

Making Disciples: *Our Delightful Duty*
Matthew 19:18-20

“The one indispensable requirement for producing godly, mature Christians is godly, mature Christians.”— *Kevin DeYoung*

Introduction: You have to be exceptionally devious or strangely successful to have an entire scheme named after you. But if I said the words “Ponzi Scheme”, most in here would understand what it is, or at least that it’s negative, or perhaps have even been a victim of it. In 1903, an Italian immigrant by the name of Charles Ponzi came to the United States looking for economic opportunities, but after the bank that he was working at (Bank Zarossi) went bankrupt, he was out of work and idle. After dabbling in check forgery and smuggling, he spent some time in prison, which gave him time to gain inspiration. He set up an invented company called *Securities Exchange Company*, where he sold international postal coupons.

The scheme went something like this: Hired and trained sales agents would pitch potential investors, telling them that they’d receive double their money back *plus interest* within 45 days. As money was poured in to purchase these coupons, Ponzi simply received the money directly, pocketing most, while giving portions to pay off previous investors, creating an infinite cycle of non-profitable investments. During his run, he secured over 40,000 investors, which made one person filthy rich: Charles Ponzi, whose worth in 1920 was \$8.5 million (which in those days was a lot of money!). Narratives of his lavish wealth and lifestyle created buzz, and false news of others receiving the same wealth continued the cycle until Ponzi’s publicist, William McMasters, reported his duplicitous scheme to the authorities. Ponzi ended spending 3 ½ years in federal prison and 9 years in the State clink, but never showed any amount of remorse for taking people’s hard earned money. After his time in prison he said the scam was “*the best show ever staged on their territory since the landing of the Pilgrims!*” After several escape attempts out of prison, he was deported back to Italy in 1934, and died in a charity hospital in 1949 with only \$75 to his name.

Sometimes *making disciples* as a primary mission of God's church functions more like Charles Ponzi than we'd like to admit. We don't want to do the hard work of actually cultivating relationships and pointing people to the transformative work of Jesus Christ, but instead get them to sign up to attend, observe, and maybe even serve in some capacity. Thinking that gathering people or adding numbers is equivalent to making disciples, churches have fallen prey to a scheme that celebrates numeric growth rather than life change. It's a fascinating conversation to have with pastor friends around the country who are part of churches with thousands of people: “*we are good at gathering people, but we're weak at discipleship.*” This is hard to hear but makes perfect sense! Making disciples is difficult, time consuming, not always easily quantifiable, and often ends in heartbreak. Simply look to Jesus' intimate three years with 12 men and you will see examples of all of that and more. In calling people to follow Him, Jesus had more people *reject Him* than yield to Him, at least initially. It would be much easier if Jesus had left us a command, a mission that stated, “**Gather crowds, fill a room, get people to acknowledge they believe in God, rattle off a prayer, or have them recite a verse or 2.**” Instead, Jesus gave a *command mission* that involves genuine followers of Jesus as the conduit to help make genuine followers of Jesus. Which simply means that the mission can only be accomplished by those who have already tasted of the mission in their own life, not by being part of a crowd. *Truly, everyone is welcome here, but only those who have yielded their lives to Christ in faith and repentance can join us on our mission.* As we look freshly at **Matthew 28:18-20**, we are not only reminded that the scope of our mission is to **reach the nations, but also to MAKE DISCIPLES**. This morning we want to see what a disciple is and is not, and what we are calling a drowning world to.

*"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, **they worshipped Him**, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES** of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"*
Matthew 28:16-20

A Working Definition of "Disciple"

A few observations to make of this text.

1. **The context of the command was worship** - Often there is a artificial debate in the church regarding its purpose: is the purpose of the church to gather and worship or to reach the lost? The answer, of course, is YES! We gather to worship and scatter to witness, recognizing worship happens both individually *and* corporately, but reaching the lost is something that happens as a result. In fact, **worship is both the impetus and goal of making disciple-making**. We are motivated by our love and zeal FOR Christ, and our desire to see Him magnified by all nations, as well as knowing that when people turn from self-love and self-worship to worshipping Christ, true joy and satisfaction can be had. *"The complete focus (of the disciples) was on Christ. That is the essence of true worship - single minded, unhindered, and unqualified concentration on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."*¹ This was Paul's goal and motivation later on in the epistles: *"For I decided to know nothing among you expect Jesus Christ and Him crucified...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but on the power of God (1 Cor. 2:2, 5), and later declared the goal of life/marriage/singleness was simply "to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." (1 Cor. 7:35). Worship is integral in making disciples, which answers the all important question: **how do I grow in my ability/desire to make disciples?** The answer: Are you growing in your love, devotion, and commitment to Christ? If so, loving people and seeing them find their joy in Christ will be a clear intention and goal.*

2. **The authority we have in making disciples belongs to Christ alone** - Making disciples who love Christ is an impossible task without supernatural intervention. We can have people follow US, but they can only go as far as our weakness will allow. To have someone follow us as we follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1) takes something far outside of our ability or control. The fact that **all authority in heaven and earth was given to Christ** not only gives us great *assurance* of our mission, but shows us exactly what lane we run in. **Ephesians 1:18-23** tells us what happened after Jesus' resurrection: 1) riches of His glorious inheritance, 2) immeasurable greatness of power toward those who believe, 3) Christ is seated in a position of authority, 4) He has authority over all rulers, power, dominion, and name for all time, 5) Christ is the head of His church. Do you see how Christ dominant our mission is? He is the point, the goal, and the means to get it all done. It is His authority that calls out people from darkness to light, not ours. It is not our ability, eloquence, or creativity that rescues drowning people from their sin, it is His alone, so that through the exercise of His authority He gets all the glory!

3. **Making Disciples is an Active Command for all Disciples** - If you study this passage, it becomes evident that though there seems to be multiple commands, in the Greek there is only one, an active imperative: **Make Disciples**. The other commands to *go, teach, and baptize* are tied to this command, but are corollary to it. What does this command mean?

¹ John MacArthur, Matthew Commentary, Vol. 4. p. 338.

What is a disciple? For a word that is known and thrown around in just about every church, we often have a nebulous idea of its true meaning.

According to the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, a **disciple** is *someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of the leader or way*. It means a *learner or one who is taught*. In the OT, Isaiah 8:16 50:4 and 54:13, the idea is "learned" and "taught". In the NT, the term is almost exclusively used in the Gospels and Acts, wherever there is a teacher and those taught, the idea of discipleship is present. Though we know Jesus called His 12 disciples, but also those who were sympathetic to His teaching, the **Pharisees and John the Baptist** were also said to have their own disciples (Mark 2:18, Matt. 9:14). At the core definitional level, a disciple is one who follows and learns. **So what differentiates a disciple of Jesus?**

- **Not all disciples are true disciples** - In John 6, Jesus had large crowd following Him (after feeding the 5,000 days before). There were some who had followed Him around and had learned from Him, and they were referred to as disciples (John 6:60), which is the basic and strict definition of the term. But as He began to narrow the focus of His teaching to believing in Him specifically (6:29) as the means of eternal life (6:47) and receiving Him as the Bread of Life (6:51), the crowds began to struggle with this idea. Some of His disciples found this teaching too difficult to listen to, so many turned back and no longer walked with Him (6:66). This prompted Peter's confession of faith, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."* (6:68-9) But Jesus also reminded the disciples that even one of the 12 was a devil (yikes), knowing that Judas would betray Him (6:70-71). Those who followed Jesus for a while WERE His disciples, but only those who remained were truly His (Matt. 10:22)
- **Disciples of Jesus are marked by self-denial** - Jesus defined what separated out true from false disciples: *"Now a great crowd accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple...so therefore, anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:25-27, 33). Jesus did not mince words. To follow Him was costly, and one who would follow Him had to consider that cost BEFORE following Him. It would not only cost the inevitable persecution and suffering, but it would cost a radical change of desires, plans, futures, relationships, and rule. In today's culture, one can claim "being a Christian" because they believe there is a God, that Jesus existed, and the cross probably happened. But being a Christian means a transformation of our heart and mind that translates to a new Master, new affections, and new course of life. Anything less falls short of the qualification Jesus laid out. **AND**, in case we want to differentiate being a Christian and being a disciple, **Acts 11:26** says, *"And in Antioch (church at Antioch) **disciples were first called Christians.**"* The term "disciple" was still used in Acts (6:1-7), but was replaced by other words, like Christian, in the rest of the NT, but the identity of both was the same.
- **Disciples of Jesus follow Him and His example** - Following Jesus is glorious and joyful, but it is also difficult. Following Jesus requires understanding of His life, but also in following His example. *"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."* (John 12:25-26) In following Him, we will not only serve Him, but suffer for Him. *"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for*

you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. (1 Peter 2:21-22). We cannot follow Whom we do not know. We cannot follow the One we know unless we are willing to follow in His steps.

- **Disciples of Jesus grow in maturity and fullness of Christ** - Central to the idea of being a disciple is one who learns, and in the context that learning would be *continual and ongoing*. This means that following Jesus is not simply learning a set of information in entirety and then concluding we know it all, but rather that learning becomes part of who we are. Just as a child has the expectation of growth or growing up, so the disciple of Jesus has learning and obeying as an inevitable core of life. Jesus even promised His disciples that he **Holy Spirit** would be sent to help teach and bring to remembrance all that Jesus taught them, since they missed things along the way, but also that they would understand His teachings more clearly as they grew (John 14:26). **Ephesians 4:11-15** builds the case that the goal of gifting in the church is for **unity of faith, maturation, and that we attain to the measure of Christ's full stature**. In other words, the **OBJECT** of our discipleship is CHRIST, deepening our dependency on, obedience to, and worship of His glorious name. A true disciple is one that is in Christ, and making disciples has at its core helping others find their joy in Him (2 Cor. 1:24; John 15:11).

Stopping briefly here, how are we doing so far? Does this characterize who YOU are? Have you declared you believe in Jesus but have never trusted Him, asked for forgiveness, and yielded your life to Him? Remember, even demons believe in God and shudder (James 2:19). But those who deny themselves, take up their cross in willingness to suffer with and for Jesus, and follow Him are His true disciples. And only true disciples can make disciples. But what does that look like?

3 Key Aspects of Making Disciples:

1) **GO** - As we saw, there is only one command in Matt. 28:18-20, "make disciples". But there are three other words that describe how we do this that look like verbs. In reality, these three: go, baptize, and teach, are participles, meaning there are not **4 equal commands** but **ONE** with three descriptors. The translation of "poreuthentes" is translated as "go" in almost all major translations, which we should see as correct. Often we have heard that since the word is a participle, it should be translated "as you go, or as you are going", which is not wrong per se but also it loses the force of the word. Bill Mounce builds a case that this participle picks up the **mood of the main verb**, and since "make disciples" is an aorist active imperative, the word should be translated "Go". *Why does this matter?*

Making disciples does not simply happen by accident but by purposeful intent. It is a command for all disciples. What does a disciple of Jesus do? He "goes to make disciples"...of all nations. The go is not defined narrowly but broadly. Go to your neighbor, co-worker, team or classmate, to other areas, and across oceans. In **Acts 1:8** the disciples were given the power to operate in the Holy Spirit and the scope of the reach of their witness, "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" Neither of these circles of reach were *better* than the other, but all required disciples to **GO!** In fact, as the NT church settled into fellowship (Acts 2:42) and reaching Jerusalem, it took God bringing in persecution to **scatter the church throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria** (Acts 8:1), and finally setting apart Paul as a missionary to reach the ends of the earth (Acts 13:1-3). Disciples are not made without the church going.

2) **Baptize** - Baptism is the great identifier of one with Christ. Baptism follows salvation, and declares the work that the Godhead did in our life, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though it may be a costless event in our day today, in the NT as well as parts of the world today,

baptism is the great differentiator. In Kyrgyzstan, a young person was ok to go to a Bible study, since his family would think it was just a phase. But when a young person would be **publically baptized**, they would be rejected, with some even having hits put out on their life. Baptism publically displays what God has done in our heart (Rom. 6:1-11). If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, publically, by immersion. That is not just a requirement of this church for membership (though it is), but a direct command by Jesus Himself.

3) Teach - Finally, discipleship, or making disciples, is all about teaching and learning. For sure, being a disciple of Jesus puts you immediately into the family of God, which means there are *relational expectations of the 'one anothers'* and community. But it also necessitates growing in our understanding of God through His Word, craving it (1 Pet. 2:2), and being transformed by it (Rom. 12:1-2). This takes place in the **informal and formal, through face to face communication, listening to sermons or Scripture, reading, and formalized training**. We all have different learning styles, intellectual abilities, and appetites for reading, but all of us are called to learn...AND TEACH. In fact, if you are a disciple, you are a *theologian, a lifelong student, a participant in Christian Education, and a teacher*. All of this takes place primarily (but not exclusively) in the **home and the church**. Let me give you an example.

In Ephesians 6:4, fathers are exhorted to bring up their children in "**discipline and instruction of the Lord**." What does that mean? Most parents struggle with what it means to raise their kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord. But the reality is stark. A typical evangelical kid spends **47 hours in church** over the course of the year. The same kid will **15 minutes of face to face time in meaningful conversation with his father**. But he will spend **7 hours with media every day** (totaling 2,555 hours a year...as compared to 47) and **7.5 hours a day in school** (or 1350 vs. 41 hours with dad)

First, it starts with an understanding of the word "discipline". It is the word *paideia*, which John Piper said meant, "*This word signifies the action that a father takes to give his children the abilities and skills and character to live life o the glory of God. It involves being shown how to do the things that the Christ-exalting life requires and being held accountable to them as well as you can.*"² This means that training or discipleship is not only learning formally and by the book, but also **by example**. I loved watching Brett Tarr bring over his son Dawson to my house over the last several weeks to help me with my electrical issues. Not only was he able to teach Dawson about safety and electricity, but also got to show him hard work, precision, and service.

Second, the source of teaching is God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), which is profitable for teaching (*paideia*) and training in righteousness, so that the **man of God may be complete, capable, and equipped for every good work**. Parents must know the Word of God and teach it, not only by example but in formal instruction, so that children learn how to think, to make decisions, and to be ready to take on the pressures, temptations, and narratives they will face in the world. This takes a great amount of toil, struggle, and energy, but is of eternal value (Col. 1:28-29).

Conclusion: Making disciples is not optional for any Christian. We cannot help anyone come to Christ or mature in Christ if we ourselves do not know or worship Christ. Thus, discipleship is NOT a nice ministry the church has or part of parenting, but central to both. The church is involved in many things (and should be), but whatever else we do as a church **making disciples must be central in our heart, time, prayer, evaluation, and celebration** since our goal is to glorify Christ and He is glorified when we are obedient by His grace and satisfied in Him. I think it's fair to ask some diagnostic questions in conclusion:

² Dr. Alan Pue, "Re-thinking Discipleship" p. 40.

- How are you obedient to the call to discipleship and making disciples?
- What is your plan to grow and mature in Christ?
- What is your plan to help others grow and mature, both in coming to Christ in evangelism and then growing in maturity?
- What are changes that need to be made to be obedient to this mission? What is needed for you to grow in your effectiveness?

*"The main aim...is for the sole purpose of pointing ourselves and those we lead toward the infinite beauty of the Triune God. **Success in ministry** is not found in building programs but in building disciples ---disciples who love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27). **Christ is the goal, not better or more impressive ministries. He is what we want.**"³*

³ J.T English, *"Deep Discipleship: How the church can make whole disciples of Jesus."* p. 17