

True Charge: The Goal in Making Disciples
Matthew 28:16-20

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, **let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"*
Matthew 16:24-26

One of the challenges of parenting is finding the tension spot between pushing our kids too hard, leading to discouragement, and allowing them to be content with the *path of least resistance*. The first version is the parent who demands perfection and often lives vicariously through their child, melding their own success through the lens of their progeny. In this, there is much accomplishment, but little grace with high resentment. In the second, the parent believes that loving their children means giving in, giving what they *want*, and halting any kind of pain or discomfort, equating happiness with maturity. This parent will *feel* better in the present, but lacks the truth, and will produce a self-absorbed brat who thinks the world revolves around them.

Growing up with a dad who threaded that needle well was a blessing. There was a positive pressure to work hard and try our best, and the expectations were set according to our aptitude academics and athletics. We were not allowed to quit what we started, he never took our side without first supporting the teacher we complained against, and taking care of responsibilities was a must. All we were called to do was live up to the standard he set for us. When we'd work with him on the weekends and summers, mowing lawns and doing yardwork, the expectation was to keep pace with him, which meant no complaining, no stopping because of minor pain, and completing the job, no matter how long it took. Discipleship in the Bakker home was following and learning from the model set out for us with realistic and clear expectation that anything less was unacceptable.

This is a key principle in understanding the call to Biblical discipleship. ***What are we calling people to? What is the tension spot of expectation? How do we express both truth and grace, patience and expectation, love and discipline?*** The answer to these questions will shape our view of and the necessity for robust discipleship for all.

In identifying the reason (disease) for a lack of discipleship in the local church. J.T English sought to clarify the underlying issues. His conclusion:

*Our ministry disease is not that the evangelical church is **too deep**, but that it is **far too shallow**. The symptoms of people and students leaving the church, or the lack of maturing disciples, or decreased attendance are **symptoms** that should tell us not that we are too deep but that we are too trivial. People are leaving NOT because we have given them too much but because we have given them far too little. They are leaving the church because we have not given them any reason to stay. We are treating the symptoms of the wrong disease. **Deep discipleship** is about giving people MORE Bible, MORE theology, MORE spiritual disciplines, MORE gospel, MORE Christ, not less.*

*We are giving people a **shallow and generic** spirituality when we need to give them distinctive Christianity. We have tried to treat our discipleship disease by **appealing to the lowest common denominator, oversimplifying discipleship**, and taking the edges off what it means to follow Christ.*

Put simply, we have settle for a shallow approach to discipleship, believing that breadth will lead to depth.”¹

What does this push for depth and maturity look like? What is the goal of our discipleship?

Training Disciples Is the Privilege of Every Believer

1. It was formal & informal (Matt. 5-7; 13:10-11)
2. It was holistic (Matt. 9:35-38; Matt. 4:23)
3. It was public & private
4. It included warning & encouragement (Col. 1:28-29)

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. **Discipleship** is not just a pat on the back, it’s not your fault, you’ve had it worse than anyone complaint fest. It recognizes there is a **war raging** around and within (Eph. 6:10-12; James 1:14-15). *What does this look like?*

1 Thessalonians 5:14 - *14 And we **urge** you, brothers, **admonish** the idle, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, **be patient** with them all.*

Hebrews 3:12-13 - *Take care, brothers, lest there be in **any** of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But **exhort one another every day**, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*

Colossians 1:28 - *Him we proclaim, **warning everyone and teaching everyone** with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ*

Putting these together, we get a clear picture of what the message of discipleship is as we point everyone to Christ. **1)** No one is left behind. Discipleship is for “all”, “any” and “everyone”; **2)** we approach each person with what is needed in the moment, covering every encounter with patience and wisdom. We have been given “*tools in our toolbox*” when it comes to discipleship, in the form of **admonition, encouragement, and help**; **3)** the stakes are high – falling away as opposed to presenting mature; **4)** This means that in order to help, we must know. In order to know, we must take time to listen and understand, quick to listen, slow to draw conclusions.

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.

But sometimes the encouragement comes **after** the sin or hard stretch. Sometimes **discipleship demands a shoulder to cry on, an embodied reminder that we are loved and forgiven**. At the conclusion of the Last Supper, **Peter** was full of confidence, reminding Jesus, “*Hey, though these guys may fall away and wimp out, I will never do that!*” (Matt. 26:33). Jesus then gave him the unexpected,

¹ JT English, “*Deep Discipleship: How the church can make whole disciples of Jesus*”, p. 8-9, 2020.

earth-shattering news, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times!” (Matt. 26:34), to which Peter protested and confessed his undying loyalty, which the other disciples agreed with. There was clearly more going on than met the eye, as Satan had asked to sift Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31), to which Jesus did NOT deny access, but offered prayer and hope of returning after failure.

Peter’s failure is well documented (Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-27), included in all the synoptics because it was such a pivotal event. But this pictured and modeled an immensely important part of discipleship: **the restoration and redirection of a broken sinner**. Jesus sought Peter out back in Galilee as he had gone back to a life of fishing. After asking Peter if he loved Him, Jesus reaffirmed him three times to feed His sheep (John 21:15-18), restoring him from the three denials. He redirected his life by saying again, “**Follow Me**” (21:19) and letting him know what kind of death he’d face in the future (21:18). He also reminded Peter not to worry so much about what others were going to do (he asked about John), but Jesus simply said it was up to His will, not Peter’s so he should simply “**Follow Me**” (21:21).

As disciples, we embrace failure as part of the process of maturation, growth, and humility. This is exactly what Jesus walked Peter through to equip Him for his place in leadership. Failure is easier to embrace when it’s written on paper than in dealing with real life issues, but **failure at some level is inevitable**. If we have no category for **restoration and redirection**, we will never train up leaders, or see joyful worshippers, or mature disciples.

5. 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 than 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.

6. We set out a life of discipline to be emulated (Matt. 10:24-25a; 1 Tim. 4:6-8)

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”

1 Timothy 4:6-8 - *“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”*

Unfortunately, we live in a time where our government officials often live by the mantra: *do as I say, not as I do*. **Making disciples** is all about living a life that those we are discipling can follow in principle. Jesus said that if He was persecuted, those who followed and emulated His life would be persecuted, and they could count on it. There was no such thing as following Jesus and living categorically different. In order to disciple others in the church, we must have a life that says, *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1) **How does a new follower of Jesus know how to pray, read Scripture, give, serve, teach, counsel, lead, and evangelize?** They follow someone in the church who is already doing these things, not perfectly, but faithfully. This is the essence of discipleship.

7. 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 nor 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.

What do you find hinders us from living this way? What hinders us from calling others to live this way? Is it that we don't want to be hypocrites? Then we must work through a process of repentance and restoration. Do we not want the responsibility? Then we must understand what Christ has called us to? Do we simply not want to work that hard? Then we must examine our understanding of the gospel call on our lives, which is one to die to self, to lose our life, and follow Christ.

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 – pointing others to Christ, joyful worship, and selfless service
- Pursuit – securing undivided devotion to Christ
- Training in God's Word both formally and informally
- Release to replicate

We will be effective and healthy to the degree of the quality and quantity participation we have in making disciples. If this is relegated to staff/elders, or a few in the church, we will have a paltry ability to do all that God has commanded us to do. If, however, we have a passionate group who are **growing and maturing** and are willing to help others do the same, all to the glory of God and the person of Christ to the joy of all nations, we will have something that few churches experience. **Making disciples** is the call of every church, everywhere, for all time, so in learning to do this here, you will be equipped for faithful ministry anywhere in the world, since **purposeful relationships** that are **found in the gospel, pointed to Christ, ground in the Word, and dependent on the Spirit, and centered in the church** transcend any program or structure that we can create.

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? What would need to change to be a disciple maker here?