

7. Foundations to Help Us Develop Healthy Christians

God called us to “Make Disciples.” The various forms of the word disciple are used two hundred and seventy-four times in the New Testament:

matheteuo - to make disciples - used 4 times including Matthew 28:19-20

mathetes - a disciple used two hundred sixty-eight times

mathetria - a female disciple used one time

summathetes – fellow disciples used one time

However, the two hundred seventy-fourth time comes in Acts 21:16 and the word is never used in the New Testament after that point. Since the command to “Make Disciples” is our Great Commission, we need to first examine why this word is never used in the rest of the New Testament.

There were at least two different systems of teaching in the New Testament world. The main system, known by the Gentile world, was the Greek system of teaching. The Greek system of teaching has been adopted today by most of the industrialized nations of the world. The Greek system of teaching is based on telling (and punishing those who cannot repeat back by using severe discipline - we fail those who cannot repeat back) and has been adopted almost universally in our school systems at all levels.

In contrast, the Hebrew system of teaching is based on showing rather than telling. The best illustration of the Hebrew system of teaching is the way Christ made disciples. Christ gave the disciples Four Calls and a Commission, and together, those calls and commission illustrate the process of making disciples.

Call One - Come and See - John 1:39-46, Matthew 9:9-10, Mark 1:30-33

This call came when Christ first met the disciples (or anyone) and was a call inviting people to spend time with Him and get acquainted and even go places with him like weddings - John 2:1-12, to Jerusalem - John 2:13-3:36, through Samaria - John 4. The disciples just went along with Christ and observed what He did and taught. During this period, Christ did and the disciples observed. This provided many opportunities to see Christ lead by love. This period lasted for about a year and was an open invitation to all.

Call Two - Come and Grow - Mark 1:16-20

This call came after the disciples had already been observing Christ for about a year and lasted for an additional nine months. During this period, Christ invited the disciples to learn how to become fishers of men by observing Him. He took them with Him as He went and preached throughout the two hundred and three towns and villages of Galilee. The disciples went along with Christ and observed what He did and taught. They also began to participate. Throughout this period, the group who observed and participated was larger than just the twelve, because it was open to all.

Call Three - Come and Serve - Mark 3:13-15, Luke 6:12-16

This call came after the disciples had been observing Christ for about twenty-one months. This call came after Christ had spent an entire night in prayer - Luke 6:12-13. Christ chose the twelve

that:

- ◆ They might be with Him
- ◆ He might send them forth to preach
- ◆ To have authority to heal sicknesses and cast out demons

During this period, Christ was now sending the disciples out to do, while Christ was there to observe and encourage. In Matthew 10:1-42, Mark 6:7-13, and Luke 9:1-6, Christ sent out the twelve with very specific instructions about how they were to go, what they were to say and what they were to do. In Mark 6:30-31, and Luke 9:10, the disciples came and reported to Christ all that they had done and taught. Later, in Luke 10:1-12, Christ sent out the seventy which would have included the twelve again with some very specific instructions about what to say and what to do. Then, in Luke 10:17-20, they came back and reported to Christ what they had said and done and what had happened. This period lasted for about twenty-one months (about the same length of time as the first two calls combined) and Christ spent much time giving further instruction and showing them how to minister.

Call Four - Come and Shepherd - John 20:21, John 21:15-17

This call came after the resurrection and the disciples were asked to feed and shepherd the flock just as Christ had fed and shepherded them for three-and-a-half years. This time, they would be doing and Christ would be serving them in love (Mark 10:42-45 and John 15:1-8) even though He would not be present. They were to wait until they were endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49) Once they received that power, they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The Commission - As you are going, Make Disciples - Matthew 28:19-20

This commission also came after the resurrection and shortly before Christ returned to heaven. Christ was now sending them out to Make Disciples just as He had made disciples of them. Matthew 28:19-20 gives one command with three participles telling them how to carry out that command:

The command - Make Disciples

- going - they were not to wait for people to come to them
- baptizing - they were to help those who believed identify with Christ and His body, the church
- teaching them to obey all things - just as they had been shown how to obey by Christ, now they were to show others how to obey

The disciples had been shown how to obey by Christ, and now, they were to Make Disciples by showing others how to obey. The Jews understood that was how you made disciples, because that was the way not only Christ, but the Pharisees and other Jewish groups made disciples. The problem was that the Pharisees made their disciples just like themselves. Matthew 23:15 says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” The Hebrew system of teaching and learning was based on showing, having people participate, having people do, having people report what they had done, and then discussing what they had learned together.

However, we mentioned that the Greek system of teaching was based on telling and severe

discipline. This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 where Paul said they had ten thousand instructors - the slave who told a child and then exercised severe discipline if the child failed to learn - but not many fathers. The same word is used two more times in the New Testament, in Galatians 3:24-25, where we see that the law was our tutor or schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, but once we come to Christ we are no longer under the schoolmaster. (The original instructor was a slave by the name of Mentor who was appointed by Odysseus to raise his son while he went off to war for twenty years.) That became the Greek model for teaching.

Because the Greek model was lacking - the focus was on telling and exercising severe discipline - Christ came and provided a totally different model - the focus was on showing and loving. That is why the disciples could easily understand the new commandment that Christ gave in John 13:34-35 the night before He was crucified, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The disciples knew how to make disciples by showing and loving because that is the way that Christ had developed them as disciples. They were able to repeat that in the Jewish culture because that was the way the Jews developed disciples. However, that was not understood in the Gentile world because the model they had was the Greek model of telling and severe discipline.

As a result, once we get past Acts 21:16, the word disciple is no longer used. Instead, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16, Paul used the model of a loving father and encouraged the Corinthians to imitate him. Paul used this same model in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 where Paul, Silas, and Timothy had shown the care of a loving mother (verses 7-9) and provided the example of a godly father (verses 10-12). In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul said, "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ." In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul told Timothy to, "Be an example to the believers." In Titus 2, Paul told Titus to share with the older men and women how to teach the younger men and women by example and then told Titus to be an example himself in verses 7 and 8. In Acts 20:20-21 and 35, Paul told the leaders at Ephesus that he had equipped them for ministry by showing them.

Just as physical children learn by imitating those around them, new Christians learn to live the Christian life by imitating those Christians that they spend time with and see their examples. You will have a much greater impact on the lives of new Christians as you take them with you in a wide variety of situations than you will have in sermons where you tell them what to do. They will see your heart and passion for the lost as you take them with you as you share the Gospel in the homes of non-Christians. They will see how to encourage a discouraged brother as you take them with you as you go to encourage others. The Christian life and godly living is primarily caught not taught. May the Lord richly bless you as you spend time with new Christians so that they can learn to imitate you just as you imitate Christ.