

Discipleship: It's Letting People In and Showing Them How to Live as Family

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I. Introduction

Our #1 responsibility is to make disciples, i.e., to show people how to join God's family and how to live in that family. This means that we share our lives with people, with Christians and non-Christians. We reach out to them and treat them the way Jesus did. We befriend them, laugh and eat with them, discuss serious matters, share God's Word and salvation, etc., etc., And as we show them how to be Jesus' disciple, how to live like Jesus, they learn how to do the same for others. What's awesome is that Jesus is going to do all the heavy lifting for us.

II. Discipleship: Are You Living Life With Those Who Know Christ and Those Who Don't?

Church growth is Jesus' problem, our problem is making disciples, because of our financial reality, unless we get more annual donations we'll have to shut our doors. This requires that our church membership increase. Thankfully, this is not our responsibility. The burden of growing the church is Jesus' (Matthew 16:18). Our responsibility is to make disciples, but notice that Jesus is also going to help us with this problem: His authority and power will guide us and He will be with us every step of the way (Matthew 28:18-20).

But hasn't Grace Chapel made disciples? Yes and no. It's not that we haven't done any discipleship. We have, some more than others. We've been there to disciple each other through various problems, but we haven't made disciples the way Jesus intended, the way He showed His disciples, which they went on to do with the rest of the world (Acts). And this is mostly our fault as your elders because we may've taught *about* discipleship and discussed various principles of discipleship but discipleship is not something you teach, it's something you do. Unless someone shows you how to make disciples, you won't know how. And Sunday church (or Sunday and Wednesday) is not enough. Three (or five or more) hours a week won't address someone's everyday spiritual needs (in marriage, parenting, work, anxiety, etc., etc.).

Clarification: you can fail to be Jesus' disciple and still be eternally saved, some say that if you fail to be a disciple of Jesus—which means that you have to commit your life to Jesus, put Him first above all else and follow Him faithfully (Luke 14:25-33)—then you're not a true Christian and therefore not truly saved because a true Christian and disciple will bear fruit (John 15:8), after all Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16). First, the ONLY condition to eternal salvation is faith, not faith + being Jesus' disciple (John 1:12; 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:47, et al.). Second, yes, to be Jesus' disciple is to put Him first in your life: what He thinks about life in general and your life in particular must be the most important thing in your life (Luke 14:33) but this has nothing to do with eternal salvation just like being born into a family has nothing to do with obeying the rules of the family. Third, yes, a true disciple bears fruit, but Jesus' discussion about bearing fruit in John 15 is about the fact that you cannot bear fruit without Him; it's not about eternal salvation. Fourth, yes, Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruit," but to whom was Jesus referring? In context, Jesus was talking about false prophets not Christians (the word "Christian" was not known until 10-12 years later, Acts 11:26). Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience and "false prophet" to them would've meant just that, a false prophet in the Old Testament sense (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

Making disciples is letting people into your life and showing them how to live as family, discipleship is showing people how to join Jesus' family and then showing them how to live in that family. This means that you show them how to do everything the way Jesus did (Matthew 28:19-20), how to pray, i.e., how to speak with and hear from God the Father (Matthew 6:7-15; John 16:12-15), how to study and understand God's Word (Matthew 5-7), how to see themselves as a brand new person (Psalm 139:13-16; Luke 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17), how to deal with stress and depression (Matthew 26:36-56), how to give and accept forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3-4), how to deal with those who mistreat you (Luke 23:32-38), how to deal with betrayal, how to deal with frustration and disappointment, how to deal with sin and temptation (Matthew 3:13-4:11; 5:27-30), how to defeat our #1 enemy and his lies (Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-18), how to reach out to those who don't yet know God and are living in sin (Mark 2:15-17), and on and on.

But to do all this, you have to let people into your life, you have to live life with the lost and hurting the way Jesus did. You do this with your fellow Christian family members and also with those who don't yet know Jesus. It means you see people the way Jesus saw them, like children who needed to be reunited with their Heavenly Father, like individuals who were valuable to God. This means you actually care about people; you long to see them transformed by the power of God. It means you hang out with them, you eat together, play together, talk about serious stuff and fun stuff, etc., etc. And as you love them, i.e., as you laugh with them, as you eat with them, as you share God's Word with them, as you make friends with them, i.e., as you love them the way Jesus loved them, then the Lord will open their hearts and they will become part of His family and begin to walk like Jesus and they in turn begin to show others how to join God's family and live like Jesus.

But aren't we supposed to give them the "Gospel" first then make them disciples?

Jesus's command was to make disciples not believers. Can you give someone the Gospel in 2-5 minutes? Sure and sometimes God opens the door for that. But that's not the way Jesus usually gave the "Gospel." What Jesus offered people was a lifelong relationship with Him and the Father (John 17) not a Gospel tract (e.g., Matthew 19:16-22). After all, the Gospel means Goodnews and the goodnews is more than salvation from the Lake of Fire. It's an eternal relationship with the God who made you, who longs to be part of every moment of your life, who longs to free you from everything that's bad and wrong in your life (Luke 4:18).

What about the obstacles? As you think of this process, you might be thinking to yourself, "But I can't show someone how to study and understand the Bible, I barely know how to do that myself." "I don't have time for more people in my life; my schedule is too busy as it is." "I'm not really much for company; I'm not a people person." "I like to keep my things private; I don't want anyone getting into my business." "If I have a bunch of people over my house, I'll have to spend hours cleaning; I don't want a bunch of people seeing my messy home." And on and on. First, NONE of this will be done by you but the Lord who dwells in you (Acts 1:1; Galatians 2:20). Second, He will be with you every step of the way and will give you everything you need, even helpers to clean your house, even the words to say when you don't know what to say (Matthew 10:19-20; 28:18-20; Mark 10:29-30; John 16:12-15).

III. Conclusion

"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."