

Impact

By Making Disciples

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February 15, 2009



By Making Disciples Matthew 28:16-20

Good evening. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 28. We are continuing this process tonight that we started a couple of weeks ago. The membership process is happening with over 500 people this month, and we're walking through this membership process, and before we dive into this text tonight, I want to give us a couple of reminders about this whole church membership picture.

When I think about 500 or so folks walking through this membership process, I realize that some of those folks, some of you may be joining a church, becoming a member of a church for the first time. Maybe you recently became a follower of Christ, or maybe you recently realized for the first time the importance of committing your life to a local body of believers if this is the first time you're walking through the process like this.

There are others of you who may have been members of other churches previously. Maybe you moved to Birmingham, and you're getting plugged in with Brook Hills, connected to this faith family. I'm guessing there's some in that number who are joining with this body who are coming from another local body here in Birmingham.

A Few Reminders About the Process of Church Membership...

That can happen for a number of different reasons, but if that is the case, then I want to make sure we're very careful on a couple of different levels. Reminder number one: I want to remind us that we are not consumers shopping for the best product. It's a good thing to seek the Lord, to ask God where we can best commit our lives to a local body of believers for the sake of His glory among the nations. That's a good thing, but if we're not careful in looking for a body of believers to commit to, we can end up looking at different churches and lining up what each church has to offer when it comes to programs and events and offerings. We can line them up just like we do the products in a grocery store, and we choose what caters best to our needs.

There's a danger there. We need to be rid of the consumer mentality with the way that we approach the body of Christ in our day today. What's most important is to pray and seek the face of God and to ask Him where you can commit your life, because if we're just shopping for the best product...and the reality is we'll find a product we like now, but a month down the road, or a year down the road, we'll find a product we like better, and we'll move on to that if we're not careful. We will go through our Christianity never committing our lives to the local church. We want to be careful to avoid that. So, reminder number one: We're not consumer shopping for the best product.

Number two, second reminder: We are not competitors looking to compare with the church down the street. The danger of so many people walking through a membership process like

this, some coming from another local church, is that people might come into this membership process saying, "Well, I used to be a member of whatever church in Birmingham, but I don't like that church anymore because of this. Or, I'm leaving that church because of this." We'll feel the need somehow to justify our decision to move to another local church by speaking negatively about another local body of Christ. This is unbiblical and dishonoring to Christ, and I want us to make sure we avoid it completely.

Statements like, "Well, my church that I'm coming from did this or that," cuts down the kingdom of God, builds up walls of divisions between local churches, and if we're not careful, then especially in a "churched" culture like we live in in Birmingham, where there's hundreds of different churches, we'll start comparing, "Well, this church does this; this church does this, and this church does this. Well, that church doesn't do that anymore. I left that church." We'll even start planting churches...that's what we call them...but in reality they're church flips because we don't like what our church is doing anymore, so we need to start a new one. We need to be very, very careful.

Even if walking through this vision/mission/goal process and some people in this faith family say, "You know, I'm not sure if I'm really on board with this whole picture," then by all means, be in the place among the people where you can best grow in Christ and best give glory to Christ in all nations. However, whether you are coming to Brook Hills or leaving Brook Hills, joining a church or leaving any church, don't feel the need to talk about anything negative about another body of Christ. Simply say, "Well, Christ is leading me to join this church for His glory in the nations." That's good enough. You don't have to expound on that any.

So, we are not consumers shopping for the best product, competitors looking to compare with the church down the street, because we're a community passionate about advancing a kingdom. We're the people of God. We're the people of God, and if we're not careful, particularly in a church culture like we live in, where shopping and comparing churches is the norm, we will lose sight of the fact that we are surrounded by a multitude of people in this city who are lost and on a road that leads to an eternal hell, in addition to a billion people who still don't even have the gospel. We will end up comparing and shopping and missing the whole point of what God has called us to do as the local church.

We glorify Christ BY MAKING DISCIPLES of all nations.

This is why we join a local church, for the sake of His glory in all nations. So, let's fix our conversations on that. That's what we're diving into tonight. This one statement that really sums up who we are as The Church of Brook Hills: "We glorify Christ." we talked about last week, especially in the context of our worship gatherings. "By making disciples" is where we're going to camp tonight. You look at the notes you have in front of you, and you realize this is going to be Secret Church style. So, just hopefully, you're sitting next to somebody who like pays attention to stuff and will be able to help you along the way.

However, the goal is, we're going to look at Matthew 28:16-20, but we're going to try to summarize what we did a couple years ago. We walked through...this faith family walked through six weeks of a series called "Follow Me" where we looked at Matthew 28 and John 17, and we dove in depth into those texts. We're not going to have time to dive in depth. The goal tonight is to get a summary picture of what it means to make disciples. The quintessential text on that is Matthew 28:16-20. So, we'll start there.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The command is clear...

Two words: Make Disciples

In this passage of Scripture, there is one command, one imperative verb in the original language of the New Testament, and the command is clear: Two words, "make disciples". It is the command in the Great Commission: Make disciples. Now, we're going to unpack that, but before we even start unpacking, I want to keep you there in your notes for just a second and say something that's foundational, huge, when it comes to these two words, "make disciples".

Biblical community and biblical mission are inseparable.

You've got this in your notes: Biblical community and biblical mission are inseparable. Biblical community and biblical mission are inseparable. Think about this in terms of the disciples of Jesus. Do you think they knew each other well? Yes. Did they have community with one another? Yes. There was conflict at times, joy at times, but there was sharing life going on. It was intimate community. At the same time, this was a group of men who Jesus would commission to turn the world upside down for the glory of the Father.

Community and mission together, and this is so huge for us, because we have this tendency to try to compartmentalize and separate the two; fellowship over here is what we'll call it, community, caring for another, and then we've got missions over here. However, what if God's call for us to enjoy one another is not contrary to His call for us to make the gospel known among all peoples? What if they go together? What if we experience the depths of Christian community in the context of Christian missions, and vice versa, in the context of Christian mission, we experience the depth of community with one another?

I saw this picture this last week. Earlier in the week, I was having lunch with some seniors in our faith family. To see some of the community forged over years of relationships in that room, sweet, precious community, friendships, people...there are community groups in this faith family of senior adults who are...people are meeting each other's needs and caring for each other in incredible ways. I told them that there are people in younger generations that long for the type of community that they're experiencing.

At the same time, there are seniors across this faith family who are ministering to shut-ins in their neighborhoods, and they're going to prisons and...like, voluntarily going to prisons, not involuntarily seniors being carted off to prisons. They can, like, come out whenever they want. However, they're going, and they're serving there. They're giving their lives there. There are seniors in this faith family who operate disaster relief trailers and go around the country whenever there are emergencies. There are seniors who are going to Arizona and Africa and everywhere in between. I got one email this afternoon from some seniors who are going on some other trips. This is a picture of community and mission. They go together.

So, there's this tendency, some of us will think, or maybe even say, "Well, all this talk about disciple-making, when are we going to talk about caring for each other and meeting the deep needs we have?" Well, that's the picture. We will do biblical community in the context of biblical mission. That's what disciple-making is about. Bringing them together, disciple-making is about sharing life in Christ. We share life in Christ and, at the same time, disciple-making is about multiplying the life of Christ. It's at both ends. We share life and multiply life. That's what we talked about with the seniors earlier this week.

The reality is there are 50,000 senior adults in this community around us, most of whom long for the kind of intimacy with others that are being experienced among many seniors in this faith family. So that's why we don't just do community for the sake of community; we do community for the sake of mission, and we experience the debts of both together in this picture of disciple-making. So, the command is clear: Make disciples.

The command has been compromised...

We are tempted to do everything except the one thing Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission.

However, the command has been compromised. This is the dangerous reality. Ladies and gentlemen, we are tempted to do everything except for the one thing Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission. We're tempted to do everything except for the one thing Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission. What do I mean by that? Well, Jesus never told us to start Sunday School; Jesus never told us to form classes; Jesus never told us to create programs, and He never once came up with a new innovative program. He never told us to construct church buildings. In fact, He ransacked the one they had at one point. He never told us to build colleges, universities, and seminaries. He never told us to organize conventions or hold conferences. Jesus never sent a five color brochure advertising that he was coming to town. We do all of these things, and Jesus never told us to do one of them.

Instead, He told us to make disciples in every part of the world. Now, it's not that all of those things are bad, but it's that all of those things are good only in so much as they enable us to do this one thing. They are bad if, at any point, they keep us from doing this one thing: Make disciples. Here is the frightening reality. For us as a community of faith, we can have the most amazing Bible classes spread throughout this church. We can have the most creative, innovative programs that have ever been thought of. We can have the sharpest people trained and the sharpest colleges and seminaries. We can have the nicest building facilities with all the stuff that you can imagine. We can do all of those things and never once make disciples.

I'm convinced that I can...I could pastor for twenty, thirty years and never intentionally make disciples. I'm convinced that we could...anyone of us could serve in another country as a missionary and never intentionally make disciples, because we will always be tempted to do everything except for the one thing Jesus has told us to do here. So, here's the deal.

We have two options ...

We have two options. First option: We can create self-directive strategies that hope for God's blessing; self-directed strategies that hope for God's blessing. Picture this in terms of the disciples in the Gospels here. They had all kinds of ideas about how to advance the kingdom. Let me see them. "Jesus, let's call fire down from heaven. That would work. That would get people's attention. Let's get the crowds together to do this or that." When Jesus starts talking about how He's going to suffer at the hands of religious leaders, Peter

basically pulls Him aside and says, "With all due respect, Jesus, as your PR manager, I do not think this is going to work very well." They had all kinds of strategies and so do we.

You survey the landscape of contemporary Christianity, and there are all kinds of ideas and innovative strategies for how we can grow the church. There are Christian building firms, there are mail outs after mail outs after mail outs that I get on my desk every week that advertise, in five colors, the innovative strategies that are guaranteed to make your church grow at this price. Make checks payable to: Fill in the blank. All kinds of ideas, and here's the deal, most of the people who are putting those things out have great motives. They want to see God glorified in most cases, and they want to see people come to Christ.

However, here's what we need to realize. Nowhere in Scripture has God promised to bless what we do based solely on whether or not we have good motives or not. It's not that motives aren't important. Motives are certainly important in Scripture. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. However, you won't find a place in Scripture where God says, "I'll bless whatever you do as long as you've got a good motive behind it." He never promises to bless us based solely on our motives. Instead, He promises to bless this one thing: His plan. He blesses it every single time. So, the first option for us is to create self-directed strategies that hope. "Well, maybe this will work out. Maybe God will bless what we've come up with in all of our innovation."

Second option is a Christ-directed strategy that is guaranteed God's blessing. This is the beauty: We do not have to come up with a flashy strategy. I mean, you look at this statement in your notes. "We glorify Christ by making disciples of all nations." How plain is that? You'd think we could have gotten some minds together and come up with something a little more creative. However, the beauty is, we don't have to. We don't have to come up with anything. We don't have to come up with new innovations. We have the plan of God. We need to do it. When we do it, God says, "You're guaranteed my blessing." Guaranteed, that's good. We've got two options: Self-directed strategies that we can create that we hope, maybe in the end, God will bless, or a Christ-directed strategy that He is guaranteed to bless. We're going to go with option number two.

The command in Christ...

Now, what do you mean Christ-directed? Well, look at this picture in Christ, the command in Christ. When Jesus gets to this place with these guys on this mountain in Matthew 28, and He says, "Make disciples", He's basically saying, "You have seen what I have done in you, now you do it in others." So, what did He do? The command in Christ.

"I have finished the work."

This is where John 17:4 is so enlightening. You come to John 17 and this is a prayer at the end of Jesus' life and ministry before He goes to the cross, and when He gets to John 17, He is recounting what He has done before the Father as He prays. In John 17:4, He says, "I have finished, or I have completed the work you have given me to do." So, "I've finished the work." Then, He begins to describe what He had done. What's interesting is there in John 17, Jesus never mentions the miracles He performed. He never mentions the multitudes to whom He preached, but over forty times, He mentions the men whom God had given him out of the world. This is amazing. Jesus gets to the end of His life and ministry, He looks back, and He doesn't mention one of the great sermons He preached. He doesn't mention one of the miracles, none of the miracles, that He performed: Giving sight

to the blind, causing the lame to walk, causing the dead to rise, you'd think those were momentous things to look back at in the work that the Father had given Him to do.

However, instead, over and over and over and over again, He talks about this small group of men that God had given Him out of the world. They were His work. These men were His work that the Father had given Him to do. Jesus' strategy was to revolutionize the hearts of a few and in the process, turn the world upside down. This is so unlike us. For us, bigger is better. Mega-churches, with mega-strategies, and mega-conferences, and with Jesus you've got twelve guys. You get to Acts 1, there's only 120 people who have actually stuck around and told...and done what He had told them to do.

You think about it. What even secular scholars would call one of the greatest, if not the greatest religious teacher in the history of the world, at the end of His life, He's got a following of 120 people. It's a failure by our standards of success. Many-churches, not mega-churches. In Acts 1, what He had done is He had given His life into revolutionizing the hearts of a few men who would begin to think like Him, feel like Him, see like Him, live like Him, love like Him, and serve like Him, and those men would be empowered to impact the world.

Disciples cannot be mass-produced.

The implication is extremely important for us today in the church. Ladies and gentlemen, disciples cannot be mass-produced. Disciple-making is not an overnight success strategy. It starts small. It takes time. Jesus spent three years with twelve guys. If the Son of God thought it necessary to spend that kind of time producing disciples, then we are fooling ourselves to think that we can produce disciples on an assembly line of programs and performances.

This is the picture in Christ. He spent more time with His disciples than everybody else in the world put together. He devoted Himself to a few men, rather than the masses, so that the masses might be saved. That's so important. It's not that He didn't care about the crowds. He cared about the crowds enough to multiply His life into these men. One writer said, "Jesus invested 90 percent of His time in twelve Jewish men in the first century, so that He could reach all Americans in the 21st century." He invested 90 percent of His time with twelve Jewish men in the first century, so that, two thousand years later, you and I would gather together in this room singing His praises.

People are God's method for winning the world to Himself.

That's the picture. It was the genius of His strategy. Do we believe it though? Is this something we're willing to say, "Okay, we're going to give ourselves to it." The foundational truth at the core of this is...it's in your notes there. The people are God's method for winning the world to Himself. People...people are God's method for winning the world to Himself.

I'm convinced the Adversary will do whatever He can to pull us away from focus on people. If you have been around Brook Hills very long, you've heard us talk about disciple-making in some of these things, but I want to remind us, and especially for those of you who are walking through this membership process, the Adversary will do everything He can to keep us from focusing on people. I'm convinced the Adversary has convinced us today that, in order to grow the church today in our culture, certain components are necessary.

First, you need performance. You need a charismatic communicator who can draw the crowds and hold the attention of the crowds. Make sure you've got a charismatic communicator. If you have to put him on the screen, by all means, do so, just make sure

you've got a good communicator. You're even better if you've got a charismatic worship leader as well. A band is an extra plus. Put all of it together, and it better be excellent because that's what people in our culture expect.

Now, in order to have this performance successful, we've got to have a place to bring the crowds to. So, we need to spend untold millions on places to house the performance, places that are designed for people's comfort as they're a part of the performance. Now, once we get them to the place, we need to keep them there. So, we need to create first class, top of the line programs for every age and stage: Kids, youth, college, this group, that group, this demographic; we need programs to reach out to them all, and if we're going to have good programs that are excellent, we certainly need some professionals to run them. So, we need to hire the professionals to run the programs, and that way, we can say to parents, for example, "You drop your kids off with us on Sundays. We'll handle disciple-making here. You don't want to try this at home."

Performance, place, programs, professionals, I know it sounds a bit overly simplistic, but isn't it reality? Haven't we organized the church to revolve around all of these things so that we can say to people, "Invite your friends to church, and that's how we're going to grow the kingdom." Did you catch the misnomer there? I hope if you've been around Brook Hills very long, you've caught the misnomer. Invite people to church, because apparently church is the place where the performance is housed and the program takes place at the place where the professionals work.

However, when you look in the New Testament, you will not see church described as a performance, a program run by professionals at a place. You will see church described as a body, as a people, and here we see the missing component, the crucial component. It's missing people; people whose hearts have been revolutionized by Jesus Christ; people equipped with the power of the Spirit of Christ; people not sidelined to sit on a Sunday in a seat and watch professionals lead individuals and families to Jesus.

Instead, people who are equipped to lead individuals and families to Jesus on Sundays and every other day of the week. People who are able to be empowered to accomplish the mission of Christ for the glory of Christ in the world without dependence on an institution to do it for them. People across this faith family, seniors ministering in the ways I mentioned earlier; the couple that sits down here who, this last year in this faith family, led 16 of their co-workers to faith and Christ, most of whom had never come into this building; the mom of three who sits over here, who's involved in ministry with poverty-stricken families in Birmingham and in the Sudan, young mom of three. For the fifth grader who led her Japanese friend to Christ on the school bus the other day. The people of God, with the Spirit of God, accomplishing the mission of God for the glory of God.

This is it. People, not programs, performances, people are God's method for winning the world to Himself. Jesus was empowering ordinary followers of His...not the most impressive guys in the world...ordinary followers of His to be a part of an extraordinary mission. So, if this is the command, if every follower of Christ in this room is intended to make disciples, then we need to know how to do this one. It is kind of the importance behind going through that "Follow Me" series where we looked at disciple-making because, realize we're talking about disciple-making a lot around Brook Hills, but if you were to survey folks sitting in a room on Sunday, "What does it mean to make disciples?", you'd probably get all kinds of different answers, and maybe a couple blank stares along the way.

Even tonight, I'd ask, just picture, if we were to go around this room and say, "What does it mean to make disciples?" We actually have microphones that are...I'm just playing. What

would you say? What would your response be? The way I look at it, if we know anything...know how to do anything, we need to know how to do what Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission. We need to know that well.

The command in the church...

So, what I want us to dive into is this command in the church, and I want to share with you based on Matthew 28 and what we've studied in John 17, four components of disciple-making. I want to be really careful, even with that kind of preface, because I, in no way, want to communicate that disciple-making is this formulaic, step-by-step outline, where you do this and this and this and this; check, you're making disciples. It's not an easy process at all. Disciple-making involves people. So it's not easy.

It involves you and me, which makes it tough. Whatever involves people, involves work, doesn't it? Even the closest relationships we have, is marriage work? You might not want to answer that. It was Valentine's yesterday, things are going well, you don't have to answer that out loud, but we know this. Even in the most loving, intimate relationship God has designed, marriage is work. So, when it comes to disciple-making, bringing these components together, where they intersect together, we know it's going to be a slow process. It's going to be a tedious, even painful, vulnerable process.

Jesus poured His life into these men. He told them, "You pour life into people." What do you do? How do you take the relationships that God has given you...I want you to think, when we talk about making disciples, think about the relationships in your sphere of influence, at home, at work, in your neighborhood, think about the people who you have direct influence in their lives, Christian, non-Christian alike. How do these components come together so that you focus your lives on people, like Jesus has commanded us to do here?

Share the Word.

So, I want us to look at these four components. First...well not first; it's not like first, second, third; it's just a component. Not first, not number one, just it happens to be first in the outline. Okay. A component: Share the Word; share the Word. This command, "Make disciples", surrounded by participles in the Great Commission: Going, baptizing, and teaching.

Now, I think we've got it in the structure in the original language in the New Testament here...we've got a structure of what Jesus is talking about when it comes to disciple-making. It's supplemented in this picture in John 17 as He recounts what He did with them. So, we've got this first part of going. We go, we share the gospel, and we introduce people to Christ. This is what Jesus did starting out with His disciples. He introduced them to faith in Him, to trust in Him, to trust in the Father. He revealed Himself to them, He says, a couple different times in John 17.

We introduce people to Christ. Evangelism is a critical, non-negotiable component of disciple-making. We don't just do disciple-making with people who are already Christians. If so, then well, a lost and dying world is going to miss out on the gospel. So, it starts with evangelism. It's not all that's involved in disciple-making. It's a critical component of it.

Now, obviously, when we talk about evangelism, sharing the gospel, we have discussed this before. This is not one of the areas that we as Christians feel most comfortable in. In fact, we are probably most timid, most afraid when it comes to this kind of picture. I want to

remind us based on the picture here in the Great Commission that we need not be timid or afraid when it comes to sharing the gospel. We go...when we go, we go with confidence in the sovereignty of God. Right before Jesus said to go in verse 18, He said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." That's a lot of authority. We sang about it just a second ago. Everything revolves around Him. Everything was made for Him. Jesus has authority over disease and demons and death. He has authority over the stars and the moon and the sun. He has authority over every life in this room. He has authority over whether or not we have breath for the next moment. He has authority over all things in heaven and on earth.

He says, "Therefore, in light of that, you go as representatives of this king." We need not be timid; we need not be afraid. We go with the authority of the king. In fact, we look in places like Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 3 and see that Christ has entrusted His authority to the church, to us as the church. So, we go with confidence in Him.

Second, we go living out the gospel of God. We've discussed this last year in the threads picture, how we sew threads of the gospel in our everyday conversations. We season our conversations with the gospel, with facets of the gospel, so we speak every day meaningfully about the gospel.

We go living out the gospel of God, and we go empowered by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of the living God is inside of you, Christian. He has promised to give you everything you need to share the gospel. Acts 1:8, even this picture of Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, the very end of the age", Jesus is saying, "You give yourself to this command. You will see my presence. You will know my presence." I'm convinced we'll know His presence when we're abandoned to this mission in ways we would never know. We would never experience it if we sit on the sidelines and don't give ourselves to this. So, we share the word. We go with confidence in the sovereignty, living out His gospel and empowered by His Spirit.

Show the Word.

Second...or another component...another component: Show the Word. Share the Word, show the Word. Going, baptizing...now, we're going to dive next month deeper into baptism. I hesitate to say that because the last four or five weeks, I've said, "Well, we're going to dive into this later on, like, next month." So, we've got a lot to cover next month, but we're going to dive into it next month. We're going to...especially those of you who are going to walk through this membership process and thinking about baptism, what does Scripture teach about baptism? Some of you who may not have been baptized before, is it that important? Why is it important? What does Scripture teach about it? We're going to dive into that next month.

However, the picture is baptism is our identification with Christ. Baptism is where we go from private confession of faith to public demonstration of faith. You go from private confession to public demonstration, and it's extremely important. It's why Jesus put it here in the Great Commission. Now, I want you to take that picture from private confession to public demonstration of a faith in Christ and think about how this relates to this whole disciple-making process and why baptism is so important.

You've got this in your notes: The world longs to see a demonstration of Christ that accompanies our explanation of Christ. It's not just sharing the Word that's involved in this disciple-making process. It's showing the effects of the words in our...the effects of the Word in our lives. Jesus intentionally showed these men how to live and how to love and how to think and how to serve and how to talk to the glory of the Father. Jesus never told

them to do anything He hadn't already showed them how to do. He was intimately involved in their lives showing them how to obey the Father, how to live out a life a disciple of Christ.

We have a tendency to shirk this responsibility. I think we shirk it with the way we approach discipleship. Even those of us who may have been Christians for years, when we think about discipleship, oftentimes we think about discipleship as a program, or as a class. "Discipleship Hour", "Discipleship Training", "Discipleship whatever". Go to this discipleship class", "When do you offer discipleship classes?" When we look at the life of Jesus and His investment in these men, we realize that if we're talking about discipleship as a class, we've missed the whole point. Disciple-making is not about going to a class; disciple-making is about sharing our lives.

The last thing we want to do with a new follower of Christ is throw them in a class to learn to follow Christ. Think about it. Imagine...imagine you were to lead someone to faith in Christ tomorrow at your workplace, your neighborhood, you lead someone to faith in Christ. The last thing you need to do is begin to say to them, "Well, make sure you get signed up and get in the class for Sunday." It's relegating disciple-making to an institution to do what God has enabled and entrusted and empowered you to do. However, think about...how are they going to grow in Christ?

Think about basics like prayer. How are they going to learn? How's a new Christian going to learn to pray? Getting signed up for the class? Or, would it be more affective for you to say, "Why don't you come over this week, and I want to show you what I've learned about prayer, and we're going to pray together, and I'm going to show you how I've learned to focus my mind on God and prayer and kind of keep from wandering...show you what it means to intercede to pray for other people, and how the Bible says that has effects. I'm going to show you why prayer is so important and what happens when we get alone with God in a prayer closet. I want to invite you into my quiet time and show you how I pray intentionally." That's going to open things wide for this new believer.

Same thing with studying the Bible. Instead of saying, "Well, go sign up for a class or go listen to a sermon.", why not sit down with them and say, "When I open up the Bible, and I come to a passage of Scripture, here's the different questions I ask, and here are the things I'm looking for, and here's how I study this Word that was written a couple thousand years ago and how it comes to life in me today." Do you think new Christians need that? Do you think old Christians need that? Yes, because we've been in all kinds of classes, but where many of us not had somebody show us what this looks like. This is the picture: Show the Word; demonstrate the Word, and we're doing disciple-making; we're living to help others grow in Christ, and we're laying down our lives for that purpose.

The process of...we devote our lives to the process of disciple-making for others' sanctification. Disciple-making...we want to show others how to follow Christ. This is 1 Corinthians 11:1, when Paul says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Is that a bold statement or what? He literally says, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ." In other words, "You follow me. You follow the pattern of my life." That's what he says in Philippians 4:9, "Whatever you've learned or heard or received from me, put it into practice. Whatever you see in me, put it into practice, and you'll be following Christ." That's a bold statement.

This is what disciple-making is about. It's about saying to people, "Follow me. I'm going to show you...I'm going to take responsibility for showing you what the Christ-life looks like in action." This may be one of the reasons why we avoid disciple-making, because this steps up the bar, doesn't it? Now, other people's growth in Christ is dependent on us. However, here's the beauty. We devote ourselves to the process of disciple-making for others'

sanctification and, in the process, we realize that we're dependent on disciple-making for our own sanctification.

Here's what I mean by that. As soon as others' growth in Christ is dependent on seeing Christ in us, then God uses this whole process to take us to levels we've never been before. The reality is, if you're going to show somebody else how to pray, you've got to know how to do what? Pray. If you're going to show somebody else how to study the Bible, you've got to know how to study the Bible. God has is this disciple-making thing rigged. He's got it designed so that when you begin to live for others' growth in Christ, you begin to experience new heights in your own growth in Christ.

I'm convinced that until each of us, as a Christian, give ourselves to this process of disciple-making, we will be stagnant in our relationship with Christ. We will hit a ceiling, so to speak, that we will never grow beyond until others are dependent on us to see Christ. The danger here...I want to be careful. Don't misunderstand here. The point is not, "Well, then, I need to spend some time and learn how to pray and learn how to study the Bible, learn how to do this, and then, I'll be ready to make disciples." That misses the point.

We have this idea...artificial idea we have in our minds, that when we've reached a certain standard, then we'll be ready to obey the command of Christ, when the reality is, and you see this all over the world, especially in unreached places, when people come to Christ, then they start making disciples immediately. We don't wait until we arrive. Which one of us has arrived? The whole point is we will grow to those points when we give ourselves to this command.

I've got a small group of guys, and when I challenge them to pray and study the Word and memorize Scripture, I've got to pray, study, memorize Scripture. They challenge me in that whole process the way God has designed it. This is the beauty of disciple-making. It's where Christianity goes from being so self-centered to be so God-centered for the sake of His glory in other people's lives. At the core, making disciples is living for the glory of God in others. It's living for the glory of God in others.

We don't have time to turn there, 1 Thessalonians 3; it is a great picture of this. Paul literally says, "I live when you stand firm in the Lord." He is living to see them stand firm, and when they stand firm, he lives. It's like a parrot.

We're in the middle of...this is too much information, but I'm going to share it with you anyway. We're potty training Caleb, and I'm not going to give you details of all that's involved, but he turned a corner this last week that was good. It was really, really good, a needed corner, and the beauty of it is, when he turned the corner and things started to be successful in this whole process, Heather and I just lit up. Okay, we're excited. We're living...life is much better around the house when this is going well. When he begins to thrive, then we live. As we're pouring ourselves into him, teaching him, then this is the picture when you begin to see the people that you are laying down your life for have victory over sin in their lives.

You begin to see them, understand the beauty of Jesus, and the joy found in knowing God. You begin to see their hunger for the Word grow. It brings life in you. That's why Paul said earlier in 1 Thessalonians 2...1 Thessalonians 2:19-20. He said, "You are my life and my joy and my crown." Talking about the people he had poured his life into. So, it begs to question, "Who is your joy? Who is your life? Who is your crown? Who are you living for? Who right now is dependent on seeing Christ in you, and you are intentionally showing Christ to them

in your home, in your workplace, in your neighborhood?" Where those people are, this is where disciple-making takes place. Share the Word; show the Word.

Teach the Word.

Another component: Teach the Word. "Going, baptizing, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Now, there's obviously a sense in the New Testament in which teaching is a spiritual gift; teaching is something that is entrusted as a task to certain leaders in the church. However, obviously in the context of the Great Commission here, this is given to all disciples. There is a sense in which every follower of Christ is intended to teach the Word of Christ. Now, be careful not to think about teaching...again, don't go to this classroom mode and think that every follower of Christ is supposed to stand in front of group, however big or small, and lecture and teach.

However, the picture is, as Christ teaches you to obey Him, you teach others to obey Him. You teach others His Word. So, the picture in disciple-making: First, we are always receiving His Word, constantly receiving His Word as disciples of Christ, in our personal study, and small groups, and context like this. We're soaking in the Word, we're receiving the Word, but disciple-making is not just about receiving the Word; disciple-making is about reproducing the Word. We're constantly receiving it, and subsequently reproducing it. If we're just receiving biblical knowledge, we're not doing disciple-making. We're just soaking it in, digesting it, and we're not doing disciple-making until we're reproducing it. That's when disciple-making is happening. When we hear the Word, we're not just hearing it for ourselves; we're hearing it and learning it for the sake of others.

This is the picture, even when I was thinking this week about this "Follow Me" series we did a couple years ago. I'm looking, and I see faces around the room of people who I know have taken John 17 and Matthew 28 and what we studied together in the context of this faith family, and you have taught it. You have taught these texts all over the world. Members of this faith family have taught disciple-making from these texts in Mexico, in India, in Sudan, in Venezuela; you've sent e-mails to me and told me how you improved what I had done.

That's great, like, this is the picture. It's the picture in Sudan. The first time I went there and sitting in a mud hut with a group of church leaders, and the whole time I'm teaching them, I hardly ever see their eyes. It's not because they're sleeping; it's not because they're kind of off daydreaming, but it's because they're writing down every single thing I said. They come up to me afterwards and they said, "David, we believe we have a responsibility to take everything you have taught us from God's Word, translate it into our tribe's languages and teach it to them." They were not just listening to receive; they were listening to what? To reproduce. They were not just listening for themselves. They were listening for others.

Now, bring that picture into this room. Suppose we've got a crowd of people in this room who is listening. Let's just suppose what people are listening. So, we'll start with that, and, if we're listening, maybe...maybe even eagerly listening, maybe you've come here tonight even thinking, "Yes, I want to grow in Christ. I want to learn from the Word." So, you're thinking, "What can I get out of tonight? How can I grow?" Even that mindset misses the point. Even that mindset misses the point because, if that's all we're doing in this room, then Christianity is centering around us. Christianity doesn't center around us. It centers around the glory of God among all nations.

So, what happens, when we begin to sit in this room tonight, we begin to take notes. That's what those notes are there for, not that note taking is some legalistic measure of whether

or not you're making disciples, but are you...are we listening in this room so that...not so that we can grow in Christ alone, although that's hopefully part of the purpose here when we listen to the Word, to receive it for our growth in Christ. However, are we listening in this room for the sake of people who are not in this room? For the sake of people that you work with, not that you're going to sit down tomorrow at work and say, "If you have your Bible, and I hope you do," and you're going to walk through...that's not the point.

The point is there are truths from God's Word that we're diving to Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, and what happens when what's going on in this room is not just infiltrating this building with the Word of God, but it's infiltrating hearts who are taking this Word and truths from throughout this Word throughout Birmingham all week long? Not stopping in Birmingham, but going to the ends of the earth with it, reproducing the Word. God, help us not to let the Word stop with us. Help us to spread the Word. Let the Word spread through us.

Serve the world.

That's the picture: Teaching the Word. Sharing the Word, showing the Word, teaching the Word, and last component, serving the world. Going, baptizing, teaching; do it in all nations, summed up in the end of John 17 as He's getting that end part of His prayer, specifically for His disciples, and He says, "As the Father has sent me, so now I am sending them." He's sending them out, going into all nations, baptizing all nations, teaching all nations. In disciple-making, we lock arms with one another as we lay down our lives for the world. Indeed, disciple-making is far more than a class once a week. It is a people, getting their lives dirty in the world together for the sake of the glory of Christ.

So, the question we need to constantly keep before us is this: Are we discipling in the church...in this local church, are we discipling or disinfecting Christians? Here's the difference. Disinfecting isolates Christians in a spiritual safety deposit box called the church building and teaches them to be good. In this scenario, we define success based on how many people we can get into the building for a couple of hours a week. When we get into the building, we insulate and isolate ourselves from the spiritual losses and the dangers of the world around us. In fact, we define holiness based on what we avoid in the world around us. "If you don't do this, and you don't do this, and you don't do this, and everything everybody else in the world does, then you're holy."

At this point, we may be the only organization in the world that's defining success based on what we don't do. It's not a good picture. The result is decent church members, with little world impact. We live good, risk-free, decent lives with decent homes and decent jobs as decent families and decent citizens. Someone asks us, "Where is your church?" We point them to a building; we point them to an address where we go and gather together in four-wall quarantined world where we actually believe the world looks like this. The danger is we run the risk of being disobedient to God's command to reach the entire world.

I want to be very careful in how I say this, but I want to say very clearly that I sense this temptation as a pastor. It goes back to where we started; bring it back around. Do you think it's possible to be a Christian for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, or thirty plus years and, in the end, have little to no world impact than we did the day before we were saved? Do you think it's possible to get to the end of thirty or forty years of Christianity and have served on all kinds of committees and teams and sat in the chair and sung the songs and written the checks and done all kinds of good things, but never have produced one person for the kingdom, not be able to point to one person, particularly one person outside of your home who you've led to Christ and is now leading others to Christ in this process called disciple-making?

The result of this picture is wasted lives, lives entrusted with the gospel of Christ that never multiply the gospel of Christ. We must be careful to avoid that scenario. Discipling Christians is much different. Discipling Christians, instead of isolating them, propels Christians into the world to risk their lives for the sake of others. Now, what if success is not dependent on how many thousands we can get into our buildings, but how many thousands are going out of our buildings into the world to take on the nations with the gospel of Christ? Now, we've got real holiness, not defined by what we avoid, but by what we risk our lives to do, to make the gospel known in the ends and outs of Birmingham and Alabama and the United States and all nations.

The result here: Disciples of Christ with total world impact; men and women who really believe their lives were created to impact nations for the glory of God. Obedience to God's command to reach the entire world. We realize that obedience to the plan of Christ could never take place in one service a week at one location at one time with the one teacher, because disciple-making takes place multiple times every week throughout the city as we go. The result is abundant lives, lives that count for the multiplication of the kingdom.

The question we must constantly ask as the local church ...

If that's the case, then the question we must constantly ask the local church is this: How can we most effectively make disciples of all nations? How can we most effectively make disciples of all nations as the local church? This is what God has ordained us to do, to accomplish the Great Commission. Therefore, disciple-making must be at the center of the local church. It must be the filter through which everything goes. We all know that the enemy of the best is the what? It's the good. There are all kinds of good things that we could give ourselves to, but if they detract us from the best, things filter out. We want to give ourselves...the task is too urgent, the need is too great.

Based on the precedent of Christ and the pattern of the early church, the primary avenue for disciple-making to occur is in the context of small groups.

How can we most effectively make disciples of all nations? This is why...this is why, if you've been around Brook Hills very long, you've heard...you hear a decided emphasis on small groups. Based on the precedent of Christ and the pattern of the early church, the primary avenue for disciple-making to occur is in the context of small groups. Now, I want to be very clear. I can't go to a point in Scripture where it says, "Do small groups; impact the world." However, when we look at Jesus' life, He changed human history through a small group of twelve men, one who fell away.

You look and picture the early church in the book of Acts, and what you'll see is gatherings, "*ekklesia*", gatherings of believers from house to house to house meeting together, accomplishing the mission of Christ in the context of biblical community, biblical mission, coming together, sharing life, multiplying the life of Christ. God has ordained for His kingdom to advance...don't miss this...God has ordained for His kingdom to advance through ordinary followers of Christ that are involved in extraordinary missions that will have impact far beyond what they ever could have imagined when they began to obey this plan.

I want to introduce you to Ben DeLoach and Chris Ritter. Ben, you know, preached a few weeks ago, leads us, helps equip small group leaders in the context of this faith family, and Chris Ritter is one of those small group leaders in our faith family. I want you to get just a glimpse of these facets of disciple-making coming together in Chris and his wife, Tina, and their family and their small group.

Ben DeLoach: Well Chris, you and I've...we've known each other about three years, I guess, and when I first met you, you were serving in a variety of ways at Brook Hills, and then, all of the sudden, there was a passion that developed in you to lead...it was a particular study, I remember, called "Raising a Modern Day Knight" that has to do with fathers investing in their sons. Talk a little a little bit about your motivations for wanting to do that. For somebody who had no experience really teaching or leading, what were your motivations to lead that group?

Chris Ritter: Well, my first motivation, Ben, was that growing up I didn't have a strong male role model in my life and knowing the little I knew about what God wanted us to do, I knew that it was very important for me to lead my family, obviously, and I had a strong desire to do that. I came upon that curriculum...I can't remember how I did...but it hit me really hard, and I knew that it was something that I needed to do. So, initially my thought was I was going to invest in my son and give him something that I was short on growing up.

Then, as I went through that, I began to realize the value of being the spiritual leader of the family, and I really started blossoming at that point, but that was the initial...the initial thought was to invest in my son and to establish a common "manhood language", as it's called in the book, so that we could communicate better as he grew up.

Ben DeLoach: Over the years, I've seen you invest in your family. I've seen you invest in Chris Jr., and you and Tina both, and other of your children, and you and I have often talked about the balance between a home and investing in family and work and all the things that we've been involved with in serving the local church, and you're family really...I've seen it...it has been become your first small group. They've been your first investment, but now, you've added an additional component to that with this small group where you've invited other families into that picture. So, talk about a little bit about why add this additional element to what you're already doing with your family.

Chris Ritter: Okay, yeah, it's...you know, we all talk about being busy, and we're all busy, and my thing is always, I'll put my busy up against your busy because we all have way too much to do. However, you know, the original small group is the family, and it's what God calls us to do is to lead our families as He led us. What I saw happening, it was all good stuff, but I had a lot of things I was doing, and Tina was doing this, and I was doing that, and we would do this as a family and...when we could.

However, incorporating it all together was difficult. So, what struck me, I remember the day we had lunch, and you kind of told me about the new small group thing, and I really didn't come away mad, like I said this morning, but I came away wondering, "Okay, wait a minute. How's this going to work with all this stuff I've got set up?" So, when we...when I really came to terms with the fact that that was the way to go, what I realized is that all the little silos, if you will, of ministry we were doing really were all there in a small group, just like they're all there in a family. A small group is really nothing more than a family, a larger family.

So, if you take what you...the way you invest in your family, and you expand that to the small group, and then that goes out, and what we've really found that's been very interesting to me is that the...when we talk about biblical missions, biblical missions really are an automatic outflow of biblical community that you form in a

small group, and it's kind of like when you put God in the center and you let him have you, and that's always been a...I've always had two real prayers for our small group: That it would about Him and that when He tells us to go, we go. It's not always popular, but that's something that I've always kept on the table. When He says it's time to go, we're going to go.

So, what I found is when you get to that point, and you let God have it, and you try to follow what He wants us to do, the biblical piece just comes automatically. It's not...you're really doing missions all the time in that group. It's not like something you have to plan. You plan a yearly mission trip or bi-yearly, but as far as the things that just kind of happen over time, they just kind of happen and God takes care of all those details.

Ben DeLoach: That's good; that's good. That's part of walking by faith, I guess, and I've certainly seen that. Now, just real quick, just specifically some things that your group has...well, I guess some opportunities, some doors that have been opened to carry out the Great Commission within the context of that group. A lot of these things, you never planned, never dreamed of. They just, like you say, just kind of happened as you began investing. So, talk about a few of those opportunities that you've had.

Chris Ritter: Well, we all started out, the culmination of our small group, we started on a mission trip in Venezuela, and now, people have come and gone, and we've...you know, God's refined that group and as only He can, but you know, when it all comes to the end, what we really have is a group of people who started on a mission trip, and from there, we have a...last summer we put together and did a mission trip to New Orleans.

We have adults and kids. We have kids from ages 9 to 17, and one of the neat things has been how the kids have brought other kids in. You know, the adults bring other people in too, but the kids bring their friends in, and we've even got one entire family that's been brought in by my daughter's...the relationship that my daughter had that has led to their whole family coming in. However, we did a mission trip. We did a backyard Bible club; we hosted it and taught it. We've done premarital counseling for a couple in our group who were getting married, obviously, and that was a real benefit for all of us.

We...the latest thing we've done is we're currently in the process of beginning an investment into an inner-city school here in Birmingham. We haven't got that all worked out yet, but that's going to be more of a long term local thing. We're praying through what we're going to do internationally this year.

However, one of the best things we've done, and what we're in the middle of right now, is we're actually leading the New Christian's Class. So, on a weekly basis, when we get together for small group, we're actually serving two families. One of them is the relationship my daughter had, and the other one is another family that came to us through the church, and who, strangely enough, I knew from high school, which is really bizarre how all that worked out. However, so what we're doing is we're going through the New Christians Class, and sometime here in the next couple weeks to a month, we should have, I don't know, half-dozen to ten people that will get baptized.

So, you know, what could be better when you...and I was talking to our group about it last week, when you talk about the process of sharing, showing, teaching, and

serving, we've really gone the gambit, and God has been so good to take us through that and let us really live it. So, if we sit back and take account of everything that's happened, when you look at it backwards, it's all crystal clear. As it happens in the beginning, you go, "What was that?", you know, but as you look back it just all falls right in place, and it truly is His plan for all of us.

Ben DeLoach: That's awesome. All right. Thank you Chris, and you've encouraged me, been an example to me as a father, as a husband, as a small group leader, and I thank you very much, man.

Chris Ritter: Thank you.

There are "Chrises" and "Tinas" represented across this faith family, and this is the picture. It's not grandiose, flashy, look at the innovative strategy, but it's beginning to pour your life into people, and a year later, having seen your daughter's friends come to Christ, family come to Christ, seen half a dozen-plus people baptized; God has guaranteed to bless His plan.

We want to see small groups of disciple-makers all over the planet.

So, what happens when simple ordinary followers of Christ give themselves to it? As The Church of Brook Hills, what we are saying is we want to see small groups of disciple-makers all over the planet, all over the planet. Let me give you two scenarios. Let me give you two scenarios. Scenario number one: Let's say we took the five colored brochure and decided we were going to put it into action. Let's say we poured our resources into having the stellar performance and programs, place, and let's imagine we had crowds coming in. Let's imagine, maybe, every week, say, ten people coming to faith in Christ every single week. Just imagine, every Sunday we got together, ten people coming to faith in Christ, and at the end of this year, 500-plus people would have come to faith in Christ. Imagine we pressed on, continuing, continuing, continuing to do that year after year after year after year, thirty years from now, 15,000 people would have come to faith in Christ. We'd be in all the church magazines. We would make a small dent in the lost population of the United States.

The second scenario, they're more personal on this one. The second scenario: Imagine just you sitting right where you are. You decided that you were going to trust the plan of God, plan of Christ here, and you were going to ask God to use you to make disciples, to do what He has commanded us to do and equipped us to do. Imagine over the next year, you had the opportunity to lead maybe a coworker to faith in Christ. You share Christ with a coworker, and they receive Christ, and so, then you think, "Okay, I'm going to show them how to pray, show them how to study the Word", and you begin to show them how to follow Christ.

You begin to teach what Christ has taught you, and everything that has been entrusted to you, you begin to pour out into their life, and you begin to serve alongside them. So, you encourage them. They can do the same thing, so that this time next year, you've multiplied your life in one person, one person. So, the next year there's two of you doing that. The next year, four of you doing that. You do the math. You continue to do that year after year, when it's slow, when the results are not quick, you press on, you trust Jesus' plan, the reality is you do that for the next thirty years, the same time frame over there that we see 15,000 people come to Christ, and in this time frame you would see over four billion people come to faith in Christ.

I think Jesus knew what He was talking about. I say we go with this scenario: Our lives multiplying the gospel in others' lives. What happens if we really believe this, and we do this

for the next year and two years and three years, and maybe, it's not flashy, maybe it's not grandiose, maybe it doesn't even look successful in the eyes of church culture, but we give ourselves to the plan of Christ year after year after year after year, and thirty years from now, there are multitudes of people all over Birmingham and among unreached peoples and everywhere in between that are pursuing Christ and making disciples with their lives.

The question for the church member...

This is the picture, and so it begs the question for every member of this faith family, every person walking through this membership process, every member of this faith family already: How are you going to multiply the gospel with your life? How are you going to multiply the gospel with your life? We have been saved by the gospel, and our lives were created to resound to His glory.

What I want to invite you to do is I want to invite you to consider with me what it means to have the gospel in your heart. I want you to think about how the gospel has transformed you, and then, I want to invite you to contemplate how the gospel has transformed you, not just for you. The gospel...Christ has transformed your life for the sake of multiplying the gospel in other's lives.

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