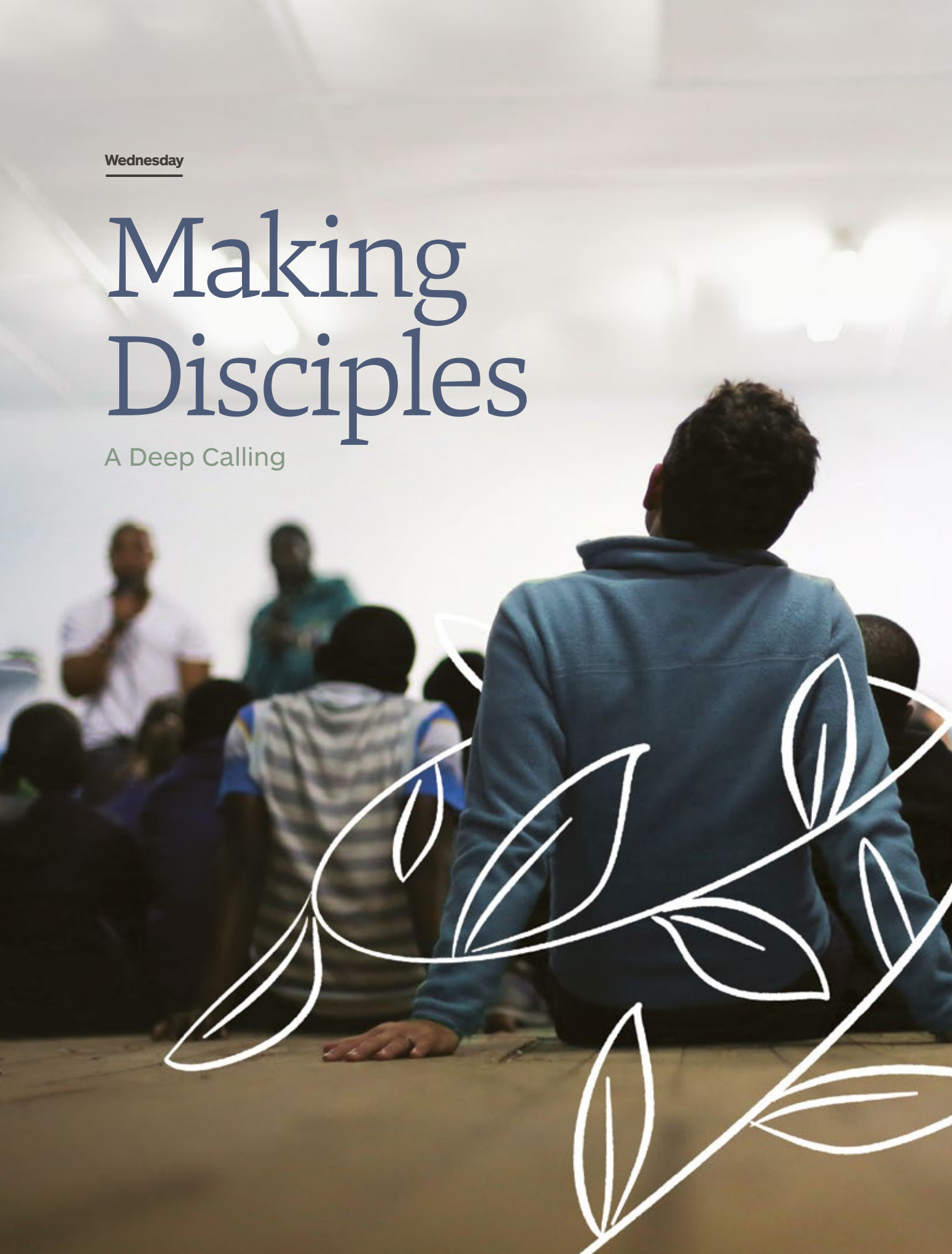


Wednesday

# Making Disciples

A Deep Calling



BY TARA VINCROSS

**T**he Christian life is a life based on practice. One preacher shared an analogy I find helpful. Imagine wanting to be more healthy. You may want to start exercising, build muscle, or become more flexible, so you go to your local gym and sign up for a membership. Each week you go, and they direct you to an auditorium where you listen to a lecture. They tell you how to position your body when lifting weights, how to get the best cardio workout, how to stretch at the end to increase your range of motion. Each week you go to the gym to sit and listen, then return home. You're never invited to the exercise floor.

Would you see change in your body? Would you start to feel stronger? No, you wouldn't. It's not until you practice what you are learning that you will start to see a change. We cannot simply know information about health, we must practice it: warming up our muscles, stretching, playing, running, lifting—whatever it may be.

The truth is simple to see, but more difficult to put into practice. Following Jesus is not just about belief—it's about practice. It's practicing our faith that puts our beliefs into action.

As you look back over this past year or two, what have your rhythms of life looked like? How have you been intentional about practicing your faith? Perhaps you've been juggling kids in distance learning while working full-time. Perhaps you've lost someone close to you. Perhaps you've been dealing with significant uncertainty or anxiety in this season.

I want to acknowledge what you—what we—have been through. God has faithfully carried us, yet it has still been hard. Perhaps you've lost some of your former practices. I'm not sure where you're coming from right now, but this I know: God wants to meet you right where you are on your journey.

I believe God is inviting us to practice discipleship, putting our faith into action. Our calling as believers is to join God in reaching the world. As we focus on putting our faith into practice, it's so important for us to understand a wholistic approach to discipleship.

Wholistic discipleship involves knowing (head), being (heart), and doing (hands). We engage in growth; then we must put it into action, sharing the experience we have with our Lord. That's what it means to make disciples. Revelation 12:11 says that we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. The word of your testimony is an act of disciple-making. Sharing the story of how God has worked in your life.

#### WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

This term is hard for us because people interpret it in different ways. Usually when someone says the word "discipleship," they mean one of two things: (1) my own journey of following Jesus, or (2) my actions that help others grow in their journey with Jesus. Discipleship, as evidenced in the Scriptures, includes both elements: being a disciple and making disciples. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of

people" (Matt. 4:19, NASB).<sup>1</sup> Being a disciple is a lifelong process of growth in Christ. Part of discipleship is how God uses our lives to grow other disciples.

To be a disciple is to live in a posture of learning. This growth is done in the context of community. As Jim Moon, pastor for worship at the Collegedale church in Tennessee puts it: "Living out communion with God and commission to the world must be done in community with others."

#### WHY TALK ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP?

I believe deep in my bones that the church makes the invisible God visible. That the people of God show what love looks like because God is incarnate in what we do and how we do it. Ellen White highlights the special work of God through the church, saying, "Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts."<sup>2</sup> Just think of it: God shows grace, love and transforming power to the world through you and me. Your actions and my actions matter.

I care deeply about discipleship because the space that I take with God, the community God has nurtured in my life, and the purpose God has given me in joining Jesus' mission are lifesaving for me. I am a fellow disciple on the journey with you and sharing from the painful and hopeful place where life and ministry happen.

I have the blessing of serving the Azure Hills church as senior pastor. In my region there live more than 4 million people that we are praying come into deeper connection with the saving love of Jesus. I serve with some incredible pastors and local leaders, where we join in the mission

# “As disciples, we are called to make space for transformation, the work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.”

of God together. As disciples we are called to be transformed, changed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

You must start with yourself. You cannot offer what you are not experiencing. As Ellen White poignantly shares: “The minister [or disciple] cannot give to others that which [he or she] . . . does not possess . . . . Many are able to talk upon doctrinal points, but they are ignorant of the lessons of Christ. Such [men or women] cannot be a blessing either in the pulpit or at the fireside.”<sup>3</sup>

What do you need to stay anchored and abiding as a disciple of Jesus? Without this, you will not be effective in making disciples.

## DEEP CALLING

For the past 12 years I have used a curriculum I wrote titled *Deep Calling: On Being and Growing Disciples* (AdventSource, 2020). Each year I’ve had a group of 12-16 people that I have journeyed with through this Deep Calling process. These intergenerational groups have involved all ages in being and making disciples. In the space set aside for connection with God, He has moved and worked in remarkable ways. It isn’t about a certificate of completion that you

hang on your wall and you’re done. Being a disciple and making disciples is a lifelong journey.

Deep Calling is a 12-week discipleship curriculum designed to be implemented in community. It’s structured around how to discover and put into practice eight calls of God: devotion, prayer, rest, community, healing, witness, serving, and blessing. The act of being a disciple cannot be separated from making disciples. If my own prayer life is deepening, it is going to be experienced by those around me in the way I witness.

The practices demonstrated in the eight calls offer a structure to develop spiritually. Through a growing love for Jesus, catalyzed by time in the Scriptures, prayer, service, and blessing, transformation is ongoing. Deep Calling utilizes teaching time, spiritual companions, small groups, community building, hands-on service, and retreats—all with the goal to make space for God to work in the lives of the participants.

## FAITH IN ACTION

An elder at one of my churches has been an Adventist for most of his life. As he went through the Deep Calling discipleship journey, however, he found God inviting him into new territory. Through his time in prayer and devotion, God led him into making disciples.

He was always a friendly person, getting to know his neighbors and helping them out when he could. But as he spent more time with those around him and listened more deeply to their needs, he found himself offering to open up the Bible with them. His testimony and prayer with them led to weekly time spent together in the Scriptures.

It was my great joy to stand in the waters of baptism with him as we baptized his neighbors, the very couple God led to faith by studying the

Bible with him! As he said, “I never could have dreamed that God would do this through me!” God brought this couple into the family of faith, and the community enriched their lives. The beautiful thing is that this couple then reached out to others and brought them into fellowship!

On average, human beings live 27,350 days. The question is What will we do with these days? Will we join the greatest adventure we could imagine, uniting with Jesus and making disciples? We desperately need to make space for the practice of our faith. As we do, I know we will witness the transforming work of God.

May you be held in love as you experience the transforming work of God in your life. May you know the delight of joining God in the mission of sharing the love of Jesus to reach the world. ©

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 2, 1890.

**Tara VinCross** is the senior pastor of Azure Hills church in **Grand Terrace, California**, where she lives with her husband and two kids. She is the author of the *Deep Calling Discipleship* series and a children’s book titled, *God Loves Me and All My Feelings*.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In what way has personally experiencing Jesus’ love impacted how you view His disciple-making mission?
2. What are the things that most make you come alive?
3. Who are the people you are most burdened for?