

## Essential Truths III: Working With God

## 19

## Making Disciples

“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...”

Familiar words. Yet as we have seen in **ES106-03**, the Great Commission (found in **Matthew 28:19-20**) is the directive that gives the Church its forward momentum. Every kind of ministry in the Body of Christ operates within the broad framework of the Great Commission and draws its authority from this one command.

We need to guard ourselves against over-familiarity with verses like **Matthew 28:19-20**. And the only guard against over-familiarity is *application*. When you apply a verse to your life, your obedience brings new life to that verse. Its property of being “living and active” comes into play when it is applied to life and to action. So let’s take another look at this familiar scripture, with the view of applying it to our lives.

Have you noticed that the *command* portion of the Great Commission is sandwiched between two declarative statements?

- ➔ **Declaration #1** – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (**Verse 17**)
- ➔ **Declaration #2** – “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (**Verse 20**)

The Birthright

Taking the Baton

The Great Commission

The Body of Christ

The Ministry of Every Believer

Joining the Work of God

The Tree of Life

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Filled with the Spirit

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt and Light

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

▶ **Making Disciples** ◀

The New Wine

The Goal of Ministry

These two statements – declaring the absolute backing of heaven and the eternal presence of Jesus – reinforce Christ’s command to “go and make disciples.” We often take the authority that we have in Christ and the abiding presence of the Lord for granted, without realizing that we have both his authority and his presence for a reason: *to make disciples!*

But what does it actually mean to “make disciples”? Why would the making of disciples require the full authority of heaven and the abiding presence of Jesus? In this lesson we will be looking at the strategy that Jesus initiated – a strategy called “disciple-making.”

## Multiplying the Gospel

God created within every living creature the ability to reproduce “each according to its kind” (**Genesis 1:11,24**). When we make disciples, as we shall soon see, we are reproducing after our own kind.

After the Flood, God told Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (**Genesis 9:7**). And when Jesus told us to “go and make disciples of all nations,” he was telling us to do the exactly same thing: multiply!

In **Mark 4:8**, at the end of his parable about the sower, Jesus says:

“Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

Any seed is planted into the ground with the hope of a return of multiple yield. The seed of the Gospel that has been planted into your life is also designed to produce a “thirty-fold, sixty-fold and hundred-fold” yield (KJV).\*

This multiplication process is called exponential, because it builds upon itself. Let’s take a look at two examples that illustrate the power of exponential growth.

**Illustration One:** A story is told of a wise man who proved such a help to his king that the monarch offered him any reward of his choosing. The man thought for a moment, then asked for a chessboard and said, “I want one grain of wheat placed on the first chess square, two grains of wheat for the second square, four grains of wheat for the third square and so on, doubling the grains for each following square.” The king, who thought he was being let off easily, ordered it to be so, until it was calculated that by the time the 64th square was reached, the man had owing to him more wheat than America produced in the last century!

**Illustration Two:** Imagine a pond that is slowly covered, over a period of 30 days, with water lilies. Each day the water lilies cover twice as much area

\* The measure of how fruitful your life is simply a function of the quality of the soil of your heart. In the picture of the field in the parable of the sower, the edges of the fertile field produced a thirty-fold yield, and the closer to the center of the field you got, the higher the yield of the grain. In the same way, as you press closer into the Lord, you will find that the yield of your life will increase in its fruitfulness (note **John 15:4,8**).

as the day before. On what day is the pond half-covered with water lilies? The answer, of course, is the 29th day. Such is the rate of exponential growth that in that on the last day half of the entire remaining surface area of the pond is overtaken with lilies.

These are simple illustrations of the power of exponential growth. But this is exactly what Jesus unleashed in **Matthew 28:18** when he commanded his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations”!

God’s plan is to multiply the Gospel through you. As God’s Word takes root in your life, then is shared with others, that Word is multiplied in the lives of others. This is what Luke reported in **Acts 12:24**:

“But the word of God continued to increase and spread.”

The *King James Version* words Luke’s account this way:

“But the word of God grew and multiplied...”

This phrase has become the slogan for the Online Bible College, and it can be a slogan for your life too. Through you, the Word of God can grow and multiply, impacting the world around you.

**Read Acts 19:20**

## **Seeing Beyond the First Generation**

Making disciples involves an costly investment of time on your part. As with anything in your walk as a disciple, you need to count the cost and calculate whether the returns are worth the investment (note **Luke 14:28-33**).

As with a business venture, it is important to see beyond the initial capital outlay. Returns on investment are rarely immediate. They often take years. But a wise business investor sees the medium- and long-term fruit of his investment.

In a similar way, the disciple-maker sees beyond short-term returns. He sees beyond even the first generation of disciples he will make. Do you remember the parable of the chessboard? On the first few squares, the grains looked negligible, like the leftovers after a meal. But by the end of the second line of squares, there were already sackfuls of grain. And even before the last line of squares was reached, the accumulated sacks of grain were threatening to bankrupt the king.

**Read 2 Timothy 2:2**

In his second letter, Paul instructs Timothy, his disciple, on how to begin discipling others. Note the specific instructions:

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Paul tells Timothy to entrust what he has heard to reliable men, but then Paul shows that he is seeing even beyond Timothy’s disciples to those that they will

teach. Take a look at the generations listed in just this one verse:

<b>First generation:</b>	Paul
<b>Second generation:</b>	Timothy
<b>Third generation:</b>	Reliable men
<b>Fourth generation:</b>	Others taught

The secret to exponential growth is simple: teaching others to teach others to teach others to teach others to teach others...

As we've learned so far in the Biblical Studies Course, "teaching" is not just about speaking the *words* of the Word; it's about imparting the *life* of the Word. The reason that the Word of God is able to grow and multiply is because the life of the Word is being passed from generation to generation. This is why revelation in the Word of God is so important for your life. Not only does it change *you*, but also what has transformed you is what you are able to pass on to others!

## The Strategy of Disciple-Making

God's strategy of salvation can be broken down into two indispensable parts. We need to understand both these parts in order to appreciate how God is working not only in our lives but also through our lives as we minister to others.

The two parts of God's salvation strategy are:

### ***The strategy of the Cross***

This part of God's strategy cancels the effects of the old self and brings a person into new life in Christ. This strategy corresponds to the first and second quarters of the Gospel, and focuses on *revelation*.

### ***The strategy of disciple-making***

This part of God's strategy focuses on establishing a person in the life of Christ in such a way that this life multiplies. This strategy corresponds to the third and fourth quarters of the Gospel, and focuses on *application*.

It is this second part of God's salvation strategy that we are examining in this lesson. Let's take another look at **Matthew 28:19-20** and see exactly how this strategy of disciple-making is to be enacted.

There are a number of verbs used in Jesus' command: *go, make* (disciples), *baptize, teach*. But if you study the structure of the Greek grammar recorded by Matthew you will find that the principal verb is *make disciples*. In other words, all the other verbs used simply describe *how* disciples are made. You *make* disciples by:

- ➡ Going to them
- ➡ Baptizing them
- ➡ Teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded

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## Making Disciples, Part 1 – Going

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### Read Mark 16:15

When we think of “going,” we often think of evangelistic outreaches and missionary activities, and “going” definitely does include these. But the act of going to make disciples is also much more fundamental. The world is not just “out there” beyond the oceans; it is also “out there” beyond the door of your home and beyond the vestibule of your church.

Going has to do with movement, with action. The opposite of going is staying – staying where you are in the comfortable confines of your home and your church.

In **John 15:8**, Jesus said that he has “appointed you to *go* and bear fruit – fruit that will last.” In order to make disciples you must go where they are. This involves being friends with unbelievers, witnessing to them and leading them to a personal knowledge of the Lord – the first steps of the disciple-making process.

### Read Romans 10:14-15

Disciple-making demands proximity – and proximity requires that you come alongside other people’s lives, just as Jesus came alongside ours (**John 1:14**). To be close to people you must go to where they are. As Paul himself expressed it in **1 Thessalonians 1:5**:

“...because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know *how we lived among you* for your sake.”

This act of going to where people are has one major focus: introducing them to the *salvation* that is in Christ Jesus.

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## Making Disciples, Part 2 – Baptizing

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The second step in the disciple-making process is to baptize converts. As we’ve already discovered in **Module 102**, baptism is more than just the ceremony of immersing a person in water. The act of baptism represents a revelation of the finished work of the Cross, that the old life has gone and that a new life has begun.

Baptism in water is about full *identification* with Christ. Although a person has believed in Christ (and received the eternal salvation that comes from faith in Christ) prior to baptism, the decision to be baptized is the first step in the process of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

A person cannot be made a disciple of Jesus without identifying totally with him – identifying not only with his death, burial and resurrection, but also identifying with his eternal purpose. The decision to follow Christ is simply the outworking of this total identification with Christ.

## Making Disciples, Part 3 – Teaching

### Read Acts 2:41-42

The teaching of the apostles was written down for us in the New Testament and includes a number of unchanging themes:

### ***The person of Jesus***

#### Read Acts 5:42

#### Read Acts 28:31

All the purposes of God have been focused in the person of Christ (**Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:11**). He is the way, the truth and the life (**John 14:6**) and the focus of our faith (**Hebrews 12:2**). This is the central truth that we impart to a disciple.

### ***The finished work of the Cross***

#### Read 1 Corinthians 1:18,23-24

The Cross is the foundation of the Christian life. The message of the Gospel centers around the finished work of the Cross. When teaching a disciple, a major focus is helping the disciple come to a revelation of the finished work of the Cross.

### ***The pattern of godly living***

#### Read Romans 6:17-18

#### Read Ephesians 4:21-24

#### Read Titus 2:1-15

The making of disciples involves “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (**Matthew 28:19**). Everywhere Paul went, he spent time teaching the disciples how to live a godly life (**Acts 18:11**). In **1 Corinthians 4:17**, he wrote:

“For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

#### Read John 8:31

#### Read John 14:23-24

#### Read John 15:20

Let’s now summarize the three steps of disciple-making:

- **Step One** – “going” – focus on *salvation*
- **Step Two** – “baptizing” – focus on *identification*
- **Step Three** – “teaching” – focus on *application*

## The Principle of Imitation

For most people, the word “imitation” has a negative meaning. We speak of a cheap imitation, or we might say that one person is just imitating another. But the Bible reveals that there is a good kind of imitation, and that this imitation is a vital

part of the disciple-making process.

### Read Philippians 3:17

Paul's admonition to the Philippian church has two parts, which can be rephrased in this way:

- Follow my example
- Follow the example of those who follow my example

Someone once said: "The Christian life is more caught than taught." Just as a child learns more from observing how his parents act and react than from what his parents say, so a young disciple quickly absorbs the pattern of life lived by the one discipling him. This is why we have emphasized in the course so far that there must be a match between your "wordstyle" and your "lifestyle." This is not just for your own sake, but also for the sake of those who will be following you.

### Read 2 Timothy 3:10-11

### Read Hebrews 13:7

## Discipling in the Gospel

### Read Matthew 24:14

As has been emphasized throughout the Biblical Studies Course, the Gospel is central to every aspect of your life. This Gospel is the key to a life that pleases God, a life that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and a life that is able to multiply itself. This means that the Gospel is also central to the disciple-making process.

In **Romans 16:25**, Paul declares his strategy of disciple-making:

"Now to him who is able to *establish you by my gospel* and the proclamation of Jesus Christ..."

## The Wise Investment

There are a number of decisions that a person makes in life that can be called Big Decisions. Marriage obviously tops the list for a lot of people, as do decisions such as major career choices.

In the Christian experience, there are two Big Decisions:

- **Big Decision #1** – Deciding whether you will *commit* your life to Christ
- **Big Decision #2** – Deciding how you will *invest* your life in Christ

Where are you going to invest your dreams, your energy, your passion, your life? If you are to be a disciple of Christ, you cannot avoid taking on the priorities of Christ. And Christ's top priority is people.

As Bill Hybels expresses it:

"Those who choose to follow Christ will eventually come to the conclusion

that there's nothing more important than reaching people. And when they do, their values will change forever. They'll be seized by the realization that every other activity pales in comparison with helping an individual man, woman, boy, or girl come into a saving, liberating, life-changing relationship with the God of the universe."<sup>1</sup>

Take a look around you for a moment and then read **2 Peter 3:10**. Now read it again, this time slowly, meditating on this one verse. Now look around you again. What are the things around you that you consider important in life? What are the objects you've worked hard to purchase? Everything you see around you – all the things we work so hard for – will one day burn. There is only one thing that you can take with you into eternity – and that's people!

You have the privilege of participating in the salvation strategy of the Lord. Who can tell how many souls will come to the Lord just because you choose to invest your life in one person? Who can tell what chain reaction will be initiated simply because of your desire to be a true follower of Jesus Christ?

As you study God's Word, the fuse has been lit. As you begin to apply that Word, the chain reaction begins.

## Life Assignment

Take a piece of paper and divide the paper into two columns. At the top of the first column write the heading, "Things." At the top of the second column write the heading, "People."

Walk through your house and make a brief inventory of all the *significant* things you have – things like car, computer, TV, refrigerator, etc – and write them down on the left hand side of the page.

Then take your paper with you and over a 24 hour period make a list of all the people with whom you have *significant* contact in one day. Significant contact means that you have a conversation of *at least* five minutes with them. (Yes, you can include *significant* email contact!).

Once you have completed your list (and your 24 hours is complete), look at your list again. Talk with the Lord about your priorities as a disciple-maker. Read **2 Peter 3:10** once more and when you have finished, write these words across the list of your physical possessions:

*To be burned!*

Then read **2 Peter 3:11**.

<sup>1</sup> Bill Hybels & Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.213.