

## Discipleship May 2018

IN June of 2016 Ancestry.com announced that they received the 2 millionth member into their DNA data base. This is what they wrote on the company blog:

It was just a little over 11 months ago that we reached the 1 million mark, so the Ancestry DNA database has doubled in just short of one year. We now have 2,000,000 people DNA tested who are connecting to family and making discoveries of their own.”

- By the way, that figure doubled again in only 10 months the number of people submitting their DNA reached 4 million. It seems that everyone is interested in discovering the roots of their family tree.

In June of 2016, CBS News reported: Genealogy -- the study of family ancestry -- has become a multi-billion-dollar business.

- It is reportedly the second Largest hobby in the United States, just behind gardening. (*Can you believe that?*)
- Ancestry inquires have become the second most popular entry in online search engines. (*Like Google*)

USC professor Vern Bengetson says we all have a built-in desire to know where, and whom, we come from. "We want to find out about the highs and the lows, the triumphs, the tribulations of people whose genes we carry,"

Now WE understand from the Word of God that all of humanity, every family on the earth shares a common ancestry.

If scientists were able to trace our DNA far enough they would discover what we know to be true from the Bible, we share a common origin, and a common plight.

Genesis 1:26 **Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

Now if you can think back that far, you may remember from High School Biology that each strand of DNA is shaped like a chain. You may have heard people refer to a “Chain of DNA.

Well this morning I would like us to consider a different kind of chain, a living chain, which I believe to be a fundamental element of life in the Body of Christ.

- This morning I would like to consider the living chain of discipleship.

Like the human genome, this living chain of discipleship has been the building block of spiritual life in the body of Christ for all generations. The Apostle Paul described this living chain of discipleship in his letter to Timothy when he wrote:

2 Timothy 2:1 **You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**

- With these words, Paul outlined a simple pattern of succession and stability for the spread of the Gospel and the ongoing growth of the Body of Christ.
- Paul said, The Message that you heard from me, must be entrusted, deposited by the work of the Holy Spirit to faithful men who will be able to teach others.

Paul's command actually looks beyond Timothy to the next generation of believers. And it lays out a perpetual strategy for raising up generation after generation of faithful believers. The Gospel that was passed on to Timothy would ultimately be handed off to faithful men, who in turn would pass it on to a fourth generation—and so on, and so on. As King David wrote in Psalm 145:

Psalm 145:4 **One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. 5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.**

- Following the chain of discipleship backward, link by link, it inevitably lands us all in that small group of Apostles who received the Word of Truth from Christ

Now listen, If we would be faithful stewards of the truth that we have received, we simply must pass that truth on to others. In other words, every Christian ought to be a discipler.

- No matter who you are or where you live, surely you know someone who is lost. And somewhere within your circle of influence there is an immature Christian who needs to know the truth that you have learned. These responsibilities are inherent in the Great Commission: **“Go and Make disciples”** (Matt. 28:19).

You may remember that we started the New Year with a series of topical sermons on discipleship. In that initial series, we came to understand that the church fulfills its purpose on the earth and glorifies God when it actively seeks to make disciples of all nations. Our goal in 2018 is to develop a culture of discipleship here at Harvest.

This morning before we move on to our studies in 1 John I would like to stir you up by way of reminder with three essential elements of Christian discipleship.

- The Message carried by the Disciples
- The Method of Discipleship
- The Motivation for Discipleship

## 1. Message

This past winter (*the never-ending winter*) was a particularly bad one for the spread of the Flu. Although we laid out numerous boxes of tissues and bottles of anti-bacterial gel, some people still stayed away from church because they see the sanctuary as a veritable petri dish for the growth of the virus.

- We meet together in public gatherings, we welcome one another in love with a warm handshake or a gracious hug. We gather from house to house for fellowship. We all use the same door handles and drinking fountains.
- And we understand that when our lives intersect with one another there is an opportunity for the transference of the virus.

I say all of this to remind you that wherever and wherever Believers gather together there is an opportunity for discipleship.

- As a Pastor, I pray that our lives would be AS infectious with the Gospel as they are with the flu. I pray that sound doctrine would spread among us as freely as the common cold.

When it comes to disease, we understand, the power to infect is found in the virus, Our physical bodies, our hands and mouth actually have no power to infect they simply provide a means for the transference of disease.

- IT'S the same with Discipleship. Physically being together doesn't cause us to grow, it is the Word of God that provides the power to transform us.
- We can hang out together and talk about our kids, we can discuss the NFL draft picks, and frankly that may be enjoyable but that's NOT discipleship.
- Discipleship takes place when believers study and apply the Word of God together in committed loving relationships.
- Consider the impact that the Gospel message had on the city of Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 **For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.**

- Evidence of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit was easily observed in the radical transformation that took place in the lives of those who believed.

6 **And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.**

- Persecution and hardship had no effect on the joy that the Holy Spirit brought to those who believed. And in that joy they carried the gospel throughout the entire region.

8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

- News of the great awakening that took place in Thessalonica spread throughout all of Macedonia and Achaia. Wherever believers traveled, they shared the Gospel and made disciples.

In Vs 9, Paul repeats some of the good reports that He heard from Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 1: 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead,

- It was there in the city of Thessalonica where the Disciples were referred to as those men who turned the world upside down.
- Well we understand that the power of God is contained in the message, not the messenger. Paul and Silas were simply obedient to the command of the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations. WHAT was their Message???

On that great day when Jesus rose from the dead, He met with his disciples in the upper room. There in Jerusalem He opened their mind to understand the Scripture and He imparted to them the message they would carry to the ends of the earth.

Luke 24: 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

- Their message contained three essential, Scriptural elements:
  - First, Christ would suffer. (*he showed this to them through the O.T.*)
  - Second, Christ would rise from the dead.
  - Finally, that Repentance and forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed to all nations. And He said to them:

48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

- The message is true because it is Scriptural, it is authoritative because it came from the mouth of Jesus, and is powerful because it is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

When you read Acts Ch. 2, you can see how the Disciples followed the pattern that was given to them by the Lord. On the Day of Pentecost God opened Peter's mind to the Scriptures and He proclaimed:

The suffering of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ and He called the people to repent of their sin and believe on Christ and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Now that we understand the power and authority of the message let's look at the Method of discipleship that is connected to the spread of that message.

## 2 Method of Discipleship

The book of Acts leaves us with no doubt that the power behind the proclamation and spread of the message belongs to God. At every point in the narrative, we see the activity of God the Holy Spirit.

He gave the Disciples boldness to speak in the face of opposition, and He opened the hearts of the elect to hear and believe the Gospel message.

- Throughout the Book of Acts, the making of disciples is God's work, achieved by God's Word through God's Spirit in the lives of God's people.
- When we turn to the Epistles, we see a continuation of the same methods that were employed in the book of Acts as the Gospel moved from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.
- We already saw the power of the message in 1 Thessalonians, now lets go back to that same book to see the method in which discipleship takes place.

The Method of Discipleship begins with the clear Proclamation of the Gospel

(I already spent a good deal of time in this so I will be brief)

1 Thessalonians 1: 5 **because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.**

- The Holy Spirit, working through the proclamation of the Gospel brought the conviction of sin and grace for repentance and faith in Christ.
- This was evident in Thessalonica where the people **turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

Next, in the Method of Discipleship is ENDURANCE. We see throughout the N.T. that Paul and his companions were tenacious in their efforts to make Disciples

- They arrived in Thessalonica, after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, and yet they didn't give up they continued to herald the message.

1 Thessalonians 2: 2 **But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.**

- Now, we may not be beaten or imprisoned for the Gospel here in the US, at least not today, BUT we will face numerous trials, hardships and disappointments.
- I spent nine years working with a man who eventually walked away from the faith. I invested 18 months of intense discipleship into a man who went on a binge of drug abuse that sadly ended in suicide.
- If you are going to give your life to disciple others you must be resilient and tenacious and look to the Lord for your strength.
- Next we find that the method of Discipleship must be gentle and loving.

Again we look to Paul for clarity regarding the method of discipleship. In 1 Thess 2 we see his method was grounded in humility and bathed in love.

1 Thessalonians 2: 6 **Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.**

- Paul and his colleagues expressed genuine care for the Thessalonian people. He compares his gentleness with the people to a nursing mother and his instruction to that of a faithful dad.

1 Thessalonians 11 **For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.**

- The nitty gritty work of discipleship takes place in the realm of personal relationships so love must be genuine.....
- Discipling relationships will test your character so love must be patient, it must be kind it cannot be arrogant or rude, it cannot insist on its own way... It must believe all things, hope all things and endure all things.

Finally we see from chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians that PRAYER was a vital part of Paul's method of Discipleship.

1 Thessalonians 3: 9 **For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?**

- Paul's love for the Saints revealed itself in continual, passionate prayer. We find an example of that prayer in Ch. 3 Vs 11.

11 **Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.**

- You may have a limited amount of time to spend face to face with the people you are discipling but you can express your love and concern 4 them in daily prayer.
- You can ask the Lord to open their eyes to the truth of His word, you can pray for the fruit of God's Spirit to be displayed through them, Pray that they will grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, Pray for their marriages, kids...

Friends, discipleship is NOT a program, it is not an activity that you can sign up for in the Narthex. It is the God ordained lifestyle of the redeemed. The living chain that links us to the generations of Believers who have gone before us and the greatest investment that we can make in the lives of the people we love.

With that in mind we have considered the message and the method of discipleship, now lets consider the motivation behind our discipleship?

The First and Most Important motivation for discipleship is simple OBEDIENCE to the command of the Lord.

- In His exalted state, Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28: 18 Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- Now that they were set free from slavery to sin. Having been empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a new life of joyful obedience to God, we hear the command of the Lord calling them to
  - Go and make disciples of all nations.
- In essence they are carrying on the very work that Christ began when he walked among them.
- He came announcing the Good News, He gathered a handful of men, He chose to live among them teaching them the Word of God.
- He sent the Holy Spirit to empower them for the work

Our primary motive for discipleship is loving obedience to the one who bore the punishment for our sin on the cross. But there is more:

A secondary motivation that inspires us and spurs us on in obedience is found in the final book of the Bible. Turn with me to the book of Revelation chapter 7:

Revelation 7: 9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

- In this glorious vision of the throne of God, John shows us the fruit of the Gospel, the completed work of God's redeeming grace at the end of the age.
- What began with a command from the risen Lord to "Go and make disciples of all nations" finds its finale in the gathering of a great multitude in heaven giving glory to God.

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

FRIENDS the chain of discipleship that began with the first generation of disciples ends in a glorious crescendo of praise to glory to God.

There are some very practical steps that you can follow to engage in a lifestyle of discipleship:

First — Join a church. (preferably this one!!)

- Arrive at church a little early and stay late so that you can build relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Second - Practice hospitality with members of the church.

- Dedicate the necessary resources of time and materials to meet with one another. If you can share a meal with someone once a month.
- Discuss discipleship efforts with your spouse and work together to reach other couples and pray together for your efforts.

Third — Ask God to arrange strategic friendships with both believers and unbelievers.

- Reach out to your neighbors and look for opportunities to engage in spiritual conversations. Offer to pray for them or even with them
- Ask people to read a devotional book or a book of the Bible with you and schedule a time to discuss what you are reading.
- Take the time to help people with their practical needs. Painting their house, planting a garden and talk with them while you work.
- Push yourself to break through the bubble of isolation and ask the Lord to fill you with his Spirit, pray for boldness and courage.

ABOVE ALL KNOW the Gospel!! Learn how to share it effectively.