

The Practices of the Christian Life – Church – Discipleship – Making Them

Christianity could die in one generation. The generation that professes Christianity now is responsible to preserve it and propagate it to the next. A failure to do so will mean that, at least as far as living adherents are concerned, Christianity will cease to be. For this reason, all Christians have to be disciple-makers.

Matthew 28:19 - Mark 1:1 ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Our Lord's last commands to His church all come back to one thing - making disciples. How are we to perform the task of making disciples?

We must firstly understand that we cannot make disciples, only God can. Nevertheless, as we yield to His means, He will use us to make worshippers and followers out of former rebels. Matthew 28:19-20, give three parts of the central command to 'make disciples'. Though God is the one who does the saving and transforming, the following three responsibilities are ours.

1) "Going" = Conversion Through a Clear Gospel

Our first responsibility is to share the Gospel that transforms lives. We are to share the message of salvation with family, friends, colleagues, and strangers. Jesus appointed us as witnesses of His transforming power.

What is a 'clear Gospel'?

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 **1 Corinthians 15:1** Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

All of the elements of a clear Gospel are found in these verses. We must make sure we do not add, subtract or modify these clear aspects of the Gospel.

"Our sins" - The Gospel is about our sins. Man is not inherently good. He is sinful and separated from a holy and righteous God. Man deserves the penalty of death. Romans 3:23, 6:23; Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 25:46

"**For** our sins" - The Gospel is about substitution. We could not save ourselves, or else Christ did not have to die. None of our own works are good enough to save us. Isaiah 64:6, Ephesians 2:8-9

"Christ died" - The Gospel is about **a Saviour**. God's holy nature is also merciful. God lovingly paid the penalty that our sins had incurred. For Christ to be a worthy and acceptable substitute, He had to be the God-man. He had to be conceived of the Spirit, born of a virgin, perfectly keep God's Law and fulfill all righteousness. When He died, a perfectly innocent and righteous life with infinite merit was offered up to appease God's wrath, and experience punishment for us. John 1:1,13, I Peter 2:22-23, Phil 2:9-11

"And rose again the third day" - The Gospel is about **justification**. When Jesus rose from the dead, it meant He was vindicated from our sins, having made a full payment for sin without being guilty of

any of them. This means He is alive to forgive sin completely, and to impute His perfect righteousness to us. Romans 4:25; 2 Cor 5:21

"Which also you received" - The Gospel is about personal **repentance and faith**. Saving faith is when we recognise our state, and are willing to turn from our sin and rebellion, and embrace Christ as Saviour, Lord and King. Romans 10:9, 13

How should we approach this presentation?

1. If someone does not believe that he or she is a sinner, do not bring the good news of grace. First appeal to the conscience, and allow the Law of God to convict. Do not try to soften the message or edit out what might be offensive.
2. Work according to the person's understanding, agreement and interest. Do not try to hurry people to a sinner's prayer. Prayer does not save a person. God's grace saves a person, and grace is received by faith. Faith is often expressed in prayer, but the individual experiences of conversion are different. For some, the sinner's prayer will express their genuine faith.
3. Love the person and show genuine compassion. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) - it is when you love people that you will not be ashamed to share the Gospel with them. Love is also patient and will keep on witnessing to the object of its love. Remember to pray:

- For boldness & utterance (Eph 6:19-20)
- For the Word to have free course (2 Thes 3:1-2)
- For open doors & divine appointments (Col 4:3-4)
- For conversions (Romans 10:1)

2) "Baptising" = Commitment through baptism and membership

Once someone has professed Christ, the next step is baptism and involvement in a local church. We have already dealt with the concepts of baptism and church membership in previous programmes. The important thing to realise is that a true disciple of Jesus Christ will be committed to Christ, and therefore to the visible Body of Christ, the local church. When people claim to have personally received Christ, but reject any corporate identification with Christ, it calls their profession of faith into question.

Can you imagine a new-born baby being left for a week or more to fend for itself? What will happen to him or her? Death will be the tragic result of such neglect, because at such an early age, humans cannot walk, crawl or even see very clearly. New-born Christians are not supposed to be left to fend for themselves. They are to be quickly brought into the 'nursery' of the local church, where they can be nourished, supported, and helped through the struggles of growth. If you evangelise someone, be prepared to go the distance with him or her - or to provide someone to do so.

3) "Teaching" = Coaching through systematic teaching and accountability

As a person commits to a local church, the third stage of disciple-making is mentoring them to learn, grow and serve, and eventually, disciple others.

What will this involve?

I. Intercession

Discipleship is like farming: you are responsible for cultivation, but not for the growth itself. You cannot make anyone grow spiritually. However, you can ask the One who can! Intercession for the Christians you disciple is vital if the Word of God is to effectually work in them.

Consider some of Paul's prayers for the spiritual growth of the people he loved:

Ephesians 1:17-19; Philippians 1:35; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:34; Colossians 1:9-11; Colossians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

II. Involvement

Discipleship is a form of parenting, and a form of friendship. It has the nurturing sacrifice of a mother (1 Thes 2:7-8). This speaks of a sacrificial involvement that does not balk at sacrificing for the good of the child. It has the encouraging direction of a father (1 Thes 2:11). This speaks of staying at your disciple's side, seeing him through ups and downs, with advice, warnings and comfort.

The analogy of a parent shows that God wants us to be involved with one another, being present for ups and downs, sacrificing our own comforts and time to see another Christian established.

Involvement does not mean we lose all our privacy. Nor does it mean that we become nosy and intrusive in the lives of those we disciple. It means that a real relationship of trust, respect and affection is growing that goes beyond a formal meeting once a week.

III. Example/ Imitation

The Lord did not preach from an ivory tower. What He taught His disciples He lived out in front of them. Jesus so prayed before His disciples that they eventually came to Him and said, 'Teach us to pray'. He modelled the life He was teaching them. Peter would later write that He was a lamb without blemish and without spot. They were with Him and they saw His sinless life. They, in turn, would seek to copy how He lived. They would seek to imitate Him. They had a pattern, they had a living demonstration of what the truth meant.

This is why God does not disciple us through books or tapes or CDs or DVDs of sermons alone. God discipled us through being in the presence of other believers who are living the truth. They flesh the truth out for us and we see it and understand it, and desire it, and seek to copy it. It is the example lived in front of your disciples that makes them want more truth, and want to implement it in their lives. This is why Paul could say seemingly radical things like:

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (1Co 11:1) When he hands the baton to Timothy, he tells him, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1Ti 4:12)

Likewise to Titus: "in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, (Titus 2:7).

It does not work in parenting, it does not work in pastoring and it does not work in mentoring to say, "Do as I say, not as I do." If you fail to practice the truth in front of the ones you teach, you effectively render what you have taught powerless and useless. They reason – if the truth isn't strong enough to change you – why should I be interested in it? Now do you have to be perfect to disciple another believer? No. But you do need to aim for consistency and you need to humbly confess your inconsistency to a young believer. God has stern warnings for those who cause young believers to stumble in their walk with God. Let us use discipleship as a further impetus for us to walk worthy of our calling.

IV. Instruction

Once the Lord had His disciples, He spent hours and hours teaching them. Only part of His ministry, that which the Spirit of God wanted in the Scripture, is recorded for us. But you can imagine how much Jesus taught His disciples. Even if you take the recorded words of Jesus, you have teaching on the Father, on Himself, on the Spirit, on heaven, on hell, on sin, on salvation, on holy living, on future events. He must have taught His disciples an enormous amount.

The discipler's role is to impart to the disciple the knowledge he/she needs to love and glorify God. As you know, the whole counsel of God is a huge amount of information. And the teacher must start with the basics, the priorities, and teach the fundamentals of the Christian life. As the person assimilates and understands and obeys, the teacher advances. The knowledge becomes more detailed, sometimes more complex, sometimes more difficult. The Lord knew that His disciples could not handle everything he had to tell them. Even after three years, the night before is crucifixion, he says,

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (John 16:12.

They weren't ready yet. But listen to the next verse:

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (John 16:13)

V. Apprenticing

Read Mark 6:7-13.

Our Lord did more than teach and model obedience. He gave His disciples opportunities to practice the truth under His supervision. He gave them opportunities to serve, from which He could guide them and teach them.

A discipler sees the whole process as an apprenticeship. Apprentices have to try their hands at various things. They have to be trained. And while they try on their own, the trainer is there to supervise, to correct, to further encourage.

As you train someone, you are initially training them in their walk with the Lord, to think biblically. Then you train them in various practices of the Christian life – Bible study, prayer, memorisation, church attendance. Then you train them to witness to others, to serve others, and eventually to teach others. But all along the way, with their cooperation, it is a process of setting goals, supervising, and guiding.

The more you train your disciple, the closer he or she will come to training someone else.

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2Ti 2:2)

A discipler should think in terms of head, heart and hands.

Head: What you want them to know – the knowledge.

Heart: What you want them to feel – the affections and values.

Hands: What you want them to do – the decisions and actions.

VI. Correction

There is a place for correction in the process of supervision as well. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Word is profitable for doctrine (God's standard), for reproof (showing the deviation from the

standard), for correction (showing how to return to the standard), for instruction in righteousness (showing how to maintain God's standards).

Several Scriptures show the need for, and the attitude in which correction ought to be administered:

Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. (Pro 27:56)

Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked. (Psa 141:5)

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal 6:1)

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (Jam 5:19-20).

2 Timothy 2:24-25 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

We need accountability. We need exam invigilators. We need speed cameras. We need external audits. We need performance reviews. We need managers and supervisors. Without these, our sinful natures will try to do as little as possible much of the time. So to mentor someone in walking with God, there has to be a sense of accountability. If there are no expectations on the person you are discipling, then don't expect much! It is when you expect them to put something into practice, knowing you will be asking if they did it, which encourages action. If, at any point in the discipleship process, the discipler feels that the disciple is not living up to the expectations being placed upon him or her by the Word of God, the discipleship process should be stopped, and the disciple encouraged to faithfulness. The goal is not simply to pass on knowledge, but to promote Christlikeness.

VII. Patient Encouragement

However: patience!!! Sanctification is a very slow process. Do not give up on your disciple because of repeated failures. You have had them yourself! Having someone to encourage you in your failure is what has made the difference in many a Christian's life. One of the most precious verses that describes the nature of our Lord is:

Matthew 12:20 "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax [smouldering wick] shall he not quench, till he send forth judgement unto victory.

The Lord is not a cruel god who snaps off a broken reed, and extinguishes a smouldering wick. If there is still life in it, He will help, strengthen, encourage. Again and again, we find Him encouraging His disciples. Think of Christ's gentle encouragements. He said to them, "Fear not – you are of more value than sparrows." "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "Let not your heart be troubled." He encouraged them with promises of His return, of the Comforter coming, of the future kingdom. The Lord knew the frailty of man. We take some steps forward, and we take steps back. We have really up days, and down days. We have days we are discouraged. There are days the person you are discipling will have great doubts, great anxieties.

A discipler is to inspire as well. You are to provide the strength from the Word which revives the spirit, gives extra strength for the journey. You bear some of their burdens and encourage them. Many of the "oneanother" commands are commands to inspire each other:

Consider one another to provoke to good works (Heb 10:24).
Encourage one another daily (Heb 3:13).
Comfort one another (1 Thes 4:18).
Edify one another (1 Thes 5:11).
Don't forsake assembling with one another (Heb 10:24).
Be hospitable toward each other (1 Pet 4:9)
Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; (Heb 12:12)

Your goal is to see your disciple succeed, not fail. So generous amounts of encouragement are needed. Also, consider what state the person you are discipling is in. Weakness is not the same as rebellion. Laziness is not the same as discouragement. Being overcome is not the same as refusing to obey (1 Thes 5:14, Gal 6:1)

VIII. Counselling

Part of the supervision and instruction will be counselling. On one level, all Christians are competent to admonish one another, and speak the Word to each other. When you know the Scriptural principles that pertain to the situation, you ought to make the person aware of those. On another level, certain problems in people's lives require pastoral counsel. When your disciple encounters a problem you are unsure of, you ought to refer him or her to one of the pastors. This also applies to problems where you might have an opinion, but know the problems are severe enough to require pastoral attention. Referral is important in these situations. Working together as a body means avoiding contradicting one another's counsel. A "multitude of counselors" does not mean people need to bounce around from one person to another, until they get the counsel they like. It means that on matters which the Word of God does not clearly specify a course of action, a variety of views is helpful. If you strongly disagree with the pastoral counsel given to someone, speak to the pastor in question before you contradict it with your disciple.

If we combine intercession, involvement, imitation of Christ, instruction, supervision, with generous amounts of encouragement, we can expect to see growth in the lives of those who are truly regenerated.

Several Scriptures record the joy in this process:

2 John 1:4

I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

3 John 1:3

For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

1 Thessalonians 2:19

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.