

# How Jesus Made Disciples

John 6:1-15

The last command the resurrected Lord Jesus gave to His disciples before He ascended back into heaven, is called the Great Commission. This command makes up **one of the three core values** that every Christian and every church must embrace in order to be true to Christ. These three core values are: to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength; to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; and to make disciples for Christ. It is a pretty tough sale for Christians to say that we love God and our neighbor if we are not in some way involved in making disciples for Christ.

It was very helpful for me to understand that when Jesus commanded His disciples **to make disciples**, they knew exactly what He meant and how to go about it. Why? Because Jesus had just spend three years making them into disciples. What is shocking is that most of us have never been discipled in a way similar to how Jesus made disciples. And so this morning we are going to look at the disciple making process given to us in the Bible.

The starting point is always regeneration. We must experience a transformation that takes us from being spiritually dead and separated from God – to being made spiritually alive and in union with Christ. A true disciple must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has the authority to forgive sin and grant eternal life. Jesus does this for all who repent and trust in the sufficiency of His sacrifice for our sins.

If people are trying to earn eternal life, they are doomed. After all, what can we do in a 70 or even a 100 year life-span that causes us to merit or deserve life forever and ever? Eternal life is a gift only God can give. And by the way, unbelievers could not enjoy heaven because they spent their whole lives avoiding the true and living God and ignoring what He says. Why would they want to be stuck with Him for an eternity?

When we do become followers of Christ, we all start out as baby Christians, who are ignorant of God and ignorant of God's ways – and sometimes even rebellious toward God. And so Jesus used a model, a method we can follow, to help spiritual infants grow into spiritual adults. Our real life discipleship manual likens Jesus' method to that of taking a successful road trip from one state to another. In order for that to happen: (1) There must be a driver, (2) we must have a vehicle and (3) we need a map that tells us how to get to our destination. In John 6, Jesus was the driver, the intentional leader. The vehicle Jesus used to get His disciples to where they needed to be, was the small group He formed them into. And the map that Jesus followed to get His disciples from infants to adults was the Word of God, which gives us truth, and helps us live in reality. Let's look again at John 6:5-6,

*“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’<sup>6</sup> He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do” [Jesus was intentional in helping His disciples to grow].*

One of the greatest needs for every new believer is to grow in our understanding of who Jesus is. The better we get to know Jesus, the bigger He becomes. The disciples were still weak in this area. They believed Jesus was the Son of God, but exactly what that meant was still very fuzzy. Jesus was about to help them gain some clarity in this area. But first Jesus had to put up with a little sass and backtalk from Philip, who believed it was a totally dumb idea for their small group to try and feed this tidal wave of people coming at them. And so Philip informed the Son of God

that eight months' wages would not be enough money to buy the amount of bread necessary for each person to have even one bite. And Philip had an iron-clad case if Jesus wasn't in the equation.

I don't know about you, but I have absolutely no idea why Andrew even mentioned that a boy was willing to donate his lunch of 5 biscuits and 2 small fish. How was that pathetically small amount of food going to solve the problem of feeding such a great multitude? The other disciples were probably making the crazy sign and pointing at Andrew. But here is the encouraging truth we can learn from this passage: Our pathetically small abilities, placed into the hands of Jesus, is more than enough to accomplish any task God gives us. Listen to **Matthew's account** of what happened next. It is recorded in **Matthew 14:15-21**,

*"As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said . . . 'Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'<sup>16</sup> Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat' [they probably didn't do the crazy sign, but they were undoubtedly thinking it].<sup>17</sup> 'We have here only five [biscuit sized] loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered.<sup>18</sup> 'Bring them here to me,' Jesus said.<sup>19</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then Jesus gave the broken pieces to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.<sup>20</sup> They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.<sup>21</sup> The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children."*

This miracle is recorded in all four Gospels and I believe it is emphasized because it is the first miracle Jesus performed **working through His disciples**. And how does Jesus work today? Through His disciples.

Years ago, when I first read the Great Commission, I was shocked when Jesus commanded His small group of followers to make disciples of **all the nations**. I thought that was a totally unreasonable expectation. Didn't Jesus realize how many people are out there? I was just like Philip. But now I understand that Jesus also gave those men the means and the process for accomplishing that great task. The means for success was for them to put their meager abilities into Christ's hands – which they could do because Jesus promised to be with them always. The process of achieving the Great Commission was to let Jesus work through them as they poured their lives into people – in a face to face to way – in order to help the lost come to know Christ and then grow in Christ.

Let me illustrate the growth dynamic of disciples making disciples who make disciples. Let's say that two people get together and grow in Christ, and then each person goes and gets another person to help grow in Christ. And so the two become four and then the four become eight and so on. A few weeks ago I met with a young man and asked him this question, "If you went to work for a company and the boss told you to choose between two possible salaries packages. You could either receive \$10,000 a month or the boss would start you out by paying you a penny for your first day, then two pennies the next day and would continue to double the pennies every day for 30 days. At the end of the month, you would get all the pennies. What salary option would you take? The young man laughed and said he would take the \$10,000 a month. I then told him that if he took the penny doubled every day for 30 days he would receive \$5,368,709.12. The young man really didn't believe that sum of money was possible – but he was polite and smiled at me.

Let's say that one disciple for Christ, makes three more disciples over a five year period. And then the four of them each do the same during the next five years. If you are like me, you are

thinking that will take forever to make disciples of the nations. The fact is in 85 years that process would result in over 17 billion disciples, who have been trained to make disciples.

Of course none of us can make even one person into a disciple – if Christ does not work through us. But the clear fact is **Christ wants us to make disciples** and is **eager to work through us**. We have hundreds of millions of Christians in the world today. It should be more. But what if each of us started doing what Jesus commanded us to do, and promised to be with us while we do it.

And so we really do need intentional leaders committed to helping people grow. And the vehicle which most helps people to grow is small groups. And of course, we need people who are willing to commit themselves to being in small groups. Why are small groups the vehicle in which disciples are made? Jesus helps to explain why in Matthew 13. Let's listen in as the disciples asked Jesus a question, which is recorded in **Matthew 13:10-18**,

*“The disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’ [parables are common, everyday occurrences, which illustrate spiritual truths. But the crowds could not understand the spiritual truths contained in the parables without an explanation].<sup>11</sup> Jesus replied, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them . . .<sup>15</sup> For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ [that generation of Jews was going to be horribly judged. The more truth they rejected, the greater their judgment would be. And so Jesus hid truth from people who did not want truth – so their judgment would not be even greater].<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.<sup>17</sup> For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. Listen then to what the parable of the sower means...”*

Jesus then explained to His small group, who wanted to know truth, what the parable meant. At some point down the road, people who were not interested in truth at the time Jesus was speaking, did become interested. And the best way for those people to learn truth was in a small group setting where they could ask questions – face to face with another person – who gave them face to face answers. The disciples of Jesus learned this dynamic, which is why we read what we do in **Acts 2:42**,

*“They [3,000 new believers in Christ] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [this initially took place in the temple courts where the Apostles could teach large groups of people] and [they were devoted] to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

The fellowship and the breaking of bread occurred in the homes of believers who lived in Jerusalem or nearby. It was in these small groups that people could ask their questions concerning the apostles’ teachings. The verse goes on to say that it was also in the small groups where they learned to pray for each other, which got their minds off themselves and on to others. A huge part of the Christian life is getting our focus off ourselves and on to others.

Jesus limited the number of men He discipled to 12. He lived with them, ate with them, and looked for teachable moments to illustrate spiritual truths. Listen to this example from **Matthew 6:28-30**,

*“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow [Jesus was probably pointing to a field with lilies]. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”*

It is also in small group settings where a person’s spiritual growth can be more accurately observed. Remember, the goal and destination of discipleship is to help believers move from infancy to maturity in Christ. It is easy to know in a physical way if a person is a baby, or a child,

or an adult [although some 30 year olds are self-centered babies trapped in an adult body]. It is usually harder to know what level a person is at spiritually. After all, there can be brilliant people with Ph. Ds that are baby Christians – spiritually ignorant and self-centered.

Everyone is supposed to grow up and mature. Even the Lord Jesus, in His humanity had to experience the growth process. Listen to **Luke 2:52**, “*And Jesus grew in wisdom [mentally] and stature [physically], and in favor with God [spiritually] and men*” [socially]. Every Christian should desire to be as strong as we can be in all four of those areas. And we are at our best for Christ when we want to be grown up Christians who have a strong desire to help others know Christ and grow in Christ. That is the destination Jesus wants all of us arrive at.

This past week I went to the Batavia Library and could not find a parking spot anywhere on the premises. I had to park on the street a few blocks away. When I got inside the library I asked what was going on? The librarian explained that they had a special workshop about lifelong learning. All Christian should be lifelong learners and have a lifelong desire to help others know Christ and grow in Christ. Jesus used small groups as the vehicle to move people from infancy to adulthood. It is a model we should use here at Living Hope Church. We hope you will all be involved with us in our journey of growing in Christ. Let’s pray.