



The Essentials of Disciple-Making

Session One: A Vision for Discipleship

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

What are the essentials of disciple-making? Is going to church, reading your Bible, and praying enough for you to grow? What about people that you bring to faith? If they start attending church and join a small group, will they grow into all that God wants them to be?

Discipleship is more than just logging hours in a seat in church. It's more than just reading one's Bible. As we begin this series, we will examine what it means to have a vision for discipleship.

In Matthew 9, we see that Christ met people where they were, healed their broken parts of body and spirit, and invited them into the kingdom. Not only did He see individuals, but He also had a vision and compassion for the crowds of people who needed God.

When we join Christ in His mission to reach individuals and whole communities, our faith grows, and the church increases its ministry and mission locally and globally.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 9

THE MAIN IDEA

In Matthew chapter 9, we see a single day in the life of Jesus and the disciples. In it, Christ met a wide range of people with various needs. He could have, in one breath, healed them all. Instead, he touched each individual with His love and attention. Not long after this, He commissioned His disciples to go out and serve in His name.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How am I called to be a disciple-maker in my life today?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Matthew 9:1-13 Having a vision for discipleship begins with seeing people the way Jesus does. Jesus met people where they were and pointed them toward God. When we see people as Jesus does—dearly loved and invited—we will also love and serve them in His name.

Matthew 9:18-34 We constantly manage the tension between the important and the urgent. Jesus modeled this perfectly in today's text. He did the important work of ministry while tending to the urgent need for people to have a relationship with God. He calls us to do the same as we align our priorities with Christ's heart for the world.

Matthew 9:35-38 After a long day of ministry, Jesus looked out over the crowds and had compassion for them. From His compassion, He commissioned the church to carry out His mission, saying, "It is better for you if I go away" (John 16:7). Now, the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, empowering the mission of Christ to be multiplied as His people join Him in ministry and service.



START HERE

We can all think of an impossibly busy day—the kind where you oversleep, someone spills a bowl of cereal, the dog gets out of the back yard, and the car has a dead battery. When we are ruled by the “tyranny of the urgent,” it can be difficult to keep an eternal perspective, let alone be about the important work of making disciples. In today’s text, we will see how Jesus met the demands of the day by meeting people where they were, seeing them as individuals loved by God and born with a purpose, and commissioning others to multiply the work. As we serve Christ by reaching and teaching others, faith collectively grows.

DISCUSS

Can you think of a recent “impossibly busy” day? How do you make time for things that matter when the demands of the day seem never-ending?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. A vision for discipleship means seeing people the way Jesus sees them.

Matthew 9:1-13: *So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town. Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.” At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, “He’s blaspheming!” Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts? For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then he told the paralytic, “Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.” So he got up and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men. As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, “Follow me,” and he got up and followed him. While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Now when he heard this, he said, “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

Unpacking Matthew 9:1-13

Imagine starting a new job at a large corporation. You show up for your first day, receive your badge, fill out your paperwork, and get a key to your office. Next, they load your arms full of company swag—coffee cups with the company logo, embroidered polos, and even a snow globe with a picture of the office building to put on your desk. Then, they take you to your office and walk away—no training manual, orientation, or job description. Instead, they leave you to figure things out on your own. This wouldn’t be a great first impression. You might become



frustrated trying to figure out exactly what you're supposed to do. You might even decide to walk out the front door, take your snow globe with you, and never come back.

When Jesus called the disciples, He gave them clear direction. In Matthew, we see Jesus's mission on earth: "Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Jesus made it clear through His words and actions that His mission was to teach, preach, and heal. In Matthew 4, after His baptism and desert temptation, Jesus went into Galilee, and "from then on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 4:17). In chapters 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount contains the largest block of Jesus's teaching ministry. In chapter 9, Matthew provides a rapid-fire list of Jesus' healing ministry. These chapters close with a statement on Jesus's mission: "Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness" (Matthew 9:35).

The church receives its mission statement in the Great Commission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20a). Further, we receive direction from the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

As chapter 9 opens, we see Jesus's healing ministry begin as He heals a paralytic man. In verse 2, the text states that Jesus saw the faith of the men who carried the paralytic to Him and responded by healing the man. We aren't told whether the man asked his friends for help getting to Jesus or if they came up with the idea themselves. Either way, these verses demonstrate an important principle in developing a vision for discipleship: Not everyone who needs Jesus has the physical, emotional, or spiritual means to get there on their own. We serve God and others when we step into people's lives and lovingly point them to Jesus. On our own, we are insufficient to bring about healing for anyone. What we can do, however, is take them to the One who knows and can meet their deepest needs.

We also see that Jesus highlighted the man's spiritual condition over his physical. In verse 2, Jesus said, "Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus knew regeneration of the man's spirit superseded the rehabilitation of his legs. Then, as an act of grace, He also healed the man physically.

When we partner with Christ to bring people into His presence—regardless of their physical, mental, or spiritual condition—we make a way for His healing power to work in their lives and in His church. Our job is not to bring out healing; our job is to carry people to Jesus, the first and most crucial step in discipleship.

Immediately after this scene, Matthew inserted an autobiographical scene. "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow



me,' and he got up and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). At first glance, this might seem like an abrupt departure in the text. If Matthew used this part of the text to describe Jesus's healing ministry, why would he include his own calling to become a disciple? Continuing in the text, we receive a clue. Matthew's work as a tax collector put him on the outside of the Jewish community, which viewed his association with the Roman government as an affront to his people. However, where Matthew did have community was with others like him, who, through choice or circumstance, found themselves outside of the religious norm. When Matthew threw a dinner for Jesus and invited his friends, the Pharisees accused Him of eating "with tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 9:11).

In the next verse, we not only understand Matthew's motive in writing about himself in this order, but we also see a more holistic view of the healing ministry of Jesus. "Now when he heard this, he said, 'It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Matthew 9:12-13). The ultimate healing that every person on earth needs is the healing of spiritual sickness caused by sin. No physical healing, though wonderful, comes even close to having an eternal impact.

Reflecting on the calling of Matthew, Tim Keller notes, "A real Christian is someone who has been called. A real Christian is someone who has had an experience like Matthew. The calling of Matthew shows us that to be called means (1) you sense a power coming in from outside taking charge, (2) you are confronted with a person, not a lot of intellectual ideas, and (3) you rise and follow him."¹ Matthew's conversion is evidence of the impact Christ has on all who follow Him. As we see people the way Jesus does, we will never run out of individuals with whom to share the gospel. No one is too far gone for His saving grace.

A clear vision for discipleship begins with seeing people the way Jesus does. Whether a paralyzed man without much to his name other than faithful friends or a tax collector with everything money can buy, the need is the same. Because of sin, we all need spiritual healing that trumps every other need. When the church brings people to Jesus, we allow them to meet the One who can meet all their needs. Bringing people to Jesus is the beginning of the spiritual journey, not the end. He continues to take our weaknesses and carry our needs as we walk with Him through life and into eternity.

DISCUSS

- *Can you think of a time when you felt unclear about the direction of a task you were given? How does a lack of clarity make it difficult to reach an intended goal?*
- *How do these two short narratives help you have a better understanding of the healing we all need?*
- *Why is pointing someone to Jesus the first step in discipleship? What does that look like practically?*



2. A vision for discipleship means seeing individuals who need Jesus.

Matthew 9:18-34: *As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him. Just then, a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years approached from behind and touched the end of his robe, for she said to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I’ll be made well.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Have courage, daughter,” he said. “Your faith has saved you.” And the woman was made well from that moment. When Jesus came to the leader’s house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. “Leave,” he said, “because the girl is not dead but asleep.” And they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. Then news of this spread throughout that whole area. As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” When he entered the house, the blind men approached him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” Then he touched their eyes, saying, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus warned them sternly, “Be sure that no one finds out.” But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area. Just as they were going out, a demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to him. When the demon had been driven out, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed, saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!” But the Pharisees said, “He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons.”*

Unpacking Matthew 9:18-34

Ask anyone who has run a successful small business, and they will likely tell you that they can barely keep their heads above water some days. Whether it’s answering phones, filling orders, managing social media, or keeping up with the books, running a company can be a more than a full-time job. In that environment, it can be challenging to distinguish what is urgent from what is important.

In this extended scene from Matthew 9, we encounter a day when Jesus had an impossibly long list of priorities. Before we examine verses 18-34 in detail, look back at verses 14-17. John’s disciples questioned why Jesus’s disciples were not fasting regularly. In their eyes, fasting was urgent, and following tradition was important. However, Jesus used their questions as an opportunity to distinguish the changing priorities in the coming kingdom. People are important, and the message of salvation is urgent. Jesus said, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (vv. 15-17). Jesus’s primary business was teaching, preaching, and healing, all in the urgent work of reconciling people to God. It was a new day suited for an expanding kingdom that would include people from every tribe, nation, and tongue.



In verses 18-34, we get one continuous storyline. Jesus and the disciples, now including Matthew, traveled throughout His hometown, preaching, teaching, and healing. A synagogue ruler, whom we know from Mark's account to be a man named Jarius (Mark 5:22-43), knelt at Jesus's feet. "My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live" (v. 18). Jesus responded to the man's urgent request and his faith, and immediately went with him.

No sooner were they on the way than a woman, plagued for twelve years by bleeding illness, pressed into Jesus among the crowd, believing, "If I can just touch his robe, I'll be made well" (v. 21). While her illness made her ceremonially unclean, Jesus chose the urgency of her need over the technicality of the law. And the woman was made well from that moment (v. 22). She received both physical and spiritual healing, and experienced a cleansing that exceeded her hopes.

Immediately and urgently, the scene changed again. Jesus arrived at Jarius's home to a crowd of mourners. It appeared He was too late (vv. 23-24). However, Jesus dismissed the people, took the girl by the hand, and raised her back to life. The news of what He had done spread, and the crowds continued to grow (vv. 25-26).

Matthew vividly continued the relentless frenzy of the day. No sooner had Jesus performed His second miracle than two blind men called out to Him: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (v. 27). Jesus healed the men, according to their faith, and warned them to tell no one. But such good news could not be kept secret for long: "They went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area" (v. 31).

Matthew impressed the urgency and importance of the day with one more vignette: "Just as they were going out, a demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to him" (v. 32). This man had an urgent spiritual need and lacked even the ability to advocate for his healing. The text does not suggest anyone else advocated for him either. Perhaps the crowd remained figuratively blind and deaf to the hurt of a real person standing right in front of them. Self-importance, coupled with a desire to belong to the in-crowd, can keep us from seeing the individual people that God puts right in our paths. As we read, Jesus drove out the demon, and the man spoke. The crowds spoke too: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" (v. 33).

In 1967, Charles E. Hummel published an essay titled "The Tyranny of the Urgent." In it, he aimed to help people distinguish between what is important and what is urgent in their work. He said, "Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important."² In business, as in life and ministry, we sometimes must manage the tension between the urgent and the important. Some tasks, like getting an annual checkup at the dentist, might not feel important until they become urgent. That middle-of-the-night toothache (always on a weekend, no less) will make you prioritize calling the dentist's office first thing Monday morning.

As we consider this text, it's essential to note that much of ministry cannot be so clearly divided between urgent and important matters. Serving in the nursery is important. Rebooting a projector that goes dark during the service is urgent. Both are necessary for the church to



accomplish its mission. So, how do we differentiate? How do we choose what needs to be done? If we look to Jesus, we see He prioritized people over projects. In a scene filled with chaos, He took notice of individuals who were hurting and met them at the point of their need. For some of us, that means serving the congregation's smallest members. For others, it means serving the whole congregation by ministering through tech arts, hospitality, or greeting. As each person does their part, needs are met, individuals are pointed to Jesus, and discipleship happens.

A clear vision of discipleship means seeing individual people as loved by God and important to Him. It also means taking personal responsibility for the urgent task of seeing the good news of Jesus spread throughout the world. When we respond to the important needs of others, physically, mentally, relationally, or spiritually, our faith grows, and in turn, we also grow as disciples.

Not only that, but we also invite others to do life together with Jesus. Healed and helped people want to join the healing and helping work of Christ. As Christ gives us vision to see people the way He sees them, our hearts will be stirred to action, and others will also catch the vision for participating with Christ in His mission for the world and His church.

DISCUSS

- *How do you differentiate between the important and the urgent in your life? What about the relentless frenzy of life makes it hard to choose?*
- *How would you describe Jesus's healing ministry?*
- *Why is seeing and serving individuals, and not just the crowd, both the important and urgent work of the church?*

3. A vision for discipleship means participating in Christ's compassion for the masses by living on mission for Him.

Matthew 9:35-38: Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

Unpacking Matthew 9:35-38

Smart business owners are constantly on the lookout for trends in their particular market. As much as they want their companies to meet the needs of individual consumers, it is also vital that they have a view of the business horizon: the cultural, economic, and social trends that dictate how people shop and what they buy. Throughout chapter 9, we see Jesus's intentional



perspective on the individual needs of people. In the close of the chapter, however, we see Jesus's heart for all people, everywhere, to experience life and healing in Him. We also see a glimpse of how God will fulfill that mission through the church—the body of believers carrying the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Matthew 9:35 recaps Jesus's mission statement during his earthly ministry—preaching, teaching, and healing. Verse 36 gives us a glimpse into how Jesus saw the crowds, and how He sees us: “When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.” This word “compassion,” *splagchnizomai* in Greek, means to be “moved as to one's bowels.”³ While we wouldn't describe our bowels as the part of our body where we feel sympathy or compassion today, we can all probably relate to seeing someone in a situation so challenging and difficult that it makes us feel sick inside. Rather than a passing feeling, Jesus's compassion stirred Him to action. Throughout the Gospels, when this word is used, Jesus follows it up with action—feeding the five thousand, healing the sick, and releasing a demon-possessed person from bondage.

It is interesting to note the action Jesus took in verses 37-38. Seeing the crowd and the depth of their spiritual poverty: “[Jesus] said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.’” Jesus empowered the disciples to carry out His ministry and mission. In fact, the first verse in chapter 10 tells us that Jesus then commissioned the disciples and sent them out on their first missionary journey. The multiplication of ministry through believers in the local church is one way Jesus shows compassion to people who need to hear the good news.

Discipleship begins with telling others about Jesus, but it doesn't end there. As individuals come to believe in Jesus, they are then brought into the family of God to continue growing in Christlikeness within the context of the church community. We all have a role to play in this. We are called to be disciples but also to help disciple others. Discipleship is an ongoing process that requires us to be involved in one another's daily lives as we collectively seek to follow Jesus more closely at every point. As we do, we will continue to share the good news of Jesus with others and invite even more people into a life of discipleship under Jesus.

A vision for discipleship means seeing the individuals around us and bringing them to Jesus. It also means seeing the crowds of people, in our community and around the world, who need Christ and being moved with compassion to serve them. As we pray for, reach, and disciple people, they encounter Jesus, and we collectively grow in faith. As we continue to explore the essentials of discipleship over the next seven weeks, be on the lookout for ways that God calls us to see people as Jesus sees them, to see individuals as loved by God and invited into the kingdom, and to see the crowds around us with compassion and a sincere desire to reach them for Christ.

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus view the crowds of people He encountered?*



- *Jesus's vision for reaching the world is to stir His people toward ministry in action. What does this teach you about the church being "the plan" for discipleship?*
- *What stirs you toward compassion? How might you serve, give, or pray differently with the perspective that Jesus tasked us with reaching and discipling the world?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

Jesus's public ministry fulfilled His earthly mission—preaching, teaching, and healing. His preaching proclaimed the kingdom of heaven. His teaching pointed people to the Father, and He healed hearts and bodies as a beacon pointing toward the ultimate healing that would take place following His finished work on the cross. When we participate in loving and serving others, we proclaim Christ's death until He returns. We also grow as disciples as we invite others into a life-changing (discipleship) relationship with Him.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- Can you think of a time when serving others impacted your personal discipleship?
- How does Jesus's ministry to preach, reach, and heal inform the church's mission today? How might we gain a greater perspective on healing than just physical?
- When should new followers of Jesus begin serving others? (See Matthew 10:1-5 for a clue.) How might a new Christian (or a maturing one) have deficiencies in their discipleship process if they learn but never serve?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

The church is God's "Plan A" to reach the world for Christ. There is no "Plan B." We join Jesus in reaching and discipling people when we love them the way Jesus loves them, see them as individuals who need ministry and discipleship, and connect with the crowds locally and around the world who need to experience His love.

APPLY

How does ministering to others contribute to your discipleship process? To theirs? What would need to shift in your priorities to create margin to see and serve others like Jesus did?

REFERENCES

¹ Tim Keller, host, *Timothy Keller Sermons Podcast*, podcast, "Christ Calls Us to Himself," Gospel in Life, December 8, 2023, <https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/e/christ-calls-us-to-himself-1701967103>.



² Charles Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 5.

³ *Blue Letter Bible*, “Strong's G4697 – splagchnizomai,” accessed May 8, 2025,
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4697/csb/mgnt/0-1/>.