

(small circle), the disciple is able to share more openly about specific struggles related to that same truth, and be encouraged more directly and specifically in terms of application.

Isn't participating in a worship service (large circle) adequate in terms of my spiritual well-being and growth? As important as it is, large circle involvement by itself can tempt us toward a mindset of 'isolated discipleship', one that places meeting my own needs over the Great Commandment/Great Commission priorities of Jesus. In reality, not only will your deepest needs (i.e., God's work in us) not be met in a meaningful way through that large circle alone, but additionally, you simply are not able to fully participate in the "work of ministry" (i.e., God's work through us). Thus, when we are going to church, but not truly being the church, we will struggle to become like Jesus (the very point of being his disciple).

In which circles can I participate in Jesus' disciple-making work? We should seek to bless and be blessed in all three of these circles! If you "strive to excel in building up the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12), there are always opportunities to spiritually invest in others with an eye toward their wholeness in Christ. In large circle fellowship, our joyful participation alone enhances the contributions of those leading. In that medium circle, good questions, thoughtful reflections, and/or an encouraging word or prayer, can be incredibly helpful to others. And in a small-circle group, the impact of that relational aspect of Jesus-inspired disciple-making can be even more profound. Additionally, this small circle is an excellent place to involve others (and train others) in the hands-on work of spiritually investing in others.

So the goal is to get everyone involved in all three of these circles? Yes and no. It's gloriously bigger than that. By God's grace and the Spirit's power, the goal is to nurture a disciple-maker's heart in each and every disciple. Why? So that every disciple becomes more and more like Jesus! We believe a

commitment to our disciple-making approach at Way of Grace is very profitable. But in our efforts, a commitment to God's ultimate purpose, to his work of transformation, is even more profitable. For beyond our three formal circles are other, everyday circles; some larger, some smaller. And God wants to use all of them in us, and use us in all of them, for the sake of the gospel. Whether we are serving one another or serving our community with this disciple-maker's heart, we grow and shine as "those called out". In this way, we glorify God as an equipped and fruitful church. As Paul prayed for his readers...

...that our God may make you worthy if his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

UNDERSTANDING CHURCH *The Call to* DISCIPLESHIP

FOLLOWING JESUS as  WAY of GRACE CHURCH

Why the Church? Why this church?

The church is all about Jesus. In the original language of the New Testament, "church" simply means "an assembly" or "those called out" (like when you were called out of class for a school assembly). And Jesus is the one who calls us out, from darkness into light (Mark 2:14; John 8:12)! So by following Jesus in the light, the church is actually continuing his work in the world (starting in our own community).

How might we sum up Jesus' work?

Easy: disciple-making. For Jesus, the work of ministry was the work of making disciples. It's what He did (Mark 1:16-20), and it's what He instructed those first disciples to do in his absence (Matthew 28:18-20). The Apostle Paul described that mission like this in Colossians 1:28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." As Christians, we should desire to bless and be blessed in light of this disciple-making mission.

What exactly is a disciple?

A disciple is a student or apprentice, someone who is with a teacher (or skilled worker), in order to learn from that teacher, in order to become like that teacher (Luke 6:40). In following Jesus' loving leadership, we learn to be like him. In what ways? In so many ways. But the best summary of that goal is the one Jesus provided: to love God with your all, in every way (Matthew 22:34-40), and to love others "as yourself" (Luke 10:25-37).

How are those top two commands related to disciple-making? In making disciples Jesus was fully (and perfectly!) expressing love for God and love for others, for in accomplishing his Father's mission, he was meeting each person's deepest need: their need to be in a right relationship with God, a relationship

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characterized by love (John 17). So when he charged his disciples to continue this disciple-making work (a charge often called the Great Commission) he was, in fact, calling them to the fullness of the Great Commandment(s).

But isn't the church's mission to proclaim the gospel (i.e., the Good News about Jesus)?

Yes! Jesus demonstrated that proclaiming the gospel is where disciple-making begins (Mark 1:14-15; 16-20). And his first disciples did the very same thing (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 2:14-41). How does the gospel relate to disciple-making? The gospel is ultimately a call to follow Christ as Lord through the forgiveness of his cross and in the power of his resurrection. We cannot follow Jesus as "slaves of sin". We must be set free and empowered in order to be "obedient from the heart to [his] standard of teaching" (Romans 6:17).

Is every disciple of Jesus meant to become like Jesus in terms of making disciples?

Yes. If we think of disciple-making as spiritually investing in others with an eye toward their wholeness in Christ, then this "work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12) is the responsibility and privilege of every believer, serving those inside (Colossians 3:16a; cf. 1:28) and outside the church (Colossians 4:5-6).

DISCIPLE-MAKING:

spiritually investing in others with an eye toward their wholeness in Christ.

If Jesus commissioned the apostles in Matthew 28, doesn't that indicate disciple-making is primarily for church leaders? Some disciples do fulfill this work as "evangelists" and "pastors/ teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). But while these offices are certainly entrusted with special responsibilities (e.g., public preaching and teaching, oversight), Christ's work prospers most when "each one of us" is serving; "when each part is working properly" (Eph. 4:7, 16). A leader like Paul had this very

work and this same heart in mind when he called his fellow disciples to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1).

What do we learn from Jesus' example when it comes to disciple-making? First, in addition to gospel proclamation, it shouldn't be surprising that Jesus taught his disciples in light of the presence and priorities of God's kingdom (Matthew 7:28-29; 11:1). Second, Jesus' approach was radically relational, further explaining and faithfully modeling his teaching in a life-on-life context (Mark 4:10-12; John 13:14). Third, Jesus involved his disciples in God's work. This involvement could be as simple as distributing food (Mark 8:6), or as challenging as co-laboring with Jesus in his kingdom ministry (Matthew 9-10). Most important of all, Jesus kept himself at the center of it all. Unlike other teachers, this discipleship arrangement was not simply about conveying content or skills, but ultimately himself as the Giver of spiritual rest/eternal life (Matthew 11:28-30).

What else can we learn from how Jesus made disciples? Three discipleship settings seem apparent throughout Jesus' ministry: 1) a large circle included both the crowds and a broader group of disciples whom he regularly taught (and who witnessed many of his miracles) (Luke 7:24-35), 2) a medium circle included his committed followers (especially "the twelve") (Luke 8:1-3), and 3) a small circle included three of the disciples/apostles (Peter, John, and James) with whom Jesus worked in a special way (Mark 9:23; Luke 8:49-56; Matthew 26:36-38) (notably, beyond the initial list in 1:13, these three men are also the only apostles of "the twelve" mentioned throughout the book of Acts).

So how do all of these things inform and inspire our ministry? All of this informs our vision as a faith family. Therefore, for the glory of God, we strive to faithfully announce and fully apply Jesus, in order that others might do the same. That's not simply a vision for the whole church, but one that every individual disciple should wholeheartedly embrace (i.e., "For the glory of God, I strive

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to..."). Why? Because we do this above all, not simply as supportive members/partners of a local church, but as disciples responding personally to Jesus Christ's call, "Follow me..."

How do all of these things practically shape our ministry as Way of Grace Church? Inspired by the wisdom of Jesus' three circles of ministry, inside the church, we commit to three core community disciplines; to a large circle of *shared worship* each Sunday morning, immediately after that, to a medium circle of fellowship in *life groups*, and at some point during the week, to a small circle (3-4 individuals) of discipleship in

Why are all three circles so important? These circles are both integrated and individually unique. For example, a person may be deeply impacted by a truth preached about and sung about in corporate worship (large circle). But in the subsequent life group gathering (medium circle), he or she is able to ask questions about that truth, learn from the contributions of others, and receive encouragement in terms of application. Finally, as he or she regularly gathers with 2-3 others in a formal core group setting

