

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: “Disciples: Follow Christ & Make Disciples”

Matthew 28:16-20

Today, if asked, most of us would describe ourselves as “Christians”, some maybe as “Born-again”, others that we are “Saved”. Those are all good, valid, and proper terms; but, what is amazing is how far we have moved from what the New Testament called those who were saints and headed to Heaven.

If you just read and note the descriptions as you proceed through the books of the New Testament, you would assemble a list of the:

NEW TESTAMENT NAMES OF CHRISTIANS

Those who are part of God’s family are called by an amazing galaxy of terms in the New Testament. Most of us have heard of the top seven, but all together there are almost 100 different ways that born-again believers are named in the New Testament.

Beyond the top seven there are many different combinations of words used one, two, three times like *aliens and strangers*” (1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11); “*kingdom of priests*” (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:10); and “*chosen people*” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Here is a brief summary that may surprise you. Let me give you the top seven in reverse order:

Seventh place: “Christians” = 3x (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16);

Sixth place: Followers of “The Way” = 5x (Acts 9:1-2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 23:14; 24:22);

Fifth place: “Witnesses” = c. 27x (Luke 1:2; 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 26:16; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16-18);

Fourth place: “Saints” = 62x;

Third place: Those Jesus asked and they were “Following/Followers” = c.100x;

Second place: Those who were “Believing/believers” = 266x;

First place, and most used is: “Disciples” = 274x (John 13:35 ; Acts 6:1-2 ; 11:26 ; 14:21-22 ; 18:27).

That’s why we refer so often to the truth that:

JESUS CHRIST COMMISSIONED HIS CHURCH TO MAKE DISCIPLES

Jesus Himself sums all of those various ways of naming and describing us into one overarching term: “disciples”. That is why it is the most frequent term for us in the New Testament, and the clearest target for all of our lives to be focused upon in “making disciples”.

All the promises of the Old Testament may be seen as finding their fulfillment in and through the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ, who stood on a mountaintop in Galilee and commissioned His Apostles.

All of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ in the four Gospels may be seen as distilled and crystallized in those powerful words of Matthew 28:18-20.

All of the truths of God taught through the New Testament Scriptures from Acts to Revelation may be seen as an outflow of that amazing declaration by God the Son that we know as the Great Commission.

The clarity and scope of those words demand our attention. Please join me listening again to Him challenging them and now us with these wonderful words:

Matthew 28:16-20 (NKJV) Then the eleven **disciples** went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 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, 20 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.

For us on this side of the Cross, what Christ said is so simple: ***Disciples Follow Christ & Make Disciples***. That’s it. Everything else is tied to that simple statement: worshipping God, Biblical ministry, and glorifying God all flow from God’s purpose to show the world that He is a Savior, Who so loved the world that He sent His Beloved Son to be the Savior of the world.

Welcome to a study of the central theme of our earthly lives. We glorify, please, and serve God to the degree that we are a part of what He has so clearly asked us to do and to be for Him. That takes us back to how we got here, in 1 Timothy 4, Paul is training Timothy in how to keep the church on target through the centuries. Paul gives Timothy a set of exercises that if done in the power of the Spirit, would keep Timothy and his church members he served, spiritually healthy. We have been looking at these as:

BIBLICAL EXERCISES FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH & FITNESS IN 2014

1. The Discipline of **Truth** (our source is in God's Word of Truth v. 1-6a) leads us to
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2. The Discipline of **Devotion** (we love of God's Word that feeds us v. 6b) leads us to >
3. The Discipline of **Time** (we invest our lives in the eternal not the worthless v. 7a) leads us to >
4. The Discipline of **Integrity** (we actually personally pursue godliness v. 7b-10) leads to >
5. The Discipline of **Disciple-Making** (we explain to others what knowing & following Jesus is all about) v. 11. Note how short, sweet, and to the point Paul gets, here in 1 Tim. 4:11:

1 Timothy 4:11 (NKJV) These things **command** and **teach**.

Our purpose as believers, disciples who follow Christ, is to continue reaffirming Christ's commands (that is the "command" part of v. 11), and following up with explaining how to do what He said (that is the "teach" part of v. 11).

What are the "commands" that Christ taught, and how are we to continue in His steps, making disciples and teaching them what He wants us to teach them? To understand the elements of the "making disciples" command, we will first look at what Jesus did, and then what His Apostles taught from what they learned.

WHAT JESUS CHRIST TAUGHT & HIS APOSTLES HEARD

First, we need to trace how Christ actually described "**Who is a disciple?**" That is making disciples. Since Jesus Christ actually did what He left us to do, this study is the heart of what we need to know.

Second, when those closest to Christ obeyed the command to "make disciples", how did they explain: "**What does a disciple do?**" That is teaching them to observe all things. How did they do so themselves, and what did they write down for us to see as the process that we are to follow. Throughout all the centuries since the Great Commission, we have had the record of what Christ did in the Four Gospels; and we have in Acts & the Epistles, the Divinely inspired explanation by those closest to Him, and sent by Him: actually doing and recording what they did in obedience to His call.

WHO ARE DISCIPLES: DISCIPLES FOLLOW CHRIST

Trace with me Christ's explaining what following Him as a disciple really means, starting in Matthew 4:19. The next three passages we will look at are each almost exactly a year apart if you use the standard harmony of the Gospels that has Christ's three and a half year ministry starting near the end of AD 26, and the Cross being early in AD 30.

Watch how over three years of recorded ministry, Christ's call to His disciples is also used for others who want to follow Him. Jesus begins to use His distinct call of those He

wanted as disciples by asking them to “Follow”. Christ goes on to repeat this call 22x in the Gospels¹. Read along with me starting there in Matthew and heading towards the Gospel by John.

Note the instructive nature that Matthew’s record of Christ’s first spoken words in ministry about were a call to “repent”; and His second recorded words were the call to “follow”.

Matthew 4:17-19 (NKJV) From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, “**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Now move onward in the sequence of Christ’s ministry, one year later to halfway through AD 29, as we turn to Mark 8:34, and see the continued explanation by Christ of discipleship.

Mark 8:34 (NKJV) When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “**Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**”

Then in Luke 14:26-33, we are in the events just prior to the raising of Lazarus, we are into AD 30, just before Christ’s final week. So we are near the end of Christ’s public teachings, and we see another enlargement of the call to following Christ that the disciples heard Jesus present in ministry.

Luke 14:26-27, 33 (NKJV) “If anyone **comes to Me** and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot **be My disciple**. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot **be My disciple**. 33 **So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.**

Now turn to the Gospel by John where we find the most complete treatment of the word disciple, since John uses that word “disciple” (81x) as well as “follow” (7x) more times than any other Gospel.² First in John 1 we see that disciples believe on Christ and follow Him.

John 1:37 (NKJV) The **two disciples** heard him speak, and **they followed Jesus**.

¹ Matthew (six times) 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21, 28; Mark (four times) 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke (five times) 5:27; 9:23, 59; 18:22; John (seven times) 1 :43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19, 22.

² “Disciple” is used 74x Matthew; 46x in Mark; 38x in Luke; 81x in John; and 30x in Acts. “Follow Me” is used 6x in Matthew; 4x in Mark; 5x in Luke; and 7x in John.

John 2:11 (NKJV) This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and **His disciples believed in Him.**

John 6:66 (NKJV) From that time **many of His disciples** went back and walked with Him no more.

John 8:31 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.** 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 13:35 (NKJV) By this all will **know that you are My disciples**, if you have love for one another.”

John 15:8 (NKJV) By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; **so you will be My disciples.**

WHO ARE DISCIPLES: DISCIPLES ARE TRUE BELIEVERS

Now to make the big connection, look at the Book of Acts and note that when those who followed Christ in His ministry are merged with those who after the Cross get saved, who respond to the Gospel, and who enter the Church: what are they called? ***They are called disciples!*** Look at the first nine chapters of Acts:

Acts 1:15 (NKJV) And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of ***the disciples*** (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said,

Acts 6:1-7 (NKJV) Now in those days, when ***the number of the disciples was multiplying***, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 7 Then the word of God spread, and ***the number of the disciples multiplied greatly*** in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 9:1,10,19,25-26,36, 38 (NKJV) Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against ***the disciples of the Lord***, went to the high priest 10 Now there was ***a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias***; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with ***the disciples at Damascus***. 25 Then ***the disciples*** took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. 26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried ***to join the disciples***; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 36 At Joppa there was ***a certain disciple named Tabitha***, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds, which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she

became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and *the disciples* had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

WHO ARE DISCIPLES: PEOPLE WHO GET SAVED ARE DISCIPLES

Now notice a summary of what Paul did as an Apostle sent out by Christ into ministry in Acts 14:

Acts 14:21 (NKJV) And when they had preached the gospel to that city *and made many disciples*, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

Finally, we see the very last time the word “disciple is used in Acts 21:16. From then on believers are called by many other terms, but God's Word has identified them as disciples who follow Jesus Christ in obedience to His Word.

Acts 21:16 (NKJV) Also some of *the disciples from Caesarea* went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an *early disciple*, with whom we were to lodge.

Now, remember where we started?

TEACH DISCIPLES WHAT CHRIST TAUGHT

We have just traced what Christ actually taught about what it meant to be a disciple. Next, we need to know: what did Jesus teach disciples they need to do, to be properly observing all that He commanded them?

One of the best places to start is to just analyze Christ's longest sermon. We call this three chapter long sermon the Sermon of the Mount; and it is in Matthew 5-7. From this passage we can actually see the teachings of Christ on the basics for all believers, all followers, and all disciples. Join me back in Matthew 5-7 as we see those “basics” that all believers need to be taught.

BASIC-1: SALVATION MUST BE GENUINE

Basic-1 is Salvation: First Jesus explains what it means to be saved. He used His very first words in public ministry (Mt. 4:17-19) to say “repent”, but here in Matthew 5:1-4 He begins to enlarge upon salvation and talks about the elements of coming to God as an absolutely helpless beggar (“poor in spirit”) with contrition or sorrow for sin (“mourn”).

Then Christ ends the sermon with those stern warnings that a decision is not enough, saying all the right things without a life-transformation is deadly. That is Mat. 7:13-29.

So Jesus opens and closes this message for “disciples” in Matthew 5-7 with the **Plan of Salvation**. So the first element disciples need to know, understand, and be taught is what it really means to be saved:

- In Mat. 4:17-19 and 5:1-5 Jesus said: repent, come helplessly seeking mercy, sorrowing over personal sinfulness, humbly to follow Him.
- In Mat. 7:13-29 Jesus said: make sure you have entered the right gate, are on the right road, and have come to obey the right Lord, or great will be your disastrous ending apart from Him.

BASIC-2: GOD'S WORD MUST BECOME YOUR PRIORITY

Basic-2 is God's Word: Next, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus explains to His disciples the vital place that the Word of God has in the life of a disciple for: nurture of our spiritual lives, protection of our spiritual lives, and directions for lives of pleasing God.

In chapter 4 Jesus stated that we need to “live” by feeding upon every part of God's Word. Then Jesus showed the way we are to use God's Word as our weapon in spiritual warfare.

Starting in Matthew 5:6 and extending all the way to Matthew 6:4 were elements of what God expects to see growing in the lives of true disciples: spiritual hunger and thirst (5:6), mercy (5:7), purity (5:8), peacemakers (5:9), bold witnesses (5:10-12), filled with good works (5:13-16), understanding God's Word is Divine (5:17-20), with heart change (5:21-32), truthful words (5:33-37), love (5:38-48), and generosity (6:1-4).

BASIC-3: PRAYER MUST BECOME VITAL

Basic-3 is Prayer: Jesus then goes on to explain how central prayer is to be in the life of a believer (6:5-15). He explains the role of fasting, since He later ties that to prayer (6:16-18), and then explains the faith our Heaven Father desires that prevents anxiety (6:25-32, 34). Finally Jesus ties together self examination and confrontation (7:1-6) with the needed persistence of prayer (7:7-12).

BASIC-4: SURRENDER & CONSECRATION MUST BECOME YOUR GOAL

Basic-4 is Surrender & Consecration: Jesus ties together surrender to His will, and consecration to holiness twice. First in two individual sections on pure “eyes” (6:22-23) and surrendering to one “master” (6:24) the twin concepts of surrender and consecration

are explained. Then in one verse (6:33) Jesus combines surrender into the call to “seek” God’s rule over our lives; and consecration as we “seek” God’s righteousness in our lives.

BASIC-5: STAY FILLED & IN STEP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Basic-5 is the Work of the Spirit: Jesus taught that: the Spirit of God is to energize us to a lifestyle of worship (Jn. 4:21-24); the Spirit of God gives us an overflowing life of joy (John 7:37-38); the Spirit of God reveals Christ more and more to us (John 16:13-15).

So, in just a simple look, we can see these “basics” that Jesus Christ taught to those who were His disciples. They are still the framework for us today. They also are seen enlarged and explained, all the way through the Epistles as those closest to Christ understand the command to “make disciples” meant.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DISCIPLE-MAKING: “DISCIPLES: FOLLOW CHRIST & MAKE DISCIPLES”

For us on this side of the Cross, what Christ said is so simple: ***Disciples Follow Christ & Make Disciples***. That's it. Everything else is tied to that simple statement: worshipping God, Biblical ministry, and glorifying God all flow from God's purpose to show the world that He is a Savior, Who so loved the world that He sent His Beloved Son to be the Savior of the world.

How did they “make disciples”? What is the process that we are to follow, that they followed? That is what we find in the rest of the New Testament.

Throughout all the centuries since the Great Commission, we have had the Scripture record of what Christ did in the Four Gospels; and we have had the explanation by those closest to Him, and sent by Him, actually doing and recording what they did in obedience to His call.

DISCIPLE-MAKING IN THE EPISTLES

Here is a quick summary of what Jesus told the Apostles to do, and how they obeyed.

1. In Matthew 28:18-20 Christ explains that “making disciples” means: those who follow of Christ. Or, a truly saved church.
2. In Acts 1:8 Luke explains that “making disciples” means: those who share the Gospel. Or, a truly evangelistic church.
3. In Acts 6:4 the Apostles explain that “making disciples” means: those who are stuck to prayer. Or, a truly praying church.
4. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul explains that “making disciples” means: those who surrender to God. Or, a truly consecrated church.
5. In 1 Cor. 10:31 Paul explains that “making disciples” means: those who want to feel the weight (glory) of God on everything they do. Or, a truly glorifying God church.
6. In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul explains that “making disciples” means: those who explain how to follow Christ to others. Or, a truly discipling church.
7. In 1 Peter 2:2 Peter explains that “making disciples” means: those who are actually using God's Word. Or, a truly healthy church.

So, the simple lessons we see that Christ gave, and we are to pass on are lessons about: salvation, witnessing, praying, surrendering to God, glorifying God, training others, and staying healthy through the Word of God.

I actually teach these as seven simple sessions with any believer wanting to get started in the right direction.

DISCIPLESHIP LESSONS IN THE BASICS

1. ***Salvation, Assurance, Confession & Soul winning:*** Mark the Romans Road starting in Romans 3:10; and discuss 1 John 1:9; John 10.
2. ***Devotional Bible Study Methods:*** Summary, Lessons & Application from Mt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16.

3. ***Daily Spirit-Filled Living:*** Galatians 5: 16-23; Ephesians 4:22-5:18; Colossians 3:1-17; Romans 8
4. ***Sacrifice, Surrender & Consecration:*** Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1-2; Mt. 6:33; Rom 12:1-2; Gal 6:7-8.
5. ***Lifelong disciplines of Scripture Memory & Meditation for Spiritual Warfare:*** Joshua 1:8-9; Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Peter 5:6-9.
6. ***Stewardship of Time, Treasures & Talents in Christ's Church:*** Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10.
7. ***Lifelong Disciplines of Prayer & Following God's Will:*** Prov. 3:5-6; 1 Th. 5:17