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The transformative power embedded in Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου and Ἀκολούθει μοι in Matthew as gospel embodiment in contemporary ecclesial discipleship

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Are churches missing some key aspects of discipleship? Are churches missing a primary way in which Jesus ushered people into a journey of personal renewal? I think that it is clearly the case, and that the transformative power that ecclesial communities seek is to be found in Jesus' invitations to follow. Jesus invited people in his day to 'Follow Me' (Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου or Ἀκολούθει μοι).

Contribution: Implicit in these invitations are ideas like embodiment and movement, ideas that are vital in leading to deep and authentic personal as well as communal, transformation.

Keywords: discipleship; personal transformation; fruitfulness; bodily movement; embodiment; ecclesial communities; communal transformation.

Introduction: Hypothesis and the significance of the study

In this study, I hope to convince the reader of the following hypothetical premises:

That many churches are missing a fundamental but practical transformational aspect of Matthew's call to discipleship. A key part of the solution to this challenge is already embedded in the way Jesus led when he invited people to 'follow him'. Matthew indicates that this necessary part in contemporary discipleship is an 'embodied' form of discipleship.

This will be translated into the following basic research questions:

- What are some of the transformational qualities embedded in Jesus' call to follow, if any?
- What are some of the implications of this methodology on contemporary ecclesial discipleship?

Although many people in the Western Church (South Africa included) identify as Christians, many do not experience transformation, at a level that would be expected (Peterson 2007:1–3). The Barna Research Group[1] (2018:210–211) indicated that about 50% of people who call themselves Christian are not actively practising their faith and are Christian only in theory. A further 56% of professing Christians hold to the view that God will eventually save them on the basis of their good works and only 27% of Christians think it important to actively share the Good News of Jesus. Only 38% read their Bible regularly and a mere 18% volunteer at a non-profit or their local community of faith. Can faith communities be missing something that might be of fundamental importance?

This article is an attempt to contribute to this conversation. This would be performed by:

- exploring some of the theological implications of Jesus' invitations to follow, in the context of the gospel of Matthew and Matthean disciple making

1.The Barna Research Group is a visionary research and communications company headquartered in California. They have conducted over a million interviews over the course of hundreds of studies. Their purpose is to hold a finger on the American and international spiritual and church pulse. They have performed this specific studygathering suggestions and information from partner organisations such as local churches, denominations, parachurch ministries, foundations and private companies. They chose a specific population to study by way of region, ethnicity, age, gender and educational attainment. They also establish minimum and maximum ranges of respondents of various profiles. To make certain that a certain sample be representative of the studies population, after the completion of a survey, researchers often apply minimal statistical weighing to balance those in categories with lower response rates. For the above-mentioned study, they interviewed, among other respondents, over 14 000 pastors over a period of 12 years. A more detailed report of their methods of surveying and interpreting data can be found in their publication Barna Trends 2018: What is New and what is next at the Intersection of Faith and Culture, pp. 5–10.

Note: Special Collection: From timely exegesis to contemporary ecclesiology: Relevant hermeneutics and provocative embodiment of faith in a Corona-defined world – Festschrift for Stephan Joubert, sub-edited by Willem Oliver (University of South Africa).

- receiving input from some transformational disciplines about how personal, as well as collective, transformation takes place in the light of the embodiment of the Jesus message
- drawing some implications from the perspectives of community life and leadership perspectives
- drawing some conclusions in the light of the hypothesis.

The need and expectation for transformational growth, or 'fruitfulness' in Matthean terms (cf. Mt 12:33–37), are going to be understood as foundational to this study. On a purely observational level, Jesus seemed to have expected change and transformation from his disciples and from those who identified with his movement. This can be seen in, for example, Jesus' demand for repentance (Mt 4:7; 11:20, 21; 12:41; 20:32). John the Baptist severely judges the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees for not having fruit in keeping with repentance (Mt 3:2; 8, 11). Jesus follows up the same metaphor of fruit bearing and the lack thereof in many (Mt 7:16–20; 12:33–37). In addition, the entire Sermon on the Mount seems to be directed at shaping God's new Israel into a new way of living in the kingdom of heaven. The parable of the good soil that delivers 100-fold, 60-fold and 30-fold reemphasises this expected fruitfulness in the light of the coming kingdom (Mt 13:1–23).

We scarcely need to prove that this Jesus-infused transformation was continued in the life of the Patristic Church. They were a spiritually transformed, and continuously transforming, community. If the work of Rodney Stark is to be taken seriously, it was clear that the Christian Church of the first three centuries apparently grew at a pace of 40% per decade (Stark 1997:7). It might be worth mentioning a few of Stark's reasons for these radical transformations (Stark 1997): Notwithstanding hostility from the Jews, the Christians did not stop their mission of loving inclusion towards their fellow human beings and won over a large percentage of them (Stark 1997:70–71); they grew because they reacted generously, compassionately and maturely to sufferings and epidemics (Stark 1997:93–94); they also grew partially because of the fact that they were anti-sexist and anti-ethnicity (Stark 1997:95–128); they grew because they served as a revitalisation movement in response to chaos, fear, war, the brutality of life and constant urban misery (Stark 1997:161, 163–189); they grew because the Jesus movement developed into a loving, generous community, who shared the 'good news' with friends, relatives and neighbours (Stark 1997:208); they grew because they evolved from the ethnocentric and racist culture of the Greco-Roman environment to an inclusive culture entirely stripped of ethnic discrimination (Stark 1997:213). They experienced that Jesus gave his followers back their true humanity (Stark 1997:215). They were indeed a transformed community.

Transformation cannot, however, be separated from discipleship, as the latter establishes the process through which one follows Jesus to transformation and fruitful living. If these transformations can be traced back to the disciples and their counterparts – as seen in Acts – and eventually to Jesus himself, how did Jesus' call to follow contribute to these changes in his disciples? That is the aim of this study.

Followership in Matthew

It would be beyond the scope of this study to elaborate again in detail on the basic background elements surrounding Matthew and the Matthean community, Matthean rhetoric, Form-Critical considerations, the possible setting, authorship and date of origin. This has been adequately performed in many commentaries over the years.[2] For now it is enough to hold the position that possibly Matthew wrote somewhere during the 80s CE and he tried to address certain definite concerns (i.e. the Gentile mission) and that he presupposes a large Jewish ideal audience who would have understood his message (Burridge 1998:143–144). The gospel also focusses on conflict as he is engaged in some kind of polemic against Jewish authorities (Keener 2009:45), perhaps because of the fruitless lives (Mt 23:1–39). Some of these, and other material relevant to the exegetical process, may be alluded to and accessed as necessary, and when relevant during the study.

The first insight regarding discipleship in Matthew comes from the end of the gospel. Although much has transpired in Matthean scholarship since the nineties (see, e.g. Keener 2009:xxv), I hold to Bosch's view (1997:56–57) that Matthew 28:18–20 is a key hermeneutical passage in understanding the rest of the gospel. The timing of these sayings at the end of Jesus ministry or public life gives these verses a pivotal nature that provides insights on how important the concept of discipleship is in the gospel (Bosch 1997:56–57). The intent here is not only to conduct a full exegetical analysis on the passage, but also to direct the focus on one relevant issue, namely discipleship and faithfully following Jesus, as the process of fruitful transformation.

Let us explore some key insights from this text. On the surface, 'teaching them' (διδάσκοντες) with the preceding 'baptising them' (βαπτίζοντες) seems to form the main content of the commission to 'make disciples' (μαθητεύσατε) (Bosch 1997:64; Mounce 2002:268). Hahn (1965:121) pointed out that whilst Mark uses 'proclaim' (κηρύσσω) and 'teach' (διδάσκω) as synonyms, Matthew seems to be fairly consistent in making a conceptual distinction between the two terms. In Matthew, 'proclaim' (or 'preach') was an action almost always directed towards pagans or outsiders (Bosch 1997:66). Jesus never 'preaches' to his close disciples, and he 'teaches' them. Why does Jesus not use 'proclaim' when he talks about discipling the nations as he does in Matthew 10 when he sends out his disciples? Although it may have to do with his disagreements with a strong group of Hellenistic Jewish sectarians within his own community, polemics can scarcely be his only reason. Perhaps, Bosch is again correct in asserting that for Matthew, teaching is by no means a merely intellectual exercise (as it appears to be for us today). To Jesus, it seemed to have been more important to make a

2.See, for example, the adequate introductions by commentators like the one by Keener in his *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*.

strong appeal to the *will* of his listeners, not merely their intellect (Bosch 1997:66). Mounce (2002:268) supported this notion, stating that the 'teaching' here is ethical rather than doctrinal. The purpose of Jesus is to challenge prospective followers, not only to become more knowledgeable, but also to make concrete decisions to follow him daily and submit their lives to the will and kingship of God. Submitting to the will of God as demonstrated in Jesus' ministry and teaching is a central theme in Matthew. In Matthew 28, Jesus therefore demands prospective followers to follow him just as the 11 did: Not only to acquire new knowledge about God but also to submit their will by continuing the mission of Jesus (Robins 1992:174–75). This observation of teaching for the purpose of shaping the will as opposed to mere intellect is central to this study.

Although part of what it means to follow, might also include listening to good preaching and sound theological lectures, it can by no means be all that it implies, not if someone's 'will' is to be reached.

What did it mean then for the first disciples to follow Jesus? This brings us to the specific call by Jesus which is expressed in the sentences Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου and Ἀκολούθει μοι.

The specific invitations by Jesus

Although Jesus' call to follow cannot be separated from his call to repentance (Mt 4:17) and faith (Mt 15) (Dunn 2003:498–503), it will be the focus of this study to reflect on the first mentioned. Imbued throughout the gospel of Matthew there seems to be at least four direct invitations from Jesus to follow him (4:18–19; 8:22; 9:9; 19:21) as well as a few indirect invitations (10:38; 16:24). The first of the four direct invitations is expressed by the Greek sentence Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου [come on after me], whereas Matthew uses Ἀκολούθει μοι [follow me] for the other three. Other references like Matthew 10:38 are not direct invitations in the imperative form although they are emphatic statements by the Matthean Jesus about how followership should work. The same goes for Matthew 16:24–25. In the light of the scope of this study, it would not justify conducting a comprehensive and detailed exegesis on each text, because that has been performed repeatedly and extensively in the wide array of articles and commentaries available today.[3] Instead, the intent is more to make a few focussed and relevant exegetical remarks pertaining to a possible pattern in Jesus' way of making disciples. Following this, we can then ascertain what the implications are for personal transformation in the piety of the faith community.

Matthew 4:18–22: Both Greek and Jewish teachers had disciples (Diog. Laert *Lives* 9.1.5). In Jewish Pharisaic times, there was a great emphasis on disciple making (Jos *Ant*.15.3) although rabbis seldom chose their own disciples in the manner that Jesus did. Jesus seemed to have been guilty of a serious breach of custom by calling his own disciples and stooping down to their level (Malina 1981:78). At this point, following his first call to repentance and announcement of the kingdom (4:17), Jesus starts his own discipling ministry. He does this by choosing his first disciples. Note that in each case, Jesus' call to follow involves literal 'bodily movement', a physical relocation from the comfort of what is known to a new life of accompanying Jesus (Keener 2009:153).

Why would fairly successful fishers like Peter and his colleagues abandon everything to embrace a lifestyle where one has no stone to lay one's head on (Mt 8:20)? Jesus is calling them away from the life they know to a new way of 'fishing'. Jesus demands severe transformation and modification of life focus: to literally abandon their work and physically follow Jesus (Mounce 2002:33–34).[4]

Matthew 8:18–22: Verses 18 and 23 indicate that these two brief episodes take place, whilst Jesus and his disciples were on their way to a boat to get 'to the other side' (εἰς τὸ πέραν). *En route* one of the prospective disciples (a scribe) utters the commitment that he would follow Jesus wherever he may go (8:19). Jesus responds by highlighting the difficulty of this endeavour for the new disciple and the costliness of the venture. The fact that the human held the position of a scribe entailed that he would have to decline his high status in society to, essentially, become homeless. This would take a considerable amount of sacrifice (Witherington 1990:52–53), because following would mean Gethsemane, death and the cross (Bailey 1980:24).

Further along their way to the boat, another wishes to excuse himself to go and bury his father. Jesus, however, expects the human to follow him, the first step of which, is to follow Jesus into the boat (8:22, Kingsbury 1988:56). Jesus' remark: 'Let the dead bury their dead …' probably refers to the spiritually dead (Luke 15:24, 32) who have concerns about such things (Davies & Allison 1991:168; Hengel 1981:7–8). It is a way of saying: 'Stop finding excuses, follow me'. This takes shape in moving bodily and mentally in the direction of Jesus (Keener 2009:275).

Matthew 9:9–10: The same would apply for Levi, the tax collector. Alongside fishermen, tax collectors were also some of the more economically mobile residents in village culture (Freyne 1988:241). Again, much has been said in the past regarding the scandalous nature of being a tax collector[5] or the radical inclusivity of Jesus by allowing a traitor of the Jewish people into his circle of disciples (Blomberg 2005), or the great sacrifice it takes to follow (Keener 2009:273–277) or the general disdain for tax collectors (Sanders 1985). Yet, that is precisely what happens: When Jesus calls to Levi, he immediately left his physical comfort and followed Jesus (καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ). Again, following Jesus means a shift in 'physical location'.

3.To list commentaries almost seem futile because of the long historic list available. See *Works Consulted* at the end of this study to see some of the commentaries that were considered relevant for this article.

4.This is, of course, not unlike the calling of some prophets in the Old Testament, for example, 1 Kings 19:19–21.

5.See Sanders 1990:46–47 or Josephus (1988) *Wars* 2.405.

Matthew 19:21: This is the one invitation by Jesus that invoked a negative reaction, because the rich young ruler walked away discouraged (19:22). About other instances (8:18–22) we are less sure. After a brief discussion, Jesus then imparted a well-known radical challenge, saying that he should sell all of his possessions and come back and follow him (ὕπαγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δὸς τοῖς πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἕξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι). There is not much more to say here except that Jesus demanded followership on his own terms, which the rich man felt he could not abide by Keener (2009:474–475).

Matthew 10:38 and 16:24: These two verses display similar utterances by Jesus although in somewhat different contexts. Matthew 10:38 happens just after Jesus sent out the 12, stating that he is sending them out like sheep amongst wolves (10:16). Thereafter he warns them about some coming tribulations (10:17–25). Subsequently, Jesus encouraged them not to fear people but rather fear God (10:26–30). In 10:34–39, Jesus admonishes his followers to stay faithful and keep following despite the difficult circumstances. He says: καὶ ὃς οὐ λαμβάνει τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ ὀπίσω μου, οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος ['And he that does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me']. It is about the primacy of following Jesus amidst trials, tribulations and difficult times (Wright 2004:122–124). Matthew 16:24 is just after Jesus' first announcement of his death on the cross. If his own mission involved his own death, he would expect no less from his disciples (Keener 2009:424–425). Here following Jesus does not involve the minor burdens assumed by some popular writers, but rather a deliberate advance towards one's own execution, scandalously carrying the crossbeam of one's own cross through the midst of a jeering mob (Jeremias 1972:218–219).

Of course, when it comes to Jesus' invitations in Matthew, one has to make some comments about Matthew 11:28, which is a purely Matthean phrase. It is found neither in Mark nor in Q. Here Jesus is not only saying: 'Come and follow', but also: 'Come to me …' (Δεῦτε πρός με …). Although this saying cannot be separated from, and is certainly not excluding the idea of, following, it is rather a saying regarding Jesus' specific interpretation of the Law. A yoke was considered – in figurative language – the specific interpretation of the Law by a rabbi that he laid on the shoulders of his disciples (Davies & Allison 1991:289).[6] Just like the yoke of bondage in the Old Testament (Hs 11:4), Jesus is speaking about a figurative bond of unprofitable labour under an inadequate understanding of God's Law (Keener 2009:348). Jesus interprets the Law differently from his contemporary fellow rabbis. His yoke is 'lighter'; he interprets the Law according to its original divine purpose (Keener 2009:348–350).

It is meaningful at this stage to consider the question: Who exactly are the recipients of the 'follow Me' invitations? Dunn suggested (2003:503) that Jesus calls on individuals to follow him, as can be seen in the discussion up until now. Crowds are never invited in this way. The answer to this question is further obscured by the fact that there were probably several circles of disciples (Dunn 2003:503). The innermost appears to be the 12, with Peter, James and John at its heart (Dunn 2003:540). Around the 12, we encounter a wider circle of followers, including the women who followed (Mary Magdalene) as well as women who stayed at home (Mary of Bethany). In addition to the women, we find another circle of those that followed Jesus secretly such as Joseph of Arimathea. But then we also have to mention those who heard Jesus gladly (Mk 3:35) and sought to live out his teaching (Mt 7:24–25). Those who were healed could probably also be included in the list of circles of disciples. Was Jesus' call to follow selective invitations to specific circles or chosen individuals, or did it apply on a more universal level? This article will take the position that Jesus' call has a universal ring to it and applies to everyone who is seeking the kingdom.[7] The call is universal because we see that those who follow do not always belong to the 'inner' 12, but are also unknown persons who do not always obey the call of Jesus (Mt 19:21). It even includes some people who were not even invited (Mk 10:52), as well as the women who supported Jesus (Mt 27:55). We also see that although Jesus' personal invitation to follow was never directed at a crowd, we nevertheless notice great crowds following him (Mt 4:25; 5:1; 14:13; 15:30). Following this line of thinking, when the word 'disciples' is mentioned, it will refer to the 12 with the probability (in most cases) that wider circles of followers might also be included (Dunn 2003:540–541).

The broader context of embodied following in Matthew

It is not only these invitational utterances of Jesus that allude to following. There are also purely descriptive comments from Matthew that suggest a broader context of followership in which the previous texts make sense. The 'follow Me' phrases seem to be imbedded in a broader context of constant movement. Jesus and his disciples were, in fact, a religious band of travellers. They were constantly on the move. No wonder that several scholars compared Jesus and his disciples to the wandering Cynics of the time (Hengel 1981:27–33; Kee 1980:68). This comparison is not unreasonable, yet Jesus' ministry was also dissimilar from a purely Cynic style, because Jesus did base his ministry in Capernaum and he did not discard property altogether (Witherington 1990:117–143). It is significant for understanding discipleship, although, to acknowledge the amount of travelling performed by Jesus and his disciples. It is as although Jesus developed a kind of 'discipleship of movement'.[8] In Matthew 4:18, we have Jesus 'walking by the Sea of Galilea'. Even the Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus 'going up the mountain', and his disciples 'coming to him' (5:1). After the Sermon, he 'came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him' (8:1). Phrases like Καὶ ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πέραν ['Arriving on the other side…' (8:28)], Καὶ παράγοντι ἐκεῖθεν ['And he went on

6.A yoke could also be seen as the burden of slavery against the background of the Old Testament (Keener 2009:348). God lifted the yoke of slavery from Israel (Hs 11:4) and promised to do so again in the future (Is 10:27; 14:25).

7.For a more comprehensive discussion on this issue, see Dunn 2003:543–611.

8.Bosch (2001) perhaps would have called it (in a more Pauline context).

from there' (9:27)], Αὐτῶν δὲ ἐξερχομένων ['As they went out…' (9:32)] and μετέβη ἐκεῖθεν ['He removed himself from there', (11:1)], repeat over and over again in Matthew. Other examples are found in Matthew 12:9; 13:53–54; 14:13, 34; 15:29, 39. In Matthew 10:1–15, Jesus sends out his disciples amongst people of the surrounding area. He then constantly engages in actions like strolling through the grain fields (12:1), withdrawing from the synagogue (12:15), going out of the house and sitting by the sea (13:1), withdrawing from the crowds going up the mountain (14:23) and walking on water to meet his disciples (14:25).

What is fairly clear from all these passages is the idea of constant motion. Jesus calls. The result from his followers is almost always physical action. They follow literally and physically. The transformation brought forward by the process of discipleship can rarely be achieved standing still. It seems that the primacy of 'physicality' is foundational in discipleship. Indeed, in most cases, physical bodily movement and a shift in physical location.

Preliminary conclusion

Answering the hypothesis stated in the beginning, it seems as although faith communities could be neglecting the principle of 'embodiment'. The narrative focus on bodily following Jesus really seems to be a significant part of discipleship. Although discipleship can entail all forms of community life like listening to a sermon (Hirsch & Ford 2011:101–118), bodily movement is so central in Matthew that one has to consider all the other practices almost in vain without it. This significance is amplified when considering the contemporary habit of usually 'doing discipleship' in air-conditioned buildings as part of theoretical programmes (McKnight 2010:34). When observing from the vantage point of Matthean discipleship, the centrality of gospel embodiment and continuous bodily movement can hardly be denied. Jesus says 'Follow Me', and then he drags those who follow him all over Palestine even to the outskirts and places like Tyre, Sidon (Mt 15:21), Caesarea-Philippi (Mt 16:13) the region of the Gadarenes and the Decapolis into the presence of demoniacs (Mt 4:25; 8:28; 14:34). Some of these locations were not the kind of places where devout Jews would ever consider spending their time for fear of being contaminated or influenced by pagan culture (Mounce 2002:79; Witherington 2001:178). Jesus led them to physically enter these places, coupled with the meaning that the verbal teachings of Jesus brought in these locations. Jesus led them into relationships with obscure people: helping Roman soldiers (Mt 8:5–13), eating with tax collectors (Mt 9:10), preaching to heathens on the 'other side' (Mt 8:28–34), leading his disciples into the presence of children (Mt 18:2–4, 13–15) and women, even women with questionable repute (Mt 15:38, Mt 26:6–13, Lk 8:1–3). That is how he made disciples. That is how he decided to shape their thoughts, life and character. That is how he taught: not unlike like the Torah demands – in the house, on the road, when lying down and when rising (Dt 6:7), demanding from his followers to move their bodies. Disciples accomplish this by building their lives on Jesus' works and words, following, becoming like him (Mt 7:24–29, Lk 6:40).

The connection between 'bodily movement' and fruitful discipleship

Why did Jesus teach his disciples the way he did, by inviting them to follow, and then leading them to and through the specific kinds of localities mentioned previously? We can only assume from the Matthean context, it was to develop the proper kind of mind shifts, fruit and transformation in the lives of his followers. Bearing the right kind of fruit was foundational to Jesus in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 12:33–37). As matter of fact, the false religious teachers would be characterised by bad fruit (Mt 7:15–20). Fruitful transformation would imply living under the rule of Jesus and living the way he demands in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1–8, 39). Amongst other things, it would entail actions like, for example, adopting a new attitude towards life through the beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12), living lives of reconciliation (Mt 5:21–26), sexual purity (Mt 5:27–30), marital faithfulness (Mt 5:30–32), not taking revenge but loving one's enemy (5:38–48), secretly helping the poor (6:1–4), praying (6:5–15), resisting the power of money (Mt 6:19–24) and completely trusting God with daily living (Mt 6:25–34). Bonhoeffer (2009), whilst reflecting on discipleship in Matthew, gave enlightening insights:

> If we would follow Jesus, we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence. The call to follow at once produces a new situation. To stay in the old situation makes discipleship impossible. Levi must leave the receipt of custom and Peter his nets in following Jesus. (p. 19)

Bonhoeffer (2009:19–24) made an important connection between discipleship and radical obedience (cf. Mt 7:21). In order to learn to be obedient to the Messiah, one needs to respond immediately through action and action cannot happen without the body.

When contemplating the rich young ruler (Mt 19:16–22), Bonhoeffer (2009:28) alluded to the fact that, for this young man, eternal life was an 'academic' problem to be discussed. Jesus challenges him to drop the 'academic' question in favour of a simple obedience towards God as it has been revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.

In an article published in *Neotestamentica*, Vorster (1997:389–411) conveyed interesting insights about the centrality of the human body as a transformative change agent, especially in religious endeavours. He states that, from the perspective of synoptic discipleship, the body is of immense importance because spirituality is not a theoretical system of abstracts. It is practical and ethical in nature, hence the centrality of the body. This idea is rather simple to understand and should not be over-complicated. As we can only experience life through

our own bodily existence, the bodies are the central spheres from which we practise following the Messiah. We indeed work with a wide variety of theologies, ideas and values that can be conveyed through language. But these linguistic concepts can, however, only be concretised through bodily experience (Vorster 1997:392).

Vorster pointed out (1997:393) that the centrality of the body starts at the most basic levels of human experience. When a body is born, it activates the environment's processes of symbolising, entrenching the body into the discursive practices of society. This symbolising (or 'languaging') of the body continues after birth, as each bodily activity and every phase in the development of the body are named in verbal language. The body is drawn into what is called 'context of situation'. This 'context' refers to those discursive practices that a society regards as non-negotiable. It refers to the network of meanings that function as 'objective' in a given society. These 'contexts' are formed linguistically and can be so powerful that material 'things' like bodies can become signs with certain meanings attached to it (Vorster 1997:393). In other words, we give expression to our thought life by living it out bodily on a daily basis. For example: we can think about loving our enemies, but these thoughts only come truly alive when we start talking about it, or crossing a social boundary towards an enemy and extending a hand in possible friendship. Blomberg (2005:168–180) spoke about 'application'. We bodily 'apply' our theological thought life by, for example, physically eating meals with sinners, the way Jesus did.

Cameron (1991:68), writing even earlier than Vorster, called attention to the fact that all the dominant aspects of Christianity such as the virgin birth, the incarnation, the Eucharist and the resurrection and the organisation of the household communities are all themes that find their expression in bodily symbolism. All these concepts were viewed, at least in some sense, as analogous to the human body (Cameron 1991:69). Vorster (1997:402) stressed the notion that it is no coincidence that Paul sums up Jesus' life and ministry in his death and resurrection. In the cross, his earliest followers would recognise their own dysfunctional bodies as a result of their own life sufferings. When someone finds himself physically ill, beaten or broken in some way, these individuals can find some healing by physically identifying with Jesus on the cross (Frost & Hirsch 2009:151). Similarly, the resurrection pointed to their hope in a new future reality, also for their bodies. Thus, our bodies can become signs and symbols of the gospel, and in doing so, can become change agents in a community (Vorster 1997:403).

We could certainly continue mentioning other academic areas in favour of bodily movement for the wanted transformation in discipleship.[9] By this time, it should, however, be clear that discipleship cannot work without a 'follow me' strategy with some bodily movement implied.

9.We could, for example, refer to neuroscience and the growth in character that is derived from exposing the brain to new experiences through bodily action (Berns 2010:13–58). We could also refer to the area of education and didactics, in emphasising the results of active learning, which employs bodily actions and interactions that create better learning (Bonwell & Eison 1991:ad.loc.).

Conclusion: Key findings and implications for ongoing ecclesial discipleship and leadership

Discipleship in Matthew is closely connected to bodily movement

It should be clear that when Jesus said 'Follow Me', it implied unconditional submission to his Lordship (7:21; 28:18), love for God and people (22:34–40) and loving and forgiving enemies (5:38–48). The one overlooked aspect is, however, the active physical obedience to certain locations conducive for growth in faith and character. In the context of Matthean discipleship, action seems to be a form of sacrament (Frost & Hirsch 2009:152). That does not that imply that bodily movement necessarily culminates in spiritual growth. One can certainly grow in spiritual insight by reading a book or experiencing a mind shift by listening to a lecture. However, Peterson (2007) stated:

> The ways Jesus goes about loving and saving the world are personal: nothing disembodied, nothing abstract, nothing impersonal. Incarnate, flesh and blood, relational, particular, local. (p. 1)

Ecclesial implications: Fruitful discipleship asks for complexity, rather than order

It seems that 'how' Jesus discipled might be just as important as the fact 'that' he discipled. Jesus' discipleship seemingly needs to be performed in the Jesus way (Peterson 2007:1). This means that if Jesus followers want to grow in faith and fruitfulness, they need to engage in practices that will produce the wanted outcome. When we react to Jesus' call in actions in his name, we meet him in new and fresh ways (Frost & Hirsch 2009:152). An expert in transformational science, Bill Eckström (2017:ad. loc.), called attention to wisdom that connects splendidly with Jesus' way of followership. He highlights the fact that personal character transformation does not take place in *orderly* spheres, but in spheres that constantly create *complexity* for us. Order, however, is the life status that we as humans persistently choose for ourselves. This – according to Eckström (2017:ad. loc.) – is a severe problem that would be detrimental to a person's growth in character. Faithful followers of Jesus who want to produce spiritually fruitful lives need to embrace complex situations like Jesus did with his disciples. Eckström (2017:ad. loc.) stated three possible ways we can experience complexity for the sake of growth: Firstly, life can throw one into complexity, like when someone gets fired or experiences the loss of a loved one. Secondly, a coach can guide one into a complex situation. Thirdly, the most mature notion, and that is to willingly leave the safety of order and choose complexity for oneself.

A follower can choose complexity through actions and situations similar to those described by Matthew. Some

examples have already been mentioned in the article. All this should surely be performed in the spirituality of Matthew: whilst saturating oneself with prayer and piety (i.e. Mt 6:1–18). Prayer and piety without embodied action, however, will not produce the appropriate fruit. Frost and Hirsch (2009:156) suggested a threefold balance in discipleship between orthodoxy (right thinking), orthopraxy (right acting) and orthopathy (right feeling).

Leading differently

Take note that it is not only 'growing' as a disciple who involves movement but also disciple 'making' (Mt 28:19) (Keener 2009:718). This provides an interesting challenge for pastoral leadership. If a local church commits itself to create a community of fruitful, transformed and transforming followers, the leadership will need to take this into account in their discipleship journey with members. They will need to create what Hirsch (2016:187–218) called an 'apostolic environment' where apostolic leaders create a missional culture of movement. To understand precisely what Hirsch implies by this, one has to discern how he distinguishes the five pastoral leadership gifts in Paul (Eph 4:11–12), namely Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. He states that most main line denominations accommodate mainly shepherds and teachers, but lose the apostolic leaders to a large extent (Hirsch 2016:191). Apostolic leaders are the ones who model Paul's travelling ministry[10] in the sense that they cross socio-ethnic, and socio-economic borders, experiment with new ways of doing church and conserve the 'sentness' of the church. They do this by lovingly guiding a local body of followers beyond the limits of their comfort zones and making them move their bodies to new, unknown locations in service of the mission of Jesus. Perhaps, a few examples are in order. In a country like South Africa, it might mean that there are opportunities created where church members sleep over in an informal settlement, connecting to the local people, learning to experience the presence Jesus in new ways (Frost & Hirsch 2009:154). It might mean to suspend a church service one morning and challenge the regular attendees to visit the local hospital instead to encourage and pray for the sick. Of course, in a corona-defined world with its social distancing and sanitising, one will have to contemplate what this embodied 'discipleship of movement' would look like. Hirsch wrote (2016):

> This 'loss' of the apostolic influencer is one of the major reasons for mainstream denominational decline. If we really want missional church, then we must have a missional leadership system to drive it – it's that simple. (p. 191)

It seems that like former church practices have been exposed as being 'out of touch' with fruitfulness and transformational reality. The church in general has become too comfortable in her discipleship process of creating Jesus-followers. In the Western Church, there seemed to have been one-sided intellectual and impersonal approach of attempting to transform the lives of people. Peterson (2007) observed:

> The ways employed in our North American culture are conspicuously impersonal: program, organizations, techniques, general guideline, information detached from place … the whole ... Ways and means culture, from assumptions and tactics, is counter to the rich and textured narrative that is laid out for us in our Scriptures regarding walking in the way of righteousness, running in the way of the commandments, following Jesus. (p. 3)

This materialistic consumer culture needs to be severely challenged by an embodied way of following, by Jesus' 'discipleship of movement'. What we need is already embedded in Jesus' call to 'Follow Me'.[11]

I proposed the following hypothetical premises:

That many churches are missing a fundamental but practical transformational aspect of Matthew's call to discipleship. A key part of the solution to this challenge is already embedded in the way Jesus led when he invited people to 'follow him'. Matthew indicates that this necessary part in contemporary discipleship is an 'embodied' form of discipleship.

I trust that I have sufficiently indicated from Matthew that embedded in Jesus' call to 'follow me', there is an ecclesiastically neglected aspect of following him, namely 'bodily movement', which can lead to bearing more fruit. I attempted to support the first premise by indicating from works by authors such as Vorster, Cameron, Eckström and Hirsch, why the role of leading the body into complexity, can lead to in-depth transformation in discipleship today.

A very appropriate follow-up study could include exactly what this 'discipleship of movement' would look like in a corona-defined world, a world of lockdowns, social distancing and sanitation. The purpose of this study was to lay a theological foundation for such a follow-up research project.

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Author's contributions

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Ethical considerations

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10.Apostolic leadership in this sense should be distinguished from the unique apostolic office that Paul held as an apostle of Christ. Apostolic leadership the way Hirsch uses it is apostolic only in its function.

11.A very appropriate follow-up study could include exactly what this *Discipleship of Movement* would look like in a corona-defined world, a world of lockdowns, social distancing and sanitation. The purpose of this study was to lay a theological foundation for such a follow-up research project.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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