

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAKE DISCIPLES?**MATTHEW 28:18-20**

If you think the original twelve disciples were already deeply spiritual guys, natural leaders, and generally outstanding human beings before Jesus called them, you have never read the Bible! Just imagine if they had lived in our day and time and Jesus had asked some consultants to evaluate the group He personally selected before He started His ministry. It might have sounded something like this: "To: Jesus, son of Joseph, Woodcrafters Shop, Nazareth. From: Jerusalem Management Consultants. Subject: Staff Aptitude Evaluation. Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests, and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also have arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. It is the staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not understand the team concept. We recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability."

"Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. It is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus definitely have radical political leanings and both registered a high score on the probable personality disorder scale. One candidate, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability, resourcefulness, and strong people skills. He has a business background and a strong network among well placed leaders in Jerusalem. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and innovative. We recommend Judas Iscariot to you as your top associate and treasurer of any and all company funds. We wish you every success in your new venture."

Those twelve original disciples were just as sinful, limited, and human as any of us here. But isn't it remarkable what the Holy Spirit did through those flawed men and another key leader named Paul? Some 70 years after Jesus left, they and the first followers of Jesus had effectively shared the good news about Jesus through most of the provinces of the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean Sea. Now, nothing would ever have happened without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He's the real Hero of that story! Nevertheless, those first disciples of Jesus had learned something that we either tend to forget or have never truly learned. Because of Jesus' training and example, they learned how to reproduce themselves spiritually in other people.

This morning I'm concluding a series of messages on what it means to be Jesus' disciple. How do you and I actually go about following Jesus right now today in 2015? I want you to think with me today about disciple-making. What is disciple-making? The best place to get answers to that question are found in our text for today. **READ, p. 989.** Let's ask and try to answer three simple questions. Here's the first one:

WHAT IS DISCIPLE-MAKING?

Disciple-making is an important part of discipleship. Here's an image that helps me. Think of discipleship as a house with many rooms in it. We've explored a few of those rooms over the last several weeks. For example, we've looked into the importance of living in and under the Bible, practicing prayer, being filled with the Holy Spirit, learning to practice certain spiritual disciplines, the transformation of our behavior and attitudes, and loving others. Now, disciple-making is one very important room in the house of discipleship. It's not exactly the same as discipleship, but it's certainly linked to it.

Looking again at what Jesus said there in Matthew 28, disciple-making is, first of all, intentionally helping a person become Jesus' disciple. In other words, evangelism. When Jesus says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19 NLT), that's what He means there. Tell people anywhere and everywhere about what Jesus has done for them and invite them to become His followers, His disciples. Once they make that decision, baptize them as a public sign of identification with Jesus. The original twelve disciples – most of them who were fisherman by profession - should have been expecting this because when Jesus first called them to be His disciples, He had said to them, "...Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" (Matt 4:19 NLT) Being sent out to the entire world was probably a surprise to the first disciples, but not asking other people to follow Jesus. That was just a part of being Jesus' disciple.

It still is. For us today it often looks like this. God puts someone in your life – a family member, a neighbor, someone you work or go to school with – who He's drawing to Himself. You discover that this person has an interest in spiritual things. You have some spiritual conversations. Maybe you invite them to church. Then, one day you share with them what Jesus has done for them by dying on the cross and rising again. You ask them if they want to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. If they say yes, you pray with them. We refer to it as getting saved or being born again. Mark that word "intentional." This is no accident. God put this person in your life. You prayed, you took the initiative to have spiritual conversations, and when the time seemed right, you asked the question, "Will you follow Jesus and be His disciple?" When you intentionally help another person become Jesus' disciple, you are a disciple-maker.

But disciple-making is, secondly, intentionally helping another person grow as Jesus' disciple. It includes evangelism, but it's bigger than evangelism. This kind of disciple-making is a bit like giving a person directions. Let's say someone new to our community was in the church today and said to you, "Now, how do I get to downtown Columbus from here?" You say, "Well, you get into your car and turn it on." Then, without another word, you just walk away. Now, that's good advice, and you've gotten then started, to be sure. But that person needs a bit more help, yes? So, instead, you say, "You take a right out of the church parking lot, turn left at the light onto Rt. 161, drive about a mile and then get onto Interstate 71 going south. That will take you right downtown." Making disciples is getting people started in the Christian faith, but it also involves giving people spiritual direction so they, too, end up at the right place.

I can use the same image that I used earlier. Imagine disciple-making as a house with several rooms. Evangelism is one very important room in the house of disciple-making. It's not only getting people started in the Christian life, but helping them become spiritually mature, too. Jesus broadens the concept of disciple-making when He says, "Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you...." (Matt 28:20 NLT) Following Jesus is more than acknowledging certain truths about Jesus, like you believe the Earth revolves around the sun or that Washington DC is the capitol of our country. Being a disciple of Jesus is about the spiritual transformation of every part of your life: Disciple-making is one disciple of Jesus intentionally helping another disciple of Jesus to grow spiritually – to follow Jesus better. Here's a second question:

WHY IS DISCIPLE-MAKING IMPORTANT?

First of all, disciple-making is important because it's how Jesus' mission is fulfilled. What was Jesus' mission? Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." (Lk 19:10 NLT) That's why He left Heaven, became a human being, died on a cross, and rose again. This world is full of spiritually lost people cut off from any meaningful relationship with the Creator of the Universe. Jesus came to change all of that. That was His mission. Restore that broken relationship between His Father and human beings and enable them to experience life as God intended. But how does it get done – this mission of Jesus? Through you and me.

I know grammar bores most people, but here's one place where knowing your grammar is very important! In Matthew 28 Jesus gave one primary, central command: make disciples. The other key verbs in those verses – go, baptize, and teach – are something called subordinate participles (Yuck!). They describe and support the main verb: make disciples. So, the main emphasis is not on going, baptizing, or even teaching. The stress is on making disciples. If I can be permitted to re-state what Jesus says here, it would sound like this: "Above all, make disciples. As you are going to different places and whenever you go anywhere, make disciples. Then when someone becomes My disciple, yes, baptize him or her. Above all, make disciples. And remember that making someone my disciple means teaching them everything I taught you and helping him or her obey it, do it, and apply it. Above all, make disciples."

The only way Jesus' mission is going to be fulfilled is if His disciples from one generation to the next spiritually reproduce and multiply. It means current disciples of Jesus help to make new disciples of Jesus. Not accidentally. Not occasionally. Not half-heartedly. Intentionally. Faithfully. Passionately. Because Jesus' mission depends on it. And notice what Jesus promises to disciple-makers. First, His absolute authority in everything and over everything. "Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.'" (Matt 28:18 NLT) Second, His presence at all times. "...And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20 NLT) Yes, if you are disciple of Jesus, you are called to be a disciple-maker. Feel inadequate? Feel unworthy? Feel unable? Join the club! But, remember, who stands behind you and is with you every time you make even the smallest, most tentative step to be a disciple-maker. The One who has all authority. The One who is with you at all times. None other than Jesus Christ the Lord.

Why is disciple-making important? Secondly, it's important because it's a command every follower of Jesus is called to obey. Did Jesus just want the original disciples to obey this command and no one else? If so, Christianity would have died out after a few decades. Does Jesus today just want full time pastors, missionaries, or church staff types to do all the disciple-making? If so, the Christian faith in this country or anywhere else in the world will not survive to the end of this century. Many of you know that this passage in Matthew 28 is often referred to as the Great Commission. Jesus tells His disciples what He wants us to do. He commissions or sends us. Some have suggested, however, that it might better be referred to as the Great Omission. Why? Because most of us want to omit this command of Jesus for ourselves personally. "Not me, Lord, surely not me! It was meant for those first disciples. It was meant for Pastor Rick. It was meant for super-spiritual followers of Jesus." No, my friend, it was meant for you and every other disciple of Jesus. Make disciples. Make disciples. Make disciples.

We're in the early days of intentionally becoming a disciple-making church. I don't know all that means or looks like yet. But I do look forward to the day when we see 25, 50, 100, 200 disciples of Jesus in this place meeting one-on-one or in groups of three or four to help other disciples of Jesus grow and follow Jesus better. Studying the Bible together. Praying together. Helping each other know how to act and respond as Jesus would to all the different situations that life presents. Serving the Northland community and beyond Northland together. If you've been in this church for a few years, you know I've spoken about the need to become a turnaround church. It really isn't about getting bigger numerically. Spiritual success isn't measured by having more people in the worship service this time next year. There's a lot of big churches out there that are full of spectators not disciples. It's not about adding new facilities. We've got all the square footage we need for a while! It's not about having a bigger budget so we can hire more staff to do all the ministry for you. A turnaround church is comfortable with numerical growth, but as a byproduct of its ministry not as the goal. A turnaround church is training and releasing its people to do the work of ministry – to make disciples. Success for a turnaround church is helping more and more of its members have a transforming impact in their own homes, within their own families, in their neighborhoods, in their schools, and in their places of work. A turnaround church is a church that stopped making disciples for some reason, but is now intentionally, by the Holy Spirit's grace and power, making new disciples who make more new disciples. It's that simple.

Why should you care about being a disciple-maker? Why should it be important to you personally? Because it's important to Jesus, your Lord and Savior. If you claim to know and love Jesus, then you will value what Jesus valued. Jesus valued making disciples. Name something He valued more. If you don't value making disciples, what does that say about you? Making disciples should also be important to you, because someone shared the good news about Jesus with you. Someone valued you. Someone was willing to extend himself or herself to help you become a disciple of Jesus. Others may have come alongside of you to help you grow as a disciple of Jesus. What's one way you can show your gratitude to God and to them? How about praying something like this, "Dear God, help me to become a disciple-maker. I don't know where to start and I

don't even know where I'm supposed to fit in or who or how to help, but I'm willing." Now, here's a final question that we can try to answer:

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

Here's one answer to that question. The best way to make disciples is coming alongside others not being over others. Maybe you've heard the story about the little boy who tried to get a turtle to come out of its shell. He took a stick and poked the turtle to get its attention. He continued to prod the frightened turtle and couldn't understand why it didn't want to come out and play. The boy's older sister came along and took the traumatized creature in her hands for a few minutes. After a while, the turtle's head and legs emerged. Nobody likes to get poked. Sometimes we don't want people to get all that close to us – not even God. Healthy disciple-making flourishes in certain kinds of environments. These aren't original with me, but I sure do endorse them.

The first environment for healthy disciple-making is trust. If you're going to be a disciple-maker, people you disciple must know they can trust you. Trust is based on integrity, honesty, and kindness. When you trust someone, you can make yourself vulnerable and invite him or her to speak into your life. Trusting relationships provide a platform for life transformation to get started. A second environment is grace. Grace means treating other people better than they deserve to be treated – just like Jesus treats us. It's not about ignoring sin, faults, or problems, but grace helps to create a culture of godly acceptance that opens people up to Holy Spirit-inspired change. A third environment for healthy disciple-making is humility. If you're willing to ask someone to help you follow Jesus better, that takes humility. Humility is needed by the disciple-maker as well. Jesus humbled Himself by agreeing to give up the limitlessness of Heaven for all the limitations of life here on Earth. God doesn't call you or me to "fix" anybody. He simply calls us to walk alongside other disciples of Jesus and through our prayers, our words, and our love point them back to Jesus so that they can follow Him better. Jesus is the "fixer" – not you and not me.

A fourth environment for healthy disciple-making is submission. That's a dirty word in our culture, but it doesn't have to be. Jesus submitted to the will of His Father. There are people out there that need to be disciplined. If you become a willing disciple-maker, you are submitting to the Lord and those who need discipling in a healthy, God-honoring way by helping to meet that need in their lives. By the same token, if you're the one being disciplined, submission isn't about finding someone to keep you in line in some kind of harsh, dictatorial way. Instead, it's allowing someone to help you keep your commitments to God. Finally, there is the environment of affirmation. We all need frequent and ample doses of godly encouragement. Listen to how Paul affirmed his young friend, Timothy, who he had disciplined. "Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again." (2 Tim 1:3-4 NLT)

Here's another answer to our final question: what's the best way to make disciples? It's by stressing transformation not just information. Don't get me wrong! Getting to know

the Bible inside and out can only help you. Learning all sorts of neat Bible facts and navigating around and through all those doctrines is great. Memorizing the Bible can be tremendously beneficial. But the goal of it all is a changed life that glorifies God, not a brain crammed full of information. It's appropriate to keep the end in mind at all times. Being a disciple of Jesus is about the spiritual transformation of every part of your life: how you relate to people, how you do marriage, how you do singleness, how you raise your kids, how you handle money, your attitude toward work and how you do your work, how you express your sexuality, how you relax and use your free time. Everything. No area of life is exempt. Jesus said, "Teach them to do...." what? Obey! Apply it your life! Live it out! As disciples of Jesus, we never expect to be perfect in this life and we're not all anxious and uptight about being perfect either. But, through the Holy Spirit's grace and power, we're going to pursue spiritual maturity. We're going to get after it! We're going to make every effort to follow Jesus better. That's what it means to be a disciple. And that's what it means to be a disciple-maker as well.

Have you ever heard of Charlie Riggs? He passed away back in 2008. Charlie received Jesus as his Savior on a Sunday night when he was 15 years old. He had no immediate follow-up help at all after that personal decision. In other words, no one disciplined Charlie. He coasted spiritually, working in the oil fields of Pennsylvania, and did other work until he was 25. Then he came under the influence of a godly man by the name of Lorne Sanney. Lorne began to disciple Charlie intentionally. He remembers that he was not impressed by Charlie at all at first. Social graces weren't particularly prominent in his life. He could hardly talk without stuttering. Lorne recalls scheduling a discipling session in his home for several men, but Charlie was the only one who showed up. Just one man! Charlie would come to those meetings and sit without a smile, looking tough and rugged. They would have their Bible class, and then he would leave. But it wasn't long before Charlie came in one night and said, "Lorrie, let me show you something God gave me out of the Scripture." I also remember the night when he said, "Lorrie, I've been getting up to meet the Lord in the morning at six, and then a quarter to six, and then five-thirty, but it still isn't time enough. I just feel I ought to get up and start my devotions at five." Soon Lorne found out that Charlie was reviewing two or three hundred memorized verses a day.

Charlie Riggs went on to become the person in charge of training counselors at all of the Billy Graham Crusades. I remember going to some training sessions that Charlie Riggs conducted when Billy Graham had his crusade here in Columbus back in the early 1990s. For over 40 years, Charlie Riggs trained several hundred thousand people all over the world on how to share their faith and then follow up with and disciple those who decided to follow Jesus. I love this quote from Lorne Sanney as he reflected on the life of the man he had personally disciplined years before. "To me it's astounding what God has done with that fellow. I would never have picked him out for it. In fact, I've quit picking out people for what God wants to do with them. But I am having an ever-increasing vision of the possibilities of every individual as a channel of blessing through the transforming power of Christ." Charlie Riggs became that worldwide blessing because someone was willing to come alongside of him and help him follow Jesus better. Then he turned around and did the same thing for others – so many others. That's what it means to make disciples.