

True Change: The Focus in Making Disciples
Matthew 28:16-20; Col. 1:28-29

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all the energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Parenting is a bitter sweet venture. It is demanding and rewarding, painful and delightful, sacrificial yet satisfying. The irony of parenting is this: if you do it well there is a high likelihood that your kids will leave, being prepared for an independently dependent life of following the Lord and truth (3 John 4). But there is also the hope that we will still have **influence** and **relationship** with our kid’s even after they move away to start a life of their own.

When we begin to talk about **discipleship**, there is a seemingly mysterious understanding of what it is, but truly, discipleship is eerily similar to **parenting**, with a desire to see growth, maturity, and eventually independence (dependently). When we *overcomplicate* either one, we miss the point, and when we *undervalue* either one, we miss the goal. This morning we want to talk about what discipleship is and how we go about it, which is as diverse as the makeup of each of our families. Remember, a disciple is a **learner, a follower, and one that is built to grow**. We want to approach the church like the home and the home like the church, and in doing so, we will be consistent in our goal and approach. Before looking at some texts, it’s good to frame this discussion through the lens of **relationship** and the specific nature of both evangelism and discipleship:

First, it’s important to have a **grid to think through as we approach relationships in this life**.

Second, it’s good to have an **example to emulate**, and we have a great One in Jesus Christ. We’ll look at how Jesus went about calling, training, and commissioning His disciples in the book of Matthew.

Now, it is also important to restate what we looked at last week and the nature of **conversion**, since expecting someone to grow as a disciple when they are not truly **saved or converted** leads to frustration, disenchantment, and a furthering hardness of heart.

Conversion is the gateway in the path of discipleship

Acts 20:21 - *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*

- **Saving Faith** – Faith in general does not save, since there are those who “believe” there is a God and creator, but do not yield to Him (Rom. 1:18, 32), and even demons ‘believe’ in God ---- and shudder at the thought (James 2:19), but not many fight for that type of belief saving Satan’s minions. No, saving faith is a personal trust, a committed ascent to what we believe. It is a trust in Jesus as a living person for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life. It is a belief that receives HIM (John 1:12), and believes INTO Him (John 3:16). This is NOT an anti-intellectual belief, since faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God, consistent with a true understanding of the facts (Rom. 10:17). This is the side of the coin that is often referred to in salvation, and it is true, but not complete.

- **Saving Repentance** – *What is repentance?* It is heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and sincere commitment to forsake it by walking in obedience to Christ. Repentance is just like faith since it requires an **intellectual understanding** and an emotional approval of what the Bible says about sin, and a personal decision (of the will) to turn from it, to hate it. This kind of repentance will result in a **changed life**, since it flows out of a new heart, an indwelling Spirit, and the mind of Christ. Let's look at what **repentance is NOT, and then we'll conclude with some indelible marks of a changed heart.**

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 - *"As it is, I rejoice, not because you were **grieved**, but because you were **grieved into repenting**. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.*

¹⁰ ***For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief produces death****"*

Notice here that there are two kinds of sorrow that is produced when confronted with grief: one that leads to repentance which leads to salvation, and the other that is **void of repentance** that leads to death. Since every single person has written in their heart the law of God, including absolutes, that causes their consciences to accuse them (Rom. 2:15-16), every person FEELS bad when they do something wrong: when you lie, you can't look someone in the eye; when you're caught stealing, you feel bad; when you hurt someone you care about, you feel remorse; when you get away with something, you feel guilt; when you go against your conscience, you feel shame; when punishment is possible, you feel fear. These are all written into our minds and hearts as a result of being an image bearer. However, **remorse and guilt that does not produce change is like faith without works: dead.** The way to assuage our consciences without repentance is simply to justify it in our minds long enough, or keep practicing the sin enough that we no longer actually feel the nagging sense of remorse and guilt anymore. Shame is a gift that should lead us to repentance, but we can suppress it in unrighteousness as well.

True, God produced, sorrow filled grief will produce repentance, **which is marked by:**

- **A Change of Mind** – This is what the Greek word "*Metanoia*" means. Our once darkened mind is now enlightened with our new heart, allowing us to be **renewed in our thinking** (Eph. 4:23) since we now have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). A mind that was given over to addiction, desire, lust, and passion can now be *changed, renewed, and replaced*. This is what Paul expressed in Philippians 3:7-9
- **A Sorrow Over Sin** – The Hebrew equivalent "*nacham*" means to breathe deeply, having sorrow and contrition. This was the sorrow David felt over his sin with Bathsheba, saying in **Psalm 51:17** *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"*
- **Personal Confession and Acknowledgment** – Repentance always involves owning up to what we are and what we have done, taking **responsibility**, something Adam refused to do but David took (**Psalm 51:4** – *Against you, you only, have I sinned and one what is evil in your sight*) **Paul Washer** said, *"One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is NOT sinless perfection, but sensitivity to sin and transparency before God regarding sin, and open confession of sin."*¹

¹ Paul Washer, "The Gospel Call and True Conversion", p. 11.

- **Turning from and Growing Hatred of Sin** – This means our interaction with sin should be a **battle and struggle**. Without a struggle, we have been given over. The struggle is real...and good since it is a mark of true conversion. Our life is characterized by *frequent battles, great victories, and discouraging defeats*. *Even the most mature believer will at times be caught in the very sin we have renounced* (Ezek. 36:25). So we depend on our Great High Priest who Advocates for us and has made propitiation for us. (1 John 2:1-2).
- **Repentance for Salvation Breeds Continual Repentance throughout life** – One of the evidences of a person who has truly repented for salvation is that he continues to repent throughout the course of his life. I love the fact that **Romanian Christians were given the derogatory title of “Repenters”** under Ceausescu’s communist government in the 1970’s, which is a fantastic mark. When we believe in the power of the gospel, our security in Christ, and the gift of faith and repentance, we have boldness to acknowledge, turn from and flee our sin as we run into the big arms of our Savior. And it is here that **joy is finally realized**:

*“At conversion, a person begins to see God and himself as never before. This greater revelation of God’s holiness and righteousness leads to a greater revelation of self, which results in a repentance of brokenness over sin. Nevertheless, the believer is NOT left in despair, for he is also afforded a greater revelation of God’s grace in the face of Jesus Christ, **which leads to unspeakable joy**. This cycle repeats itself throughout our Christian life, as we see more of God and more of self, resulting in greater and deeper brokenness.*

Paul Washer

It is this **“unspeakable joy”** found only in the forgiveness brought about in true conversion, forgiveness, and reconciliation to the Father through Christ that we are after. The *process* of maturation is where we need each other, as Paul told the church at Corinth he was a “worker for their joy” (2 Cor. 1:24) and to remain with the church in Philippi for *“their progress and joy in the faith”* (Phil. 1:25). Not an apathetic, nominal, path-of-least-resistance, following the crowd, tossed by every wind and wave of doctrine, chasing a mythical happiness apart from God existence, but one that makes sense, has purpose, understands it is NOT about us, and that seeks to glorify God life. THAT is the life of a disciple, and that is what we are helping others see.

Training Disciples Is the Privilege of Every Believer

A. It was formal & informal

There were clear times that Jesus taught His disciples in formal settings. Each time He sat down (like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7), He took part in normative teaching between Rabbi and followers. When He taught in parables, He explained that He was using earthly stories that most of the crowd would not understand, but His disciples would (Matt. 13:10-11). There was a time and place for formal, structured, and dare I say programmed methods of training.

However, Jesus’ training was not all formal. The Gospel narrative is full of instances where Jesus would go boating (though no skiing), fishing, attend weddings, and make the trek to feasts in observance to the Law. Jesus used these times for object lessons, but think about all the time that this took. When the text says they travelled from Jerusalem to Galilee, that takes up a sentence of text but many days of travel. In other words, Jesus redeemed the time with the disciples doing the menial tasks and activities of normal life. When Jesus went somewhere, He took others with Him,

There are formal times for discipleship, but often the best times and places for it are simply to live life together. If we think holistically about ministry and life, not separating the two, we can interweave time

with a disciple with time we are doing something else. Whether serving, teaching, or simply going on an activity, each carries an opportunity to bring someone with you. Once Jesus identified the disciples, everything He did with them was intentional and an opportunity to teach a holistic view of life in God.

B. It was holistic

Matthew 9:35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and every affliction.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** for them, *because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "**The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;**³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (cf. Matt. 4:23)

Jesus did not separate out His teaching from His living. He understood (better than anyone) that good teaching consists of that which is **caught** as well as **taught**. That is why He spent time teaching them in the Synagogue, He spent other time proclaiming, but spent still other time **among people**, taking care of physical affliction and ailment.

NOTE: Jesus' training encapsulated a well-rounded view of ministry, including teaching and serving (much like using our gifts in the church – 1 Pet. 4:10-11). He taught them in formal protocol in the Synagogue, where He would teach through Scripture in a normative way. He taught them by proclaiming the message of the gospel of the Kingdom, which was calling people to **repentance** (Matt. 4:17). He also trained them in **compassion**, but the compassion He showed and shared was holistic, not simply taking care of physical needs, but seeing the real needs of the people around them. They were directionless and hopeless, and the best way to truly show compassion was to raise up faithful workers for the harvest.

I often receive the question, "*Do we make leaders in the classroom or the laboratory?*" The answer is: YES. Discipleship between Jesus and His followers had a large **time component**, knowing that in order to have **quality** time, we often must have **quantity** time. This does not always jive with our hyper efficient way of thinking, but just as love is inefficient, so discipleship cannot be slotted into an hour every other week (NOTE: this does not invalidate meetings that happen for an hour every other week, but that is not the totality of discipleship).

C. It was public & private

Along the same vein, His training of the disciples was both public and private. There were times that we read that the crowds were right along with them. When Jesus would teach in the Synagogues (the formal and public place of Jewish worship), the disciples were being trained. However, there were **private times** that Jesus allowed the disciples close access to Himself. They were allowed to ask perplexing questions (Matt. 24:3) or times when Jesus would share intimate times of worship (John 13 in the upper room).

We have public venues of training (Sunday morning worship, equipping classes, shepherding groups), but these are only **part of the training process**. To truly make a disciple the way Jesus did means that we actually open up our life to them, sharing our life, home, and even scabs (now Jesus did not have any sin, but He did face emotional times, and let the disciples see and share in those). The community of the church should lead to deep relationship, and those deep relationships should be where learning about **how the word of God plays out should be taught and caught**. Our hesitancy is that we do not really like letting people get too close to us, but that is exactly what God does with us. He shares with us the love

and unity in the Godhead. He brings us into a close, bear all relationship with Himself because He gave us grace and paid for our sin. Discipleship is simply an outflow of what God has already done with us, and we simply let it trickle down to others.

D. It included warning & encouragement

Jesus spent time **warning against** the subtle deception of dead and formulaic religion that pervaded the culture at the time (Matt. 15:1-12). He did this by not only knowing the dangers around, but countered them with Scriptural support and authority.

He also **encouraged them** to fight against sin, to pursue God in humility, and to understand God's passion for the lost (Matt. 18:10-35). In other words, Jesus did not simply teach the disciples a good **defense**, but gave them a proactive look and view of life, what they should be invested and involved in.

E. It gave practical outlets & opportunities

Jesus not only told the disciples they were empowered; He actually gave them opportunities to take what they were taught out for a spin. In Matthew 10 He sent the twelve out to proclaim the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This was two years before He would go to the cross, and they were going to proclaim a message to the Jewish nation that they would reject (receive Jesus as Messiah now), because they were looking for a different type of Messiah.

As we live life with people in relationship, we must allow people to learn by doing and even by failure. This means the goal of one discipling another is to give ministry away, to allow others to have practical opportunities. But there are TWO MAJOR PRINCIPLES we must remember when doing this:

- **We would rather control then confront** – When we give things away, we either over-control or abdicate. Over-controlling means people are never trained up and the ministry suffers. Abdication means there is no follow up, no help, and no long term care. Failure will come with giving ministry away, so there needs to be follow up, and coming around after failure is imperative to healthy relationships. Giving ministry away often creates more work for us, but it's the best use of our time.
- **We need to understand our disciples will do things differently than us** (*and that's a good thing*) – If we give things away, we must support and encourage that work when it's done differently than we would do it. This is true when we are dealing with issues of preference, not Biblical mandates. The death nail to any disciple is giving ministry away, not liking how they did it, and taking it back to do it "right". We must give the freedom to fail, then follow up to teach through failure.

This helps us remember a very important principle in discipleship: our disciples will be uniquely different than us, and they will make different (preferential) decisions than we would, and this is a good thing, not a deterrent.

F. It gave the clear cost of following

Matthew 10:37-39 *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* ³⁸ *And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* ³⁹ *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* (cf. Matt. 16:24-27)

Jesus never minced words not did He sugarcoat anything. In both Matthew 10:37-39 and 16:24-28, Jesus made it clear that following Him would require death. They must deny self, take up their cross, and follow Him. They must not love anything else more than Him, not mother, father, nor son or daughter. Following Him would be an all-in venture, but it required one to die to self.

One of the reason we are weak at discipleship is that we have lost a sense of that kind of calling. We call people to be better. We call people to attend. We call people to serve, to get involved, to give, but do we call people to die. This was not a super call or a different call, but the normative call to follow Jesus Christ. **Discipleship begins and ends when someone who has died to Christ and now lives in Him calls someone else to do the same;** anything less than that is not discipleship.

Releasing of Disciples is the Goal of All Discipleship

A. The goal was to release –

Matthew 28:19 *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.*

Discipleship relationships are made to change. What Jesus and Paul modeled was the fact that we build a tight relationship with someone with the goal that they will then go and do the same. This means that we must be willing to release people from our care to go and follow the same pattern with others. This does not mean the relationship will be cut off, but it absolutely means the relationship will change. This is a hard concept, as the disciples had a hard time coming to grips with the idea, as did Timothy when Paul released him in Ephesus. The goal is always: train up, release, and send.

B. The goal was to replicate

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

None of this would be possible in our own strength. Sometimes we spend time thinking, strategizing, comparing with others, and sitting on our hands when it comes to this issue instead of unleashing the power that has been given to us. In other words, Jesus did not leave us impotent in relationship, but gave us the Helper, the Holy Spirit to empower us for the task. The Holy Spirit not only gives us the ability to do, but gives the ability of others to believe and yield. We must trust that power enough to actually live differently as a result. This is why Jesus walked with the **disciples 3 years before they were ready to propagate the message to the world.**

Concluding Thoughts and Questions:

Discipleship, as Jesus exemplified, takes:

- Time in relationship
- Purpose on the gospel
- Pursuit
- Training in God's Word both formally and informally
- Release

How do you view every relationship that you have? Through the lens of the gospel or through another lens?

Are you in a relationship currently where you are either training or being trained as a disciple? If no, then why not?

Why are we so afraid to let people get close to us? Why are we so afraid if people know our scars?