

Come and See
John 1:39, 46; 4:29
John Breon

The church's mission is to make disciples. Our vision here for what that looks like is aiming "to be the head, the heart and the hands of Christ—thinking like Jesus, loving like Jesus and serving like Jesus." Someone who does that, or is growing toward that, is a disciple. And by living that way, we encourage others to become and grow as disciples.

A disciple is a believer, a follower, a learner. Another good word is *apprentice*—that is, someone who works with another to learn a trade. We work and live alongside Jesus to learn from him how to live in God's kingdom. We may *become* a disciple in a moment. We put our faith and trust in Jesus and begin to follow him. But *being* a disciple is a life-long adventure. Making disciples means not just bringing people to that moment of initial decision, important as that is, but also continuing to teach and shape and provide for experiences of life in Christ for a person's entire life. Disciples are life-long, committed followers of Jesus Christ.

A disciple of Jesus is with Jesus, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God. We are learning from Jesus how to live our lives as he would if he were in our place. God's Spirit is transforming our inner life to be like the inner life of Jesus. The result is that we are learning to do what we do in the way Jesus did what he did (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 283; *Renovation of the Heart* 22).

How do we get into this life of discipleship? How do we help others enter it? If our purpose as a church is to make disciples, how do we do that? How do we help people who haven't started following Jesus start following him?

The older terms for people who aren't Jesus followers are "unsaved" or "lost." Sometime in the last few decades, someone started calling them "unchurched." Another phrase I've heard is "pre-Christians." That's more positive and promising. However we refer to people who have not yet started following Jesus, we need to answer some questions. Who are these

people? What are they like? Do we want to reach them? What communicates to them? How do we connect with them? Where are they?

The current population of the zip code areas around Durant and Caddo is around 26,500. In ten years, it's projected to be almost 29,000. The percentage of people in this area who indicate "No religious preference, and not interested" was 17% ten years ago and is currently 18% (<http://missioninsite.com/>). That means there are almost 4800 people in and around these two towns who don't think they are interested in religious commitment. There are likely many others who are believers but are not connected to a church. What did Jesus say about fields being ripe for harvest?

There's a lot of demographic information available to help us understand who is not in church and why. We do better to talk with people and find out what's important to them, what needs they see in their lives and the community. If you're like me, you find it awkward to just call someone up and say, "I understand you don't attend church. Can I talk to you about that?" And, if you're like me, you don't know that many unchurched people. That's part of the problem: most church members stick together and don't associate with non-church folks. If you do, that's great. I hope you'll talk to them about these things. Friendship is one of the best avenues for sharing the faith and inviting people to experience Christ in the church.

Greg Graffin is frontman, singer and songwriter for the punk rock band Bad Religion. He also has a Ph.D. in zoology and wrote his dissertation on evolution, atheism and naturalism. Preston Jones is a history professor at a Christian college and a fan of Bad Religion's music. On a whim one day, Preston sent Greg an appreciative email. This led to an ongoing correspondence by email where these two exchanged views in a respectful way. Some of their correspondence was published in the book *Is Belief in God Good, Bad or Irrelevant?*

Graffin didn't grow up with any real religious input. He sees no need for faith or reference to God and spirituality to explain life or to live well. He's not really antagonistic toward religion; he just sees it as a human way of coping that is passed from generation to generation. With increasing

education in science, especially biology, he thinks that in 100 years hardly anyone will resort to religious faith to explain anything about life.

Not all unchurched people are naturalists and atheists like Graffin. About nine per cent of the U.S. population is estimated to be atheists. But that minority is fairly influential in higher education and some other areas. We might think the best way to handle these folks is to write them off or debate them combatively. But respectful conversation where we really listen as well as state our views can sharpen our faith and may help others consider the claims of the gospel more seriously. That's at the heart of exploregod.com and the program built around it. We hope to have conversations and listen to each other on some important topics.

Some unchurched or pre-Christian people in the U.S. simply have no Christian memory. They didn't grow up going to church, hearing the stories and singing the songs. A number of unchurched people claim to be believers—they just don't see much need for active church involvement.

We can't assume that most people these days know what we're talking about when we share our faith. Probably more do in this area than in some other parts of the country, but it's likely that a lot don't. Bob Tuttle tells about being at a dinner party and having a conversation with a man who asked about Bob's faith in Jesus Christ. At some point in the conversation, Tuttle realized he was getting nowhere. Blushing, he asked, "Are we communicating?" The man said, "I'm sorry, but I don't have a clue what you're talking about."

Tuttle's typical presentation of the gospel says that having personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord means experiencing the promise of God who gives the Holy Spirit to empower us to live victoriously and abundantly. But that wasn't getting through in this case. He comments that among most pre-Christians today, *Jesus Christ* is simply a swear word; *Holy Spirit* implies something like cosmic fluff; *personal* means none of your business; and *faith* tries to believe in something that is not quite believable.

After adjusting to the awkwardness of the initial lack of communication, Tuttle asked a straightforward question: "Have you ever considered Christianity?" The man smiled and said, "No, why should I?" Tuttle then asked, "What do you do for a living?" The man was an engineer.

So Tuttle asked, "What do you do when you've got to move a fifty-ton block of concrete? How do you move it?" He immediately responded, "You've got to have a hoist."

Tuttle then said, "Let me tell you about the hoist." This opened the door to some interesting conversation. Tuttle began to explain in a very introductory way that every religion the world over (including Christianity) is like a fifty-ton block of concrete without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (the hoist). He was communicating the same ideas but now with a point of reference in the man's own life and experience. As Tuttle left that evening, he got the man's attention then lifted his arm and said, "Don't forget the hoist." The next week, at the home of a mutual friend, the man noticed Bob across a crowded room, smiled and lifted his arm, mimicking a hoist. That began a series of conversations that eventually led to the man getting involved in Christian service and sharing faith in Jesus with others (*Can We Talk?* 9, 14-15, 110).

Pre-Christian people ask about the Church and Christian life, "Is this for real?" The best answer comes through trusted friends who are followers of Jesus and who invite these people to "come and see" what life in Christ is all about.

We find the "come and see" approach in John's Gospel. In John 1, John the Baptist introduces some of his followers to Jesus. They then follow Jesus, hoping to get to know him. The first words Jesus speaks in this Gospel are, "What do you want?" Jesus takes the initiative and asks this question of every one who would follow him. "What are you looking for? What do you want—really, deep down?" This question touches on our basic need that causes us to turn to God. It's a good question. Listen to Jesus ask it of you. Ask yourself, "What am I really looking for?" It's a good question to ask about the people we want to reach. What are people looking for? We can identify people's needs and help them see the deep need for God that's beneath all their other needs.

These two disciples, hoping to stay with Jesus, ask him where he's staying. Jesus replies, "Come and see." All through John's Gospel, the theme of "coming to Jesus" is used to describe faith. Also, "seeing" Jesus with spiritual perception is another way John describes faith. In a couple of

passages, eternal life is promised to those who come to Jesus, look on him and believe in him. What we are offered in Jesus' invitation to "come and see" is no less than eternal life. What we offer people in our invitations, in all our evangelism ministry, is no less than eternal life.

After spending some time with Jesus, these disciples now bring others to Jesus. Andrew goes to his brother Simon Peter and tells him about Jesus. Then he brings his brother to Jesus.

Later, Philip goes to tell his friend Nathanael about Jesus of Nazareth. He says, "We have found the One Moses and the Prophets wrote about." This seems like a joke to Nathanael. Nazareth was a tiny insignificant backwoods town. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" he asks. This kind of disparaging doubt was a reaction that Jesus would face often. We'll face this kind of reaction too. This just shows our need for persistence, winsomeness, creativity and even playfulness in our witness and evangelism. Philip shows these characteristics. Having learned something from Jesus, he answers Nathanael's question with "come and see." And because of Nathanael's willingness to come to the light, Jesus honors him as one who truly represents Israel.

"Come and see" doesn't mean that we sit back and wait for people to come to us. "They know the church is here and they can come if they want." We can't assume that any unchurched person knows anything about our church. Rather, we go to people with the invitation. It becomes, "Come *with me* and see."

Notice the relationships that spread the news of Jesus. The good news travels best along the networks of our relationships. If we're not motivated by love, if we're not sharing Christ's life in our relationships, then church programs and buildings and such won't matter much. But if we invest ourselves in people, we will see a return for the kingdom of God.

In John 4, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman by a well outside the town of Sychar. This conversation is a model for sharing the faith and inviting people. Jesus gets the woman's attention by asking her for a drink of water. He begins with what she understands and deals with some of her misunderstandings. He shows that he knows what her life is like. He slowly and patiently reveals himself as the Messiah.

At that point she runs back into town and tells the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" Then all the people come out to where Jesus is. "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony..." (verse 39). She didn't have a complete Christian theology of who Jesus is, she simply told what he had said to her and how that affected her. The people, attracted by the woman's testimony and invitation, came to Jesus and believed in him. Then they said to her, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

"Come and see" is the invitation to come to Jesus ourselves, to hear him, to see what he is about, to trust him and love him. Hearing Jesus' invitation is the first step. Then, like those early followers, we spend time with Jesus, we get to know him for ourselves. If we're going to invite others, we need to know for ourselves the One we're inviting them to.

How do we invite people? What's the nature of our sharing and invitation? Think about it this way: What comes to mind when you think of the people who had the greatest influence for God in your life? They were probably loving, kind, winsome, patient and so forth. Let that be our model for inviting.

Whom do we invite? Start with the people around you. We each have a unique sphere of influence or network of relationships where we can minister most effectively. Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus. Philip brought his friend Nathanael. The Samaritan woman told her neighbors about Jesus. Think of your family, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers. Use the "FRAN" method: Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances and Neighbors. Pray that God will show you some people in your life. Pray for those people and look for opportunities to share the invitation to come and see.

Here's one more story about how someone came to know Jesus. Francis Collins is a geneticist who headed up the project of mapping the human genome. In 1976, during Collins' medical residency, the serene faith of some of his mortally ill patients shocked Collins, who describes himself then as an "obnoxious atheist." So he consulted a local pastor, who gave

him a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Collins was impressed by Lewis' nuts-and-bolts approach and he investigated faith on his own methodical terms. Finally, one morning in 1978, while hiking in the Pacific Cascades, he came upon a massive, frozen, three-stream waterfall. To him, it recalled the Trinity. He writes, "I knelt in the dewy grass as the sun rose and surrendered to Jesus Christ" (*Time*, July 17, 2006, 46-48).

Today, would you surrender to Jesus Christ?

Will you commit yourself to being an instrument the Lord can use to offer his invitation to others to "come and see"?