

## The Command to Make Disciples

Imagine your reaction if someone came back from the dead to speak to you. Seriously, try to imagine that right now. What would you feel? How intensely would you listen? How seriously would you take his or her words?

The disciples left everything behind to follow Jesus, they saw Him challenge religious leaders, feed the hungry, embrace and forgive sinners, give sight to the blind, and even raise the dead. At various times and to varying degrees, people saw Him as the Messiah. But He never quite fit anyone's expectations of what the Messiah would do or say.

The disciples followed Him until the end, believing that He was the one who would restore God's people. Then He died. The disciples' hopes of a better world died as Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross. The disciples would then spend three days in confusion and doubt, as everything they had hoped for was gone. Perhaps they had wasted their time following this Jesus.

Then it happened. He came back from the dead! When Jesus reappeared on the third day, all of their hope came rushing back! Now there could be no doubt! Now that Jesus had conquered even sin and death, He would certainly fix this broken world. Jesus would accomplish what everyone was longing to see. There could be no stopping Him.

Once again, He surprised everyone. Instead of telling them that He would immediately transform the earth, Jesus gave His disciples one final command and ascended into heaven. They were to take the message that Jesus declared and demonstrated in and around Jerusalem and spread that message to the very ends of the earth, to finish what He had started.

*1. Stop for a minute and read Matthew 28. Try to place yourself in the disciples' shoes as they witnessed these things and heard these words from Jesus. How do you think you would have reacted?*

Matthew 28:18-20 // And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

## The Great Commission and the Church

- What comes to mind when you think about Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations? Have you ever considered that maybe Jesus' command is meant for you ?

- The disciples went about making disciples, teaching them to obey everything that Jesus had commanded and baptizing them. They took Jesus' words seriously and literally.
- Do we believe that Jesus told His early followers to make disciples but wants the twenty-first-century church to do something different?

2. *Assess your church experience in light of Jesus' command to make disciples. Would you say that your church is characterized by disciple making? Why or why not?*

## More Than a Program

- The Great Commission isn't a program or campaign that we can sign up for, participating for a few months, and then cross it off our list.
- Making disciples is the mission of our lives.
- A disciple is a disciple maker.
- The Great Commission uses three phrases to describe what disciple making entails: go, baptize people, and teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

### Baptism

- Baptism is more significant than we might think, baptism was an unmistakable act that marked a person as a follower of Jesus Christ.
- Just as Jesus died and was buried in the earth, so a Christian is submerged beneath the surface of the water. Just as Jesus emerged from the tomb in a resurrected body, so a Christian comes out of the waters of baptism as a new creation.
- When first-century Christians took this step of identifying themselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were publicly declaring their allegiance to Christ. (this immediately marked them for martyrdom)
- Depending on where you live in the world, you may not see the same reaction to your choice to be baptized, but that act of identifying with Christ is essential, no matter where you live.
- Baptism was and is a declaration that a person's life, identity, and priorities are centered on Jesus and His mission.

3. *Have you identified yourself with Jesus through being baptized? If so, why do you think this was an important step for you to take? If not, what is holding you back from being baptized?*

### Teaching

- Teaching people to obey Jesus' commands is an enormous task. Realistically, this will require a lifetime of devotion to studying the Scriptures, investing in the people around us and listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit to lead us.
- These tasks will never be complete.
  - We will always devote ourselves to studying the Scriptures and listening so that we can learn with clarity what God wants us to know, practice, and pass on.
  - We will always invest in the people around us, teaching them and walking with them through life's joys and trials.

- We never finish the discipleship process.
- It's much like raising a child: there comes a day when he is ready to be on his own. The relationship doesn't end. The friendship continues, and there will always be times when guidance and encouragement are still needed.
- Following Jesus by making disciples isn't difficult to understand, but it can be very costly. Jesus' teachings are often difficult to stomach. By sharing His teachings, we are often rejected along with His message. Jesus said:

John 15:18-20 // "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

4. *Would you say that you're ready to commit yourself to studying the Scriptures and investing in the people around you? Why or why not?*

## Equipped to Do the Work of Ministry

- As disciple makers we are meant to receive, respond and reproduced.
- Discipleship is everyone's job.
- The members of the early church took their responsibility to make disciples very seriously. They saw the church as body that only functions properly when every member is doing its part.
- Paul saw the church as a community of redeemed people in which each person is actively involved in doing the work of ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-16 // And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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.

- The pastors and teachers are the equippers and the members of the church are the ministers.
- The truths of discipleship are meant to spread through us not stop with us.
- Most Christians can give a number of reasons why they cannot or should not disciple other people:
  - "I don't feel called to minister"; "I just have too much on my plate right now"; "I don't have time to invest in other people"; "I don't know enough"; "I have too many issues of my own"; "I'll start once I get my life in order"

- Read Luke 9:57–62, you'll see several individuals who gave excuses for why they couldn't follow Jesus at the time. Jesus' response might surprise you.
- None of these excuses are adequate, Paul said that your job is to do the work of ministry! Jesus commands you to make disciples!
- We must be obedient in making the effort to teach them, even though we still have plenty to learn ourselves.
- Always remember that it is only God that can change a person's heart and that God wants to work in and through you to make disciples.

*5. What excuses tend to keep you from following Jesus' command to make disciples? What do you need to do in order to move past these excuses?*

## **Taking the First Step**

- Being a disciple maker means you see people in your life differently. Every person in your life is created in the image of God, and Jesus commands every one of them to follow Him.
- God has placed these people in your life so that you will do everything you can to influence them.
- Following Jesus means that you will be teaching other people to follow Jesus.
- The first step to discipling the people that God has placed in your life is developing a relationship with them, showing NO partiality!
- Everyone needs to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

*6. Whom has God placed in your life right now that you can begin making into a disciple of Jesus Christ?*

## **Working Together to Make Disciples**

- God wants you to view the other Christians in your life as partners in ministry.
- God has not called you to make disciples in isolation; He has placed you in the context of a church body so that everyone can be encourage and challenge by each other.
- Are there Christians in your life you can study this material with?
- Are there mature believers you can approach with questions that might arise?
- The goal is for you to think through this material and let these truths saturate your mind, heart, and lifestyle.

*7. Whom has God placed in your life for you to partner with in making disciples?*

*8. Spend some time praying that God will make you into a committed and effective disciple maker. Confess any feelings of unpreparedness and insecurity. Ask Him to empower you for the ministry He is calling you to. Ask Him to lead you to the right people to partner with and the right people to begin discipling.*