



The Essentials of Disciple-Making

Session Six: Ten Qualifications of a Disciple-Maker

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week we will examine the qualifications of a disciple maker. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is a command for all believers to make disciples as they go throughout the world. We can be disciple makers in our homes, schools, and churches, as we grow in our relationship with Christ and encourage others to grow in Him also.

While the list from today's lesson is certainly not an exhaustive one, we will look at ten qualities that define a disciple maker.

Let today's lesson be an encouragement to continue to grow in your walk with Christ and in service of others.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Mark 1:35; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:8

THE MAIN IDEA

Believers are all called to be disciple makers in our homes, workplaces, and churches. As we grow in our walk with God and our relationships with others, we gain opportunities to encourage and support others in their relationship with Christ also.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What qualities of a disciple maker are present in my life today, and what is lacking? How can I ask God to help me grow in those ways?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 The first step in becoming a disciple maker, after becoming a follower of Jesus, is to determine our "why." Why do we want people to come to know Jesus? Scripture says it is the love of Christ that compels us to make Him known. When we have experienced God's love and forgiveness, we want to share it with others.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 Some people think leaders should be stoic and distant. Perhaps you have had a boss, teacher, or parent who led this way. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, however, he told them how pleased he was to share his very life with them. Authentic disciple making happens when leaders can share their struggles and look to the community of faith for encouragement and support.

Mark 1:35 Disciple leaders cannot change the world on willpower alone. Even Jesus, after a long day of ministry, reconnected with the Father by drawing away to pray. Our personal devotional life with Christ fuels our ministry today and gives us endurance for the future.



START HERE

What does a maturing Christian look like? How do we measure if we are growing in our faith or not? Today, we will examine ten qualifications for a disciple-making Christian and take time to reflect on areas in our lives where we can grow in knowledge of God and His Word, our relationship with others, or in our devotional life and endurance. While none of us ever fully arrive, we can each look to Jesus to help us grow in ways that honor Him.

DISCUSS

Which is harder for you—growing in the depth of your walk with Christ, or growing in the authenticity and vulnerability of your relationship with others? What would growth in one or both of those areas look like for you?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. The starting point of disciple making is our relationship with God and His Word.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15: *For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.*

Unpacking 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Imagine you wanted to climb Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world, standing at 29,029 feet. This is an extraordinary task that few people attempt, and even fewer accomplish. Before you begin the arduous training, you need to identify your “why.” Everest poses numerous challenges and threats. It is below freezing year-round. Even in its warmest month, July, temperatures average -2 degrees Fahrenheit.¹ It’s also an expensive climb. In 2024, the cost to make the summit with a guide ranges from \$45,000 to \$160,000.² And maybe most obviously, it’s a dangerous climb. More than 300 climbers have died in the attempt, and seventeen climbers died in 2023 alone.³ To find the motivation to climb Mt. Everest and overcome the numerous obstacles, you’d need motivation greater than bragging rights at the office or a cool picture for your Instagram page. You would need a sense of purpose, challenge, and commitment to see the journey through.

Similarly, if we want to become disciple-making believers, we need to identify our “why.” Reaching others for Jesus and discipling others is an extraordinary task that many are reluctant to step into. Being a disciple maker takes time, energy, and commitment. More than that, it takes a sense of purpose and an ability to find motivation greater than approval in the church, being seen as a leader, or impressing others with knowledge. Disciple makers are first and foremost disciples themselves. That means they prioritize their relationship with God and a commitment to reading and obeying His Word. When we spend time with God daily, and we



study His Word faithfully, it is easy to find our “why.” As our relationship with God becomes real and vibrant, we cannot help but want to share our experience with others!

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul described a ministry of reconciliation given to all believers. He argued that because we have been reconciled to God through Christ, we too become ambassadors of reconciliation, urging unbelievers to turn from their sin and receive Christ and believers to live peacefully with one another.

Paul’s “why” was the love of Christ. The gospel had so radically changed His life that he was compelled to share Jesus with others. Not only had Paul experienced new life, but he also believed all people are invited into a relationship with God. If we desire to become disciple-makers, we will face numerous challenges. Sharing Jesus will cost us time, energy, and sometimes relationships. Disciple making for personal gain would never be enough to sustain us. Our “why” must be driven by our love for God and a desire to see His name proclaimed in our community and around the world.

So, what does it take to become a disciple maker? Today, as we look at ten qualifications for disciple-makers, the first five revolve around our personal commitment to loving God and spending time in His Word. Not only will our “why” flow from the depth and quality of our relationship with Christ, but the more time we spend with Him, the greater our spiritual depth and impact in reaching others.

Qualification #1: A disciple maker, first and foremost, **loves God and others**. Over the last few weeks, we have studied the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:37-40, where Jesus said, “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. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

Trying to become a disciple maker without attending to one’s own spiritual condition would be like trying to climb Mount Everest without any physical training. If we are not spending time with God in His Word and growing in relationship with Him, how could we possibly have the tools we need to help others? In the same way, if we are diligent students of God’s Word, but we are not increasing in love for others, we are missing something vitally important in our spiritual growth.

As David Platt said in his book, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*: “Discipleship is not about what you know but who you love and how that love transforms your life and the lives around you.”⁴ Our love for God and a desire to share His love with others must be the driving “why” for our disciple-making efforts.

Qualification #2: Disciple makers have an **eternal perspective**. In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Paul wrote, “For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Do you believe people’s eternity is impacted by the gospel? Do you believe Jesus is the answer to life’s greatest questions and problems? Disciple



makers have an eternal perspective. Without a kingdom-focused mindset, disciple making feels like a burden instead of a privilege. Whether you are teaching an elementary-aged Sunday School class, serving as an adult Bible Study leader, going on a short-term mission trip, or even sharing Jesus with a coworker, the eternal significance of someone coming to know Christ is the fuel that powers disciple-making. Francis Chan says, “When our lives are shaped by eternity, discipleship becomes an investment, not an interruption.”⁵

Not every experience of sharing Jesus will result in visible fruit. However, it is our job and privilege as believers in Jesus Christ to share faithfully. In Romans 10:14-15, Paul quoted the Old Testament prophet Isaiah when he said, “How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: **How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news**” (emphasis added). The gospel message is not only for a better life today but also a message for eternity. Sharing the good news of forgiveness and eternal life with Christ is the privilege of all who know Jesus.

Qualification #3: A disciple maker **knows sound doctrine**. When Paul wrote to Timothy, a young pastor he mentored, he encouraged him to be a careful student of God’s Word, saying, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). There is no shortcut to growing in discipleship.

We will never exhaust the fullness of the knowledge of God. When Paul reflected on the vastness of God’s character, he proclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:33-36). Even though we cannot understand God fully, Scripture is clear we are to seek Him diligently throughout our lives (Jeremiah 29:13).

Qualification #4: A disciple maker **embodies sound doctrine**. As children, some of us may have heard the statement, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Even as children we understand that a leader should, for lack of a better phrase, “walk the walk and talk the talk.” Disciple makers embody the sound doctrine they study. Rather than being puffed up with knowledge, they build others up through love (1 Corinthians 8:1). More than that, they demonstrate their commitment to God’s Word by living out the truths of Scripture they teach. In Paul’s instruction to Timothy he wrote, “Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Many zealous and gifted church leaders have lost their ministry over moral failure. When this tragedy occurs, it is often not because a pastor or leader didn’t know enough Scripture to know right from wrong. Instead, church leaders fall when they fail to embody the doctrine they so passionately teach.



Disciple makers embody sound doctrine when they hear, study, and apply God's Word to their lives. As James 1:22 clearly teaches, we must "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." The accumulation of knowledge of Scripture is fruitless if it does not result in obedience. As Jen Wilkin says in her book, *Ten Words to Live By*, "The gospel you live is the gospel you teach."⁶ The wisdom disciple makers give will only be received with full impact as they walk in truth and obedience.

Qualification #5: A disciple maker can **communicate sound doctrine**. As they grow in their relationship with Christ and as students of His Word, disciple makers not only know and embody sound doctrine, but they also grow in their ability to communicate sound doctrine. In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul instructed, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

What does it look like to faithfully communicate sound doctrine? Again, Paul answered this question for Timothy when he said, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

If we want to communicate sound doctrine effectively, we must begin with spiritual preparedness. How easy is it for you to share your testimony with someone? What verses would you use to tell someone how to be saved? Part of being ready "out of season" is to be ready "in season" when God brings someone your way.

Those who communicate sound doctrine can do so with perseverance as they are equipped by God to endure hardships in ways that honor Christ. In short, Paul said a disciple maker is someone who "fulfills" his or her ministry. It is important to recognize that none of us can walk faithfully in this way every day. Instead, we encourage and help one another as we live in a community of faith and hold one another accountable for pursuing growth in Christ.

DISCUSS

- *Like preparing to climb a mountain, how does our personal training as students of God's Word impact our ability to live as disciple makers?*
- *Think of a time you have witnessed or heard about church leaders discrediting themselves for ministry because of a moral failure. How did it impact your faith? Why is the personal walk of a disciple maker so important?*
- *How ready would you be to share your testimony and the plan of salvation spontaneously? What could you do this week to better prepare for when God presents the opportunity?*



2. The work of disciple making is our investment in the lives of others.

1 Thessalonians 2:8: *We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

Unpacking 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Climbing Mount Everest isn't a solo adventure. Each expedition comprises a large and complex team of other campers, guides, sherpas, base camp crews, and medical staff. If one aspect of the systems falls apart, the success and safety of the entire team could be jeopardized. One person cannot do it alone. When we think about the task Christ left the church—to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching them to obey what Jesus commands (Matthew 28:19-20)—it is also a job far too large for any one person, church, or denomination to carry out. Reaching the world for Jesus Christ is a mandate for all believers as we work together to see God's kingdom come.

Just as a climbing team works together to all arrive at the summit, believers living and working in community help challenge, support, and encourage one another. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote to a church he had established during his second missionary journey. Though localized persecution prevented him and Silas from being with them personally, his letter reminded the church of his love and care while he was with them and encouraged the church to continue to in their love and care for one another. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul recalled the way he and Silas had lived among them: “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” Paul reminded the church that not only had they shared the gospel in Thessalonica, but they had also shared their very lives with these new believers.

In some professions, maintaining a sense of personal detachment makes sense. It would seem strange if your doctor started sharing about his or her marriage, or your therapist wanted to tell you about his or her problems at home. Authentic discipleship is different. Disciple makers are effective in as much as they truthfully and transparently share life with others. Not only are disciple makers willing to appropriately share their own lives, but they also invest in the lives of others. As Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.”

Qualification #6: A disciple maker is a **relational leader**. Disciple makers are willing to share their lives with others, and they lean into community to know others authentically as well. Jesus perfectly embodied disciple making during His earthly ministry. He lived among the disciples, traveling, eating, and working together. Not only was Jesus intimately knowledgeable about the disciples' lives, but He also shared His life with them. In John 15:15, the night Jesus was arrested, He told the disciples, “I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.” That same night, Jesus leaned on His friends in His deepest hour of need. In Matthew 26:38 he requested, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.”



Disciple makers may worry that sharing their hurts and struggles will somehow disqualify them from leading others. While there are certainly seasons when a struggling leader should step away to deal with an intense season of difficulty or to address ongoing sin, a leader who shares his or her own struggles very often increases, not decreases, the ability to lead others. As Paul instructed in Galatians 6:2, “Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” In carrying one another’s burdens, and allowing others to carry theirs, disciple makers grow in authentic leadership and influence.

Qualification #7: A disciple maker can **inspire**. Imagine again you are on an expedition team, getting ready to make the final ascent to the top of the mountain, and your guide starts saying things like, “This part is really hard. I’m not sure if you’re going to make it.” Or worse, “I see that you’re struggling. If you had done your training exercises before you got here, like I asked, you wouldn’t be having such a hard time.” That would be crazy! Not only are effective guides able to do what they say, but they also find a way to encourage others to keep going as well. Jesus observed negative arrogant leadership among the Pharisees and teachers of the law. In Matthew 23:4, Jesus rebuked them saying, “They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them.” A disciple maker isn’t someone who judges others who make mistakes. Rather, a disciple maker looks for opportunities to edify and lift up other believers as they follow Jesus. As 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”

Qualification #8: A disciple maker can **rebuke gently**. There are many great things about leadership, but the responsibility of confronting someone struggling with sin is rarely described as one of them. However, Paul said in Romans 12:5, we belong to one another. That means that when one part is suffering or struggling, we all suffer and struggle alongside them. When climbers are on a mountain pass climbing Mount Everest, they are often tethered to one another to protect them from falling behind and getting disoriented in the harsh conditions. If one climber struggles and falls, the others don’t just pull him by the rope and drag him along the ground. Neither do they cut the rope and leave him to his own skill. Rather, they attend to one another, understanding that the group succeeds or fails together. In a similar way, the Bible says that disciple makers are to gently rebuke a brother or sister who is struggling with sin as a means of care for both the individual and the group.

Sometimes, a believer needs to address an offense that has happened to him or her personally. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus laid out the appropriate response in such a situation: “If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won’t listen, take one or two others with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established**. If he doesn’t pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.” In this scenario one believer is personally sinned against by another believer, and Jesus taught that the first step is a private conversation followed by increasing accountability in the event the other person is unrepentant. As followers of Jesus, we should aim to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18), regardless of our position of



leadership in the church. However, Jesus made clear that peacemakers are not called to simply endure blatant sin without addressing the offense.

At other times, a leader has knowledge of another believer walking in unconfessed sin, and for the good of the church and the unity of the body, must address it. This is, no doubt, one of the most challenging things a disciple maker can face. Paul's words to the church in Galatia give us a picture of how leaders can address sin in the church: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Let each person examine his own work, and then he can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else. For each person will have to carry his own load" (Galatians 6:1-5).

There are a few important things to note in these verses. First, we are to restore the person gently. It is never appropriate for God's people to bully, shame, or embarrass someone hoping they will repent. In addressing sin in the church, as in all things, we should do to others as we want done to us (Matthew 7:12). Paul also warned against pride in this circumstance, recognizing that temptation exists for all believers, and thus we should remain humble even as we lead and correct others. Finally, we see a call to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), while acknowledging that each believer is ultimately responsible for his or her own actions (v. 5).

Disciple makers understand that they serve the body by investing in the lives of other believers. They are first relational leaders, knowing all other leadership flows from relationships. They are inspirational leaders, looking for ways to build one another up. Finally, disciple makers can gently rebuke a believer caught up in sin. They understand that restoring a brother or sister is an act of love, and they do it gently and with humility as they serve God's people.

DISCUSS

- *What are some jobs that would be impossible to accomplish without a team? How does our ability to view discipleship as a "team sport" impact the way we think about church community?*
- *Have you ever experienced a leader with a terrible "bedside manner"? How did the person's attitude toward the rest of the team make following him or her more difficult? (Share broadly and avoid specific details and names.)*

3. The discipline of disciple making is a lifelong commitment to growth.

Mark 1:35: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.*



Unpacking Mark 1:35

If you had sixty thousand dollars to spend today, you would still be unlikely to be accepted for a Mount Everest expedition right away. When teams take on climbers, each person must demonstrate that they have excellent mountaineering skills and present a resume of previous mountains climbed. Additionally, climbers must commit to a rigorous training schedule for nine to twelve months before the trek to work on physical fitness, endurance, oxygen deprivation and skill building. Even if you had climbed the mountain previously, you would still need to redo the intensive training regimen before going a second time.

Like experienced climbers who continue to develop, disciple makers commit to a lifetime of growth and learning. God's Word has too much breadth and depth to exhaust, and the people we serve have too great a variety of needs for us to stall in our pursuit of Christ.

Qualification #9: A disciple maker has a **healthy devotional life**. In Mark 1, we get a glimpse into Jesus's early ministry. In verses 21-34 we get what appears to be a single day in the life of Jesus and His newly recruited disciples. The day began in Capernaum, with Jesus preaching in the synagogue. That was followed by Jesus commanding an unclean spirit to come out of a man, healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and then Jesus spent the evening healing all the sick and demon-possessed from the whole town who discovered His whereabouts and came to Him. You might think Jesus would sleep in the following morning. Instead, in Mark 1:35, we read, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying."

After a long day of ministry, Jesus withdrew to spend time in prayer with the Father. He knew that the only way to have longevity in leadership is to maintain a healthy devotional life. Whether we are called to lead a whole church, a class of other believers, or just the family in our own homes, there is no substitute for a rich devotional life with God. If Jesus needed to retreat to seek God and pray after a long day of ministry, how much more do we as disciple makers need daily time with Him! In Psalm 1 the writer described the blessed person who seeks God: "His delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams" (Psalm 1:2-3). Flowing streams are life sustaining. The constant movement of water creates the environment needed for wildlife and vegetation to flourish. Stagnant water, like a stagnant spiritual life, invites decay instead of an environment for growth. A healthy disciple maker delights in God's Word, which nourishes, grows, and sustains us. As Ruth Chou Simmons wrote in her book, *When Strivings Cease*, "Your private pursuit of God will shape your public ministry more than your gifting ever will."⁷

Qualification #10: A disciple maker has **perseverance**. Walking with Christ faithfully for a lifetime isn't easy. There will surely be times we want to give up. In Galatians 6, right after Paul instructed the church to bear one another's burdens, he offered this encouragement: "Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:9). Truthfully, sometimes it gets tiring doing good, trying to live for Jesus and help other people know Him too. We may face setbacks and persecution. Don't give up! A disciple maker gets the rest and renewal he or she needs through an ongoing relationship with Christ. Just as Jesus



recovered from a long day of ministry by resting and spending time with the Father, we find our strength to persevere by pursuing our walk with Him.

When we face challenging times in our Christian life, we can still use those seasons as an opportunity to learn and grow. Romans 5:3-4 says, “And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope.” While none of us would purposefully seek affliction in our lives, we can allow God to use those times to produce hope in us and the people we minister to. The mark of a disciple maker is not a life free from difficulty but a life that perseveres through difficulty with Jesus. As followers of Jesus continue endure through various hardships, our faithfulness becomes a witness for Christ in the church and beyond.

DISCUSS

- *What is the connection between personal devotion to Jesus and capacity to disciple others?*
- *How does a healthy devotional life help prevent burnout in ministry and in the faith?*
- *What makes perseverance challenging? How does belonging to a body of believers make a difference when you are struggling?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

The first step of becoming a disciple maker is to become a disciple. Knowledge of God is just the beginning. Scripture teaches that we become disciples when we confess our sin and profess Christ as Lord. If you have been on the outside looking toward a life of faith in Jesus, what's preventing you from starting today? Talk to your small group leader, pastor, or friend, about how to begin a new life in Christ today.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *How can I grow in my knowledge of and obedience to God and His Word?*
- *What would it look like for me to share my life and struggles more authentically with other believers? What prevents me from doing so?*
- *Would I describe my devotional life as healthy and persevering? What needs to shift in my schedule or priorities to make space to spend time with God every day?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- *Why does disciple making require long time commitment and endurance? Why can't we do it alone?*



APPLY

What quality of a disciple maker challenges you most? What can you do to move from where you are to where God is calling you to be?

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