

CLARIFYING TERMS

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Our mission at Grace Community Church is to Love God, Love Others and Make Disciples. This morning we're again thinking about making disciples.

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "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."

I find there is confusion about what it means to make disciples. It seems that when I use our Lord's phrase "make disciples" there are a number of different images that come into our minds.

When some of us hear "disciple making" the picture that pops into our minds is handing out gospel tracts or doing door-to-door cold turkey evangelism. We also call this witnessing. Making disciples includes evangelism through many different means, not just cold turkey evangelism. The problem is that we equate "make disciples" with evangelism.

Is this what Jesus meant when He told his disciples to make disciples. Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that people need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. No, in the sense that making disciples is more than evangelism.

Think about it this way. Sam and Sally get married and they want a family; they want to be parents. Where does parenting begin? With conception. With bringing a baby into the world. Let's say Sam and Sally conceive and have their first baby. At that point would you congratulate Sam and Sally that they had completed the task of parenting?

Of course we wouldn't say they've completed parenting. We would tell them they've just begun! Why? Because the goal of parenting is to raise and train children to become mature adults who themselves will be able to parent their own children. Conception / birth is a necessary aspect of parenting, but not its fulfillment!

Our Lord taught His disciples the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) to illustrate this aspect of disciple making.

Matthew 13:3 (ESV)

³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow..."

As Jesus explained later, the sower was sowing "the word of the kingdom".

Matthew 13:18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom..."

Jesus was teaching His disciples what to expect as they went about making disciples. They would first need to sow the Word of the Kingdom. The seed of the Word has to be sown if there is going to be any possibility for men and women to become followers of Jesus.

Jesus went on to teach that what happens to the seed in the soil is something man cannot see nor control. If, how and when the seed germinates and grows is known only to God. The farmer can only plant the seed.

Would any farmer declare their job finished when the sprouts break through the soil? Would there be any sprouts if the farmer never planted the seeds?

So is planting the seed farming? Yes. When the seeds are sown is farming complete? No. Is watering, weeding and fertilizing the sprouts farming? Yes. Is watering and weeding and fertilizing all there is to farming? No. If there were no planting, there would be no watering, weeding or fertilizing.

Sowing the seed and nurturing the sprouts are essential elements of farming.

How did Jesus go about making disciples? Where did it begin for Jesus?

Matthew 4:18–22 (ESV)

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Where did making disciples begin for Jesus? By inviting men to follow Him. Discipleship begins with inviting people to follow Jesus. But did it end there for Jesus? When Simon, Andrew, James and John got out of their boats and walked up to Jesus were they discipled? Was the process complete? No! It was just beginning! But without the invitation there would have been no possibility to become Jesus' disciples.

There are two applications I want to draw from this. First, some of us confuse a Christianly lifestyle with making disciples. If I play Christian music in my cubicle at work I'm discipling the people in my office. If I help my neighbor bring in their trash cans, I discipled them. These are not disciple making. Playing Christian music and helping your neighbor are the good things a follower of Jesus does because they love Jesus and because they love others. Playing Christian music and helping your neighbor adorns the gospel of Jesus Christ with a sweet aroma of grace and love but what the people in your office need and what your neighbor needs is the gospel of Jesus Christ. They need to hear the Words of God because only by hearing the Word of God can they be saved and transformed.

John 3:16–18 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

1 Corinthians 15:3–6 (ESV)

³ ...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time...

Now I know as soon as I said, “They need to hear the Words of God” many of you had an image pop into your mind that I'm telling you to grab your coworkers by the lapels like a crazy person, spit flying, quoting Bible verses at them and screaming they need to turn or burn.

Obviously that is not what I'm suggesting at all. But what does need to be on our hearts and minds is a readiness and watchfulness for opportunities to share the gospel.

This brings me to this second application: we all need to be prepared and anticipating the opportunities the Holy Spirit will open up for us to share the gospel with others. We need to have a few key verses memorized like John 3:16, John 14:6, Romans 3:23 & 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 15:3-6. These are the seeds of God's Word by which we are saved. Every believer, without exception, can memorize these verses and learn to share them effectively. Every one of us needs to be prepared to sow the seed. That is a minimum requirement every one of us can achieve. We'll talk more about this in a few weeks.

Making disciples begins with evangelism, but does not end there.

When we talk about making disciples some of us get this image in our minds. Disciple making is made out to be synonymous with missions. If I obey Jesus and become a disciple maker He's going to send my family and me to these cannibals in Papua New Guinea (btw, the caption over this picture on the internet said, “Tribe Apologizes for Eating Methodist Missionaries”).

Is this what Jesus means by making disciples?

Yes and no.

God's heart is that none should perish, but all should come to repentance. In the Great Commission, Jesus instructs His men to make disciples of all nations; literally, of all ethnic groups. Jesus sent His men

out with the gospel to reach Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. There are people groups who have never heard the name of Jesus. About 15 years ago there were over 4000 unreached people groups. Now, there are about 2000. God is at work. If God calls you to reach an unreached people group, He will give you that desire – you will be compelled. Do you sense that Nate and Megan are living amongst the Tagbanwa people against their will?

So is this making disciples? Absolutely. But is this the totality of making disciples?

This is our mistake – equating missions with disciple making. The task of making disciples is the same whether it be here in our culture or cross cultural. The methods are different because of cultural differences, but the goal is exactly the same; to help people come into a personal, transforming relationship with Christ.

You are called to make disciples wherever you are. If you live the rest of your life here in Ramona, Jesus wants to use you to make disciples right here in Ramona. Are you willing? Will you be obedient?

Wherever God directs you, there He calls you to make disciples.

Some of us may or may not have the privilege of leading someone to Christ. Does that mean we're not disciple makers? Not at all. We can very much be part of helping younger believers become attached to Jesus.

When we talk about this aspect of making disciples some of us might have an image like this pop into our minds. We think we have to be the Bible Answer Man or the Bible Answer Woman. Discipleship is meeting with a person and dispensing Bible knowledge. It's taking someone through a twelve week study and when they've filled in all the blanks they've been discipled.

This is not what discipleship is all about. Discipleship is coming alongside a younger believer to love them, to pray for them, to teach and model what it looks like to trust and obey Jesus in every day life.

Here is what we've learned today about disciple making:

- Discipleship is sowing and growing.
- Discipleship happens overseas and it happens right here in Ramona and every place in between.
- Jesus is calling all of us to make disciples.

So, what are you going to do?

What I'm asking you to do today is to 1) accept a correct definition of making disciples that includes evangelizing and mentoring another person to maturity in Christ and 2) accept the fact that Jesus is calling you to make disciples.

As we close in prayer, I encourage you to pray and affirm to Jesus that you want to become a disciple maker.