

#81 “As You Are Going, Make Disciples”

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2 Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." A great many churches are satisfied with drawing as many people as they can through the doors, typically appealing to the flesh rather than relying upon Christ. They are able to get a good amount of people to make some kind of profession to follow Christ at some point and in some way. Rarely, however, are many of those who profess Christ brought to any degree of Biblical maturity as far as knowing Christ. They may be fast-tracked into finding their spiritual gifts or into joining a particular ministry, but too often in-depth Bible teaching is not made a priority. This is not good. At the other extreme, there are, albeit few and far between, some churches which rightly understand the necessity and sufficiency of God's Word in discipleship. There is a tendency, however, to rely solely on right doctrine to instigate growth and change. This is not to say that God's Word cannot do all that is required in helping a person to grow to maturity, for it can. The point, however, is that as we look at how Jesus discipled, He emphasized truth and then modeled its application and deliverance. Thus, discipleship that truly wants to be Biblical by following Jesus' example is a discipleship that communicates truth through word and through life. Discipleship must be grounded in sound Bible teaching, or true growth cannot and will not occur. But it must also be reflected in the lives of those who are living as examples and doing the teaching. It is true that the meaning of Christian maturity is both caught and taught as the Spirit works in the hearts of believers.

Christ chose to invest in bringing twelve men to a place of spiritual maturity so that they could be pillars of the early church (Ephesians 2:20). He did not try to woo the thousands upon thousands who followed Him around, interested only from a distance or simply because of what they might selfishly gain. Jesus believed in developing quality. He had disciples, not just regular attenders. Interestingly, Jesus made additional efforts to invest in Peter, James, and John. Perhaps they were the most humble, the most sensitive to God's leading, and the most desiring of the things of God. When determining those with whom we ought to invest additional time in discipleship, we must not look to ability or status but to who is seeking God. The heart which truly seeks after God is rare. Only the person who has such a heart himself can, by God's grace and much prayer, identify others that share the same burden. We need more whose hearts are wholly devoted to God, and who are seeking to encourage others of like mind. Let us not put so much focus on how many people we can get to sit in a room for an hour a week as we do upon developing a handful of individuals who can, in turn, develop a handful of individuals and so on. Let us think multiplication instead of addition.

We are so poor at discipling because we have lost the idea of helping another person grow into spiritual maturity. We tend to make everything programmatic or dependent upon some rigid organizational chart. For example, we think, "The prayer meeting is on Tuesday and evangelism is on Wednesday; if you want to be discipled, come to those

meetings or programs." There is nothing wrong with scheduled prayer meetings and regular evangelism. In fact, these things are great tools in the discipleship process, but they cannot be mistaken for constituting the entire process. Rather, it should be that the older men and women are trying to connect their lives of ministry with the lives of those younger than them so that they can show them what Christian maturity and ministry is all about. And it is imperative that the lives are indeed worth imitating. Thus, discipleship is much more organic rather than structural.

Discipleship is fundamentally loving one another and passing on truth as lives are connected in serving and glorifying God. It involves really taking the time to know someone, to understand, and to care. Discipleship is not to be professionalized or made impersonal. Yet it is more than just being nice. Jesus called His disciples friends because all that He had heard from the Father He made known to them (15:15). This passing on of truth in love is the pinnacle of discipleship.

And let us not forget the importance of putting truth into action, which Jesus most certainly challenged His disciples to do as He sent them out to serve, proclaim the truth, and do works of ministry (e.g. Luke 10:1-17). Discipleship cannot be merely theorized or wished into being, but often it is accomplished in the laboratory rather than merely the lecture hall, so to speak. Training on the battlefield is very effective, and it ought to be followed by reflecting and dissecting what happened through the grid of Scripture.

We need godly teachers and leaders as well as humble followers and learners, for these will be the future teachers and leaders. If parents cannot disciple their children and if pastors can not disciple their church bodies, Christianity will fail to cross the generational gap. We need faithful men and women who can teach others to be faithful also (2 Timothy 2:2). May we not neglect and never forget God's commission to us to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), for such is the central mission of the Christian life and calling. May God make us into faithful disciples who disciple others also.