

## Dsc01 – Why Discipleship? – Matthew 28:18-20

*Pastor Dave Shepardson*

Since our very first service, we've always considered ourselves a *disciple-making church*. But have you ever heard that old saying, “If you give a man a fish – you feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish – you feed him for life.”?

Well, we have experienced the *downside* of that old saying (on and off) for seventeen years around here.

Maybe you've noticed, I *really like* to teach the Bible. Unfortunately, in my love for teaching the Bible, I have spent far too much time *giving* people fish and far too little time teaching people *how* to fish. But the Great Commission, which is our *marching orders* from our *Commander-in-Chief*, Jesus Christ, is not about me giving you fish each Sunday.

The Great Commission is about me teaching you *how* to fish so that you can fish for *yourself* and teach *others* how to fish.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, today is about your commissioning of your army. Your commissioning of “little Christs” and what we are called to do, what we are commissioned to do and what we are commanded to do. Lord, shake us. Shake off all of the cultural stuff that is attached to our idea of following you. And pierce us with your Great Commissioning of every believer. Lord, build this foundation, again, afresh and anew in our hearts, in our lives and in this church. We pray you would begin it now, anew. For your glory and in your name, Jesus, amen.*

Turn over to Matthew 28:18.

The Great Commission starts like this.

### **Matthew 28:18–19(A) (NLT)**

***18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.***

***19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations . . .***

**MAKE DISCIPLES** – this is the *single command*. It is an *imperative verb*. It means it is a command to action. And it is an imperative action verb to every single Believer – every single Christ-follower.

It is the single commanded subject in the Great Commission. Everything else in these verses *supports that single command*.

Again, Matthew 28:19.

**Matthew 28:19 (NLT)**

***19 Therefore, go (purposefully be going) and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.***

This word for “baptizing” (BAPTIZO in the Greek) means: *to immerse to bring on a permanent change*. So along with the physical act of baptism this means we are to *immerse* new disciples in *who* the Father, Son and Holy Spirit *are*.

Then the Commission ends in Matthew 28:20.

**Matthew 28:20(A) (NLT)**

***20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you . . .***

So, we are *commanded – commissioned – called – to purposefully be going and making disciples*. Immersing them in *who* the Father, Son and Holy Spirit *are* and teaching them to obey all the commands Jesus has given us.

And then comes (for me) the single greatest promise in the Bible *after* our salvation.

**Matthew 28:20(B) (NLT)**

***20 . . . And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

What an incredible *promise* to cement an incredible *commissioning of the Disciples*. Jesus says – **YOU - - You Go MAKE DISCIPLES AND I - - I will Always Be WITH YOU.**

I will be with you. The first greatest promise is salvation, by God’s grace and through our faith alone. Second greatest promise is **“I will be with you.”** Don’t you know that Jesus promised to be *with* you? Not to fix stuff, not to give you what you want, not to be your “I dream of Jeannie” – he promised to be there *with you*. To be in the fire with you, to be in the valley with you, to be on the mountaintop with you. That’s his promise.

Here’s the deal. We always *think* that is what we are doing. But there is a classic “rut” that churches in our culture almost always fall into and that is being consumed with *running the Church* and thinking we are *making disciples*. We start thinking if the *church is running* then we must be *doing okay*. But the Great Commission actually stands in direct opposition to “running the Church” mentality.

The command from Jesus *is singular* – go and *make disciples*.

And so, the question can NEVER be “*Is the church RUNNING?*” The question must ALWAYS be “*Are we making DISCIPLES?*” And I promise you “running the church” and “making disciples” are *not* one and the same.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (almost ten years ago) in this church, we made a radical announcement that we were “dismantling” all ministries except *Disciple-Making* and it was really just meant to be a radical way to get the church to *re-focus* on what Jesus actually commanded us to do – MAKE DISCIPLES.

It was supposed to be kind of like the story behind the song “Heart of Worship” where Matt Redmond’s church stripped away all instruments to get back to the heart of worship. But instead, our (slightly) radical re-focus on discipleship cost us pretty dearly.

We had one ministry leader smell blood in the water and he convinced a dozen or so key leaders and key servants to *leave the church* and just come to *his* house for Bible study. And most of them ended up in a season of meaningless wandering – which is almost always what happens when a leader is “captured” by the enemy and then used to divide the church. And so, by the time all the wrangling and opinions and self-interest was done, we had lost about twenty-five percent of the church.

Let me re-summarize that.

A radical commitment to *make disciples* instead of “playing church” cost us twenty-five percent of the people who were showing up on Sunday. Now, I’m not a “politically correct promotional expert” and we didn’t hire a Mega-Church PR team to help ensure acceptance by the people – but doesn’t it say something about our church culture that a radical commitment to making disciples would cause twenty-five percent of Church Attender’s to *stop* attending?

And you may say – well, how did it go *otherwise* (other than that twenty-five percent)? And I would say *incredible*. That commitment led us into some great years of real, actual spiritual growth and real-life transformation and some of you here today *grew tremendously* during that time.

And now, it’s time to do it again. It’s time to *revive, and refresh and remind us* of that *single commission* that we’ve been given by our *Commander-in-Chief*.

It’s time to *re-invest – refocus – and revive* our radical commitment to *making disciples* for *Jesus Christ*.

Amen?

So, the best place to start is by asking the question – *WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?*

Let me give you two definitions of a *disciple*.

**1) A *disciple* is a student who walks so closely with his master that he becomes like him in his thinking and behavior.**

That is what we've been commissioned to do to help someone else walk so closely with Jesus that they become "like Him" in their thinking and behavior.

And then – here is my favorite definition (*from Greg Ogden*)

**2) *Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us***

Please hear me – being a Christ-follower (a Disciple) *is a lifelong process of dying to self and allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us*

That is what being a Disciple MEANS!!

**#1) Walking so closely with Jesus that you become more and more like him**

**#2) And being in a lifelong process of dying to self and allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in you**

Alright, next we have to define – DISCIPLESHIP or *the process of discipling one another*.

Again, I'll use Greg Ogden's definition.

***Discipling* (or discipleship) *is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside each other in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another, in love, to grow toward maturity in Christ***

We just taught a two-part message called "**Holy Spirit Guide My Life**" (which you should really get) and when we got down to the *HOW* for both "being honest" and "being obedient" we said *this discipling relationship was THE HOW*.

We must be in – - ***an intentional relationship where we walk alongside each other - in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another, in love***

And we made it clear (in that two-part message) that *true discipling relationship* includes the *challenging* one another in love, part.

As Disciples we are called to be in and ever-increasing relationship with Jesus Christ that *actually transforms our lives*. As Disciples we are called to have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit *actually show in our lives*.

The question is: Are we (as a church) really helping you develop *that kind of life transforming relationship with Jesus Christ?*

That *has* to be *the question*.

Patrick Morley writes: *As a whole, the church is not making disciples . . . But that's not the real problem. The real problem is, we think we are.*

As a whole, the church in our culture has separated *salvation* and *discipleship*. In other words, *if you want to go to heaven, just repeat this prayer of faith and then you can decide later if you want be a Disciple or not.*

But the Bible makes no such distinction!!

Salvation *does occur* in an instant. It occurs the very moment you put your full and complete faith in Jesus Christ – *surrendering your life completely* to him. BUT, in the Bible, that moment of you putting your full and complete faith in Jesus Christ is *just the beginning* of an incredible journey of you being transformed by Jesus Christ until the moment you see him face-to-face.

Here's a statement that might shock you. Putting your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior is *not the end goal*. Getting your ticket to heaven punched by repeating a prayer is *not the end goal*. Putting your faith in Jesus Christ is *just the beginning* of a life-long, transforming relationship, with him.

A life-long, transforming relationship... where you commit day-by-day

**1) *To walk so closely with Jesus, that you become more and more like him in your thinking and behavior***

**2) (And you commit to) *a lifelong process of dying to self and allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in you***

I know our culture has *not made it clear* but that is actually the path to *living the abundant life in Christ*.

John Wesley realized this was a problem way back in the late 1700's and after this realization Wesley wrote: ***That he would not strike one evangelistic stroke where he***

*could not follow that blow with small group encouragement, accountability, and training.*

Of one place in England where Wesley had preached with what *seemed like great success* he later wrote, “*nine in ten (90%) of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever.*”

And guys, the evangelistic crusade ministries in our country acknowledge that ninety percent of the people who respond at their crusades never actually enter a *transforming relationship* with Jesus.

And entering a *genuine transforming relationship* with Jesus *is becoming a disciple!* Following Jesus close enough and long enough that your life is actually transformed by the power of his life in you.

In 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 Paul is saying that *unbelief* is like having a veil between you and God. And 2 Corinthians 3:16 says,

**2 Corinthians 3:16 (NLT)**

*16 But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

And then 2 Corinthians 3:18 says,

**2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)**

*18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*

*To be transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit that is the true abundant life and that is what God calls every Believer to.*

Look what Paul says in Colossians 1:28-29.

**Colossians 1:28–29 (ESV)**

*28 Him (Christ) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*

Notice Paul *does not* say *I toil and struggle to get everyone to heaven* but instead to present everyone *mature in Christ*.

If you have truly put your faith in Jesus Christ today, heaven is your guaranteed destination.

But **God's CALLING** - for **Christ-Followers** is  
to have Christ **Fully Formed** in us - **Galatians 4:19**  
to be **Conformed** to His **Image** - **Romans 8:29**  
to be **Transformed** by the **Renewing of our Mind** - **Romans 12:2**  
to **Live** as His **Workmanship** (Poem) - **Ephesians 2:10**  
to **Put Off** the **Old Man**, and **Put On** the **New Man** - **Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3**

This is the end goal. This is what we are called to. And this is what the Great Commission is about.

As Christ followers we are called to become more and more like Jesus and as we do we live more and more of the abundant life he promises.

And what we see so clearly in scripture is becoming a disciple is always done in community.

### **We are called to Edify One Another**

To **Equip** *one another*  
To **Bear** *one another's* burdens  
To **Fellowship** with *one another*  
To **Serve** *one another*  
To **Confess** our sins to *one another*  
To **Pray** for *one another*  
To **Encourage**, **Exhort**, and **Admonish** *one another*

And most importantly to *love one another*. Following Jesus is always *done in community with one another*.

But not just (simply) “along-side one another” like we’re sitting in Church together today. Discipleship is much more “intentional” than that. We see these incredible, intentional, discipling relationships throughout the Bible:

Moses and Joshua

Elijah and Elisha

Eli and Samuel

David and Jonathon

Jesus and ALL his disciples

Paul and Timothy and Titus

And Aquilla and Priscilla

and a dozen more. All these men and women learned to follow Jesus *with one another*.

God has chosen to *work through relationships* both vertical and horizontal so it shouldn't surprise us that his method of transforming a Christ follower is based on a *vertical relationship* with God and on *horizontal relationships* with other Christians. But not casual, surface-level only relationships, but real, intentional, honest, transparent relationships *both* with God (vertically) and with other Disciples (horizontally).

And through that *transforming* vertical relationship with God, and through those *transforming* horizontal relationships with others, you become a *transformed Christian* and *THAT* is the goal of following Jesus Christ.

The true power of *salvation* in Jesus Christ is shown in the *actual transformation* of our lives.

**Oswald Chambers says; *One life wholly devoted to God is of more value to God than one hundred lives simply awakened by His Spirit.***

**John Wesley wrote; *"I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again."***

The true *power of salvation* in Jesus Christ is shown in the *actual transformation* of our lives. And the *method* God has clearly laid out for our lives to *actually BE transformed* is *becoming a disciple*.

***Learning to walk so closely with Jesus that you become more and more like him in your thinking and behavior***

***And committing to a life long process of dying to self and allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in you.***

Let me speak practically as we close. We believe *intentional, transformational discipleship* is best accomplished in groups of three or four. We've seen it done (and we've done it) in groups of two to ten. But if the Holy Spirit is inspiring you right now to become an *intentional Christ follower* (a disciple).

Think of three.

As we continue, I'll talk more about why three may be the best number for an *intentional discipleship group*. But right now, you can begin *thinking and praying* of joining a discipleship group of three.



And guys, we have got discipleship material coming out of our ears. But all that discipleship material, whether on our shelf or on your shelf at home doesn't (by itself) make one disciple.

But I promise you, if you will pray for two other people to form an intentional discipleship group with, we will give you all the tools, all the training, and all the encouragement you need to *become disciples* and learn to *make disciples*.

You can commit to become a disciple (a true Christ follower) today, *right now* and then you can commit to join others in the *transformation journey* that Jesus Christ offers you. And if you will keep your commitment, you will *become a disciple* who is *making disciples* and then (and only then) will you take your place in the Great Commission given to us by our Eternal Commander-in-Chief.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, we want really serve you Lord. We want our lives to be radically transformed by you. We want to be different next year than we are today. We want to have less of self, and more of you, Jesus, just flowing as John said in Chapter 7, gushing out from in us, a river of Living Water. Lord we want to be used by you. We want to be witnesses for you with a transformed life and an evidence of your Holy Spirit and we want to join others in following you being a disciple and making disciples.*

Would you put yourself somewhere on that spectrum? If you've never committed your life to Jesus Christ, yes, acknowledge to him that you're a sinner and that you believe he died for your sins and then, say, "*Jesus, today I make you my Lord. You are my Commander. You are my life. I commit this day to follow you all of my days, to be transformed by you, to become more like you, to have less of my life in me and more of your life.*" You may not understand what all that means, but Jesus does. Would you start there?

And maybe you've prayed the prayer of faith before. Would you finish it please, by committing to become a genuine, sold-out Christ follower every day? And then would you commit to not only being a disciple, but making a disciple? To joining someone else that God has put in your path in an intentional, purposeful relationship to grow closer to Jesus and become more like him?

*Lord, that's our desire. That's our desire, Lord. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit. Capture us Lord and use us for your glory. May our lives exalt you, Lord. May we lift you up, may we point others to you and may you be seen through our transformed lives. We surrender it all to you, in your name, Jesus, amen.*