

The Practice of Making Disciples

Live with Jesus in Community

INTRODUCTION

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,’” (Matthew 28:16-20).

Jesus’ last words were a commission to his disciples to “go make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). These words were God’s rescue plan for a lost and broken world and helped birth the early church. They words have now reverberated throughout history to us. And yet, we can easily feel like these words are not for us or are maybe just for the ministry professionals or the missionaries that “go” to foreign lands. Just as we may have hesitations or doubts, there were some disciples who doubted when Jesus gave this command (Matthew 28:17). Even with these doubting disciples, Jesus commissions them and tells them to go and make disciples with his authority and presence. We too are told with all his authority, “go make disciples of all nations.”

But what does “making disciples” actually mean? As we look at this command, let us first define what is a disciple and then look at the great disciple maker himself, Jesus. A disciple from a Jewish perspective was someone who was a follower, learner, and an apprentice to a teacher, often referred to as a rabbi. A first-century Jewish blessing stated, “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” So, from a Christian perspective, most simply, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus. This is not following like how someone follows a sports team or a friend on Facebook. This is to intimately follow Jesus. John Mark Comer describes a disciple as someone who orients their life to “Be with Jesus, become like him, do as he did.” Or as Doug Brown says, “A disciple lives in union with Jesus to learn to live joyfully in God’s beautiful Kingdom.”

Now that we know what a disciple is, what does it mean to “make disciples”? Does it mean that we need to select twelve people like Jesus to follow us as we teach them? It could mean that but thankfully through the heart and providence of God, God uses everyone with their diverse personalities and giftings to disciple others. It might be helpful to look at the earliest structure of discipleship in the Bible - the family:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This passage in Deuteronomy is referred to as the Shema, and the Israelites would typically recite it daily as a reminder of God's heart and ways. It directed them to first declare Yahweh as their God and then to love God with all of who they are. Then, out of this love to follow the ways of God. Specifically, to pass on these ways to their children in all of life. Discipleship is in many ways like parenting. So, **making disciples is primarily passing on to others how to follow the way of Jesus**. Just as parents help kids develop, God uses our unique personality and gifting to be a part of his call to disciple others. And what we discover in the New Testament is that now we are called to do this as the church because we are the family of God (Matthew 12:50; Ephesians 2:19). Practically, it is helpful to know that it is the power and gift of the Holy Spirit that helps us serve and disciple within the family of God. For more information about our spiritual gifts, please look at the Practice, 'Discover Your Gifts', <https://greenwoodcc.com/discover-your-gifts/>.

Now that we have seen how God calls all of us and our unique personalities and gifting to be a part of his mission to "make disciples", let us look at the great disciple maker Jesus as a model for our lives. From the life of Jesus, we can learn several principles as we make disciples:

- **Be intentional and invitational** – Jesus specifically invited his disciples to "follow me" (Matt. 4:19; 9:9). In the Jewish tradition, students would request and apply to be a rabbi's disciple. While in contrast, out of love and intentionality, Jesus specifically choose his disciples, including the unlikely, such as fishermen, a tax collector, and even a zealot (a political radical). Jesus calls us to be intentional and invitational with others as they follow Jesus, even the unlikely in our lives.
- **Share life together** – Jesus invited them to be "with him" (Mark 3:14; John 1:39;). Jesus' disciples were invited into community where they would share life together. It was not simply meeting with someone for coffee, which has its value, but spending quality time together through the ups and downs of life.
- **Have fun together** – It is striking that the first thing that Jesus did with his disciples was not to teach them but to go to a party, more specifically a wedding feast (John 2:1-12). To create a community for transformation, we need a community of joy and trust. Having fun together through a party or meal is one of the best ways to do that.
- **Prioritize time with God** – Even with the demands of the people upon Jesus' presence and words, Jesus prioritized spending time with God. He often got away to lonely places to be with God and pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; John 6:15). As we disciple others, we lead from the overflow of our hearts. Therefore, we too need to prioritize our time with God as the wellspring of life. This also models to others how we follow Jesus.
- **Learn together** – Jesus taught the disciples in many ways. He taught them directly (Matthew 5:1-2), he had them listen as he taught others (Matthew 13), he explained his teaching to them (Matthew 13:36), and he was intentional in giving them opportunity to experientially live out his teaching (Matthew 14:16). We too can humbly teach others what we have learned and how we have been transformed through the Bible or discussing a spiritual book.
- **Be on mission together** – Jesus challenged the disciples to pass on the Kingdom hope and the gospel they had received from him and share it with others to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 10; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 6:7). We too are called to be a part of God's rescue and restoration of a lost and broken world. We can disciple others in God's mission by first praying together for the lost and hurting. Second, our hearts grow in alignment with God's heart as we serve others who are in need. And lastly, we can mutually encourage each other to share the gospel message with others.

THE PRACTICE

God's mission to "make disciples" is beautifully diverse as we all in our unique personalities and giftings reflect and pass on God's heart and ways to others as the family of God. In this Practice section, we will specifically look at a discipleship relationship in a one-on-one context or in a small group. In this context, we can implement the discipleship principles modeled by Jesus listed above and the following principles below. First, please take a minute to pray and ask God about someone you can disciple or a small group you can lead. Sometimes inviting someone into a group setting can be more welcoming and after developing a relationship with someone, a one-on-one discipleship mentoring opportunity might arise. Plus, it can be helpful to explain discipleship as receiving spiritual coaching; helping them discern their next step with Jesus. You could ask, "Would you be interested in spiritual coaching? I'd love to come alongside you to help you discern your next step with Jesus."

- **Sacredness of our stories** – as we get together with others, first start with everyone sharing their spiritual stories. Be sensitive to those who might not feel comfortable or ready to share. Sometimes selecting someone who is comfortable sharing can lend itself to creating a safe and vulnerable space for others to share. It might be helpful to use these questions to direct peoples' stories: Where in your life have you experienced brokenness and sin (with God, others, ourselves, and the world)? Where have you experienced God's pursuit of you when you were far from him? What has it looked like to turn from sin and believe and trust in Jesus? Where has God brought restoration in and through your story?
- **Practices** - God delights in meeting us in many different ways. Primarily we see that he connects with us through prayer and scripture individually and as the family of God. This is the foundational pathway and practice towards intimacy with God. Please consider using the 'Life with Jesus' guide as a discernment tool in discovering life-giving practices - <https://greenwoodcc.com/life-with-jesus/>. Plus, for individual practices, please check out <https://greenwoodcc.com/practices/>.
- **Barriers** – We all have barriers in our relationship with God. As seen in Scripture, we often see these barriers as sin, wounds, and warfare. As you disciple someone, be aware that God is calling all of us to greater wholeness, and through the Holy Spirit in love we can help someone see the barriers in their life. When we speak the truth in love to others about their barriers, we need to first acknowledge our own sin or wounds before we see clearly to help someone else (Matthew 7:5). Wisdom and discernment are needed to know how and when to speak to others about their barriers. Remember that these barriers are hurtful to individuals and out of a posture of love, we help them. For further understanding of our barriers with God, please read Invitations of Jesus Appendix C, 'Barriers to Intimacy with God' by Jasona Brown.
- **Be disciplined as we disciple others** – As we are called to make disciples, we need to be disciplined first. Who is pouring into you as you are pouring into others? Obviously, our primary source of life and direction is Jesus pouring into us, but God has designed us so that discipleship is primarily in relationship with others. As we see from the relationship between Paul and Timothy, Timothy is encouraged to pass on what he has learned from Paul to others who are equipped to teach others: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). This passage depicts four generations of disciples making disciples who make disciples.
- **Prioritize Prayer** – As we disciple others, we are helping people towards whole life transformation that can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit. First, we need to go before God and acknowledge our own heart, our worries, fears, false motives, etc. And then we intercede on behalf

of others. Pray for the individuals by name in your one-on-one discipleship relationship or in the small group. Ask for God's sensitivity, wisdom and boldness to see more of their heart and their barriers to intimacy with God and the path of life for them. Maybe send the individual or group a text occasionally asking how you can specifically be praying for them.

- **Training** - The pastoral staff is also always available and would gladly help you find a discipleship mentor or help train you to become a discipleship mentor. Periodic trainings on making disciples will be offered throughout the year.
- **Recommended resources:** Life with Jesus Guide, <https://greenwoodcc.com/life-with-jesus/>, 'The Lost Art of Disciple Making' by Leroy Eims, 'The Masterplan of Evangelism' by Robert Coleman, and 'Practicing the Way' by John Mark Comer.

As we respond to God's mission and invitation to make disciples, let us remember that we are simply passing on to others how to follow the way of Jesus. We do not do this alone but as the family of God with all of God's authority, presence, and power.

Please say this prayer as you take your next step in making disciples.

"Heavenly father, I thank you that in your love and mercy you have rescued, redeemed, and restored me as your beloved child – adopted into your family and into your ways. Please provide a Godly person into my life who will disciple me with wisdom and love to become more like you Jesus. And with your authority, presence, and power help me to be a part of your mission to make disciples of all nations. Give me the eyes to see what you are doing, the faith to believe, and the courage to respond. I pray this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:4-9

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." Matthew 4:19

"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon." John 1:39

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

INTERESTING QUOTES:

“The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.” – Dallas Willard

“May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.” – First-century Jewish blessing (as quoted in *Practicing the Way*)

“For those of us who desire to follow Jesus, here is the reality we must turn and face: If we’re not being intentionally formed by Jesus himself, then it’s highly likely we are being unintentionally formed by someone or something else.” – John Mark Comer

“The single most important question is, Are we becoming more loving? Not, are we becoming more biblically educated? Or practicing more spiritual disciplines? Or more involved in church? Those are all good things, but not the most important thing.” – John Mark Comer

“Micro-rituals have macro significance” – K.A. Smith

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. In your faith journey, has anyone discipled you? If so, what was the experience like for you?
2. Have you ever had an opportunity to disciple someone else? What was that like?
3. What thoughts, fears, or worries come to mind as you think about making disciples?
4. Do you currently have a discipleship mentor or do you need more training in making disciples?

After you have tried this practice:

1. What step in the practice did you feel like the Lord wanted you to work on and what was that like?
2. Did God bring to mind a person or a couple of people who could be discipled, someone you can help discern their next step with Jesus?
3. Did you have an opportunity to reach out to the person/s and invite them to be discipled? How did that go? Or what prevented you from taking that step?