

DISCIPLESHIP: IT TAKES A KINGDOM SIZE VISION

SESSION 1

What is your congregation doing to disciple each new Christian and member?

Disciple Facts

Current State of Discipleship by Barna Group:¹

- Only 20% of Christian adults mention spiritual maturity (or anything) as their number one goal in life.
 - Survey of most important thing to accomplish in life:²
 - 29% Good parent, raising good and happy kids
 - 20% go to heaven
 - 14% financial security, comfort, retirement fund, wealth
 - 7% completing/furthering education
 - 7% making a difference in the world, helping others
 - 7% career success, having good job/career
 - 6% good health
 - 4% good marriage
 - 4% being a good person and known as a good person
 - 3% having a good life, being happy and fulfilled
 - 9% nothing in particular
- 60% of adult Christians surveyed said they want to have a deep commitment to the Christian faith but are not involved in any intentional effort to grow spiritually.
- 60% of believers have no sense of what they want to achieve or become spiritually.
- How are those who are trying being developed?
 - 68% are involved in small groups
 - 24% attend Sunday school
 - 15% are being intentionally mentored by someone
 - 11% attend special classes

Additionally:

- Majority of churches have no intentional discipleship model or system
- Most new converts are not disciplined and trained how to disciple others (great commission).
- Lack of commitment among younger generation of Christians and nostalgia of older generations.
- Lack of accountability for members of the body.
- Elitist mentality that only a few are qualified to “go and make disciples.”

There is still hope! We need only become doers of the Word! But it takes a Kingdom sized vision to disciple others...a vision of the masses!

¹ From George Barna, Growing True Disciples.

² Note that these add to more than 100% because some gave more than one answer. Survey was given to 450 “born-again” adults.

What is a Disciple?

Often times, when discussing the concept of discipleship, we speak around each other because we have no clear understanding of what the term actually means. Only by agreeing upon a unified definition can individuals, groups, and the universal body of Christ begin to fulfill their responsibility of making disciples. To understand the discipleship, we must understand the noun form and then the verb becomes clearer.

What is a disciple? How would you explain it? What does a disciple look like, act like, and speak like?

Roughly, the noun *disciple* is found in approximately 249+ occurrences—29 times in the singular (Matt. 4 times, Lk. 4 times, John 16 times, and Acts 5 times), and 243 times in the plural (Matt. 71 times, Lk. 34 times, John 65 times, and Acts 26 times). Interestingly, the word does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament. The Greek word, μαθητής, is used as one who is a “learner or student.” It can be further clarified in the context of Biblical study to mean “a learner or student who accepts the teaching of Christ, not only in belief but also in lifestyle.”³

Simply put, and for our purposes, we will define a disciple as “*a student of Christ who accepts His teachings and aligns his/her life with Christ by imitating Him.*”

In today’s world, many assume that being a Christian is based mostly on sincerity and has little to do with obedience. However, a Disciple is clearly seen in Scripture as one who is very serious about obeying everything that God teaches. The word “Christian” is found in the Bible only 3 times while “Disciple” is found well over 200 times! While there is a disconnect between the terms in our current culture, *disciple* and *Christian* were interchangeable in Biblical times ([Acts 11:26](#)) and one could not be a Christian without being a seriously committed disciple.

Let’s read the following verses concerning what a Disciple is:

Luke 6:39-49

- *A Disciple is one who is like his/her teacher (Mirrors Christ)*
- *A Disciple is one who examines himself and then challenges others*
 - **John 13:34-35** – An act of love
- *A Disciple is one who produces fruit*
 - **See also John 15:5-8**
- *A Disciple is one who practices Christ’s Teachings*
 - **See also John 8:31-32**

³ Spiritual Discipleship, 8.

As stated, for our purposes we will define a disciple as **“a student of Christ who accepts His teachings and aligns his/her life with Christ by imitating Him.”**

What does it mean to make disciples (Discipleship)?

Matthew 28:19-20 “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

What comes to mind when you hear the verb “to disciple?” What does it look like to carry it out?

The imperative Greek verb translated as “make disciples” is *matheteusate*. This comes from the word *manthano*, meaning “to learn by practice; to acquire a custom or habit.”⁴ In the context of the passage and when it’s meaning is understood, the process of *discipling* consists of “intentionally developing relationships with unbelievers and leading them to acquire the customs, habits, and very nature of Jesus, the ultimate teacher/master.”⁵ One author clarifies this by stating **“discipleship is the process of cultivating relationships with unbelievers, mentoring them into developing an intimate, transformative relationship with Jesus, and teaching them to perpetuate the process with others.”**⁶

How is Biblical discipleship more than just sitting in Sunday School or listening to a sermon?

- It’s a call to radical commitment
- It’s a decision to die to ourselves
- Biblical discipleship takes place not in the classroom but in life itself.

Therefore, if a disciple is “a student of Christ who accepts His teachings and aligns his/her life with Christ by imitating Him,” **we are led to the understanding that “to make disciples” is to cultivate relationships with unbelievers, teaching them to have an intimate and transformative relationship with Jesus and to perpetuate the process with others..**

Why Should We Disciple Others?

- It is commanded (**Matt. 18:19-20**)
- Christ made disciples
- The early church made disciples
- It’s expected
- If you make disciples, you will always get the church.

⁴ Wigram, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 257.

⁵ Anderson, *Living Dangerously*, 3.

⁶ *ibid.*, 5.

Who Should Disciple Others?

So, who should make disciples?

John 17:18-23 –Who is represented by the “them” in v.18? Who are “they” throughout the passage?

Let’s approach the question of who should do the discipling from another point of view. Earlier we discussed where the term for “disciple” and “discipling” occurs and where it does not. This gives us insight as to who carries out the discipling.

Why does “disciple” and “discipling” not appear outside of Gospels-Acts?

- The answer lies in the purposes of the books. The four Gospels, along with the book of Acts, record the inception, development, and expansion of the church into the world. They tell us how the gospel is spread from Jesus to the first disciples, to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the Gentile world.
- The epistles and Revelation were written to (or about) those already established churches and the ministry of the functioning local body. These deal with issues such as doctrine, church leadership, and organization. It also includes the roles in family life. It’s interesting to note that all of these roles and such as seen in body life only occur after discipleship has taken place for many years by all believers!

From this understanding, it is very clear that discipling came before the ordering, establishment of leadership (elders, deacons, etc.), and correcting of doctrine in the New Testament. Discipleship was not just a function of the 12 Apostles, but clearly a function of every believer of Christ. In fact, it was not until after the institution of the Catholic Church that discipleship was taken out of the hands of laymen (St. Francis of Assisi for example).

But what about our gifts? Isn’t that a gift that only some have?

- **Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4**
- While each believer has one or more spiritual gifts and/or abilities to exercise within the context of the local body; discipling is not a gift, neither is it an option. The responsibility to make disciples is given to each and every believer without exception.
 - Example: **Acts 6:5**—Philip was a deacon, which was a position of service in physical and financial matters. Yet, in **Acts 8:5-6, 25-40**, we see Philip engaged in evangelism.

Matthew 28:18-20 – Was this command only for the 12 Apostles? Clergy?

CONCLUSION

Our Definitions

Definitions are VERY important because I do not want to be misunderstood of what we are talking about. With a clear definition, we are able to discuss the topic at hand and learn characteristics and implementation of it in our second break-out session.

Disciple--a disciple is “a student of Christ who accepts His teachings and aligns his/her life with Christ by imitating Him,”

Discipling/Making Disciples—“to make disciples” is to cultivate relationships with unbelievers, teaching them to have an intimate and transformative relationship with Jesus and to perpetuate the process with others

It Takes a Kingdom Sized Vision

We have understood the need for making disciples, who is responsible for making disciples, and how to define a disciple and the process. The truth is, in order to effectively make disciples, we must look beyond ourselves, our communities, and our churches. We must look at what is at stake—the Kingdom of God! If we do not understand the intentional impact of disciple making, we will not understand why or how we should do it.

Imagine your church so full of people you are busting out of the seams. You are constantly meeting to discuss what to do with all the disciples you have been making. Should we build a new building? Should we go to two services? Should we plant a new church? Should we do all three? Only in having a kingdom vision of discipleship can we accomplish the goal of taking those we love from unbeliever, to believer, to mature believer, to repeater.

Imagine what would happen if we gave the reigns back to God and became a people focused only on making disciples who make disciples. Or to put it in the words of our conference, becoming disciples who G.R.O.W. disciples!

Next Lesson

I hope you enjoyed our discussion and will return for part two. Part II will be much more practical as we discuss some of the Biblical characteristics of a disciple and how we can begin living intentionally as individuals and congregations who make disciples of Jesus Christ.