

## What Does It Mean to Make Disciples?

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Matthew 28:18-20

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We are finishing up our mini-series on what we are all about as a church. We started with the message “What Is So Special About the Church”, then we heard “What It Means to Be a Part of a Gospel Centered Community”. Then starting two weeks ago, we began looking at our mission as a church to be disciples, who grow and make disciples. So, we started with “What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple” and last week, we unpacked “What Does It Look Like to Grow as Disciples”.

Today, we are going to focus on the third aspect of our mission and answer the question “What Does It Mean to Make Disciples?”. And we are going to focus primarily on five major objections that most people have to making disciples of Jesus.

1. I don't want to impose on someone else, or I don't want to impose what I believe on someone else.
2. I don't know *where* to go, or I don't *have* anywhere to go to make disciples.
3. I don't know what it looks like.
4. I don't know how to teach.
5. I don't feel like I can.

Maybe, like me, you've had one of these objections at some point in your life, or you are wrestling with these objections now. We are going to begin to answer these objections from Scripture. So, turn with me to perhaps the most commonly read Scripture on discipleship. I hope to get us thinking about what Jesus said in light of our common objections.

*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."*

[Pray]

“Holly Butcher penned a final letter to be read after her death. She sadly passed away last week at the age of 27 after battling a rare form of cancer. Her heartbreaking letter went viral after she passed away in January. On the 4th of January, Holly Butcher lost her battle with a rare form of cancer that affects mostly young people.

The message includes Holly's moving insights as a 27-year-old woman forced to confront her mortality, despite not having done so many things she'd hoped and planned to do. 'It's a strange thing to realize and accept your mortality at 26 years young,' she reflected. 'It's just one of those things you ignore. The days tick by and you just expect they will keep on coming; until the unexpected happens. That's the thing about life,' she noted. 'It is fragile, precious and unpredictable and each day is a gift, not a given right,' she said, adding 'I'm 27 now. I don't want to go.'"

After spending time reflecting on how she would live her life if she could overcome the disease, Holly decided to share her advice with those who get to keep on living. It is a moving letter and

she has inspired many to live for what she thought mattered. Many have taken on a new life mission from her final words. I wonder though, how many of us take for granted the words of Jesus, who loved us so much that He gave His life for us. After giving us life and being raised from the dead, He gave us His final, earthly command and it is important and gives us a purpose and a true meaning to live for.

Everyone who has been a Christian for at least a few years has heard the command of Jesus that He gave to His disciples at the end of Matthew — to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He commanded us. It was one of the last commandments that Jesus gave — His great commissioning to His disciples in light of all that He taught, all that He came to do and all that He accomplished on the Cross and in His resurrection.

Why is it that so many genuine Christians, who consider themselves disciples of Jesus are not actively pursuing and engaged in making disciples? Ask yourself — am I really making disciples that are making disciples? By God's grace many of you are and I am overjoyed that you are and that you are an example for all of us. But don't check out — this message is for you too, whether or not you are making disciples and agree that you should.

So, why don't we do what Jesus commanded? Maybe some people don't care about what Jesus commanded? I doubt this is the case for many. Maybe some of us just get busy with life and forget what life is truly about? Maybe some of us get distracted by things that capture our attention but aren't as eternally significant?

How about you? Ask yourself "what keeps me from seeking to make disciples and teach others to observe all that Jesus commanded?". Think about it for a moment. Maybe you have some objections that naturally come to mind — if so you're not unusual. One of the first objections we have either spoken or at least felt is...

### **1. I don't want to impose**

We fear what people will think of us. We fear rejection. We want acceptance. In the culture and day and age that we live in, we hear a common refrain that we shouldn't impose what we believe on someone else.

Maybe you've heard someone say, "what is good for you is good for you, but don't try to convince me of your beliefs". Or maybe you've heard the argument that it is arrogant for a Christian to impose their worldview on others. Or maybe you've been told that it is wrong to tell someone else what they believe is wrong. Or maybe you've had someone say, "what gives you the right to tell me what is right and wrong and to tell me I need to repent!".

The answer is, Jesus gives me the right to proclaim His name. Jesus gives me all the authority that I need to tell people about Him, to tell people the objective truth and to teach them to follow Him. Notice verse 18 — He said something very important, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" Jesus has all authority. Who gave Jesus this authority? Well, in one sense, as God the Son, He has always had all authority.

*Colossians 1:15-18 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the*

*church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

But in another sense, as Jesus, the perfect man, He was given authority over death and hell and the grave. He died for our sins and when He died for sins, He paid the price for sins and He was given authority over all guilt and shame.

*Colossians 2:13-15 ...“having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*

He has authority to forgive our sins. He has ultimate authority over Satan and all his evil rulers – He has triumphed over them.

*Philippians 2:8-11 “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus has commissioned you as His disciple. Authority is defined as the power or right to do something. Now, think about that for a second. What earthly authority is greater than Jesus? The answer is none. What spiritual authority is greater than Jesus? The answer is none. He has the right and authority over every legislator, every judge, every mayor, every police officer, every senator, every congressman, every president, every king, every ruler – every person, every being to command them and to do as He pleases.

Because Jesus has all authority, He has the right and the power to commission us as His disciples. So, when someone asks you, “what gives you the right to tell anyone that they need to change their whole way of life – their whole way of thinking and behaving - and follow Jesus Christ?” You can have confidence that because everyone will give an account to Jesus, and He has told us to tell others about Him, that we not only have the right but we have the responsibility and the privilege of letting them know the truth.

If you told a blind man that they were about to step off a curb into a big pit – you would not be mean but loving, even if they denied the existence of the pit and swore at you for telling them about what they clearly cannot see. We don’t just have the authority and the right given to us by Jesus – we also are bound by the authority of Jesus over us that commands us to love our neighbor as He has loved us. Jesus loved us so much that while we were still God’s enemies, He died for us, to reconcile us to God. (Rom 5:10)

So, not only do we have the delegated authority of Jesus, we are bound by love to tell people about Jesus. If you really claim to be a humanitarian and to care about social causes and justice and to love people, then you must tell people about Jesus. Because it is the most unloving, unjust, unhumanitarian thing, to let people go to a life of eternal punishment to save them trouble and discomfort here. It is like saying, “I don’t want to startle all of the people on the train that is about to go off the cliff, because they are comfortable”, instead of telling them the truth that they need to get off the train, no matter the cost, or they will soon plunge to their death.

If we love people we will want them to bow and confess willingly. Because Jesus has the authority, we have a right and a responsibility to make disciples. Because Jesus has all authority, we should want everyone to willingly come under His authority and live in the good of His kingdom. In heaven and on earth – there is no person or culture or religious background that is outside of the authority of Jesus nor outside of our commission to disciple. It isn't about us, or our culture, or our perspective – it is about Jesus. We need to ask ourselves not “why should I impose the authority of Jesus on other people?”, but “why would I impose my authority on Jesus?”.

## **2. I don't know *where* to go**

Or maybe you find yourself thinking, “I don't *have* anywhere to go”.

*Matt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*

The word used for nations here can also mean a multitude, a company, troop, swarm, the human family, a tribe, or a people group. In the Bible the word for nations generally meant the people groups who were not a part of God's people – anyone who was not of the nation of Israel – but now, it includes Israel as well.

So, if there are people around you who either do not know Jesus personally or who could grow in following Jesus – that is where you need to go. Go to work – how you work reflects what you believe about following Jesus. What you do and what you say reflect what you really believe about being a disciple. Are you like the unbelievers around you? Ask yourself “How would I speak and act if Jesus was right here with me?” or “What would I want to say to my struggling co-workers or boss if I knew that they were dying?”

At school – how you study and how you treat your classmates and what you talk about in your spare time reflect what you believe about following Jesus. Capture those opportunities to point them to what you're most excited about. Capture those moments to give them hope in Jesus. Ask a classmate who seems discouraged, or down, or worried, or ashamed, or stressed out if they want to talk at lunch, and then share the reason for the hope that you have in Christ. Do you want to know where to go? Look for someone that looks like they don't fit in and don't have friends and ask if you can sit with them. Get to know them. Hear their story and share your story. Invite them to church.

Or maybe you do online school – offer to pray for them if they share that they're stressed and then follow up with them on chat or email to see how they're doing. Or maybe you do homeschool – care for and disciple your younger siblings or reach out to your neighbors. Or if you are staying at home with your kids – your kids are meant to be your disciples, along with your mail-carrier, your grocery clerk, your neighbor across the street that you can make some cookies for or invite over for coffee. Or maybe you can invite a single over to help you with chores around the house.

Who has God put in your life to influence for Jesus? Who can you teach to follow Jesus in some area? Who has God put in your path to build a relationship with them to help them see Jesus? Who has God already put in your life? In the church and out of the church? Everyone needs to know who Jesus is and know what it means to follow Him. How can you engage your friends and small group members in helping to make disciples?

Share who you want to help disciple with a mature friend and ask them if they can help or give you advice. We all need to be encouraged and exhorted as Christians – who can you encourage and exhort in Christ, so that they are built up in Him? What mature believer do you know who can you enlist when you have questions? (someone mature, or a ministry leader or care group leader?)

### **3. I don't know what it looks like**

*Matt 28:19 ...“make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*

You're a disciple. Disciples follow Jesus. It isn't a program. It isn't someone else's job. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you are called to make disciples. It is your life mission. It is who you are – as a disciple, you are a disciple-maker. Look at Paul's example.

*2 Timothy 1:13 Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

It looks like following the sound words of Scripture – telling them to other people. It looks like placing your faith in Jesus and loving Jesus and then letting other people hear and see your faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Publicly profess – just like you did in your baptism. It begins with a death to self and a public allegiance to Jesus – seen in baptism. Rising to new life of faith in Him.

If you haven't been baptized, we encourage you to be baptized as a public declaration of your faith. You may be surprised how God may use this simple act of obedience in your life to give you more boldness and confidence in Him. Tell about what God has done – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Tell about what God has done in your life. We need to see the joy of partnering together with Jesus in His work.

God invites us into His great plan – His mission to redeem all things – as He builds His kingdom. We must also be dependent on God and humble – not proud and self-assured. We aren't offering ourselves – we're offering Jesus – making disciples of Jesus – teaching them about Jesus – for Jesus. We disciple others in love – if love is the greatest commandment, then discipling is meant to be a means of loving someone else and loving God as well. The motive of discipling is to love them and care for them like Christ loves and cares for us.

How do you speak of others? Do you talk about them to “get advice” or to “get perspective”? “I just want to get your input – when they said this – what do you think about it?” As a disciple-maker: how do you speak to others? Is the content of your speech critical or loving? Are people more aware of your gratitude or your critique? Are you gracious or harsh? Are you snide and sarcastic, or mocking, or do you seek to build up in love?

*James 1:26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*

We are called to disciple by our example. Have a faith that would be good to imitate – not for show – but wholeheartedly be devoted to Jesus and it will be evident. Ask yourself – what would I not want for others to imitate about me and my walk with the Lord? Repent and seek God to enable you to change and then take steps to change. Then invite others into the change.

What is there that someone else could imitate and honor and love Jesus more as a result? Do those things with others who need help in that area. You don't need to be perfect but you need to be willing for Jesus to perfect you in whatever way He wants.

"Making disciples is all about seeing people transformed by the power of God's Word. If you want to see that happen in others, you need to be experiencing such transformation yourself."  
-Francis Chan

Are you being transformed by God's Word? Seek to be transformed by God's Word along with someone else.

#### **4. I don't know how to teach**

Illustration: Mr Tuttle – or Dead Poets Society. Inspirational teacher. "I could never teach like Mr. Tuttle". You don't have to. Start with what Jesus said.

*Matt 28:20a "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"*

We have the notion that we all have to be really good teachers to teach people about Jesus. We just need to communicate what we've learned about God and Jesus from the Bible. Open the Bible up. Read through the Bible with someone else.

The most recent person I lead to Christ was through reading the book of Mark together and him asking questions. God directed our conversations. He had a lot of questions about everything and we got off topic a lot. We went through the basic questions that every human has. We wrestled through his questions from the Bible and God spoke to his heart through His Word.

You don't have to have a certificate or go through a class to begin to teach. Get to know people. Ask questions. Use words - use God's words. Tell them about how I once was lost. Now I'm found. I once was blind, now I see. Follow up your words with a life that demonstrates loving God, loving other people and living for Jesus. Begin to study God's Word on a regular basis for yourself and then speak the truth to them.

*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*

It looks like speaking the truth in love. Speak the truth about Jesus – speak the truth lovingly. For a fellow believer, build them up in the love of God. Teaching isn't the end goal – it is loving God and obeying Him from the heart and then helping others love Him and learn how to obey Him too.

Is your desire to love others and help them glorify God or just to correct them and make them better and less annoying to you? How is your love for others seen right now? Is there anywhere you need to repent of selfishness or self-centeredness? If so, repent and then share that with a fellow believer. How can you practically seek to love others around you like Jesus? Pray, serve, care for them, etc. Our teaching is to be by our own example. One of the easiest ways for us to be deceived is to know what is right and to be able to understand it, to diagnose things and to even speak into others lives, yet fail to be living what we believe and practicing what we preach personally.

The fifth and final objection we are going to address is that objection that almost everyone in the room can relate to...

## 5. I don't feel like I can

I don't know any Christian who always feels like they are adequate on their own really. Even the great Apostle Paul needed prayer to share the gospel.

*Ephesians 6:19-20 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

He needed prayer, because he was tempted to not be bold – to not say what he should. He was tempted to fear – just like we all are.

*1 Corinthians 2:3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*

But he preached the good news about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and trusted in God's power in the gospel. We will be tempted to fear and we will be weak and tremble. It is ok – expect it. Then pray, ask for prayer, and step out in faith in God's Words and declare the good news. We don't feel like we can and we can't on our own. But the amazing truth is that we are not on our own. Look at what Jesus said in the last part of our passage.

*Matt 28:20b "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus said, "Behold". Like we would behold the glory and splendor of the sun rising over the ocean on the East Coast. We may not feel like the sun is there, but look! Behold! it is there and it gives us warmth and life on earth. In a similar way, behold the glory and splendor of Jesus Christ and then look! He is always with us.

What an amazing thing to behold – the fact that Jesus is with us always, to the end of the age. Even if we may not be aware of Him, we need to behold – to look – to perceive with our minds and spirits that Jesus is with us always. Yes, we may not feel like we can and in some sense, that may be true. But look! Jesus can and He is with us. He will enable us – even if we have to defend ourselves to the authorities.

*Mark 13:9-11 and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. <sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. <sup>11</sup> And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.*

You don't have to worry about what to speak – the Holy Spirit of God, who is always with you will give you words to say. Say whatever you need to say to proclaim the gospel and bear witness to Jesus.

*Hebrews 13:5-6 "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

God will never leave us nor forsake us. "So, we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" You can trust that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will be with you. The Holy Spirit is your helper – your comforter, your counselor, your advocate. No one can take Jesus away from you. Even if they can take your life – which is pretty unlikely in this country right now – you don't need to fear, because they cannot take God from you. What a great privilege we have that we get to step out in the authority of Jesus, to make disciples of Him, to teach them about Jesus, to profess His name.

Illustration: being on the sidelines or playing the game. The Super Bowl is today. Don't think you're playing the game because you're cheering on someone else's game. Don't just be an armchair quarterback – that's easy.

It is easy to talk about how the church isn't making disciples. It is easy to talk about how the church can grow or how other people in the church need to grow. But that it easy. If you're not on the field, you won't get hit – you won't get knocked down. But you won't know the personal joy of playing either. You won't know what it is like to have the joy of blocking for someone who gets a touchdown or seeing someone come to Christ through your labors. What other work will remain eternally and last like that of seeing someone become a disciple for all eternity and becoming a son or daughter of God forever? Get out on the field and play.

He has left us here for a reason. He enables us to come alongside another human and see them turn to follow Jesus and hope in Him. It is the fulfillment of the mission that God has called us to. God made us for a purpose and as we fulfill His purpose for us, we find joy in Him. No follower of Christ is meant to be on the sidelines – everyone – wherever we work and play and live is called to be in the game.

There is a joy in making disciples. Joy in following Jesus. Joy in seeing others follow Him. Joy in knowing that our work will endure. Joy knowing that our life has meaning and purpose and that we have a mission we get to fulfill for God.

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