doctrine]” (e.g., 4:6; 6:3).<sup>3</sup> Notice the contrast in elders is not in abilities but rather in the performance of those abilities—“rule well” and “work hard in word and in doctrine.” All elders are to “manage well” (3:4) or “rule well” (5:17) and all elders are to “work hard in word and in doctrine” [being “skilled at teaching” (3:2)]. *Elders are distinguished in diligence in the task, not ability for the task*—all had the same abilities and responsibilities. Lastly, an elder must not be “a new convert” (3:6) and must be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching [doctrine]” (Titus 1:9). The reason for these requirements was that a new believer would not have had time to become knowledgeable in “the teachings” or “doctrine.”<sup>4</sup>

Each of these leadership positions required a level of maturity in Christ. While the deacons’ responsibility allowed the Apostles to pursue their main task, the ministry priority for both the Apostles and elders was leading the church and teaching the Word. **Note:** in each case when the selection or appointment occurred the individuals were already mature, having fulfilled every needed qualification for service.

**QUALIFICATIONS for "SELECTION" or "APPOINTMENT"**

EVENT	TEXT	QUALIFICATIONS
Apostle Replacement	Acts 1:21-22	Accompanied us—beginning with baptism of John until the day Christ was taken up from us A witness with us of Christ's resurrection
Selection of Deacons	Acts 6:3	Good Reputation Full of the Spirit and of Wisdom
Appointment of Elders	1 Tim 3:2-7 Titus 1:6-9	Qualities: Above Reproach, Husband of One Wife, Temperate, Prudent, Respectable, Hospitable, Not Addicted to Wine, Not Pugnacious, Gentle, Uncontentious, Free from Love of Money, Children under Control, Good Reputation with those Outside, Blameless, Not Self-Willed, Not Quick-Tempered, Not Fond of Sordid Gain, Loving what is Good, Just, Devout, Self-Controlled Abilities: Able to Teach, <sup>1</sup> Manages His own House Well Knowledge: Not a New Convert, Holding Fast the Faithful Word

1—διδάκτικος = Skilled at Teaching, not διδύκτος = Teachable (BDAG, 240)

**9**

**Slide #10**

If you accept the two-step approach to the making-disciples/followers process from the Gospels as shown in slide 5, the pattern in Acts and the Epistles for appointing Apostles, deacons and elders is reversed (slide 10). As just described, these appointments in Acts and the Epistles were made to completely qualified recipients. They were selected because they were already prepared for ministry. They were ready to perform their responsibilities. On the other hand, Jesus appointed those who needed to be prepared for ministry. The obvious question needs to be asked: “How were these individuals in Acts and the Epistles prepared for their appointed ministries?”

I suggest the answer is found in the body of Christ as it properly functioned (see Step 1). In Hebrews 10:24-25, Paul sets forth the responsibility of believers to assemble together and through

mutual, reciprocal ministries in intimate connections to motivate one another to godly behavior. Under the leadership and teaching of apostles and/or elders and with each assembly member using his/her spiritual gift(s), the body experienced biblical fellowship, causing it own spiritual growth (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Tim 5:17; Ephesians 4:11-16; and see article: *Adopting A Biblical Ministry Perspective*). If the body of Christ functions in this manner, preparation for ministry would be a natural, spontaneous outcome. Mutual ministries provided the training ground for preparing leadership for the community. With observable ministry abilities and character traits, those prepared for leadership responsibilities were appointed to leadership positions.<sup>5</sup>

In the Gospels, Jesus selected men to experience intimate fellowship with Him. He taught and modeled that which they were to replicate. Following that preparation, they were sent out to minister. In Acts and the Epistles, there was a change in the procedure. Only after a person demonstrated that he was prepared for leadership was he appointed. Now, you could say that Jesus knew those men would be prepared after being “with Him” and thus He appointed them. But that, I believe, misses the point. So, why the change?

In either case, individuals went through a preparation process that led to leadership positions. For a moment lets put aside the timing of the “appointment,” and just consider the manner of preparation. Jesus gathered twelve men, which He “poured His life into.” They in turn, as His “eyewitnesses,” set the stage for turning the world upside down. That was accomplished as these Twelve worked toward and witnessed the birth of the church.

MAKING-FOLLOWERS PROCESS (Acts & Epistles)					
STEP	EVENT	TEXT	PARTICIPANTS	QUALIFICATIONS	PURPOSE
1	Functioning Body of Christ	Acts 2:42-47 Eph 4:11-16 1Tim 5:17 Heb 10:24-25	Body of Christ	Intimate Fellowship; Mutual Ministries	Prepare for Ministry & Leadership
2	Eleven Proposed Replacement	Acts 1:23	Gathering of 120 Brethren	Accompanied Us during Jesus' Time	Share in this Ministry
	Assembly Selected 7 Deacons	Acts 6:5	Whole Group of the Disciples	Good Reputation, Full Spirit & Wisdom	Serve the Body; Apostles Teach
	Paul Appointed Elders	Acts 14:23	Assembly of Believers	Qualities, Abilities & Knowledge	Lead & Teach the Assembly
	Titus to Appoint Elders	Titus 1:5	Assembly of Believers	Qualities, Abilities & Knowledge	Lead & Teach the Assembly
	Timothy Entrusted Faithful Men	2 Tim 2:2	Assembly of Believers	Qualities, Abilities & Knowledge	Lead & Teach the Assembly

## Slide #11

Consider the parallels between Mark 3:14 and Matthew 28:19-20 (slide 11). Christ's pattern for discipleship is found in Mark 3 and played out in the last two-and-a-half years of His ministry (see slide 4). Jesus prepared the Twelve for their future task and for leadership in the coming church. As Christ readied to return to the Father, He gave these men their marching orders: "Go and make disciples...baptizing them...and teaching them." The Twelve lived through that very same process. They saw how it was done! So, what do you think they were thinking when Jesus gave them their marching orders? Ditto Mark 3:14?

That may have been their first reaction. Yet, we must not forget that Jesus was continually making disciples beyond the Twelve. Remember He selected the Twelve from among a large group of followers. Of course His appointed ones had the privilege of

experiencing intimacy and fellowship with Christ day after day 24/7 for two-and-a-half years. However only a few months after Jesus sent out the Twelve (Luke 9:2), He also sent seventy others out in pairs "ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come" (10:1). These men were not just an advance team, they proclaimed the Christ and performed healings. Now, what do you think the Twelve were actually thinking?

Also, what do you think the Twelve were thinking at Pentecost, "that day there were added about *three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41, italics added) from the "Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from *every nation* under heaven" (v 5, italics added, cf. Matt 28:19)? And what came next? "[Those new believers] were continually devoting themselves to the *apostles' teaching* and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42, italics added). In fact, verses 42-46 tells us that the body of Christ went functioning as designed, by gathering in large and house-to-house venues where the apostles taught. And next? "The Lord was adding to their number day by day who were being saved" (v 47). This sound a lot like Matthew 28, with a dash of Hebrews 10:24-25 and Ephesians 4:11-16 mixed in.

In the mission's appeal, "Go and make disciples" (Matt 28:19) is used to motivate individuals to become missionaries. Nevertheless, Acts 8:1 gives a needed perspective and insight. You remember: "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they we all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles*" (italics added). The Apostles didn't "go" anywhere. In fact, they hadn't gone anywhere for the last two years since the resurrection of Christ. In Matthew 28, "go" doesn't necessary mean to go to foreign lands, but it certainly demands "initiating" personal connections with people whatever your location.<sup>6</sup>

As in the previous two years, the Apostles remained in Jerusalem to continue the discipleship process. They were keenly aware that the prerequisite to making followers of Christ was the intentional establishment of personal connections with individuals, bringing the curious to faith and finally to commitment as followers of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Take note that the process of becoming increasing committed followers primarily took place in a biblically functioning community of believers (e.g., Acts 2:42-46). As the Twelve had experienced intimacy with and ministry by Jesus, mutual ministries between believers and fellowship within a community of believers provided that type environment for spiritual growth. And the result—fourteen years later at the Jerusalem Council, we find the body in Jerusalem being led by the Apostles and the elders (Acts 15:4, see slide 8). These elders were the product of an environment in which their character qualities and skills would be evident and recognized. A properly functioning body of believers was the essential ingredient in the Apostles' practice of making-followers of Christ.

When we think about making-disciples, we tend to focus on the process of the Twelve (e.g., Mark 3:14). In the Gospels, the itinerant nature of Jesus' ministry was emphasized with the Twelve in tow. In Acts and the Epistles we see the emphasis on community—a community of believers assembling together for mutual ministry under the leadership and teaching of the Apostles and/or elders.

the **PATTERN**  
in the Gospels

He appointed Twelve  
that  
They might be with Him  
and that  
He might send Them out.

Mark 3:14

the **COMMISSION**  
in Acts & Epistles

Go therefore and make disciples  
of all the nations, baptizing them  
in the name of the Father and  
the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
teaching them to observe all  
that I commanded you; and lo, I  
am with you always, even to the  
end of the age.

Matt 28:19-20

11

Slide #12

The “Commission” (Matt 28) is consistent with the process of the “Pattern” (Mark 3)—preparation leads to the development of servant-leaders. Nevertheless, there are transitional issues that must be considered:

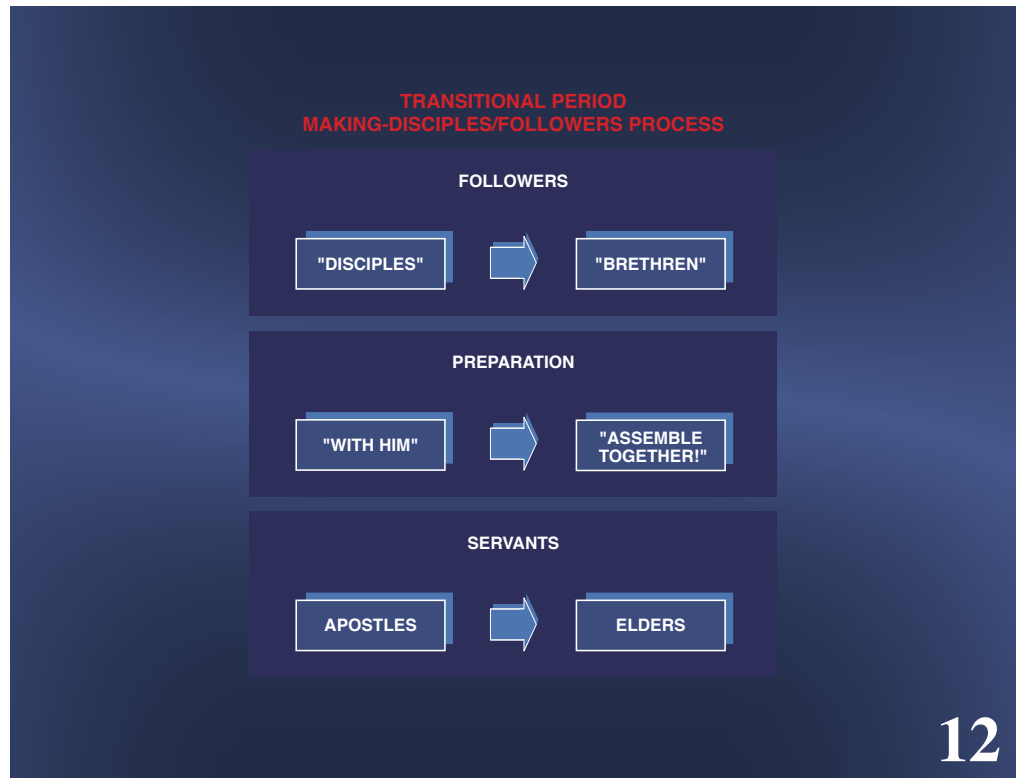
*First*, we find a change in the use of particular terms: in the Gospels—“disciples” (237 times) vs. “brethren” (0 times); in Acts—“disciples” (30 times) vs. “brethren” (32 times); and in the Epistles—“disciples” (0 times) vs. “brethren” (190 times). This transition in terminology reflects the change from an itinerant to a community emphasis. In either case, whether disciples or brethren, the meaning is a Jesus follower, particularly with brethren indicating one’s association in the family or the community of followers.<sup>8</sup>

*Second*, in the pattern with the Twelve, the disciples’ preparation involved continual fellowship with and teaching by Jesus. Yet, when we turn to Acts and the Epistles, the body of Christ was indispensable in providing an environment in which spiritual growth of believers flourished. Consequently, assembling together for mutual ministry and fellowship produced leadership development under the Apostles and/or elders.

*Third*, not only being Christ’s eyewitnesses, the Apostles were the core servant-leaders/teachers prepared by Jesus to oversee the birth of the church. In that capacity they were responsible for instituting the office of elder to carry on as servant-leader/teachers in order to watch over the expanding assemblies of the church worldwide.

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This takes us back to our original question, “If the commission of the Church is to make disciples, why didn’t any writers of the Epistles use the term *disciple* in their teachings to the Church?” As we have found, the commission was to make Jesus followers, whether called disciples or brethren. The primary manner has changed from the Jesus with the Twelve 24/7 to mutual ministries as believers assemble together. The product is the new servant-leader/teachers of the church—the elders in every assembly.



**Endnotes:**

1. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), xi-xvii.
2. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 240.
3. Ken Neff, Article, *Plurality of Elders: Change, But No Change* [www.leaderquest.org], 5-8; John Moore and Ken Neff, *A New Testament Blueprint for the Church* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1985], 104-07.



4. When Paul appointed elders at the end of his first missionary journey, little time passed from establishing assemblies of believers and the appointment of elders in each assembly. Since Paul typically went first to a Synagogue in the cities he evangelized, those believers who believed in Christ from a Synagogue would already be knowledgeable of the Old Testament teachings, which would be the foundation for quickly incorporating Christ's teachings.
5. We can also assume that the Apostles selected certain men to "pour they life into" in a somewhat similar manner as Jesus. For example, Paul traveled with Timothy, Titus, and Luke. Also the church can have special programs for men to mentor other men. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the first-century was that preparation for leadership occurred through the properly functioning church.
6. David Janssen, a friend in a private conversation, suggested that "go" indicates "initiation."
7. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 13-21.  
Pentecost indicated the distinction between *curious*, *convinced*, and *committed* followers of Christ.
8. While believers inside the body of Christ used the term *brethren* to describe themselves as Jesus followers, outside the church believers were indicated by the term *Christian* (e.g., Acts 11:26:26:28), designating a follower of Christ.