

Why Discipleship?
Matthew 28:19-20
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By Ryan Perry

Passage: Matthew 28:19-20

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

Let's Pray

Introduction:

*It was the year 2000, I was just beginning college, was excited about Jesus, was excited about what God was going to do in this next chapter of my life, and yet I was clueless about what I was supposed to do and how I was supposed to do it. It should be stated that I had come to Christ earlier that year in January while I was taking a year off of college. I encountered Christ through some friends at a local college ministry. I was now ready to be used by Jesus, and grow in my understanding and love for Him...yet, I was still so unsure of what to do, how to grow, how to read my Bible, how to pray, how to battle sin, **and looking back I am unsure if I even understood what the gospel was.***

*Yet in my confusion, God sent a man by the name of Dan Hedge into my life. He met me where I was at early on in my college career. And he patiently met me with me week after week for that first year to not only walk me through the Bible, but to teach me what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus, how to read my Bible, how to pray, and he showed me through his life what it looked like to follow Jesus. **Dan Hedge disciplined me, and in so doing was obeying and fulfilling the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. He was fulfilling the Great Commission.***

*Was Dan a Bible scholar? No. Did he have all the answers, no? Did he have a perfect relationship with Jesus? No. Did he struggle with sin? Yes. **Did he follow the command of God to teach me what God's Word says and show me both through words and actions how I am supposed to live for Jesus? Yes.***

*God used an imperfect, messed up, man like Dan Hedge in my life to transform my mind and heart for Him in such a way that I am now a man who loves Jesus and desires to help others love Him and find their fullest joy in Him. **I am eternally grateful for Dan and I know that I am where I am today in large part because of the time he took to not just be my friend, but to care for my soul.***

Yet, he wasn't doing something that was revolutionary or even out of the ordinary. All he was doing was obeying the words of Jesus, and following a pattern of discipleship that Jesus himself modeled and a pattern that becomes very clear as we walk through the Great Commission.

But before we talk about this pattern of discipleship and really what discipleship is, it's important to recognize that many of you are freaked out by the idea of pouring into some one's life like this.

Others of you may be trying to make an argument for why you don't have to make disciples like Dan did, some may believe that discipleship is reserved for pastors, and still others might be in a place where they have no clue what a disciple is, or what it means to make disciples.

Realizing that these questions and concerns exist, I want to take sometime this morning to help you briefly understand what a disciple is, what it means to make disciples, why making disciples is a command for every believer, how making disciples is for God's glory, but also for our good and joy, and then I want to end by giving you an easy and practical method for making disciples.

And it is my earnest hope that you will be convinced of your need to be a disciple making disciple, and that you will leave understanding that it's for your joy and that it's a lot easier than you think. It doesn't require you to be perfect or have all the answers, but it does require a willingness to be present and active in people's lives.

So what is a Disciple?

As a reminder, Matthew 28:19 says: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

Contained within this verse is the idea that we are to make disciples. However, the first question needs to be, if we are to make disciples, then what is a disciple?

But before we define a "disciple" we need to understand that it is the most frequent word used to describe believers in the Bible. In the New Testament the word "disciple" is used 261 times, which means that the term is significant, and has significance for our lives.

In its most basic definition a disciple is "*some who is a student, pupil, or learner of a teacher.*" But this definition implies something different than what most students do today. In school most of us begrudgingly learn facts that we regurgitate on a test and forget once we are done with it.

But the Greek word for disciple in the New Testament, *Mathaytes*, indicates more than just learning facts. **In means learning the teachings of someone, and then following those teachings and imitating their example.**

This is why Jesus says in verse 20 of the great commission in Matthew 28: *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"

And then in John 13:14-15 He says: *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*

A disciple doesn't just learn knowledge from a teacher they apply it, live it out, and in the ancient world this would include seeking to imitate the way their teacher lived. In the same way as disciples of Jesus we not only learn facts about Him and what He said, but we also follow His teachings and seek to imitate His example.

The best modern example we have of this might be seen in the trade occupations. A master carpenter not only teaches an apprentice about carpentry, but he also models good carpentry to that apprentice. This apprentice would then seek to follow the master carpenter's teaching while imitating his example and techniques.

Definition of Disciple:

A disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who first believes in Him, and then learns His teaching, seeks to follow and obey His teaching, and seeks to imitate His example.

To put this simply: *A disciple is someone who learns what Jesus said and lives out what He did.*

What how do we make disciples?

If we now take the definition of a disciple that we have laid out we can very easily take from it what it means to make disciples.

The first aspect that I mentioned is that a disciple is someone who believes in Him. That truth is inherent within the word disciple, but I point it out to say that we cannot disciple non-believers. So before we can disciple someone we need to preach the gospel to them that they would become a believer and be baptized as Jesus says in Mark 16:16.

The second aspect of a disciple is that they would learn the teachings of Jesus and really the Bible as a whole. This means that the call to make disciples involves teaching. **We teach people what the Bible says.**

This is why the King James translates the phrase "making disciples" into "teach," and it says "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations.*" Because a large part of what we do when we make disciples is that we teach them.

Now that might seem really scary to you because most of us don't think we have a lot of Bible knowledge to give people. But the context of teaching that most often happens in the New Testament isn't in the context of a Bible study or sermon format, **but it is in the context of living life together.** Are Bible studies and sermons important? Absolutely! The regular faithful teaching and preaching of God's Word is important, but few are called to do that.

However, **all of us are called to make disciples**, which means that we are called to impart truth to other believers. And if we read our Bibles on a semi-regular basis, we should have a basic understanding of what it says, and should be able to tell others about what it says.

But the other side of this is that truth is also caught as we live life together. People will learn the truth of God's word both from your words and your actions. Again, this is why Jesus, after He washes the disciples feet says: ***For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*** Jesus is teaching the disciples truth by His actions. **In this way when we make disciples we are to be teachers both in words and actions.**

Third, a disciple seeks to follow and obey the teaching of Jesus. This means, that part of making disciples is helping believers to follow and obey the teachings of scripture and in particular the commands of Jesus.

Let's once again look at the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to **observe** all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"

In this verse the word observe does not mean to merely notice something, but it means **to obey**. So we are to do more than just notice or read all that Jesus has said to us, but we are to obey His commands and we are supposed to teach others to do likewise.

Again, this might feel like an area that seems hard to you, because what we are really talking about is **accountability**. This means that **we hold people accountable (Slide)** for how they are following and obeying God's Word. And we call them to repent and come back to Jesus when they stray away from believing and following those commands.

That feels hard right?! You mean that I may need to confront someone when they are straying away from Jesus? Yes! But doesn't that require me to be working hard to follow Jesus as well? Absolutely! **One of the great benefits of holding someone accountable is that it requires you to examine your life as well.**

Realize, however, that I am not saying that you have to be perfect. You in fact may be struggling in some of the same areas for which you are holding someone else accountable. **But I do think it is important for you to be seeking to hold yourself accountable before you can really hold someone else accountable.** Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:3-5:

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

These verses are important because they tell us that we cannot rightly call someone to obedience when we aren't trying to obey and follow Jesus in our own lives. **If that's you then you have some repenting to do before you can call out someone else's sin.**

But if you are seeking to follow Jesus, and if you are battling sin, and this still scares you, I would call you to think about being a parent. As parents we call children to obedience all the time. And though disciplining our children can be hard, we gladly do it because we believe it is for their greatest good and joy. As I say to my son, "daddy wants you to obey me and to obey God because I know that it is good for you and it will make you the happiest you can be."

In fact Jesus says the same thing, only better, in John 15:10-11 when He says:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus is telling us to obey and follow what He says because it will result in full joy. So when you call someone to obey God's commands, you are calling them to their greatest joy, and I have yet to have someone come up to me and say **I really am angry that you held me accountable**, because they to know that obedience to God's commands results in their greatest joy.

Lastly, a disciple seeks to imitate the example of Jesus that they see in God's word and **in us.**

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 says: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

Yes Paul is claiming that his way of life is an example to be followed. Why? Because it resembles how Christ wants to be followed. This means that when we are making disciples we are opening up our lives in a way that allows people to see in our words and actions, what we believe about Jesus, and how we believe he should be followed.

Now just saying that has made at least 80% of us say, "**I don't want to do that.**" Why do we do that? Because we look at our lives and think "we don't have it together like Paul did." But you are missing the point.

Paul didn't say imitate me because he had it all together, in fact Paul is the one who said in Romans 7:18 *"that he has the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out."* **But he is saying try to imitate the way I imperfectly seek to follow and cling to Jesus as I try to imperfectly imitate how Jesus lived.**

God hasn't called us to perfectly show people what He is like. He has called us to let people see our successes and your failures, so that we have an opportunity to model confession and repentance. In so doing, show others that following Jesus isn't about having it all together but it is about desperately clinging to Jesus. **As a result we are giving people an example to imitate.**

So making disciples involves teaching people the truths of God's Word, holding them accountable to God's Word, and opening your life up to them. **It really is that simple.**

And if you are still wondering if making disciples is a command of scripture, I'm here to tell you that it is. The great commission in Matthew 28 is a mandate for every believer. It's the underlying command that fuels the rest of the New Testament and really the growth of the church throughout history until now, as faithful men and woman have made disciples, who have made disciples, who have made disciples, who have discipled us, that we would go and do likewise.

And as I said earlier, if we take seriously the call to make disciples and really obey the commands of God the end result will not only be God's glory, and the spread of the gospel, but it will result in our spiritual growth and joy.

Listen to the words of Ephesians 4:15-16:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Each person here, if you are a believer, has been given a job to do in the body of Christ, and one of the tasks that is a part of every believers job description is making disciples. And these verses in Ephesians tell us that when we do our job properly the body grows which means that we grow. In fact I am convinced that if we don't take seriously the Great Commission we are stunting and hindering our spiritual growth. But we are also stunting our joy.

Look at Philippians 4:1:

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Paul is calling these men at Phillippi, whom he has disciple, his joy. It is amazing to realize that God has joy for us when we build someone else up in their love for and enjoyment of Jesus. When we teach them who Jesus is, hold them accountable to His Word, and we live our lives before them and seek to be an imperfect example of Jesus for them, God has joy in store for us as we see them grow to become disciples who go and make disciples.

So don't miss out on the growth and joy God has instore for you when you take seriously to call to make disicples.

Remember Dan Hedge, the man that disciple me? He opened the Bible and helped me to understand God's Word, he held me accountable to following God's Word, he prayed for me and with me, and shared his life with me and showed me through his actions, what it meant to follow Jesus.

And I know that he is full of joy as he sees me seeking to go and do likewise. He rejoices in the reality that I am seeking to live for God's glory and that God in His grace used Dan in that process. **And God wants to use each of us that way in the life of someone else for His glory, and our growth and joy.**

So what do I do?

Maybe the question still remains for you is, "how do I do this?" "What are the steps that I should take to actually disciple someone?" Though I think that there is no perfect model for discipleship I do want to give you a basic model that you can follow in seeking to disciple someone else. These are things we have already talked about, but here is how that could practically play out in your life.

1. Pray about the people whom God would have you disciple.

It is always important to start with prayer. Pray and ask God to bring people to mind that it would be good for you to pour your life into. And once you have found those people ask them to pray about it. Maybe this is 1 person or maybe 3. I personally like doing discipleship in groups and I think that was the general practice of Jesus throughout the gospel. But that is totally up to you.

2. Set a time and place to meet.

Once you have your person (s) to meet with then set a day, time, and place to meet. I think it is beneficial to meet in a place where you can talk openly. But this is not just a onetime meeting. For best results you should meet for an hour to an hour and a half at least once a week.

3. Pick a book of the Bible to study.

Again, our goal is to make disciples who know and obey God's Word. So read and study God's Word together. And if you are unsure if you can rightly help someone to understand God's Word then I encourage you to pick up a basic study Bible. Most of the basic interpretation work is done for you and it will give you a basic framework for studying God's word.

4. Memorize scripture together. Again, our goal is not just to teach intellectual truths, but is to make disciples who hide the word in their hearts. So do scripture memory together and in so doing you will both grow in your ability to know and apply God's Word.

5. Hold each other accountable.

Part of accountability is not just to hold someone else accountable, but it is also to model opening up your life to another person. In order to really understand what is going on in a person's life so you can hold them accountable to God's word it will require you to open your life to them so they are even willing to do likewise. **You are setting an example for them.**

6. Pray for each other.

As you pray for God to move in their lives let them pray for the same in your life. Again, you are setting an example.

7. Invite them into your messy life.

Our lives are messy and if you spend any time with me you will realize that there are messy aspects to my life. I struggle at times with pride, anger, jealousy, and envy. Yet, I earnestly seek God that he would change me, and I fight and struggle to battle these things in my life.

And when I let people see this, they not only feel like they don't have to be perfect, but they understand that I am not a super spiritual human being, but I am a man who desperately seek Jesus. I point them away from the man and I point them in my struggles to the maker and their need for him.

Now I realize that this might feel hard to you, but I am here to tell you that if you are willing to let down your guard, if you are willing to be present in someone's life, if you are willing to take seriously the call to be an imperfect disciple who teaches and lives life with other imperfect disciples; the gospel will spread, lives will be transformed for Christ, the kingdom will grow, the church will display the beauty of the gospel, and we will fulfill the great commission for the glory of God and our joy. **So take the call seriously, become a disciple making disciple. And if you do this, I believe you will stand in awe of what God will do in you and through you.**

Let's Pray.