

CRAIG CASTER

THE GREAT COMMISSION

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CHURCH

GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU, AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE. AMEN.

-MATTHEW 28:19-20

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Why Disciple?

OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER

God's first recorded question to man is found in Genesis 3:9, "*Where are you?*" Adam and Eve had sinned and were hiding from God, naked and ashamed. There is no doubt that God knew where they were, but He wanted them to acknowledge their condition and confess their sin to Him. In Genesis 4:9 God posed a similar question to Cain, "*Where is Abel your brother?*" Once again, God knew, but He was giving Cain an opportunity to confess his sin. Cain's infamous words reflected his lack of reverence for God, and the hardened condition of his heart toward his brother. Though the blood of his murdered brother was still on his hands, he coldly responded,

"...I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"
-Genesis 4:9

Keep - *To guard, protect, attend to, and take care of, as a shepherd with his sheep.*

Cain's actions were not simply a case of uncontrolled jealousy. His rebellion toward God was reflected in his contempt toward his brother. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that though Abel is dead, he still speaks to us today. What is he telling us?

"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."
-Hebrews 11:4

First, we learn that we must approach God *His way*, and on *His terms*. Cain chose a religion of his own making, unlike Abel whose relationship with his creator was marked by love for Him and obedience to offer the prescribed sacrifice. Our religion may be sincere and sacrificial but we, like Cain, will be rejected by a holy God if we do not humbly approach Him on the basis of the shed blood of Christ.

"...Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell."
-Genesis 4:3-5

Next, we learn from Abel's life that our relationship with God *will* be manifested in our affections, attitudes and actions toward others. Cain should have been his brother's keeper, but in his rebellion toward God his heart was consumed with jealousy, hatred, and finally, murder.

*"For this is the message which you have heard **from the beginning**, that we should **love one another**; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."*
-1 John 3:11-12

Like a golden thread, this theme is woven through the Scriptures. From Joseph's undying love and kindness toward his undeserving brothers, to the Ten Commandments, which begins with man's relationship to God and ends with his treatment of his fellow man, and

throughout the New Testament, the message is clear. In Jesus Christ we see God's final announcement to man that love for the Father translates into love and sacrificial service to others.

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

-1 John 4:20-21

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

In an attempt to test Jesus, a Pharisee questioned Him on which commandment was the greatest.

"...Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

-Matthew 22:36-39

Jesus said that the second commandment was *like* the first, meaning that it is similar in appearance or character. Actively loving and caring for others is only possible when we first truly love the Lord our God. In fact, Christ has given the non-believing world permission to judge the legitimacy of our profession of faith based upon the criteria of the love we demonstrate for one another.

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

-John 13:35

The sobering truth is that if we do not love one another, others have the right to question if we are truly Christ's disciples! Often when Christians fail to actively love one another and are criticized by those outside of the body of Christ, they charge them with persecution, rather than recognizing that they are merely exercising their God-given right to judge.

*"But God **demonstrates** His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

-Romans 5:8

The love we are to have for one another is not merely a warm feeling or sincere emotion, but a condition of the heart that is demonstrated in actions toward the ones we love.

Christ is our supreme example of love. His love and tender mercy for others moved Him to go out of His way to minister to their needs, to patiently bear with their weaknesses and, finally, to lay down His life for them.

*"But when He saw the multitudes, He was **moved with compassion** for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 'Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"*

-Matthew 9:36-38

moved with compassion – To feel pity or compassion at seeing the miseries of others, a vehement affection of commiseration by which the bowels and

especially the heart is moved. To be moved with pity from the very inmost bowels. (Adam Clarke Commentary)

*“We know love by this, that He **laid down** His life for us; and we ought to **lay down** our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and **closes his heart** against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*

-1 John 3:16-17

closes his heart – *To shut up or close off your bowels or inward affection and tender mercy.*

Our Lord’s heart is filled with love and compassion for others. Therefore, when we shut up or close off our hearts to others, we also close off our heart to Him. The opposite is also true. When we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, He can fill us with His love and compassion for others.

“...the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

-Romans 5:5

Shortly after Christ rose from the dead, having conquered Satan, sin and death, He manifested Himself to Peter and the other disciples on the shore of Galilee. Knowing that He would soon ascend to the Father, and that the Holy Spirit would descend to accompany, indwell and empower believers to continue His work among man, He shared His greatest concern with Peter.

*“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, **do you love Me** more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘**Feed My lambs.**’ “He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, **do you love Me?**’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘**Tend My sheep.**’ “He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, **do you love Me?**’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘**Feed My sheep.**’ ”*

-John 21:15-17

Christ’s concern was for the welfare of the sheep! He impressed upon Peter the truth that caring for others would be a response to genuine love for Him. Of utmost importance to the Lord is that we love Him. He came to this earth, became a man, suffered and bore man’s sin on the cross solely out of love. He desires us to return that love. The primary focus of our lives and the motivation for all that we do must be love for our Lord. When our hearts are filled with love for Christ, He will fill us with His compassion to *tend* and *feed* or *shepherd* and *keep* others.

Jesus demonstrated discipleship. He went out of His way and took time, He touched people that no one else would touch, He had mercy and gave grace to sinners, exhorting them to “*go and sin no more,*” He noticed the needs of others and reached out to minister to those needs. Jesus taught the multitudes but He ministered to individuals. When He ascended to heaven, His work among man was not finished. There were still multitudes to be saved from the generations that would follow. It was the Lord’s good will to entrust the continuation of this ministry to His disciples. To fulfill this ministry requires love for Him and compassion for others.

*“Greater love has no one than this, than to **lay down** one’s life for his friends.”
-John 15:13*

Mature members of the body of Christ are commissioned by Christ to guard, protect, attend to, and take care of the less-mature believers, and disciple them to maturity as a shepherd would his sheep.

Discipleship - *A more mature believer leading a less mature believer to a deeper walk with the Lord; setting an example, teaching them how to abide in an intimate relationship with Jesus, and helping them to grow in their understanding and application of biblical truths. Teaching them how to tend to all things God has given to them in accordance to His Word.*

FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION

Before ascending to heaven Jesus imparted these final words to His disciples and to all of us.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”
-Matthew 28:19-20*

Christ’s instruction, known as the *Great Commission*, was to be the focus and primary ministry goal of the church. Jesus did not commission the church to make Christians, but to *make disciples*. The Holy Spirit would descend upon, dwell among and within the members of the church, distributing spiritual gifts for God’s glory, and for the *edification* or *building up* of the body of Christ.

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’ ”
-Acts 1:8*

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,”
-Ephesians 4:11-14*

Among these are the gifts of prophecy, teaching and evangelism. The church is called to preach the gospel to the world. The Holy Spirit chooses, calls, convicts and converts the unsaved. God then entrusts these newborn believers into the cradle of His church and commissions or commands the more mature believers to build up the young believers to become mature disciples, emulating the life of Christ.

*“It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher...”
-Matthew 10:25*

Disciple - *A follower, one who attaches himself to another; a student or a learner, one whose life gradually and progressively takes on the character of the teacher.*

“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.”

Luke 6:40

Most churches today emphasize evangelism, and evangelistic events, rather than discipleship. Evangelism is crucial but should not be perceived as the main mission of the church. While the objective of evangelism is salvation, the objective of discipleship is to develop an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ and grow in spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness, teaching them how to correctly tend to the gifts God has given them.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

-John 15:4-5

The most powerful and effective evangelism will result *naturally* when mature Christians, whose lives within the church and in their homes, workplaces and communities, reflect and glorify God as a result of their abiding relationship with Jesus Christ.

“If, in our orthodox churches, the abiding in Christ, the living union with Him, the experience of His daily and hourly presence and keeping, were preached with the same distinctness and urgency as His atonement and pardon through His blood, I am confident that many would be found to accept with gladness the invitation to such a life, and that its influence would be manifest in their experience of the purity and the power, the love and the joy, the fruit bearing, and all the blessedness that the Savior connected with the abiding in Him.”

-Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

-Colossians 3:16

God has designed the church to function like a family, with the children cared for, trained by and, to some degree, accountable to the mature adults. Paul, who often referred to Timothy as his child in the faith, felt the liberty to challenge this young believer about his words and behavior, purity in his personal life, and even his use of the spiritual gifts that God had bestowed upon him (see 1 Timothy 4:12-16). In our self-absorbed society, personal privacy has been elevated far above personal accountability. This lack of personal accountability has left room for many young believers to slowly stray and wander off track with nobody to challenge, to teach, and caution or exhort them of the potential dangers of their choices and actions. Personal accountability should not be confused with ‘shepherding’, where church leaders have absolute control over the members of the church.

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

-1 Peter 2:2

Most baby Christians will only thrive and grow when they are fed and nurtured by mature spiritual parents. Like children, they need their questions answered, their errors corrected, and personal contact with loving mentors (disciple-ers) who will set the example and take time to give them personal application of biblical truths.

All too often churches today are raising *latchkey kids*. Through a variety of creative evangelistic efforts spiritual babies are born, then presented with a *new believer packet*, a paperback New Testament, and a church bulletin containing a list of church activities. They are encouraged to *get involved* and largely expected to *fend for themselves*. Some are fortunate enough to have relationships with older Christians to encourage, nurture and help them get established in their faith. However, many do not have this benefit. Lacking spiritual strength and understanding they, like neglected infants, fail to thrive.

“...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.”

-Ephesians 4:14-15

When we look at the condition of the body of Christ today, the absence of spiritual maturity, along with the presence of sin and hypocrisy, the divorce rate, and rebellious children, it is evident that discipleship and accountability has become a low priority in many churches. God is adding to the Church but the lack of focus and strategies in place to disciple new believers has produced large churches filled with immature Christians.

DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGIES

New believers become spiritually mature disciples through **observing and learning His commandments** and participating in **an abiding relationship with Christ**. Jesus emphasized these two components of discipleship in Matthew 28:19-20.

1. Observing His Commandments

“...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”

True biblical discipleship requires the study of God’s Word whereby a young believer grows in their intimate understanding and personal experience of God’s character, attributes and will. To be brought under the authority of Jesus Christ is to become a student of His Word; to believe in the truths, receive the promises, accept the warnings, and submit to the commandments. The doctrines of our faith and the biblical principles, which govern our lives, must be understood and embraced in order to grow in spiritual maturity.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

-Hebrews 5:12-14

The word “observe” is the Greek word *Tereo*, which means to guard; to keep an eye on; to obey; to observe attentively.

A Disciples life is to reflect what they are teaching. This is why it is so important to use wisdom and God's standards when appointing a disciple.

2. An Abiding Relationship with Jesus Christ

"...I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In the temple a heavy woven veil separated the holy place from the Most Holy Place, where the presence of God dwelt. This veil was a reminder to the worshippers of the separation that existed between them and God. Because of man's sin he did not have access to freely come into the presence of the holy God. At the moment of Christ's death this veil was miraculously torn from top to bottom.

*"And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."
-Mark 15:37-38*

The Heavenly Father was signifying that the death of His Son put an end to the necessity of repeated sacrifices for sins, and provided the way for man to enter freely into His presence. As believers in Jesus Christ we have forgiveness for our sins, the privilege of an abiding and intimate relationship with God, and access to enter into His presence through prayer.

*"Therefore, brethren, having **boldness to enter** the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."
-Hebrews 10:19-22*

Jesus Christ did not shed His blood on the cross in order to establish the Christian *religion*, but to open the way for man to have a *relationship* with God. New believers need to be taught the truth about Christ's abiding presence with the church, and His desire to have an intimate relationship with them individually through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit we have God's counsel, guidance, strength, encouragement, comfort and correction.

*"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may **abide with you forever**—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for **He dwells with you and will be in you.**"*

*"I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you.** A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also."*

*"At that day you will know that **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**"
-John 14:16-20*

Andrew Murray, in his classic, *Abide in Christ*, wrote the following commentary on Christ's great call to believers to "Come to me..." (Matthew 11:28) and "Abide in Me..." (John 15:4).

"The blessings He bestows are all connected with His "Come to Me" and are only to be enjoyed in close fellowship with Himself...the call means, "Come to me to stay with me." And yet this was in very deed His object and purpose when first He called

you to Himself. It was not to refresh you for a few short hours after your conversion with the joy of His love and deliverance, and then to send you forth to wander in sadness and sin. He has destined you to something better than a short-lived blessedness, to be enjoyed only in times of special earnestness and prayer, and then to pass away, as you had to return to those duties in which far the greater part of life has to be spent. No, indeed; He has prepared for you an abiding dwelling with Himself, where your whole life and every moment of it might be spent, where the work of your daily life might be done, and where all the while you might be enjoying unbroken communion with Himself.”

Without an understanding of God’s longing for a relationship with us, and His provision for that relationship by the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers in Christ will naturally divert to *religion*. In the church today, the predominance of religious activity *for* God rather than an intimate relationship *with* God reflects the lack of understanding of this intimacy.

If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of this world, most of what the church is doing would go right on and nobody would know the difference.

-A.W. Tozer

Multitudes of volunteers are needed to support, oversee and man the many programs, functions and activities in most churches today. We have bought into the mindset that “the church with the most stuff and ministries wins!” New converts are quickly enlisted into service before they are mature enough to know God’s will in tending to the things God has already given to them in their lives. As a result, many immature Christians fall by the wayside out of sheer exhaustion, seeing God as a taskmaster rather than the Savior who invites them to come to Him to be eased of their burdens through a relationship with Him, and to serve Him in the fullness and overflow of that relationship.

A DISCIPLE MUST HAVE A STRONG FOUNDATION

In Luke 6:46-49 Jesus contrasts the lives of two men, one whose life was built on a strong foundation, and stood firm under the storms of life, and another man who had no foundation, and fell when the storms arose.

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?

*“Whoever **comes to Me**, and **hears My sayings** and **does them**, I will show you whom he is like:*

“He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

*But he who heard and **did nothing** is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.”*

-Luke 6:46-49

In this parable Jesus explained the necessary components for a strong spiritual foundation.

A. “...comes to Me...” – *To move toward.*

This implies taking deliberate steps toward Christ by **receiving** Him as Lord and Savior. Once we have accepted Him, His desire is for us to continue to enter into His presence daily in order to give Him our heart, confess our sins, experience His love and forgiveness, and develop a relationship with Him.

B. "...hears My sayings..." – *To hear with attention, to hearken or listen to.*

After we come to Christ for salvation, Jesus said that we must then listen to Him. God has given us His Word.

Jesus Christ desires to have an **abiding** relationship with us through prayer and reading and meditating upon His Word, that we might learn to recognize His voice, know His will, and become His disciples.

C. "...does them..." – *To produce or bring about, obvious external acts. To live out God's Words in our lives by obedience.*

The third component is to obey. Jesus proclaimed that in order for our lives to be built upon a strong foundation, we must **obey** Him. God's Word changes or transforms our hearts. When we surrender our will to God, He gives us the power to obey. An abiding relationship with Christ will produce fruit for His glory and the edification of others.

"COMES TO ME" - RECEIVE



"HEARS MY SAYINGS" - ABIDE



"DOES THEM" - OBEY

These components are inter-related; one is the by-product of the other. After receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior, our daily abiding relationship with Him, entering into His presence and hearing His voice enables us to obey. We cannot obey unless we abide; we cannot receive His word unless we come to Him daily. This is what Jesus meant when He said that without Him we could do nothing!

Christ calls us to a standard of devotion that places our relationship with Him as our supreme goal in life and His Word as our daily bread.

CHRIST SET THE EXAMPLE

Jesus did not give His disciples a step-by-step plan for discipleship. He left no divine blueprint or detailed formula. He did not want discipleship to become a sterile church program, but rather the church's obedience out of love for Him and a desire to follow His example. When we truly abide in Him, our hearts and minds will become united with Him to do His will. Disciple-making *will* flow from the church that is surrendered and submitted to Christ and seeking to do His will rather than depending upon church tradition and programs.

"And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples."

-Mark 4:33-34

Jesus modeled discipleship with His own disciples. He preached to the masses using parables, but He took time privately to explain everything to His disciples. In John 15:1-10

Jesus candidly told His disciples that His Words must abide in them, that they must abide in Him, and that without Him they could do nothing. Most Christians, through ignorance or unwillingness, settle for far less than God's desire for a relationship with them.

Discipleship is not merely an exchange of Bible knowledge between two Christians, but a mature believer bringing a less mature believer alongside and helping them walk with Christ. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for pursuing intellectual knowledge through the Scriptures, but not seeking an intimate relationship with Him.

*"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."
-John 5:39-40*

Christ extends two great calls to man. First, to follow Him, which means to walk with Him in an abiding, intimate relationship, and then to serve Him by making disciples. The order is essential. We cannot serve Him unless we are first abiding in Him. We cannot make disciples unless we are disciples.

*"And He said to them, **"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."**
-Matthew 4:19*

Jesus told the disciples that all who believed in Him would, on a larger scale, do the same works He had done. Obviously Jesus was not implying that all disciples would walk on water, cast out demons, heal the sick or perform miracles! However, all disciples are given the Great Commission to go out and disciple others.

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."
-John 14:12*

The apostle Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles (I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus) to encourage believers, instruct church leaders, and establish church order. Paul's words were not his own opinions, but were divinely inspired, and were not optional suggestions, but commands to be followed and obeyed.

*"...I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."
-1 Timothy 3:14-15*

*"...set in order the things that are lacking..."
-Titus 1:5*

*"These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."
-Titus 2:15 (NAU)*

*"But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the **older men** be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the **older women** likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the **young women** to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, **that the word of God may not be blasphemed**. Likewise exhort the **young men** to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of*

good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.”
-Titus 2:1-8

Discipleship is a very important component of church order. Titus 2:1-8 stresses the urgency for spiritual discipleship, as well as mentoring in the areas of marriage and family. Discipleship bridges the *generation gap* in the church. It provides opportunities for the older believers to contribute and use their life experiences, wisdom and maturity to encourage the younger; who need their example, counsel and guidance. If the church neglects the principle of discipleship the older Christians become inactive and the younger Christians lose the guidance that they need in order to mature. When the church is filled with immature Christians, whose behavior and lifestyle mirrors the world, the Word of God is blasphemed or dishonored.

When God invited Noah to take part in the redemption of his family, He gave him precise directions for the construction of the ark (Genesis 6:14-15). Likewise, in the wilderness, the children of Israel were given detailed instructions for the building of the tabernacle, and all aspects of worship and were commanded to follow them carefully (Exodus 25:40). Neither Noah nor the Israelites were left to their own understanding. We serve a God of order, who calls us to walk with Him in fellowship and obedience. As leaders we are privileged to participate with Christ in building His church (Ephesians 2:21,22). We must be careful to follow the pattern provided in Scripture. God does not make it up as He goes along and neither should we! Whatever else our churches do or do not do, we should be practicing disciple-making.

WHERE TO START

Many churches see the need for discipleship, accept the call, and energetically institute programs only to see them quickly lose momentum and quietly fall by the wayside. The Great Commission is an urgent need in the body of Christ but has become obscured or neglected altogether. Christian bookstores have no lack of workbooks, manuals, programs and how-to books, covering all aspects of discipleship, but, as in the words of Jim Petersen of The Navigators, *“Thirty years of discipleship programs, and we are not disciplined.”*

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus reminded His disciples that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him. In *His* authority they were commissioned to go out and make disciples. Disciple-making is not a perfectly polished church program, but a divine work of God in and through individuals who have already become His disciples. In our human wisdom, authority, power, organization or strength we will fail.

“...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts.”
-Zechariah 4:6

How then does a church build an effective disciple-making ministry, and achieve the balance of human organization that leaves room for God’s Spirit to work unhindered?

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO GET STARTED

In The Church

1. Because discipleship should be a priority in the church, a discipleship-focused church requires strong spiritual leadership and must have the support and endorsement of the senior pastor. Ideally the senior pastor will embrace the importance and reprioritize the

ministry focus of the church. Leadership should review and discuss how they can assist in developing and implementing strategies to achieve this ministry goal.

2. Any effective work of God begins with prayer. Commit to pray with a small group from the church who share the burden for discipleship and believe they are called to this ministry.
3. Select discipleship material. The duration of the discipleship relationship will vary based upon the maturity of the discipler.

A good discipleship workbook should include the following:

- A. Biblically sound.
- B. Focuses throughout the book on the importance of a daily abiding relationship in Jesus.
- C. Daily Scripture reading.
- D. Daily writing or journaling.
- E. Covers the 3 main pillars of our faith: Deity of Jesus, the Trinity, and atonement for our sins.

Your materials should include teaching them how to tend to the gifts God has given them: spouse, children, finances, and spiritual gifts. Sadly, most churches never prioritize and/or consider these areas and this is why our families are in the sad condition they are in today.

4. Establish a standard for eligibility, training, and follow-up accountability for disciplers. Jesus began with 12 men whom He personally invited, discipled, trained, sent out to minister and report back to Him. See Discippler Questionnaire at the end of the booklet.

It is so important for the pastor to make the time to take his leadership team through the materials he desires to disciple his people in. Many pastors are very shocked or surprised of the conditions of their leadership team when they invest the time to prepare them to disciple. I have received many emails and calls from pastors over the years expressing how apart from doing this they would not have known how many of their leadership were tending to their daily intimacy with God, their spouse, or children incorrectly...not from being defiant but mostly out of ignorance.

5. Establish a standard for who desires to be discipled and I recommend not making discipleship a requirement but a privilege for those who desire to grow in their faith. See Discipleship Questionnaire at the end of the booklet.

Note: People that need counseling for serious issues like besetting sins, drugs/alcohol, pornography, addictions, or major marriage problems should first receive help to work out these problems before being matched with a disciple. The fact is, these issues are often some of the negative consequences of not abiding in Jesus but if a disciple is not equipped to deal with these issues, then those issues can or will undermine their spiritual journey to maturity.

6. Pray for an opportunity to share the vision with the church body by teaching on the Great Commission from the pulpit or a Saturday or mid-week class.
7. After the vision for discipleship has been shared with the church body, provide an opportunity to those desiring to be discipled to come forward and ask for it.

8. Based upon the number of sign-ups, and the amount of mature believers willing to commit to disciple, make small groups and/or one-on-one discipleship available.
9. If the senior pastor is unable to be available to support the disciples, then appoint a mature Christian to monitor the relationships to keep the discipler on track, encouraged, accountable and to address questions or problems that might arise.
10. Keep praying, trust God and see Him be glorified.

WHAT IF YOUR PASTOR IS NOT INTERESTED IN DISCIPLESHIP OR IMPLEMENTING THESE 10 SUGGESTIONS? THEN WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Do not undermine or judge your pastor. The fact is, most pastors have never been disciplined themselves nor have they disciplined anyone so they are skeptical over why to do this. Another fact is, most seminaries are not teaching this as part of pastoral responsibilities and/or how to implement it into church ministry strategies.
2. You need to pray and prepare yourself to fulfill what God has called you to do as His disciple. I hear from many disciples around the world that have received our materials through a friend or our website and after going through the materials felt the Lord stir their hearts to start discipling others. Fulfilling The Great Commission ourselves is not dependent upon what the church is or is not doing corporately.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
- 2 Timothy 4:3-5*

3. Continue to pray for your pastor, share with him what God is doing through you and be a blessing to him and the body you are in.

WHO IS QUALIFIED TO BE A DISCIPLER?

Because the goal of discipleship is to help a young believer develop an intimate relationship with the Savior, learn sound doctrine and grow in spiritual maturity, an individual qualified to disciple must be spiritually mature. In order to make a disciple you must be a disciple. In the early church when the disciples were increasing in number, the need for leaders within the body of Christ also increased. The standard for raising up leaders was simply stated,

*“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of **good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business.”
-Acts 6:3*

*“...**good reputation**...” - Taken from the Greek word, *martus*, meaning a martyr or a witness. A man or woman of good reputation and integrity, is well reported of by others, and has given testimony or witness of the faith by word and by actions.*

*“...**full of the Holy Spirit**...” - Jesus promised that all who came to Him would receive from His fullness, and from their innermost being would flow rivers of living water, referring to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. To be full of the Holy*

Spirit is to be in constant fellowship with Jesus Christ and to minister to others with the overflow of that intimacy.

“...wisdom...” – Having discretion and a good sense of judgment.

Later Paul wrote to the church in Rome, expressing the necessity of being filled with the fullness of God in order to be able to admonish others. We minister to others with the fullness or overflow of our own personal relationship with Christ.

*“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are **full** of goodness, **filled** with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”
-Romans 15:14*

To fulfill the Great Commission, God is not seeking Christians who have attained to all spiritual maturity. He desires to raise up believers who love Him, are committed to knowing Him more intimately, and have a desire to humbly invest themselves and their time to help another Christian walk with God.

*“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”
-2 Timothy 2:2*

In Paul's final epistle to Timothy he once again stressed the importance of discipleship in the church. Encouraging Timothy to be strong in God's grace, he challenged him to pour himself into faithful men who would then teach others. It is essential that a discipler be trustworthy and able to follow through on commitments.

Some discipleship programs lack power and fail due to impure motives on the part of the discipler. If pride, superiority, or seeking an opportunity to be looked up to by others is the motivation to disciple a young Christian, God will not bless the relationship.

*“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”
-Philippians 2:3*

The motivation for all we do must be love for Christ and for others. In 1Corinthians 13, Paul wrote that without love our words, service and sacrifice are futile. If we attempt to serve the Lord without His love, He will not be glorified, others will not be edified, and we will not be blessed. Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, spent several months discipling the new believers in Thessalonica. He later wrote an epistle expressing his humility and affection for them, which must be the model for all discipleship relationships.

*“But we were **gentle among you**, just as a nursing mother **cherishes** her own children.
So, **affectionately longing for you**, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because **you had become dear to us**.
For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.
You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;
as you know how we **exhorted**, and **comforted**, and **charged** every one of you, as a **father** does his own children,*

that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

-1Thessalonians 2:7-13

THEIR HOME IN ORDER

1 Timothy 3 makes it very clear that a church leader and mature disciple has his/her home in order. That does not mean that by appearance on the outside they seem to have a good marriage and/or have obedient children. This strong exhortation means that they have taken the time to learn and work out God's instructions in how to tend to each other as a husband/wife, and as parents to their children.

Sadly, this is an area that is overlooked when deciding on anyone being considered for a ministry position. Indirectly, by doing this, we are minimizing the value and priority God has placed upon marriage and our families.

NOTE: If a potential disciple has never been discipled themselves in being a husband/wife or parent, it is important to first invest the time into them to learn and a season to work out God's non-negotiable principles in their homes.

A discipler must:

- Have made a personal commitment to Christ.
- Be a patient and a good listener.
- Be committed to a local church, has personal accountability, an honorable reputation and proven faithfulness within that church body.
- Be motivated by love for the Lord, a desire to glorify God and to edify another believer, not personal gain or fulfillment.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit; therefore is empowered and enabled to minister from the fullness and overflow of his/her own intimate relationship with Christ.
- Have a willingness to make a commitment of 1 to 2 hours per week for a pre-determined period of time.
- Have the wisdom and ability to keep confidential what is shared.
- Have the wisdom to seek pastoral advice if the need arises.
- Have his/her home and personal life in order.

ESSENTIALS OF DISCIPLESHIP

- The goal of discipleship is for God to be glorified and the young believer to be edified (built up).
- The power and enabling to disciple is from the Holy Spirit, not our own experience, abilities or knowledge.
- Discipleship can be effectively accomplished in either a one-to-one or a small-group setting.

- Discipleship **is not** for the purpose of a more mature believer taking full responsibility for the spiritual growth of another, but to *help a committed* young believer learn to walk with God.

Flakey Saints

If the following occurs this may indicate that the disciplee may not be truly committed or ready to make discipleship a priority.

- Not consistent in keeping the discipleship appointment.
- Does not complete their homework.
- Not taking responsibility for what God is revealing to them (asking for or giving forgiveness toward others, etc.).

It would be wise in this case to *gracefully* discontinue the relationship, encouraging them to reconsider discipleship when they are ready and able to make a commitment.

- If the disciplee is unwilling to repent of sinful behavior in their life that may be exposed during discipleship (immorality, unforgiveness, marriage or family out of order, etc.) and does not begin to work out the biblically prescribed changes, direct the disciplee to the pastor or church leadership that oversees discipleship for counsel and exhortation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Be patient with the *simple-minded* believer who may struggle understanding biblical principles and may need your encouragement. Remember Paul's relationship with the Thessalonian believers!
- Don't be afraid to confront in love when the disciplee is in error.
- Never be condescending or appear to be spiritually superior to the disciplee.
- Don't allow the disciplee to become dependent upon you. Remember that the goal is dependence upon the Lord.
- During the duration of the discipleship relationship take care that you do not lose focus. Don't avoid social events and casual fellowship, but don't feel obligated to become close friends. Close friendships may develop from discipleship, but the priority should be to complete the discipleship material and accomplish the goal of helping the disciple grow toward spiritual maturity.
- With a very talkative disciplee, the discipler must make a point to keep control of the meeting time and keeping on track.
- Discipleship is not a social engagement. People may step forward for discipleship with the wrong motive, seeking to fulfill emotional or social needs, rather than spiritual needs in their life. This is why the Disciplee Questionnaire (*Why do you want to be discipled?*) is so important.

- Don't be afraid if you do not have the answer to the disciplee's questions. It is okay and even wise to tell them you will find the answer and get back to them. (Halley's Bible Handbook is a wonderful resource to have on hand!)
- Open and close each appointment with prayer. Keep your prayers simple so that you do not intimidate the disciplee.
- As the disciplee becomes comfortable, ask them to also pray.
- Pray for the disciplee during the week.
- If the disciplee has progressed, and you have seen spiritual growth and maturity developing, begin to encourage them to consider becoming a discipler when your discipleship commitment is finished. Remember 2 Timothy 2:2.

DISCIPLER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone (home): _____

(work/cell): _____

Married

Single

Widowed

Divorced

Give a brief description of your home/family life (married how long, children, ages etc.)

Give a brief testimony of when you came to Christ and the circumstances of your personal conversion.

Have you been discipled? Explain. _____

Have you been discipled in marriage or parenting? If so, how? _____

Describe your personal devotional life. _____

How long have you attended our church? _____

Are you involved in ministries at the church? If 'yes,' explain. _____

Past ministry involvement: _____

References; one spiritual (i.e. pastor, home fellowship, Sunday school or Bible study leader) and one character reference from within the church body.

1. _____

2. _____

Why do you want to be a disciple? _____

Are you willing to receive further instruction and training to be a disciple if deemed necessary? Yes No Any hesitations or concerns with this? _____

Ever been convicted of a felony? Yes No _____

DISCIPLEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ Spouse name _____

Address: _____

Phone (home): _____

(work/cell): _____

- Married Single Widowed Divorced

Your Occupation: _____

- Live Alone Live with Roommates

Give a brief description of your home/family life (Married, how long, children, etc.)

Give a brief testimony of when you came to Christ and the circumstances of your personal conversion.

How long have you attended our church? _____

Are you involved in ministries at the church? If 'yes,' explain. _____

Have you ever been discipled? Explain. _____

Why do you want to be discipled? _____

DISCIPLESHIP MATERIALS

Biblical Foundation

Discipleship – Biblical Principles for a Strong Foundation

8-Lesson workbook covering the foundational truths of the Christian faith.
Family Support Foundation (619) 590-1901 www.parentingministry.org

A New Creation by The New Believer's Fellowship at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa

A 14-week study guide for new believers.
ISBN 0-970021836

Spiritual Discipleship - Principles of Following Christ for Every Believer by J. Oswald

Sanders
20-lessons with study questions.
ISBN 0-802467984

Trusting God – Even When Life Hurts by Jerry Bridges

14-lesson book with companion study guide.
Navpress - ISBN 0-89109-617-5 (book)
ISBN 0-89109-241-2 (workbook)

Experiencing God – Knowing and Doing the Will of God

13-week course for established believers desiring a deeper walk.
LifeWay @ (800) 458-2772

Marriage discipleship

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