



The Essentials of Disciple-Making

Session Seven: The How-Tos of Disciple-Making

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week we will wrap up our series, “The Essentials of Disciple-Making,” by looking at the how-tos of disciple-making. How do we go about making disciples, and what is our responsibility in this process?

Following God together, and challenging one another to be faithful, is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. In Deuteronomy, Moses told the Israelites repeatedly to obey God’s law. Joshua charged the people to choose who they would serve, but he and his family would serve God (Joshua 24:15). And Proverbs 27:17 says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.”

The Bible is clear. Not only are we responsible to God, but we are also responsible for one another. Disciple-making is the process through which we encourage, equip, and send followers of Jesus to reach others in His name. It is the privilege and responsibility of all who know Christ.

TODAY’S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 9:1-6; John 4:13-15

THE MAIN IDEA

Followers of Jesus are called not just to be disciples, but also to make disciples. Jesus perfectly modeled disciple-making by meeting people where they were, teaching for life change, and developing leaders and empowering them to serve.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Are all Christians called to be disciple-makers? What keeps us from investing in the discipleship process of others?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Matthew 4:18-22 Peter, Andrew, James and John were unlikely disciples. These young fishermen did not have tremendous wealth or ministry experience. However, Jesus called them to follow Him and He would make them fishers of men. Jesus still calls men and women today to follow Him and to pursue people for His sake. As He calls His people, He meets them where they are and equips them to serve.

Luke 9:1-6 The real test of discipleship is not how much Scripture you know or how many times you attend worship. The fruit of discipleship is a life dedicated to serving God and making Christ known. In His relationship with the disciples, Jesus developed them as leaders and empowered them to serve.

John 4:13-15 The Samaritan woman at the well was another unlikely disciple. However, as Jesus shared with her the good news of salvation, her love and enthusiasm for Jesus sparked a revival in her town. Her changed life gave her a changed purpose, and through her testimony many came to put their faith in Jesus. Discipleship isn’t just the accumulation of knowledge. Jesus taught for life change. As we disciple others, we seek for God to work in their hearts and lives as they follow Him.



START HERE

What comes to mind when you think about growing in personal discipleship? You might read your Bible, pray, attend worship faithfully, or read books or listen to podcasts on spiritual growth. It may be harder for us to define the process of disciple-making. How do we go about making disciples, and is it even our responsibility? In today's study, we will see how Jesus perfectly modeled disciple-making by meeting people where they were, teaching for life change, and developing leaders and empowering them to lead.

DISCUSS

What does it mean to be a disciple-maker? Is that role reserved only for charismatic leaders with lots of influence? Is disciple-making the responsibility of all followers of Jesus, or just a select few?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Jesus met people where they were.

Matthew 4:18-22: As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Unpacking Matthew 4:18-22

In January 2004, MTV VJ Adam Curry and software developer Dave Winer created ipodder, the first software to automatically download audio files to Apple iPod, and by February the term “podcasting” first appeared. Today, there are more than 4.5 million podcasts available worldwide that reach 158 million listeners each month in the United States alone. Podcasting is more than just social commentary. Podcasts serve as a provider of long-form journalism, entertainment, sports analysis, and leadership development. Even influential leaders in the Christian community use podcasting to develop and disciple Christians all around the world. Podcasting (and more broadly, the Internet) creates opportunities to reach and teach people like never before and allows listeners to become “experts” in nearly any field they chose, all from the comfort of their home or car.

As we look at the “how-tos” of disciple-making, it might be tempting to think that making disciples is a little like podcasting. The church only needs to make discipleship material readily available and affordable, for people will naturally gravitate to it and grow in their faith. While it is true that exposure to Christian materials is one way to grow, true discipleship happens in the



context of authentic relationships over an extended period. No one knew this better than Jesus, who chose the twelve disciples first to follow Him, be transformed by Him, and be sent to tell others the good news about Him.

In Matthew 4:18-22, Jesus called the first four disciples, who were two sets of brothers—Simon (Peter) and Andrew, and James and John. The interesting thing about Jesus's choice is that none of these men would have been the assumed candidates for personal discipleship from the Messiah. They were fishermen, not priests or Pharisees, and likely held little to no political or social influence in their community. Jesus chose these men, not according to what they had done, or what they had to offer, but according to what He would do in them.

Notice the invitation and opportunity Jesus presented: *“Follow me...and I will make you fish for people.”* In authentic discipleship, relationship comes before mission. The disciples would indeed fish for people, taking the good news of salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles. However, before they could teach others about Jesus, they needed to walk closely with Him. In the Mishnah (the rabbinic teachings written between 200 BCE and 200 CE), students were encouraged to sit at the feet of their rabbis, and to walk so closely with them they would be covered by the dust of their feet. As we focus today on the “how-tos” of disciple-making, it is important that we begin here. Discipleship happens in authentic relationship with Christ and in community with others. If we desire to not only be disciples of Jesus but to make disciples of Jesus, our priority is to walk closely with Him.

In disciple-making, we commit ourselves first and foremost to following Christ, and then we walk with other believers as they too follow Him. More mature believers can encourage, correct, and teach newer believers, while the sincerity and enthusiasm of new followers of Christ helps more mature believers fan the flame of their faith in action. The apostle Paul boldly stated his authority to disciple the believers in Corinth when he wrote, *“Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Disciple-makers should walk so closely in the footsteps of Jesus that they can confidently say, “Follow me as I follow Jesus.”

When Jesus called the disciples, they were not yet faithful followers but rather baby believers. They saw Jesus's miracles and responded to His invitation. Jesus did not ask them to meet a certain metric of discipleship before they were deemed worthy of His time or attention. Jesus met people where they were and invited them into a deeper level of relationship. In John 1:43-51 Jesus called Philip and Nathanael to become His disciples. When Philip told Nathanael he had met the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael was skeptical, asking, “‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’” (John 1:46). However, an encounter with Jesus changed his perspective: “‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’” (John 1:49). The first job of disciple-making is to, like Philip, invite others to experience Christ and walk with Him. Real change in a person's life happens not when they become impressed with your ability to teach or reason about the Scriptures, but when you walk authentically with Jesus and invite them to walk with Him too.



We may think we are not qualified to disciple someone else, for fear that we don't know enough, or haven't walked with Jesus long enough. In John 1:43-51, Philip knew very little about Jesus. However, he knew enough to invite Nathanael to "come and see" (John 1:46). If you are new to faith or just discovering how to disciple someone else, be encouraged by Philip's approach. When we share what we have experienced with Christ and invite others to come and see for themselves, this is not based on our extensive knowledge, but on walking together as disciples as we pursue Christ.

Disciple-making thrives in the context of relationships. Like Jesus, we can meet people where they are and invite them to grow together with us and other like-minded believers. We can also accept that some people, for various reasons or life circumstances, may not say yes to an invitation for personal discipleship. Rather than become discouraged, we can pray and ask God to show us people with whom we can do life and ministry together.

DISCUSS

- *What was Jesus's first ask of Peter, Andrew, James, and John? Why is it important that relationship comes first in disciple-making?*
- *What are some barriers to meeting regularly with others for discipleship and accountability? How can the story of Philip and Nathanael encourage you to take the first step?*
- *Have you ever been in an intentional mentoring/disciple-making relationship? How did it help you grow in your faith?*

2. Jesus taught for life change.

John 4:13-15: *Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life."*

"Sir," the woman said to him, "give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and come here to draw water."

Unpacking John 4:13-15

Not only do 158 million Americans, or 62 percent of the adult population, tune in to podcasts each month, but they spend a lot of time listening. In the U.S., the average podcast listener spends more than seven hours a week listening to their favorite shows. One of the most popular categories of podcasting is lifestyle and health. Imagine if you spent seven hours a week listening to teaching on how to improve your lifestyle and health but never took action to do any of it. What a waste of time!

Unfortunately, that is the way many Christians treat the discipleship process. If we read our Bibles, but do not apply what we have read to our daily lives, we have missed much of what



God has in store for us. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say?” Integral to the discipleship process is not just hearing the Word but doing what its says. Life change, not accumulation of knowledge, is the mark of a growing disciple.

In John chapter 4, Jesus was traveling through Samaria in route to Galilee. During the hottest part of the day, while the disciples had gone into town, He encountered a Samaritan woman drawing water at the town’s well. Jesus asked her for a drink. *“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans*” (John 4:9). The woman highlighted the tension and mistrust that existed between the Jews and Samaritans. Her argument was probably intended to push this outsider away. Instead, Jesus replied, *“If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”* Jesus asked for physical water to quench His thirst, but He offered spiritual water to quench the woman’s soul.

The woman needed something far greater than physical water. She needed a new life and a renewed spirit in Christ. Over the course of the conversation, Jesus kindly pointed out her need and invited her into a relationship with Him. Disciple-makers are not called to find hurting people and bludgeon them with the Word. Instead, we model Christ-like discipleship when we kindly and humbly offer to walk alongside them as we pursue Christ together. Jesus’s words to the woman did not condemn her, but neither did they overlook her situation. Jesus ministered to her at the intersection of grace and truth (John 1:14), and the interaction changed not only her life, but the lives of people around her.

As they discussed living water, the woman said to Jesus, *“I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”* (John 4:25). Then, in a shocking and unforeseen twist, Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah, for the very first time, to this Samaritan woman with a questionable past: Jesus told her, *“I, the one speaking to you, am he.”* Disciple-makers not only speak grace and truth to people, but they bring people to Jesus. We can trust that when we bring people to Jesus, He does the true work of disciple-making.

Having encountered Jesus, the woman naturally told others about Him. Scripture records she ran back into the town and declared, *“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”* (John 4:29). Because of her testimony, many more people came to put their faith in Jesus (John 4:39-42). Jesus’s disciple-making ministry was a disciple-multiplying ministry. When we do life with other believers—teaching, encouraging, and correcting—the goal is not personal success, but rather to see God working in their hearts. Jesus taught not for situational change, but for transformational change as people came to know and put their trust in Him.

Even the disciples were positively impacted by the woman’s faith in Jesus. When they returned to the well to find Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus used it as a teaching opportunity (vv. 35-38). The Samaritan woman’s faith highlighted the magnitude of Jesus’s ministry. He came not just for the Jews or the rule-followers, but for the Gentiles and the rule-breakers,



which includes us all. As Jesus disciplined the woman, others expanded their view of the coming kingdom as well.

Authentic disciple-makers are ministry multipliers. As the woman shared the good news of Jesus, many others put their faith in Him (John 4:42). The Samaritan woman's discipleship was not just for her own benefit, but also resulted in change that impacted her entire community for Christ. In the same way, as we disciple and teach one another, we impact individual lives, whole families, our churches, and our communities.

DISCUSS

- *Why is it significant that Jesus chose to reveal Himself to the Samaritan woman? How did this conversation impact more than just her?*
- *What is the point of disciple-making? How can we get this wrong sometimes?*
- *What might prevent you from seeing yourself as a disciple-maker? What could help you overcome that objection?*

3. Jesus developed future leaders and empowered them to serve.

Luke 9:1-6: Summoning the Twelve, he gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. Then he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

"Take nothing for the road," he told them, "no staff, no traveling bag, no bread, no money; and don't take an extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. If they do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and traveled from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.

Unpacking Luke 9:1-6

Today, it's easy to become a podcaster. Anyone with a laptop and an Internet connection can start their own podcast for free. In 2024 there were more than 4.4 million podcasts in the world. Imagine for a minute that you subscribe to a podcast from someone who is teaching about personal finance. This person speaks passionately about getting out of debt, saving, and wise spending. However, when you do a little research, you realize this person has never had a job, is drowning in debt, and has filed for bankruptcy. You would probably stop listening to their advice! In the same way, authentic discipleship is more than just accumulating knowledge about God and His Word. Real discipleship is measured by the changed lives of people who follow Jesus, and the authentic ways in which they carry the gospel into the world.

In Luke 9, Jesus sent the twelve disciples on a missionary journey. First, Jesus gave them the authority to minister in His name. As disciple-makers, we must remember that we are not the ones who empower others to serve Christ. Rather, we encourage others to use the gifts God



has given them. The role of disciple-making is not to determine how someone else should serve God or proclaim a particular calling on his or her life. Rather, disciple-makers recognize that it is Christ who empowers others to serve Him.

Having equipped them, Jesus sent the disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God. Disciple-making is a sending ministry. Sometimes, small group leaders or churches are hesitant to send out their best people. They might lament when someone leaves their class to teach in the children's department or in the student ministry. But when God calls people to go and minister elsewhere, wise leaders will see this as a cause for joy and celebration, not a threat.

When we invest in disciple-making, we encourage others to serve God in whatever capacity He calls them. If we help someone to grow in their faith, learn to read and apply God's Word to their lives, teach them to share their faith, and pray with them and for them, but never encourage them to go and serve God, we have missed the point of disciple-making. Serving others out of the gifts God has given us and the growth we experience as we walk with Jesus is the natural fruit of the discipleship process.

It is impossible to predict how God will use men and women who are committed to serving Him. For the disciples, their calling looked like a radical command to walk in humility and trust in God's provision (vv. 3-5). They were to walk in a new level of trust and obedience. While the calling of God on lives varies from person to person, the heart of obedience remains the same. The true mark of discipleship is a willingness to go where God leads and do the work He calls us to do.

In 1936, B.B. McKinney published a hymn that beautifully sums up the heart of a disciple to follow Jesus. It says:

*Take up thy cross and follow me
I heard my Master say
I gave my life to ransom thee
Surrender your all today.*

*Wherever He leads, I'll go
Wherever He leads, I'll go
I'll follow my Christ who loves me so
Wherever He leads, I'll go.*

When Jesus empowered the disciples to go, they obeyed. Luke 9:6 says, "So they went out and traveled from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere." When we come to know Christ and grow in our faith, the natural result is a heart that wants to follow Jesus "wherever He leads." For the disciples, that meant going out into the villages and proclaiming the good news. However, their calling did not end after this one missionary assignment.



What began in small villages around Galilee turned into ministering before crowds of thousands. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostles stood before Jews from all over the world and boldly declared Jesus as the Messiah. As the Holy Spirit empowered them, they boldly testified to Christ and urged people to turn to Him. In Acts 2:38-41, Peter preached and the people responded: “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, ‘Be saved from this corrupt generation!’ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.”

This all began with Peter responding to Jesus’s invitation, “*Follow me...and I will make you fish for people*” (Matt. 4:19). That simple “yes” changed the trajectory of his life, and Peter became the first leader of the church. When we invest in disciple-making, we have no way of knowing how God will use others for His kingdom purposes. God chooses to use individuals, not according to their appearance or skillset, but because of their hearts (1 Samuel 16:7) and for His divine purposes (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Jesus gives us the perfect model for disciple-making. He met people where they were, taught for life change, and developed future leaders and gave them opportunities to serve. As we strive to become not just better disciples, but better disciple-makers, we are wise to follow His example.

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus sending out the disciples prepare them for the larger calling He had in their lives?*
- *What is the difference between studying the Bible for knowledge versus studying for life-change? How can we confuse the two?*
- *How do you respond when someone in your small group or Bible Study feels called to leave to serve somewhere else? How can jealousy or fear prevent us from being mission-minded?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

Disciple-making is the responsibility and the privilege of all Christians. A disciple is someone who, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, has responded to Christ’s command to “follow me.” We become disciples when we, by faith, confess our sin, trust in Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection to pay for our sin, and commit ourselves fully to Him. Scripture says that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). If you have never put your faith in Jesus, why not do that today? There are people in our church or small group who would love to talk to you about this and walk with you through your first steps of faith.



REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *How seriously have I taken the call to be a disciple-maker?*
- *How are we qualified for mission in the same way the disciples were?*
- *When I think about discipling someone else, what hesitations or fears get in the way?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- How did Jesus perfectly model disciple-making? What can we learn from today's text about how the church should develop and raise new leaders?

APPLY

How do I need to respond to the call to be a disciple-maker? What would I need to know to say “yes” to discipling or mentoring another believer?

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