

# Making Disciples Through Sharing the Good News

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2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

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Making Disciples Through Sharing the Good News  
Dr. Matthew Webster

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1. Religion 2. Christian Living 3. Personal Growth

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Chapter 1  
Why is the Gospel the Only Way  
to Make Christian Disciples?



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<sup>1</sup>Justin G. Gravitt. What's the Difference? Christian vs Disciple  
[www.justingravitt.com/blog/christian-disciple](http://www.justingravitt.com/blog/christian-disciple)

One of the most crucial lessons this book offers is that the Gospel is the foundation for making Christian disciples. At first, this might seem surprising if we view the Gospel solely as the message that brings non-believers to salvation. However, the Gospel is just as essential for those who are already saved. It encompasses far more than just forgiveness of sins—it is the sustaining power for the entire Christian life. To understand why the Gospel is necessary for discipleship, we must first define two key terms: “*the Gospel*” and “*salvation*”. As we explore these concepts, the connection between the Gospel and disciple-making will become increasingly clear.

A helpful way to begin defining the Gospel is by looking at the original language of Scripture. In Mark 16:15, Jesus commands, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.” This highlights the Gospel’s universal significance—not just for conversion, but for the ongoing growth of every believer.

“Gospel” is the Greek word (euangelion). This is the origin of where the English word evangelism comes

from. The Gospel (euangelion) means the glad tidings of salvation through Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Since salvation is an essential part of the definition of the *Gospel*, it's important that we also take time to define what salvation means. Doing so will help us understand why the Gospel is the only true foundation for making Christian disciples. Salvation is not only relevant for those who are coming to faith, but also for those who have already been saved—it remains central to the life and growth of every believer.

Salvation is the Greek word “sozo,” which Jesus uses in the very next verse. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (sozo), but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

“Sozo” is to save a suffering one (from perishing), to save one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G2098&t=NIV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G2098&t=NIV)

In Christ, we find the cure for everything sin has broken in our world. While sin brought a curse, Jesus is both our covering and cure. When we fully grasp the magnitude of the salvation He offers—healing, wholeness, eternal life, protection, and so much more—it becomes clear that both the saved and unsaved need His salvation every day. Spiritual maturity develops as we learn to see Jesus not just as Savior, but as the continual source of every blessing. This is why disciple-making cannot be separated from Gospel-sharing.

As we continue to follow Jesus' words, we discover why the Gospel is central to making disciples. He said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:17–18). These signs reveal that when we go out as Christ's ambassadors, we go with His power and authority. God confirms the message of the Gospel with miraculous signs. Physical healing often becomes a

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<sup>3</sup>[www.elijah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isindex=sozo](http://www.elijah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isindex=sozo)

doorway to spiritual salvation—but only when the Gospel is proclaimed.

Whenever the Gospel is preached, God stands behind it with His power, because the Gospel proclaims healing and wholeness in Jesus' name. The good news is this: through Jesus, both physical and spiritual salvation are available. That is the Gospel. And yes—that truly is good news!

If Christians desire to grow and mature in their faith, they must continually hear the Gospel. They need to be reminded daily of all that is available to them through Jesus.

The true Gospel is 100% good news—rooted not in our performance, but in the finished work of Christ. Whenever the message shifts from what Jesus has done to what *we must do* to earn or maintain God's favor, it stops being the Gospel. When pastors or teachers mix the Law with grace—saying, “you must do to receive”—they present a works-based counterfeit. And that is no Gospel at all.

“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel.” This is the command Jesus gave—not to preach “50 Ways to Save Your Marriage” or “A Better You in 5 Easy Steps.” Messages like these might attract crowds, but they fall short of transforming lives. The power to change hearts and circumstances doesn’t come from self-help strategies—it comes from the Gospel.

Preach the Gospel. Fix your eyes on the Savior. Spend time in His presence. As you do, the Holy Spirit will produce lasting fruit in your life.

Want a strong marriage? Start by receiving the love God offers you in Jesus Christ. His unconditional love will empower you to love your spouse the same way Christ loves the Church. Preach the Gospel to those in struggling relationships. As they encounter the love of Jesus, they’ll begin to see themselves through His eyes—valuable, forgiven, and worth dying for.

This kind of love transforms lives. It empowers believers to live and love as the new creation they truly are in Christ. That’s what it means to live from your true identity.

The word “gospel” itself is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term god-spell, meaning “good story,” a rendering of the Latin evangelium and the Greek euangelion, meaning “good news” or “good telling”.<sup>4</sup>

The word *gospel* simply means “good news” or “glad tidings.” In everyday use, it referred to any positive report—like a doctor announcing that a patient’s test results were clear. That was considered *gospel*—a good message.

In ancient times, this idea carried even greater weight during war. As battles raged, people back home anxiously awaited news from the front lines. Once the outcome was determined, swift runners would race back to deliver the report. This is the context behind Isaiah’s words: “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*” (Isaiah 52:7). Watchmen were trained to interpret the runner’s body language. If the runner’s legs moved quickly and kicked up dust, it signaled that the news was good.

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<sup>4</sup>[www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-New-Testament](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-New-Testament)

What a powerful picture for us today—the Gospel is, at its core, someone running to proclaim that the battle has been won. The good news must be carried and shared with urgency and joy. That’s the heart of the Gospel message. Disciple-making ignites in the heart of the disciple a passion for sharing Christ.

Have you ever been to a restaurant where the food was so beautifully presented that you felt compelled to take a photo and share it on social media? Even if you’re not the type to post often, chances are you told someone about the experience. Why? Because we’re wired to share the things that bring us joy. It’s natural to talk about what delights and blesses us.

As believers, we’ve received the greatest and most enduring blessing of all—salvation through Jesus Christ. This good news isn’t something to keep to ourselves. It should stir us to action, compelling us to look for every opportunity to share it with others. The Gospel was meant to move us—first in our hearts, then through our lives.

### **Why is the Gospel So Important?**

The Gospel is essential because salvation is a universal need—every person, without exception, has

been separated from a holy God by sin. Sin is the problem. It brought death, destruction, and separation. But the *good news*—the Gospel—is that Jesus came, lived a perfect life, and became the spotless Lamb, sacrificed for our sins. He made the way to eternal life.

As John 3:16 declares, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." That's the Gospel. That's the glad tidings we get to proclaim to a world in need.

Paul affirms this in Romans 10:8–9, referencing Deuteronomy 30:14: "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," and he continues, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation." That command to "go" is a call to action. But here's the truth—unless another verb takes root in our hearts, we won't go. That verb is love. Without receiving God's love, we cannot truly extend it to others. We are transformed by His love,

which has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Jesus said, "By this [love] all people will know that you are My disciples" (John 13:35).

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to share the Gospel with people everywhere. And the good news is—we don't do it alone. "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them..." (Mark 16:20). When we go together in love and unity, the Gospel is not only heard—it is seen.

If you want to step into the great adventure of making disciples, it begins and continues with sharing the Good News. Whether you're leading someone to faith in Christ or helping a fellow believer grow in their walk, it all flows from one source—the finished work of Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 2

What is the Most Important Mission in the World?



Have you ever watched a spy movie and thought, “Wow, how incredible would it be to be given a mission that important?” Maybe you haven’t—because the danger those agents face is intense, relentless, and life-threatening. But what if I told you that *your* mission—right now—is far more critical than any blockbuster plot? You’ve been entrusted with delivering the most vital news in all of history: the Gospel.

And make no mistake, the enemy is real. He’s out there, watching, waiting, hunting. 1 Peter 5:8 puts it starkly: “Be sober—well balanced and self-disciplined; be alert and cautious at all times. That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, fiercely hungry, seeking someone to devour.”

This mission is dangerous. It demands courage, vigilance, and faith. But with God’s strength, you are more than equipped to face the challenge and bring hope to a world in desperate need of the Good News.

Yet, it's important to understand the nature of the enemy you're up against. The devil is an imposter who goes about "as a roaring lion" because he is imitating the King of Kings, our Lord Jesus, the real lion of Judah. He wants people to think that our King is full of wrath, anger, and rage against us. He comes at us roaring with the voice of condemnation, accusation, and shame, and he does it to try and rob you of the truth of who God is and what His disposition toward you is. This is why your mission in making disciples—and growing as a disciple yourself—is so crucial. We must immerse ourselves in God's Word so that we learn to recognize and follow only the voice of grace—"My sheep listen to my voice"—and not the lies of the imposter, who seeks to steal the abundant life Jesus offers (John 10:10, 27).

But take heart—God, your Father, is protecting you as you step out on this vital mission. "The LORD will protect you and keep you safe from all dangers. The LORD will protect you now and always wherever you go" (Psalm 121:7-8, CEV).

And yet, as you move forward, many questions may arise. Among the most common I hear are questions

like, "What is God's will for my life?" "What's my purpose?"

The good news is the Bible tells us specifically what God's will is for your life, and God's will for your life is tied directly into your life's mission. God has not left us in the dark on a never-ending quest to try and discover what His will is. God's will remains unchanged.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

And

Ephesians 5:17 "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Paul assures us that God's will is knowable—it's not some mysterious or unreachable secret. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, encourages us with this truth:

*"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 John 5:14).

Knowing God's will begins with confident prayer, trusting that when we align our requests with His purposes, He will guide, provide clarity, and open the right doors. It's a journey of listening, obedience, and faith—believing that God is actively at work in your life, leading you step by step according to His perfect plan.

### **How Do We Discover the Will of God?**

The answer is found directly in 1 John 5:14 in the original Greek language it was written. The will of God (thelēma) is

1) The purpose of God to bless mankind through Christ

(and/or)

2) of what God wishes to be done by us.<sup>5</sup>

If we ask anything according to the purpose of God to bless mankind through Christ or if it is what God wishes to be done by us, when we pray for it, it will be ours. So, if we pray for something within the sphere of what we believe is God's will, yet we do not receive it, God must have something better in store for us and

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<sup>5</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2307&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2307&t=KJV)

others. That's why Paul would write to the Thessalonians, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

We give thanks to God in all things when we realize God's purpose is to bless us and others in Christ.

When we know the will of God, we will rejoice in it because it is always for our good (Romans 8:28).

So now we ask, "What does the will of God have to do with making disciples?" If more believers understood the will of God, then more and more disciples would be made. When more disciples are made, more and more people will share the Gospel.

"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, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20a). Jesus gave us the greatest mission of all time: to go and make disciples. This is God's clear will for your life.

You don't need to pray, "God, is it Your will for me to go and make disciples?" because it already is. Growing

in faith means moving beyond simply asking God for things (though He delights in giving good gifts) to asking, *"How can what I'm praying for—whether it's a new job, the sale of my home, or anything else—be used to bless others and advance Christ's Kingdom?"*

The first two words of Matthew 28:19, "therefore go," are the beginning instructions of our mission.

"Go" (poreuō): to lead or order one's life.<sup>6</sup> Jesus is telling us that we are to make our lives centered around disciple-making.

But imagine I set up a board game you've never played before and told you, *"It's your turn to go."* The word "go" expresses movement. But where are you to go and what are you to do if you don't know the purpose of the game? "Go and make disciples", is what Jesus commanded, but where do I go, and how am I supposed to make disciples?

"All nations" would mean everywhere in the world. So, wherever we are in the world, we are to be intentional about disciple-making (Matthew 28:19).

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<sup>6</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4198&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4198&t=KJV)

How do we make disciples? Jesus didn't set up the board game of life and just leave us with the instruction "to go". He told us our purpose, "to make disciples", and also how we are to do this, "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."

This is a fantastic clue for how you are to make disciples and how it will differ from other disciple-makers. If you have a passion for art, for example, you can integrate that passion into your disciple-making, focusing your efforts within the art community. If you work in finance, leading financial workshops could become your platform to build relationships and begin discipling others.

Disciple-making isn't limited to people who share your career or hobbies. You will often be called to disciple individuals who are very different from yourself. Sometimes our greatest potential for growth lies within our time of discipling another person.

But as we move forward, we encounter two words that have caused hesitation for many in fully embracing

their mission of disciple making: “*baptize*” and “*teach*.”

If you’re not a pastor or church leader, you might assume that disciple-making is their responsibility, and that your role is simply to invite others to attend a class led by a “trained professional.”

While small groups are common in many churches and can be valuable tools for disciple-making, the way Jesus modeled discipleship was far more organic—not programmed or scripted. His approach involved doing life together and embracing teachable moments wherever they happened—whether on a hillside, in a fishing boat, reclining at a dinner table, or in countless other everyday settings.

The phrase “baptize and teach” has led many believers to feel hesitant or disconnected from actively participating in disciple-making. It’s easy to understand why this can become a barrier.

While many people feel uncomfortable teaching others about Jesus, the idea of baptizing someone often feels even more intimidating. As you continue through this book, you’ll discover that teaching about Jesus will

naturally flow from your life through the work of the Holy Spirit.

For most believers, sharing their faith won't happen through preaching sermons or leading formal Bible studies, but rather through building genuine relationships where opportunities to share their faith arise naturally. Though few who aren't pastors or church leaders might consider baptizing someone, Jesus calls every believer to this important part of disciple-making.

Baptism is a part of making disciples. Baptism is the outward celebration and recognition of the inner reality that a person has been saved. Baptism in the time of Jesus was done by immersion. The Greek word used is (*baptizo*), which means to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge.<sup>7</sup>

The word *baptism* is the same one used to describe a boat sinking beneath the sea. Because of this, baptism was never performed on infants or anyone too young to understand its significance. It was always a public declaration of personal faith.

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<sup>7</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G907&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G907&t=KJV)

Once someone publicly professed their faith in Jesus Christ through baptism, there was no turning back. For a Jew, this act often meant being disowned by their family, receiving a slap on the cheek—the greatest insult—and being expelled from the synagogue.

When you publicly share what Jesus has done in your life through baptism, it opens the door for others to hear the Gospel and come to faith. This is especially powerful for family and friends who witness the event—many of whom may not yet believe in Jesus Christ.

You may also feel a deep gratitude in your heart for the men and women God used to bring the Gospel to you, and you can honor them in your testimony before your baptism.

Baptism is a celebration of new life—a visible reminder of the fruit born from the faithful work of those who have gone out to make disciples.

Discipleship does not end with baptism. The journey of discipling is just beginning. Those who are baptized need to be matured in the faith because without discipleship, they could easily miss their life mission too.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to teach new disciples everything He has taught us—and that includes actively going into the world and making more disciples. This isn't just the responsibility of pastors or teachers; it's a calling for every believer.

Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ..." (which means if you're a believer, this includes you), "...the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

Every believer has been entrusted with this ministry—to help the lost find their way back to God through Jesus. That's what disciple-making is all about.

Here is your message or ministry of reconciliation  
(verses 19-20):

“That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Do you hear any bad news in the message we’ve been given to share as Christ’s ambassadors? Not at all!

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

This is a message of hope, not condemnation—an invitation to restoration, not rejection. As ambassadors of Christ, we carry the best news the world could ever hear.

As Christ’s ambassadors, you are a minister of (katallagē)- the restoration of the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2643&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2643&t=KJV)

Wherever God has placed you, whatever gifting He has given to you, it shall be used to tell others the good news of Jesus, that in Christ there is favor with God forever.

Just like a spy in a movie who's given a high-stakes mission along with all the resources and protection needed to carry it out—you've been equipped in the same way.

The One who holds "*all authority in Heaven and on Earth*" is the One sending you. So go—fulfill your mission. You lack nothing, because Jesus Himself is your victory, and He goes with you every step of the way.

### **Who Knew? You're Royal!**

Did you know that because of your union with Christ, you've been made royalty? Jesus isn't just any king—He is the *King of Kings*. And through your connection with Him, you've been elevated to a royal identity.

"Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ He has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world" (Ephesians 1:3, GNB).

Your new life is filled with blessings, not because of anything you've earned, but because you are now one with Christ. He is your Maker, your Redeemer—and your Bridegroom. "For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is His name..." (Isaiah 54:5).

God planned it this way from the beginning. "*God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure*" (Ephesians 1:5, NLT).

And one day, there will be a royal wedding unlike any other. Are you looking forward to it? Jesus described it like this:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son... Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find'" (Matthew 22:1–3, 8–9).

You've not only been invited—you've been chosen, adopted, and made royalty in Christ. That's something worth celebrating.

The wedding in Heaven is not just some parable but a real-life event described in the book of Revelation.

“Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God” (Revelation 19:9).

So, who else is going to be there at the wedding? We find the answer in the tense in which Revelation 19:9 is written: “Having been called/invited (kaleō).”<sup>9</sup> This word is written in the perfect passive participle, which means the guests were called in the past and now stand as invited guests.

These invited guests to our royal wedding are the Old Testament saints. Those who are “invited” are the “friends of the bridegroom.”

John the Baptist, for example, who lived during the Old Covenant and died just before the cross, referred to himself as the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29).

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<sup>9</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2564/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2564/kjv/tr/0-1/)

He said, "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete" (John 3:29).

The unifying connection between Old Testament saints and New Testament believers is Christ Himself. This is beautifully reflected in the Greek word for "church" or "Bride of Christ" — *ekklesia* — which is derived from the verb *kaleō*, meaning "to call" or "to invite."

Just as the Old Testament saints were called by God to walk in covenant with Him, the New Testament church is also a called-out people—those invited out of darkness and into God's marvelous light. And that light is Jesus Christ.

So while they lived under different covenants, both Old and New Testament saints form a single, called-out community united by faith in the One who was, and is, and is to come.

The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 gives us a vivid picture of the time between Jesus' First and Second Coming—and it carries a vital warning about trying to enter the Kingdom of God through self-effort.

Jesus said:

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matthew 22:11–13).

This man tried to enter the celebration without the proper attire, symbolic of trying to come to God based on one's merit. Scripture makes it clear: "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). There is only one garment acceptable at the wedding feast—the robe of righteousness given by Christ.

"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And again: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

This beautiful truth is echoed in Isaiah's words:

"He has clothed me with garments of salvation and

arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

We see this imagery again in the parable of the prodigal son. When the son returned home in repentance, the father said, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him” (Luke 15:22). That robe represents restoration, identity, and the righteousness freely given—not earned.

The message is simple and freeing: in Christ, you have been clothed with His righteousness. You don’t need to fear whether your good deeds are enough. Your salvation is secure in Him. You are His beloved—and you are the Bride of Christ.

## **Jesus is Getting Things Ready for the Wedding**

### ***Phase 1: The Betrothal***

Marriage was by a contract drawn up between the fathers, often while the parties involved were still children. Though the marriage was not consummated at this point, they were considered legally married (Matthew 1:19, 2 Corinthians 11:2).

Whenever a believer receives Jesus Christ as Savior, he/she become a part of the Bride of Christ. The church age (the time we are living now) is the betrothal phase, the time when God is calling out a Bride for His Son.

It was expected in the Middle Eastern culture to pay a dowry for a bride (Ephesians 5:25). God thought your price/worth was invaluable; thus, Christ gave His own life for us as a dowry. This completes the first phase of the wedding preparation.

### ***Phase 2: The Presentation***

When the couple reached a suitable age, the wedding took place. The father of the bridegroom would present the contract to the father of the bride.

The bridegroom would then go to the house of the bride in the company of his friends and escort her to his home. This is the background for the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. During the betrothal phase, the groom would prepare an apartment, a place to live in his father's house. Homes, especially for the wealthy, were often very large complexes. Only the portions that were needed, however, were finished and furnished.

When a son was to be married, another portion was completed to make ready for the new bride.

The Rapture, or Resurrection and transformation of the church, is the event bringing the groom to the bride and which takes the bride into Heaven. That is why Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

The groom and his friends would then escort the bride to their new home. The ceremony that followed was the "presentation" or actual marriage. The hand of the bride was placed into the hand of the groom's father. He would then place it into the groom's hand. This was considered the marriage ceremony. Ephesians 5:27 speaks of this presentation, but also of Christ's present work of keeping the church pure and productive by loving her through the Word.

### ***Phase 3: The Marriage Feast (The Reception)***

The groom would invite many guests and gather all

his friends to come to the marriage feast and view his bride (Matthew 22).

The length and lavishness of the feast would, of course, depend on the wealth and status of the bridegroom. It might last a day or a week or even longer.

Jesus' Second Coming is not to welcome the bride, because the bride is with Him. He is coming back to wage war on the evil wickedness on Earth.

Revelation 19:11-21: "I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of Heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean."

The Bride of Christ, the Church, is already with Jesus. Revelation 19:8 just before this tells us so: "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

I am excited about the party to come. Clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we are dressed and ready for the wedding.

Ultimately, you've been entrusted with a mission: to go and share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. You make disciples by sharing Jesus Himself—who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Celebrate the new life of a believer at their baptism, and walk alongside them as they begin their journey of disciple-making. As you pour into others, you're helping to multiply the mission—one life, one story, one step of faith at a time.

## Chapter 3

### Your Next Disciple Might Surprise You



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<sup>10</sup>Ian Paul. Capturing the Surprise of the Resurrection. April 23, 2019. <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/capturing-the-surprise-of-the-resurrection/>

One of the greatest surprises in disciple-making is the wide variety of people God will bring into your life. You'll often find yourself discipling individuals you never expected—and being disciplined by people you wouldn't have anticipated either. It's a beautiful reminder that God's ways are not bound by our expectations.

While education, age, and life experience can enrich a discipleship relationship, they are never prerequisites—or disqualifiers. God uses willing hearts, not perfect résumés.

Healthy discipleship relationships aren't built on strict timelines. Unlike many small group models that run for a set number of weeks, true discipleship often unfolds organically. You can't always know how long God intends that relationship to last. Whether it's the beginning of a new discipleship journey or the moment when a disciple is ready to be sent out, both are reasons to rejoice.

### **How Many People Should I Disciple?**

Nowhere in Scripture do we find a set number for how many people one should disciple at a time.

Yet, some have tried to establish such a number by pointing to examples that were never meant to serve as fixed models. For instance, because Jesus disciplined twelve, some assume we should do the same. But Jesus wasn't prescribing a formula—He was modeling intentional, relational investment.

However, the fundamental flaw in this logic of discipling twelve is that the number of disciples that we are to disciple is never mentioned in Scripture, and it will vary over time. Jesus is the Son of God with a distinct mission on Earth, and Jesus also lived with His disciples. Discipling one individual, let alone twelve, is very demanding of our time. I would never suggest discipling twelve individuals at once. If you do, you'll probably be subpar at it because you won't have enough time to do it effectively. How many you choose to disciple can and should change with the seasons of your life. Once again, let's not put a number on it, let it be Spirit-led. How many people you can effectively disciple at any given time has many factors to consider, such as your unique gifting, what is happening in your life, whether the discipling is being done in a group setting or one-on-one, and even the unique personalities and time requirements of the individual(s) you are discipling.

Focusing too heavily on a specific number of disciples can lead people to force discipleship or manufacture relationships—and that’s never healthy. Discipleship should flow naturally and be Spirit-led, not driven by a numerical target.

That said, twelve tends to be a practical number for a small group setting. In a group of that size, everyone still has the opportunity to engage meaningfully in discussion and build relationships. However, we shouldn’t assume that twelve is the “ideal” number for disciple-making simply because Jesus had twelve close followers. In fact, Jesus had more than just the twelve disciples—He ministered to many and drew crowds of varying sizes.

Likewise, while small groups can be a helpful tool in the discipleship process, they aren’t the only model—and certainly not the standard. True disciple-making is less about matching numbers and more about building intentional, Spirit-led relationships. Whether it happens one-on-one, in triads, or within a group setting, what matters most is walking with others in a way that helps them grow in Christ and follow Him more closely.

Small groups play a valuable role in our spiritual growth, offering community, shared learning, and encouragement. But in many cases, discipleship tends to go deeper in a one-on-one setting. That's why small groups can serve as a great starting point—creating natural opportunities to build personal connections that lead to more intentional, individualized discipleship.

For example, imagine joining a group Bible study and then meeting up with someone from the group over coffee to reflect more personally on what was discussed. There are countless ways to disciple others, and the best approach often depends on the unique needs of both you and the person you're walking with in faith.

This brings us to a common question that arises in conversations about discipleship: *Why did Jesus choose twelve? Was that meant to be our model?*

Consider the following verse: "Go and make disciples."

It's important to note that the number twelve is not mentioned in Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19. He didn't say, "Go and make twelve disciples," but simply, "Go and make disciples." Imagine the impact if

every believer committed to intentionally discipling even just one person in their lifetime—how different the world could look.

Jesus didn't choose twelve disciples to set a strict numerical template for us to follow. If that were the case, one might (wrongly) conclude that only men should be discipled, since His twelve were all male. Clearly, that's not the point.

In Jewish tradition, the number twelve symbolized fullness and covenant, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. By choosing twelve disciples, Jesus was making a profound statement: He was initiating a new covenant people, a spiritual family that would carry His message to the world. The emphasis was never on the number itself, but on the calling to make disciples who follow Him and multiply His mission.

Jesus had more disciples than just the twelve, and His followers included both men and women—even children. Among His earliest and most devoted disciples were several Jewish women, such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. These women accompanied Jesus during His ministry and supported

Him financially and practically, playing a vital role in His mission and message.<sup>11</sup>

Discipling twelve people is simply too many for most individuals. The more people you disciple, the less time and attention you can devote to each one. Every believer, in every season of life, should prayerfully consider how many disciples they can realistically and effectively mentor.

As you engage in disciple-making, “praying without ceasing” naturally becomes easier because you recognize your dependence on God’s guidance and strength to persevere and succeed.

But what if you find yourself discipling more people than you can handle? What a wonderful problem to have! When that happens, the natural next step is to empower one of your more mature disciples to take on someone of their own. Your role with that mature disciple shifts—you become more of a coach or mentor, guiding them as they step into the role of discipler themselves.

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<sup>11</sup>[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_the\\_Apostle\\_and\\_women](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle_and_women)

## **The Reason Jesus Chose 12**

We know that everything Jesus did was purposeful, especially in selecting the twelve disciples. “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49)? It is safe to say that Jesus chose twelve disciples because this is what God the Father ordained.

In Jewish culture, it was customary for a student to approach a rabbi and ask to be taught, but Jesus flipped the script by personally choosing the men He wanted and calling them to follow Him. His choice of twelve was intentional. Jesus was preparing these disciples to be part of the New Covenant established through His death.

God’s chosen people, Israel, were organized into twelve tribes, and as Jesus called a new people for Himself, He began with twelve men to represent this new spiritual Israel.

It’s important to note that Jesus didn’t select His disciples based on rank or importance. The Bible only records the calling of seven of the twelve, and although the three closest disciples are listed first,

Andrew is mentioned before James and John, showing that the order isn't about status.

In Matthew 4:18-22, the first disciples to be called are listed like this: Simon Peter and Andrew, James, and John. In John 1:35-51, the list will continue with Philip and Nathanael (also called Bartholomew). Matthew (also called Levi) was called separately, sometime after the first six (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32).

The Bible does not describe the calling of the other five disciples. What did all of these men have in common? None of them were worthy of Jesus' calling. The same is true for us. God doesn't select us based on our merit. Few, if any, were of noble background, and none of them had religious clout.

At least four of the disciples were fishermen. Simon was a Zealot, part of a political group that sought to overthrow the Roman government. Matthew worked for the Roman government as a tax collector and would have been viewed essentially as a traitor to the Israelites. Judas Iscariot eventually betrayed Jesus.

What we see in the way Jesus called the twelve is that He selected these men based upon God the Father's leading. This is an example for us to follow.

Who is the Holy Spirit leading you to? Jesus called them as He went. This is how I believe we are to enter into our mission of making disciples: we do it as we go. We see opportunities and we invite. We make disciples as we spend time with Jesus, as disciples ourselves. We follow the Holy Spirit's lead.

When we think about Jesus and the discipling that He did on this Earth, we often think about the twelve. There is no doubt that the twelve disciples are the ones that, once Jesus' public ministry began, He spent the most time with. However, Jesus didn't just work with twelve.

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go." (Luke 10:1).

We learn from Luke that Jesus was actively working with way more than just twelve men. We also know from His relationship with Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others that Jesus wasn't secluding Himself to only a small group of people.

Jesus influenced and taught men, women, and even children. "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

The seventy-two (or seventy, according to some texts) were sent out with their faith strengthened by Jesus' words. They were about to participate in God's miracle-working power. Jesus instructed them, "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near'" (Luke 10:9).

The mission given to the seventy-two is the same mission Jesus gave to the twelve—and it's the same mission He has given to you: to go and make disciples of Jesus. Imagine the joy of being used by God to heal someone's cancer as you lay hands on them, pray, and declare God's Word over their life. What a powerful, life-changing moment to be part of!

This incredible mission not only calls us to action but also fills us with joy as we witness God's work through us. Luke captures this beautifully when he writes, "The seventy-two returned with joy," exhilarated God used them in such ministry, "saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name'" (Luke 10:17)!

It's important to note that the text doesn't specify exactly when these events occurred for the seventy-two; it simply assures us that everything happened just as Jesus promised. Sometimes, we may feel discouraged when results don't come as quickly as we hope. Yet, the promise still stands: "Whoever believes in Jesus will do the works that He did" (John 14:12). So, don't lose heart if you haven't seen immediate results. While the passage might give the impression that miracles happened right away, that likely wasn't the case for most. As the Bridgeway Commentary of the Bible explains, "Though many months probably passed before they returned..."<sup>12</sup>

How were the seventy-two able to do such amazing things in ministry? How will I be able to be a part of God's miracle-working power, impacting lives for eternity?

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you (Luke 10:18-19)." You already have the authority to do it; you might just

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<sup>12</sup>Bridgeway Commentary on the Bible. [www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/10-17.html](http://www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/10-17.html)

need to have your faith initiated by hearing the Word of God.

### **Faith to Act**

Romans 10:17 (AMP): "So faith comes from hearing [what is told], and what is heard comes by the [preaching of the] message concerning Christ."

Have you ever felt like you needed more faith? Maybe you've looked at yourself and thought, "If only I had more faith, I'd finally see a breakthrough—whether in my health, finances, relationships, or in discipling others." You imagine that with greater faith, loved ones could be healed, people could be set free, and lives could be transformed.

Here's some good news: faith isn't a struggle or a performance. Scripture shows us that faith and the works of the Law are completely opposite (Galatians 3:2,5). While the works of the Law rely on our efforts, faith requires no effort—only trust. Reflecting on the 23rd Psalm, what is our part in walking toward those green pastures? Simply to trust the Shepherd.

This is why Jesus told the seventy-two: "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). This doesn't sound like it would instill a lot of

confidence in the seventy-two, but it did because they went. Where does the protection of the lambs come from? It most certainly is not from the lambs themselves, especially in the presence of their enemies, the wolves. The protection of the lambs comes solely from the shepherd. Your protection while embarking on Kingdom work isn't from yourself. This is great Gospel news. The One with all authority and all power, the Great Shepherd, is watching over and protecting you. Yet, even with such divine care, faith can still be challenged—especially when we fall into the trap of relying on our efforts.

Faith is the opposite of the Law. The more people become focused on self-effort, trying to earn what they need from the Lord, the more their faith is drained away.

God knew that what Abram needed was to receive a Word from Him to initiate his faith to move, and the same is true for the seventy-two.

When we see more of Jesus, conscious that He was crucified on our behalf, faith will no longer be a barrier to receiving God's promises. Why is that? The more we see what Jesus has done for us, the more we see

what Jesus has qualified us for, and the more faith will spring up within us to see miracles break forth.

You don't need to wish for more faith or try to muster it up on your own for the miracle you're asking God for right now. Simply fix your eyes on Jesus—on what He did for you on the cross—and the faith you need to face any challenge will naturally flow into your life. Look to Jesus and His grace toward you! He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). The more you listen to His love and truth, the more faith will rise within your heart, empowering you to go boldly into the world. Whatever you're facing today, staying connected to the Gospel brings faith, peace, and leads you to victory!

"Do not take a purse or bag or sandals, and do not greet anyone on the road" (Luke 10:4). Go as you are. You have everything you need to successfully fulfill the mission. The question is, what baggage do we need to leave behind that doesn't help us on our mission of making disciples? We might think of baggage as getting rid of bad things, but this is not necessarily true. The things that Jesus listed are not bad at all, but they are what we might think we

typically need: a purse, a bag, and sandals. Your mission is not going to be successful based on what you bring, but the One who is with you and is sending you.

“Do not greet anyone on the road” might sound like the seventy-two were being told to ignore valuable opportunities for disciple-making along their journey, but that’s not the intent of Jesus’ instruction. The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: “And don’t waste time along the way.” Jesus was urging them not to get distracted or delayed by time-consuming social rituals. In that culture, greeting friends involved elaborate ceremonies that could take up significant time. So, Jesus called them to be laser-focused and on mission—don’t let anything slow you down or divert your purpose. A similar direction is found in 2 Kings 4:29.”<sup>13</sup>

The devil desires that we simply delay Kingdom work, that we would get distracted by things that we think we are obligated to do instead of what we are called

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<sup>13</sup>Albert Barnes’s Notes on the Bible. [www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/luk010.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/luk010.htm)

by God for. Jesus' words free us to move past time-wasting rituals to always be on mission and to continually move past distractions that would keep us from our God-given calling.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:6-10).

When God gave us Jesus, He gave us His best, and also everything that we need. Jesus is our wisdom, our righteousness, our redemption, and success. Even when it comes to faith, He is your faith (Romans 10:17). When you are fearful of the odds against you, you have God's favor, because you have Christ. When you are weak, He is your strength. When you are troubled and anxious, He is your peace. When you feel vulnerable, He is your shield. When you are lonely, He

is your faithful companion. And when you are sick, He is your healing and health.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hardships Can Bring People Together**

When you cast a wide net to fish for potential disciples (John 21:6), you are open to the various possibilities of the different individuals you might catch. God has a way of helping navigate the right fish into our Gospel nets, and one way He does this is through the experiences we have had. When it comes to the trials and the hardships that we face, those trying times can be the exact catalyst to bring people together in a discipling relationship.

Imagine the mother who has lost a child. She could benefit greatly by being mentored by someone who has also lost a child and has had some experience navigating through the troubled waters life has brought them.

A man who was diagnosed with cancer may not have ever opened up to another guy before, but now he feels alone and scared.

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Prince. You Have Jesus- You Have Everything. March 8, 2021. <https://share.josephprince.com/mbr/66/you-have-jesus-you-have-everything>

Another man who knows what chemotherapy is like and still has great joy on the other side is the type of individual who could help someone about to go through the trials of cancer.

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

A person who is going through such pain and suffering probably wants to know what produces joy in the middle of suffering. The answer is hope.

“Hope fully in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3-13). A believer is the one who is called to bring hope into another person’s life. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15b).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Your living hope is the Risen Christ. You have a great need for hope, and we have a great God who meets our need in Christ Jesus.

## **Two Reasons Why Christians Can Be Joyful Through Anything (1 Peter 1)**

### 1. The Promise of a Great Future

- Verse 3: God caused us to be born again to a living hope through the Resurrection from the dead.
- Verse 4: God is keeping an inheritance for us in Heaven that can't perish or spoil or fade.
- Verse 5: God is keeping us for that inheritance.

Our joy is based on the happiness of our future with God and the certainty that we will make it there. Christian joy is almost synonymous with Christian hope. That's why Peter says in verse 3 that we were born again into a living hope; then verses 4 and 5, he describes the content of that hope, and then in verse 6 begins with, "in this you rejoice." Our hope is our joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

## 2) God has a plan for our troubles in this life.

The second reason for joy is essentially the same as the first one: hope. But the difference is this: In verses 3–5, the point is that the inheritance is out there waiting for us, and it is imperishable and unfading, and that we are being kept for it, so that no matter what distresses we face, we can look beyond them to the sure future that is coming and take heart. It is going to be worth it all.

“The distresses themselves have a part in getting us ready to enjoy the inheritance to the fullest measure. We don’t just look beyond the trouble to the sure hope; we look at God’s design in the distress, and see how God is working all things together for our good.”<sup>15</sup>

John Piper in *Joy through the Fiery Test of Genuine Faith* said, “So, Christianity is a life of tremendous joy first because we have a great and fail-safe future to look forward to beyond all our distresses, and second because God has a design to increase our joy in that future by means of all our distresses.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>John Piper. “Joy through the Fiery Test of Genuine Faith”. October 24, 1993.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

In Christ, you lack nothing, but you won't know you lack nothing until you've been tested by the trials of life. This is the testimony you bring to those who are experiencing similar trials in their lives. It is only when you have gone past the point of your strength and found your heavenly Father, strong and smiling, that you begin to realize that when you are weak, you can be strong in Him indeed.

“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming" (1 Peter 1:8-13).

The divine order is always grace first and then hope second. Receiving grace leads us to have great hope. This is confirmed by the word "therefore" at the beginning of verse 13. This makes our ability to hope dependent on the grace that Peter spends twelve verses exulting in.

God's grace in 1 Peter 1:

- verse 1: since God has chosen you,
- verse 3: since God has caused you to be born again to a living hope,
- verse 4: since God is keeping an inheritance for you imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,

- verse 5: since God is protecting you through faith so that you won't lose that inheritance,
- verses 6–7: since God is refining your faith by fire so that it will receive praise and glory and honor,
- verse 8: since you are swimming with the strokes of love and faith and joy in Christ,
- verses 10–13: since prophets and angels are on tiptoe to see all that God's grace is going to do in your life,

"Therefore, hope fully in this grace."

What do you have to bring to someone you are discipling who is hurting? Hope fully in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Who's Your Next Disciple Going To Be?**

Let's go back to the moment when Jesus first called His disciples. One detail Matthew's Gospel highlights is that Jesus had just received news that John the Baptist had been imprisoned—and then He withdrew to Galilee (Matthew 4:12). This move might have seemed unexpected to those around Him. After all,

John the Baptist was the prophesied forerunner to the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3–5; Malachi 3:1), boldly preparing the way for Jesus. His message was clear and powerful: “After me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry” (Matthew 3:11).

John’s attitude about himself in relation to Christ was, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). John the Baptist’s job is done, his life soon will be over, and what this means is that it is now time for Jesus to begin to preach and teach and call His disciples.

At this point in Jesus’ life, He left His hometown of Nazareth and moved to live in the town of Capernaum. This move fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah foretold about the coming Messiah: “*The people living in darkness have seen a great light...*” (Isaiah 9:1–2, quoted in Matthew 4:14–16).

From that time on, Jesus began to preach, “*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near*” (Matthew 4:17)—a message that began in the very region where prophecy had said the light would dawn.

To launch His public ministry, Jesus began preaching in Capernaum—a diverse region where Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans all lived. Though Jesus was initially sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24), His message was already reaching beyond Jewish ears. The New Covenant was soon to be established, opening the way for the Gospel to be proclaimed to all people.

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen” (Matthew 4:18).

As you walked along the Sea of Galilee in Jesus’ day, one of the most common sights would’ve been fishermen hard at work. There was nothing particularly remarkable about Peter and Andrew—they were ordinary men, doing an everyday job. But Jesus approached them with an extraordinary invitation to be part of something world-changing. They weren’t out searching for Him; they were simply living their normal lives when Jesus found them and called them. “Come, follow Me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matthew 4:19).

If you will follow Jesus, the promise is “He will send you out to fish for people.” As you follow, you will fish. It doesn’t work any other way.

Jesus doesn’t use this fishing line (pun intended) with all the disciples that He called. Remember, Jesus doesn’t just call fishermen to fish for men; He calls a tax collector, a physician, and other blue-collar and white-collar people to follow and to fish. The invitation for everyone is always the same: “follow Me,” and the promise is that you will be involved in building the Kingdom through making disciples.

“Follow me”, and I will take who you are and what you do (fisherman, tax collector, doesn’t matter), and I will put it to Kingdom use, resulting in people being saved. God gave us various gifts to be used for His glory and also for our enjoyment.

I will often write sermons and books for long hours, consecutive days, and not get tired doing it. I feel energized when I work in my gifting, and I enjoy doing it. Jesus wants us to use our gifts for our enjoyment and to bless others in the greatest way possible. Our gifting is intended to open doors for us to extend an invitation for others to follow Jesus.

As we return to the passage, we see Jesus walking along the shoreline on an ordinary day. His invitation came to people during their daily routines—hard at work in familiar surroundings. We can follow His example. If you work at a bank, that’s your fishing spot. On your lunch break, invite a coworker to join you. Take time to listen to what’s happening in their life. Let the Holy Spirit work through you—He’ll guide you in offering grace and encouragement. Make it a regular practice to share meals and build genuine relationships. You never know how God might use those moments to spark faith and growth in someone’s life.

One of the greatest things I have learned about going out and fishing for people is that it isn’t about my fishing ability.

The word Jesus used when He says “I will send you out to fish for people” is (poieō), which means to be the author of a thing (to cause, bring about), to make ready, to prepare, to produce, bear, shoot forth, to make a thing out of something.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4160&t=NIV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4160&t=NIV)

Fishing for people happens as a result of following Jesus. This is what Christ does in me. He uses our talents and abilities to fish, but even in our God-given abilities, it is Christ producing the success of fishing for people. This is freeing to learn because there is a promise to us that time spent with Jesus prepares us, makes us ready, and causes us to fish. He sets up divine appointments for us. He brings people across our path. The Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes to see the opportunities before us and respond, even giving us the words to say to let the light of Christ shine in any situation (Luke 12:12). Fishing for people is not formulaic; it is organic, and it comes by way of the Spirit's leading.

### **How Did Jesus Demonstrate Fishing for People?**

After calling the disciples to follow Him and then giving them the promise of making them into fishermen, Jesus went fishing.

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and He healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him” (Matthew 4:23-25).

We are given a snapshot of what it looks like to go and make disciples, and it was done through proclaiming the good news and bringing physical salvation to the suffering! As a result of fishing for people, “large crowds followed Him.” The good news was accompanied by many miracles.

“Healing every disease and sickness among the people.” While He was on Earth, Jesus who is God’s perfect will in action healed all who were brought to Him (Matthew 4:23–24).

When we move to the time just after the Resurrection, Jesus is about to appear to the disciples again, who were called to be fishers of men but who went back to their old lives of being fishermen.

"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. The disciples' self-effort did not produce the desired catch they were looking for (John 21:3). Their emptiness is an opportunity for an overabundant filling from Jesus (John 21:3,6).

"Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish" (John 21:4-5)?

What I love about this event is that it is not about fish; it is all about people. Sure, they hadn't caught any fish, but more importantly, they had not caught any people.

"Any fish?" "No," they answered. They were empty-handed at the one thing they were best at doing. It is humbling when you fail, but especially when you fail in your strengths.

"He said, 'throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some'" (John 21:6). There is a lot of symbolism represented in verse six. The right side represented believers or those who would come to

believe. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right (believers), and the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:33-34).

The ship the disciples were on was an emblem of the church; the right side is symbolic of hauling in those who will enter into the Kingdom. The casting of the net signifies the preaching of the Gospel, the assurance Christ gives of the success of His Word, hauling in a catch. As you cast your net by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, you will haul in a catch (people).

"When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish (John 21:6). Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord! "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn" (John 21:10-11).

153 is a very specific number that must have some significance to it. It wasn't that they estimated how

many fish they had caught and said around 150. 153 is an exact number. Every detail in the Bible is important, and when they are going to tell us they caught 153, we should seek to discover the message behind the number.

So, there are a few things we already know. The fish represent people. We learn this from Matthew 4:19. Also, this message is confirmed in the timing of this miracle. Jesus is about to physically leave them (ascend to Heaven), so catching no fish without Jesus tells us that we will have no success in bringing in fish/people into the Kingdom without Him. "If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b).

I believe 153 is the number that represents humanity. Theologian Jerome stated, "There were 153 known species of fish."<sup>18</sup> This would make sense as the Bible says that all of humanity will be represented in Heaven, "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the

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<sup>18</sup>Jerome. What is the Significance of 153 Fish?  
[www.hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/890/what-is-the-significance-of-153-fish](http://www.hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/890/what-is-the-significance-of-153-fish)

Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).

After the catch, “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead” (John 21:12-14).

Some researchers have counted how many people Jesus had healed/blessed in the New Testament and found 153 of them. “All told, the Lord directly blessed a total of 153 people in 48 separate incidents mentioned in 4 Gospels.”<sup>19</sup> Although Jesus undoubtedly healed many more people that were not recorded. “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

153 fish means that we will be a part of reaching people from all over the world for the Kingdom. “And

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Bauckham. The 153 Fish and the Unity of the Fourth Gospel. Neotestamentica. Volume 36 No. ½. Word, Sacrament, and Community. New Testament Society of Southern Africa. 2002. [www.jstor.org/stable/43049111?seq=1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049111?seq=1)

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth” (Acts 1:8b).

We shouldn't be surprised when the Lord calls us to disciple someone completely different from us—someone we might never have expected to walk alongside in faith. Just like the thrill of hauling in a fishing net and discovering what's inside, making disciples often means stepping into the unexpected. You never truly know who God will place in your path next—but that's part of the joy and wonder of the mission.

## Chapter 4

### The Secret to Making Disciples Is In You



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<sup>20</sup>[www.bible.com/bible/111/EZK.36.26.NIV](http://www.bible.com/bible/111/EZK.36.26.NIV)

I want you to imagine the world without the paintings of Michelangelo and Da Vinci. What if Beethoven had never composed music, and Jane Austen had never written? How different things might be without the inventions of Thomas Edison, Louis Pasteur, and Nikola Tesla? We marvel at the bravery of Amelia Earhart, Jackie Robinson, and Davy Crockett, who paved the path for others to also be courageous in life. How different would the world be if Billy Graham had given in to his doubts about his abilities and quit the ministry? The world is impoverished when men and women do not pursue the talents God gave them.

When we think about our own lives, we often don't see ourselves making the kind of impact that others, like those I just mentioned, have had. But as we go out into the world and make disciples, we are creating an infinitely greater eternal impact through the gift of salvation. It breaks my heart to think of the lost and the disillusioned—those who have never truly discovered the incredible gift God has placed within them, and whose talents remain unfulfilled for His glory. By not stepping into their purpose, they've

deprived themselves, the world, and God of the glory He intended to reveal through them.

Consider the parable of the talents that Jesus taught: "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:14-30).

We learn so much from this parable. We learn that no two people are the same. We are given different amounts of “talent(s)” to work with for the Master. Paul Ellis said, “The parable of the talents is not about how hard you work for God, but what you will do with the riches He has given to you. God gives you grace so that you will be set free from servitude and reign in life through Jesus.”<sup>21</sup>

The problem with some interpretations of this parable is that it has been used to teach a works-based system of gaining favor with the Master. But what you see in the text is the third man, who was given one talent, had contempt for the grace of the Master.

“Master, I knew that you are a hard man... (Matthew 25:24a).

“A hard man”? What’s so hard about receiving gold for free? This was his chance—a way out of servitude—but he turned it down. “Who gives bags of gold to servants? You’ve got to be out of your mind. I want nothing to do with your reckless grace, and honestly, I’m justified in ignoring your nonsense. You gave me a

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<sup>21</sup>Paul Ellis. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). May 19, 2015. [www.escapetoreality.org/2015/05/19/parable-of-the-talents-matthew-25/](http://www.escapetoreality.org/2015/05/19/parable-of-the-talents-matthew-25/)

lot of money, but I didn't want to be held accountable for it." "I was afraid, so I went and buried your gold in the ground" (Matthew 25:25a). To the self-righteous mind, this response makes perfect sense: "If I didn't earn it, I don't want it."<sup>22</sup>

From this parable, we learn that we are called to actively use the grace God has given us. Grace (symbolized by the talent) isn't meant to be buried— it's meant to be put to work. God's grace is intended for our healing, wisdom, deliverance, and countless other blessings! The Lord takes great joy in seeing His children flourish through His grace.

In Matthew 28:20, we see that grace has already been given to us, just as the servants in the parable of the talents had already received from their Master. We've been entrusted with the ability (talents/grace) to expand God's Kingdom. The message of the parable is clear: use the talents God has given you.

Matthew 28:20 says, "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

The problem many believers have is that they don't know how to do what Jesus commands. They might believe that disciple-making is for the one who has been given more talent(s) or at least what they perceive as more disciple-making talent.

The gifting (talent) God has given you (whether you like to write, sing, build things, etc), the purpose of those gifts is for God's glory and your enjoyment. God created you the way you are with the gifts you have for a reason, and the expectation is that you will use the grace you have been given throughout your life to help people grow in faith.

Some people understandably discover new talents later in their lives. I didn't know that I loved gardening until I reached my thirties. Some learned that they love to bake after they retired, or when a pandemic hit. When you find something that you love to do, you don't have to tell yourself that you need to do it.

Whatever your gift is, you will gravitate toward it because you enjoy it. The question isn't "will I be involved in doing the things I enjoy, but how will this talent lead me to build relationships and make disciples? Proverbs 18:16 says: "A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men."

God created you for Kingdom building. He has enabled you to reach people that no one else can, and it is out of your giftings that Kingdom building is often accomplished. Your gift used for God's glory can lead you to meet some remarkable people. Romans 12:6 says, "having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them."

So how does your gift make room for you and bring you before great men? The more you use your gift, the bigger it gets. It is like a well-toned muscle that gets stronger each time it is tested. Over time, as you become excellent in your gift, it gets noticed by others, and God opens doors for you that you could never imagine.

Ephesians 5:16 says: “making the most of every opportunity (kairos),<sup>23</sup> because the days are evil.” Do you want to live wisely? “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15). You live wisely (verse 15) by making the most of every opportunity (verse 16). The problem for us is that we don’t speak Koine Greek, and we are left with the question, “How do I live wisely, and how do I make the most of every opportunity?” This question is relevant to disciple-making.

The answer is clear in the Greek. (Exagorazō) “Making the most of every opportunity” was a metaphor of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of His vicarious death.<sup>24</sup>

Paul is warning us to be careful not to fall into the trap of living under the bondage of the Law (remember that is what was dividing the church of Galatia). Live free in the grace you have been given through the death of Jesus Christ, that is, wise living. Living in grace and sharing God’s grace is what it means to make the most of every opportunity.

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<sup>23</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2540&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2540&t=KJV)

<sup>24</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1805&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1805&t=KJV)

As you live in God's grace, you will impart God's grace to others. As you live free in the grace you have been given through the death of Jesus Christ, you will see the opportunity (kairos moment) and you will respond, making a wonderful Kingdom impact as you make disciples (Ephesians 5:16).

I love to study Scripture, looking at different individuals who have received God's grace and then who immediately respond in grace out of the grace they have received. This is evident in the transformation of Levi the tax collector into Matthew the follower of Jesus.

"As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth" (Matthew 9:9).

Matthew, at this point in the story, went by a different name before Jesus changed his life. Mark 2:13: "Once again Jesus went out beside the sea. All the people came to Him, and He taught them there. As He was walking along, He saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth."

Luke was a physician, and he made a lot of money, so he would have known the name of the tax collector

who took his money too. He writes in 5:27: "After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth."

When we learn about Levi, we discover that he was using the gifting God gave him in a non-glorifying way.

Levi was robbing God's people because that is what ancient tax collectors did. There are many talented people in the world (the talent is from God) who use their talent for their glory and in other inappropriate ways.

With life transformation comes a new life calling and a discovery of how our talents were meant to be used. Matthew would later use his gifting to become an accurate record keeper, a Gospel writer, and a sharer of the Good News to the Jewish people.

How did Levi's life change? When we first meet Levi, we find him in Capernaum, in his tax booth on the main highway. Jesus needed to speak only two Greek words to forever change his life: "follow Me" (Matthew 9:9).

Join Me and become My disciple. 92 times in Scripture, whether to His disciples or crowds of people, following Jesus is used. What the Holy Spirit has prompted in the hearts and lives of believers is to follow Jesus. "Follow me" is what Jesus said to a man who was hated by almost everyone.

Jesus' invitation for someone to become His disciple wasn't out of the norm. Rabbis offered invitations all the time. The traditional way an individual became a disciple is that a rabbi would see the potential in another and, in the proper timing, extend the opportunity to become a disciple of theirs.

The stunning part of this story is who Jesus invited to follow Him. The invitation of discipleship was given to a Jewish traitor, a Roman sell-out. Tax collectors are lumped together with another word in Scripture, "sinners".

Levi is the perfect choice to follow Jesus because it shows that no one is disqualified from receiving God's grace, no matter what has transpired in their past.

“Follow Me” shows that Levi’s qualification for salvation had nothing to do with his past. What we all share in common is that our past dictates that we all needed to be saved. This is what is glorious about the Gospel: it removes our pride and causes us to desire salvation for even the worst tax collectors and sinners of the world. The invitation is for everyone to follow Jesus.

It is a little strange that Matthew referred to himself in this story as Matthew because at the time Jesus called him, he was known as Levi.

The reason I believe Matthew writes in this way is that if we were to think about our past, before we followed Jesus, we would still do it through the lens of who we are today. Our shame and guilt are gone.

Look at the Apostle Paul, he called himself the “chief of sinners” and he uses the transformation of his past to lead others to Christ. Matthew still sees himself as He is today even when reflecting on His past because his old past is gone.

At the cross, our old self was crucified (Romans 6:6). The person you used to be, apart from God, your “old man,” is dead. This is the same thing for Levi, so he writes his story from the perspective of who he became.

Levi has a new purpose, and it doesn't involve his old way of living anymore. God would hardwire a new heart with a new desire in him. Levi, who sought wealth, money, possessions, and was the greediest of them all, left it all behind at the opportunity to follow Jesus (Luke 5:28).

There is always a message that comes with biblical name changes. Levi comes from the Hebrew word meaning to lend. The name itself also means attached or pledged<sup>25</sup>. His old name perfectly matched his actions. He collected taxes for the Romans, betraying his people, and even took an extra, exorbitant cut for himself. But then Jesus showed up, simply said, “Follow me,” and with that, Levi left his old life behind and became Matthew. Matthew comes from the Hebrew word given, and it means “gift of God”.<sup>26</sup> Levi used to take from people, but Matthew will give to

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<sup>25</sup>[www.behindthename.com/name/levi](http://www.behindthename.com/name/levi)

<sup>26</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3156&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3156&t=KJV)

people what he has received, the very gift of God, grace to others, Jesus Christ.

Levi was given a fresh start and the very next thing he does is he throws a party and invites everyone he knows to attend. Grace in your life will bring out generosity and grace towards other people.

Matthew's new desire is that his Jewish tax collector friends might meet grace personified and have their lives forever changed just like he did.

"Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to His disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 5:29-30)?

Of the four Gospel writers, it was Matthew, the least likely choice to become a disciple of Jesus, who is the only one who presented Jesus to the Jews as their hoped-for Messiah, tailoring his account to answer their questions. And from that time on, instead of collecting tax money, Matthew collected souls for Christ.

## **How is Disciple-Making In You?**

“And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The reason you will be successful in making disciples is that Jesus lives in you and is with you, and the Holy Spirit will empower you because you are doing what you are called to do.

“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” (Matthew 28:19-20).

“How will I be able to go and make disciples?” Teach them about Jesus, which will lead to their baptism. Matthew got together some people he knew, and he shared Jesus with them. If you like to bake, join a community of people who like to bake too. Get to know some people and use the opportunity you have, just like Matthew did, to bring grace (Jesus) into their lives.

What Matthew the disciple learned is key to disciple-making, and it spurs us on to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, and it is found in a single word that speaks of Jesus' heart for the people. "When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

The potential to leave an eternal mark on the world happens when we follow Jesus' lead. The compassion of Christ will cause us to seek out people using our giftings from God to grace others with Jesus Christ. That is the story of how Levi became Matthew, the gift giver of God who graced people's lives with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 5 Prayer Produces



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There was an important instruction that Jesus gave during the sending of the seventy (Luke 10) that illustrates an important component to our mission, and that is the power and necessity of prayer. Prayer produces.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field” (Luke 10:1-2).

Some manuscripts say seventy, others say seventy-two. In this chapter, we are going to use the number seventy for a specific reason to be explained later in the chapter. Jesus just sent out 70 individuals to go to every place He was about to go. The word “others” is important as it is a derivative of the Greek word (heterous), meaning “others of a different kind.”<sup>28</sup> What this means is the 12 disciples were not included in this group of seventy individuals.

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<sup>28</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2087&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2087&t=KJV)

It was 70 completely different individuals that Jesus had been with, teaching and discipling, and sending out on the mission of the Kingdom.

The text also tells us they were sent out in pairs. It is so much more effective when we are involved with others in ministry. Why would Jesus choose to send them out in pairs? There are many reasons involved in His decision, and they mostly fall under the 4 C'S: courage, companionship, credibility, and cover.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:1, "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

When somebody tells you something incredible, like the news that the Messiah you have waited centuries for is here, it helps to have more than one person confirm this news. The chance of you reacting favorably to a single person with unbelievable news is probably not very high, but if two showed up sharing the good news of the Messiah, it might be worth checking into.

When you're on a mission with someone else, it gives you the courage to speak up and take action. It also strengthens the bond of companionship through the shared experiences that ministry brings. Another practical reason for having a travel companion is safety—two are always safer than one. If an emergency arises, you have someone there to help. Jesus' wisdom is evident in how He sent out the seventy in pairs.

The timing of the sending of the seventy is crucial too. The crucifixion of Christ was rapidly approaching and the sending of this group provided an extension of His ministry, reaching more people.

Dummelow said, "He wished to train His followers to act alone after His departure. Significantly, Jesus was able to command such a large group of men in such a mission, indicating the power His ministry had already generated. Jesus followed up their visits by going personally to all those places."<sup>29</sup>

Why did Jesus send 70 people? The number sent on this mission had spiritual and symbolic overtones.

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<sup>29</sup>J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 751.

The Jews held that the Gentiles were made up of seventy nations; and at their Feast of Tabernacles, "seventy bullocks were offered on behalf of the Gentile nations ... to make atonement for them."<sup>30</sup> The cities and places to which these seventy were dispatched were in Trans-Jordan, where the Gentile population predominated.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus sent out seventy because His crucifixion was drawing near and there was so much work to be done and so many people to be reached, including the Gentiles. By sending the seventy it sent the message declaring that He would die for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). Jesus was to be the sacrifice for both the Jewish and the Gentile nations.

Seventy seems like a lot to send to complete a mission, but think about how many people needed to be reached. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

Can you picture the distress a farmer might have when he/she see their fields golden with harvest, and there are no workers to gather that harvest?

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 299.

Jesus isn't saying, "There is just too much Kingdom work to possibly be done, what are we going to do?" Instead, Jesus gives us the answer to the lack of Kingdom workers, and the answer is prayer. Prayer produces.

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

Whenever someone will pray, "Lord, send out workers to Your harvest," this is the kind of prayer that builds a harvest interest within the one who prays for it. When we pray this way, we are now actively seeking and expecting the Lord of the harvest to send workers. This means that as we engage in making disciples, training people how to get involved in sharing Christ, we are eagerly anticipating more workers being sent and more disciples to be made. We are "in season", ready to harvest.

"And in view of His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage with every form of patient instruction" (2 Timothy 4:1b-2).

There was a poll taken in 1994 that reported: "72 percent of Americans don't know their next-door neighbors."<sup>32</sup> Where you are in your life is for a reason. Wherever you are planted, it is to bloom and blossom and bless those around you as you partake in Kingdom work. Start by getting to know your neighbors, your co-workers, and expand from there.

One of the most powerful ways that more laborers are sent is found a few verses later in the text.

"He also said to the 70, 'And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9). In other words, Jesus anointed the 70 disciples to preach God's Word and heal the sick.

Today, if you want refreshment, health, and healing, be a part of an anointed ministry that preaches the Good News and practices healing the sick in Jesus' name, just like the seventy. This is how you can begin to walk in divine health! This is how more and more people will be added to the Kingdom.

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<sup>32</sup>Bill McKibben, in "the Age of Missing Information", *Signs of the Times*, February, 1994.

The works that Jesus did that He calls us to do, point people to faith in Him. Your life involved in Kingdom work can be a display of the trustworthiness of Jesus.

The seventy returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." Your Kingdom work will be joyful (Luke 10:17).

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of his wealth away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it.

Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay, it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin.

The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Sorely disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea.

"Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."<sup>33</sup>

Christ in you is beautiful. He will produce the most beautiful music through your life if you would only share Him with the world. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the Earth. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

There's one more important lesson from Jesus' instructions to the seventy: don't waste time in places that aren't open to receiving the Gospel. In other

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<sup>33</sup>Our Daily Bread, February 4, 1994.

words, be ready to stay where the Gospel is taking root and making an impact.

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:5-9).

In Jesus’ time, it was common for travelers to stay with strangers, as there were few options for lodging. His instruction to the seventy was to invest time in relationships with those who were open to the Gospel, focusing on places where the message could take root. This principle of intentional investment in fertile ground is reflected in the guiding values of many movements today.

One such example is the Order of the Mustard Seed, founded by Count Zinzendorf, which operates on three core principles:

- 1. Be kind to all people.
- 2. Seek their welfare.

- 3. Win them to Christ.

### **When Is It Time to Move On?**

“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you’ (Luke 10:10-11).

“Shaking the dust off their feet was, in effect, saying that those who rejected God’s truth would not be allowed to hinder the furtherance of the Gospel. Shaking the dust off one’s feet conveys the same idea as our modern phrase “I wash my hands of it.” Shaking the dust off the feet is a symbolic indication that one has done all that can be done in a situation and therefore carries no further responsibility for it.”<sup>34</sup>

Charles Spurgeon said, “It is our business to proclaim it (the Gospel) and leave it; the responsibility of receiving or rejecting it (salvation) rests with our hearers.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>What Does it Mean to Shake the Dust Off Your Feet?  
[www.gotquestions.org/shake-dust-off-feet.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/shake-dust-off-feet.html)

<sup>35</sup>Charles Spurgeon. The Lord’s Chosen Ministers. June 23, 1889.  
[www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons39/sermons39.xxxi.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons39/sermons39.xxxi.html)

Charles Spurgeon's quote takes away our pride because salvation is a work of God. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). That is, if a man is not born from above, by a work of God alone, he cannot be saved.

R.C. Sproul explains further:

"No man has the power to raise himself from spiritual death. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). The response of the sinner is not dependent upon the messenger or the methods he/she employs."<sup>36</sup>

### **Our Position When We Pray**

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.'"' (Luke 11:5-6).

Hospitality was a common practice in this era, as travelers often needed a place to stay. As Hebrews 13:2 reminds us, "Do not forget to show hospitality to

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<sup>36</sup>[www.equippingeve.com/blog/2017/10/28/salvation-is-a-work-of-god](http://www.equippingeve.com/blog/2017/10/28/salvation-is-a-work-of-god) October 28, 2017.

strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

The Greek root of the word hospitality means “love of a stranger.”<sup>37</sup>

The ancient world had very few lodging places for travelers. Travelers stayed with whoever would open their homes to them. This request was a common one with an expectation of hospitality. Among those expectations would be to have food to offer to your guests. So, asking another friend for food to provide for a weary traveler, even if it is midnight, is not a ridiculous request at all.

But here is where things get interesting:

“And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need” (Luke 11:7-8).

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<sup>37</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5381&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G5381&t=KJV)

Some might believe that the moral of the story is that if you want something bad enough, keep bothering your friend, and eventually you'll get what you want.

That's a sure way to lose friends quickly. The point of the parable isn't about bothering people until you get what you want. Nor is it about praying endlessly and expecting God to eventually give in to your requests.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10). There is an advancement in persistence; however, Adam Clarke's Commentary said the "ask, seek, knock" refers to the lost.<sup>38</sup>

We are not the friends on the outside asking, seeking, and knocking; we are the children on the inside who are already with our Father. The Father is with us, and we are snuggled warmly next to His side.

The whole point of the parable is that Jesus is teaching us how to pray and ask, knowing that God is with us and delights to give us what is for our good.

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<sup>38</sup>Adam Clarke Commentary. [www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/luke-11.html](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/luke-11.html)

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:11-13)!

So, in our prayers to God, we must not see ourselves as being on the outside separated from God; instead, see ourselves as His child, whom He dearly loves.

The picture for believers is of warmth, closeness, and intimacy that is already ours within our Father’s house. The point of the parable is to show that if the man reluctantly answers the request of his friend on the outside, how much more eagerly will he answer the request of his children on the inside?

When we pray for something that we know God loves to give us, like laborers for Kingdom work, we don’t have to ask over and over again, wondering if He will send them. Instead, we can pray with confidence and look to the way He will provide it.

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him (Matthew 6:7-8)!

Did you know that your Father knows what you need?

- Before you even ask Him
- He knows what we need even better than we do

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 gives us another angle into prayer: “Rejoice at all times. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Your prayer life doesn’t impress God and therefore, get Him to respond. Instead, pray with confidence all the time, because you are impressed with His goodness toward you, that He delights to give good gifts to you.

If you believe this, you will want to pray all the time (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

**Your Prayers Are Powerful, And They Produce Because Of Who You Have Become in Christ**

James 5:13-16: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

I would be amiss if I didn't first read to you a contrasting group of people who do not have healing and forgiveness, and joy available to them, mentioned in the same chapter just before.

James 5:1-6: "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on Earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have

fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.”

James is talking about those who have rejected Jesus Christ. They have rejected His healing, salvation, forgiveness, and true joy is missing from their lives. They think because they are rich, they don't need God's grace.

Listen to what Jesus, Paul, and James all have to say to people who do not perceive their need for God's grace:

**Jesus:** “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

**Paul:** “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God...” (1 Timothy 6:17).

**James:** “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you” (James 5:1).

If your identity and security are tied to wealth, life will throw many challenges your way that could shake you to your core.<sup>39</sup> Sickness and affliction do not care how wealthy you are.

Now let's go back to the audience of believers to see what they have available to them in Jesus: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."

Money can't fix everything. We are incredibly blessed to have all the provisions we need in Jesus—the very things money can't buy.

You'd think that believers in need would tap into the abundant provisions they have in Christ, yet many suffer in silence. Some fall for the enemy's lie that it's God's will for them to suffer endlessly, while others let pride keep them from asking fellow believers for prayer. But there is healing available to you. As James says in 2:14, it takes just a little faith in God.

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<sup>39</sup>Paul Ellis. James- Preacher of Grace. October 2, 2010.  
[www.escapetoreality.org/2010/10/02/james-preacher-of-grace/](http://www.escapetoreality.org/2010/10/02/james-preacher-of-grace/)

What does it profit, my brothers, if someone says he is fully persuaded regarding God's promises but then does nothing about them, never steps out, never takes a risk? Can such 'faith' make any difference in his life? Can it "sozo" (save, heal, or deliver) him?

James makes it clear in this verse that he is not talking about who is saved and who's not. Since we have everything we need in Jesus, have we gone to Him to meet our needs? Is your back hurting? Is your blood pressure always too high? Take your afflictions to Jesus. Ask your heavenly Father and be fully persuaded regarding God's promises, so that as your healing comes to you, you might be His firstfruits, His trophies of grace, His living testimonies of transforming power (James 1:18).

How do we become fully persuaded to believe God for things that seem so impossible? The longer we have been suffering, the easier it is to believe that we will never be healed. Did you know that James has already written a prescription that will change your perception of your affliction?

"Is anyone among you (afflicted) in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

Is anyone among you in trouble? Is anyone happy? Is anyone sick? One of these things stands out. It seems we have two struggles and one blessing. I’ve never heard anyone say, “I need prayer because I’ve got this condition called ‘merriness.’ Everywhere I go, I’m just so happy. Last week, during jury duty, the judge dismissed me because she said I looked too eager and overly joyful about serving. Please pray for my ‘merriness ailment.’” Clearly, happiness isn’t an ailment.

I believe the second condition (merry) is sandwiched between the two ailments (afflicted and sick) as part of the prescription that will lead to our merriness.

1<sup>ST</sup> Condition: Afflicted (kakopatheō): to suffer hardships, trouble.<sup>40</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> Condition: Sick (astheneō): sick, to be weak, without strength.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2553&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2553&t=KJV)

<sup>41</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G770&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G770&t=KJV)

The prescription for these two conditions is: "Prayer from church leadership, and to join in the celebratory praises of God in song, from the merry."

"Merry" (euthymeō) in the New Testament was used to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song.<sup>42</sup>

Being merry comes as we are fully persuaded regarding God's promises. If you believe that what God's Word says is true, you are going to sing in celebration of the victory that you have over your hardship, trouble, sickness, etc. Your faith rises as a result of the prayers of the saints and as you sing God's praises. When you believe in God's promises He has made to you, you will be merry and sing. Your healing will start in your spirit, evident through your singing, prayer, and right-believing, and will then be manifested in your physical body.

"Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord." Why should we seek out the elders? What is so special about the elders of the church? Hopefully, they

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<sup>42</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2114&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2114&t=KJV)

will be fully persuaded that God wants to heal you! Elders lead by example. Elders should have faith, and faith is simply agreeing with God. Faith is saying yes to the Lord who heals. That is why the elders are usually the best chance in any given gathering to be the people who believe the promises of God, but it is not always the case. Find someone who believes the promises of God and have them pray for you.

James writes about people who pray and don't believe: "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6-8).

What limits our faith? James declares that it is doubt and uncertainty. To the degree that you are uncertain about God's will, to that degree, you are handicapped by unbelief. The devil wants you to remain uncertain, but God wants you to be sure about His good will (Romans 12:2). If you're not sure, then James says, "Pray, ask God for wisdom – and ask confidently! – receive what God gives you, then act on it."

“Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” According to Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible, oil in the East, and especially among the Jews, was a sign of the divine grace (James 5:14).<sup>43</sup>

Healing is all about the grace of Jesus Christ, who bore our infirmities; by His stripes we are healed. The oil reminds us of this powerful truth. So, when the elders or church leaders who believe the promises of God, pray with oil, the oil is a reminder that healing is ours because Jesus has purchased it for us to have it. Healing comes by the very grace of God.

James writes: “Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17-18).

James said, “Elijah was a man just like us.” To the Jews, this would’ve been scandalous! How could James compare us to Elijah? Elijah was the great prophet of God. James says the great prophet Elijah is

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<sup>43</sup>Commentary Critical and Explanatory of the Whole Bible.  
[www.studylight.org/commentary/james/5-14.html](http://www.studylight.org/commentary/james/5-14.html)

like us. If you thought the prayers of Elijah were powerful (stopping and starting rain), how powerful do you think our prayers will be, seeing we are clothed with Christ's righteousness (James 5:16)? Be encouraged that your prayers avail much because Christ has made you righteous. If Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain for 3.5 years and it didn't, remember that as you pray. Think about what God will do when you pray for someone's healing because you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

A believer isn't one who merely believes in God in his/her heart; they reveal God through his/her actions. The difference between you and an unsaved neighbor is not just a set of beliefs; it is the life of Christ revealed through you. You not only think differently, you act differently, and what you do flows from what you believe. If you don't believe God heals the sick, you won't pray for the sick, and they won't get healed. In this regard, you would be no different from an unbelieving neighbor. But if you do believe that Jesus provided for our healing 2,000 years ago (1 Peter 2:24), then you will pray for the sick and you will heal them in Jesus' name.

To the church, James is saying, don't just believe God, reveal Him! Heal the sick, drive out demons, raise the dead! If you are fully persuaded, that God can heal the sick, but you don't pray for the sick, then something is wrong. Your faith is not being expressed. It's lifeless, powerless, and incomplete. If you are fully persuaded that God will do what He promised, then act on it and receive your miracle. Why wait? Abraham didn't linger. He got up early the next morning and marched off, fully persuaded that God would raise the dead.<sup>44</sup>

"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up."

We haven't been called to do works for God, but to do the works of God.

The work of God is to believe in Jesus (John 6:29). He who believes Jesus saves will be saved and will save others (through the sharing of the Gospel), and they will be healed and heal others. If you are fully persuaded that Jesus is our wisdom from God, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption, and our

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<sup>44</sup>Paul Ellis. James- Preacher of Grace. October 2, 2010.  
[www.escapetoreality.org/2010/10/02/james-preacher-of-grace/](http://www.escapetoreality.org/2010/10/02/james-preacher-of-grace/)

victory, it will be evident in how we live and in how we pray.

Prayer is powerful and it produces. Prayer is essential in effective disciple-making, for it is in prayer that God sends Kingdom workers, and it is through prayer that people receive their miracle from the Lord.

## Chapter 6

### You Are Not Called to Disciple Everyone



To recognize who might benefit from having someone other than ourselves disciple them, we need to broaden our understanding of whom we are called to disciple. One key question to consider is, "Does discipleship begin only after salvation, or can it start before?" If discipleship begins only after salvation, then the mission of making disciples takes on a different shape. Additionally, why does Jesus link baptism with the disciple-making mission? Baptism seems like an unusual choice if discipleship is solely for those already saved, because most believers who are being disciplined have already been baptized.

The word for disciple is ambiguous. It doesn't give us any more clarity. "Disciple" (mathēteuō) is to become a pupil.<sup>45</sup> The reason for the ambiguity is that a disciple could be anyone. Jeremy Meyers asks, "Is there such a thing as discipleship for the unbeliever? Can unbelievers be disciplined?"<sup>46</sup> I firmly believe discipleship is how effective evangelism works. Why wouldn't a believer seek to teach an unbeliever about Jesus?

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<sup>45</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3100&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3100&t=KJV)

<sup>46</sup>Jeremy Meyers. Discipleship and the Unbeliever.

[www.redeeminggod.com/discipleship-and-the-unbeliever/](http://www.redeeminggod.com/discipleship-and-the-unbeliever/)

Discipleship, as modeled by Jesus, was for both the believer and the unbeliever. “Discipleship can be a way for an unbeliever to try to figure out who Jesus is, what He teaches, and what it means to follow Him. Jesus is the best example of how to perform discipleship, and it is fairly obvious from a quick reading of the Gospels that Jesus engaged in discipleship with unbelievers.”<sup>47</sup>

Discipleship can begin before salvation in Christ, as demonstrated throughout Jesus’ public ministry. There were numerous instances where large crowds followed Him, eager to hear His teachings, experience His healings, and witness His miracles (see John 6). The crowd mentioned in John 6 was made up of a diverse mix of people—a variety of individuals from different backgrounds and circumstances.<sup>48</sup>

### **Evangelism is Impossible Without Discipleship**

Evangelism, in its very definition, has a level of discipleship to it. Evangelism is sharing the glad tidings of salvation through Christ.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3793&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3793&t=KJV)

<sup>49</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2098&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2098&t=KJV)

Because discipleship involves sharing what Jesus taught, evangelism and discipleship are inextricably dependent on one another. Without evangelism, there will be no one to disciple into Christian maturity.

Without discipleship, there will be no one to go and share the Gospel with others. “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” (Matthew 28:19-20a). The order of the mission as presented by Jesus is to “go and make disciples”, and we do this through the sharing of the Gospel, which leads to salvation and the opportunity for “baptizing them”.

Baptism is the public declaration that a person has decided to follow Jesus. Once someone makes that decision, they need to be discipled—“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” However, this process doesn’t always follow a strict order. An unbeliever can be discipled (learning about Jesus) and then come to faith and be baptized. On the other hand, a believer may first experience discipleship, which leads to spiritual growth and a desire to be baptized.

It's important to remember that water baptism itself doesn't save you. The baptism that brings salvation is the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15-16), which happens the moment someone believes the Gospel.

What I love about the story of Philip and the eunuch is that we get a glimpse of effective evangelism done through just a few minutes of discipling (teaching the Word of God).

In the story of Philip and the eunuch, we learn about a man who is saved and baptized all at once, and then the relationship between the two is never mentioned again. This means Philip isn't the one who will actively disciple him in the future. There is so much to learn from this brief encounter. Anyone who believes can be water baptized at any time, as this is an outward display of the inner reality that they have already been saved.

Sometimes we might be instrumental in leading someone to faith in Christ, while someone else will continue to help them grow in their faith (discipleship).

It is also a window into a discipleship opportunity with an unbeliever that leads to salvation. Also, because Philip followed the angel's leading, which resulted in the Gospel reaching Ethiopia, salvation is a work of God.

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).

If it had not been for persecution, Philip would not be in the proper place to proclaim the Gospel to a man whose heart was ready to receive it, and who was positioned to share it throughout another nation.

The trials and tribulations that we go through prepare us for Gospel prosperity (people being saved).

Acts 8:2: "Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him." This was shocking news for the church. There had been a powerful move of God in the Upper Room; the church was established with the Holy Spirit filling the hearts of believers, miracles were unfolding, and then the first Christian was martyred for his faith. The reality had set in: their mission was dangerous, and they would face opposition from Satan.

“But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3).

“Destroy the church” (lymainō) is an interesting phrase that is used, and it does not mean “to destroy the church”. It means to make havoc of.<sup>50</sup>

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

It’s not that the church was being destroyed or becoming weaker; it was just the opposite. The persecution caused the movement so that the Gospel might spread and the church might grow.

Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the Earth.”

The Holy Spirit had already come, but yet, God’s people hadn’t moved out of Jerusalem to go and make disciples.

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<sup>50</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3075&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3075&t=KJV)

After the persecution began, Philip entered the story. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:4-8).

Why is Philip in Samaria? Because Saul was wreaking havoc on the church.

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza’” (Acts 8:26).

What good can come out of heading toward a barren place? We can, at times, think the place the Lord is leading us to doesn’t make any sense. Things are working well where I am (Acts 8:8), but if we follow His lead, we’ll continue to experience the salvation of the Lord wherever He leads us.

This desert move made no logical sense toward advancing the Gospel, but Philip is given Divine direction, and he went without knowing why. He

moved forward in obedience, and in doing so, the reason for his action was revealed. This is how God works, and it's also what works best for us. If we were given all the steps at once, we'd likely become overwhelmed. Instead, focus on what you know and what you're called to do today. Be obedient to what has been revealed, and as you take each step, the next one will follow—and eventually, the “why” will become clear.

“So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship” (Acts 8:27). So, the eunuch was either Jewish or at the very least a Jewish convert.

We find that this man had gone to Jerusalem to worship; his physical deformity (eunuch) and possibly his ethnicity (if he were a Gentile) would have kept him from approaching God (Old Testament Law).

However, in the New Testament, God approached him, seeking him out in the desert. This makes it clear that the New Covenant allows even a deformed, potentially

Gentile person to become a true saint and a member of God's family in Jesus Christ.

Gary Gilbert points out, Psalm 68:31 looked forward to Ethiopia "reaching out to God" and, more significantly for our purposes, Isaiah 56:4-5 foresees a time when eunuchs would be included among the people of God.<sup>51</sup>

"And as he was on his way home, he was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 8:28). Later in the passage, we learn that the very Scripture he was reading pointed directly to Jesus, the Messiah to come.

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'" (Acts 8:29). Effective discipleship and evangelism happen as we are sensitive to the timing of the Spirit of God.

God is doing a work in people's hearts, preparing them to receive the Word, and when we walk in the Spirit, our timing is never too early, and we don't have to fear that we will end up being too late.

"Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 8:30). Philip's quick

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<sup>51</sup>Gary Gilbert. "Acts" in JANT, 216.

movement indicates a readiness to move when it is time to act; he was ready to respond. Sometimes the opportunities happen fast, and we need to be ready to move with the Spirit.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. Here is a beautiful picture of how to successfully share the Gospel. The man is at a point in his life where he is seeking answers, and he is open to the things of God.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:31). Discipleship happens when two people begin to have a conversation about the Lord.

The passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading was from Isaiah 53:7,8:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so He did not open His mouth.  
In His humiliation He was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of His descendants?  
For His life was taken from the Earth.”

The setup is so wonderful because all Philip has to do is be ready to answer some simple questions. The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus" (Acts 8:34-35). The Gospel can be shared in a variety of ways, but it is always about leading other people to the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:35).

"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized" (Acts 8:36)?

Somewhere during the time of sharing the Gospel, Philip must have mentioned water baptism for the eunuch to respond the way he did when he saw water. We learn from this story what the qualification for water baptism is:

Belief in Jesus (Acts 2:41, 8:13, 16:14-15, 18:8, 19:4-5).

Unfortunately, for many centuries, believers have been taught that water baptism is a ritual reserved for

being performed only by pastors, for those who've completed extensive religious courses. However, anyone who has been baptized is fully qualified to baptize someone else, as it is part of the life mission Jesus gave to all believers (Matthew 28:19). What I'm saying may sound scandalous to some, but it is rooted in Scripture. You don't need a pastor, vicar, or anyone with a title to baptize you or someone else. If you've led someone to faith and they ask, "There's a lake, could you baptize me?"—why not?

Romans 6:3 tells us that when we are baptized into the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into His death. We are identifying with Christ and His crucifixion. When we are water baptized and we come out of the water, we are saying: Christ has risen and so have I! The old me no longer lives, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

The life Christ offers is not an improved life, but a new life. The old you has gone and you are a new creation. During times of intense persecution, like in Acts 8, water baptism boldly declared to onlookers, "I am not afraid of death, for Jesus died in my place. Through

His sacrificial death and Resurrection, I now experience new life—here and now.”

In Acts 8:38b-40, we read, “Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

God prepared Philip in Jerusalem for Samaria. He then supernaturally brought him from Samaria to Gaza. Your Jerusalem hardship might be the very thing you need to move you forward to the successful God-led path in Samaria and beyond.

“Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea” (Acts 8:40).

God miraculously made Philip appear 48 miles away. Sometimes the quickest route to your next destination appears to take you in the wrong direction. We are not called to disciple everyone, for Philip was taken away from the eunuch that he just led to faith and baptized.

As I have matured in my faith, I have realized that there will be times when I will lead someone to Jesus, and I might not see them much thereafter. This is especially difficult for pastors, as we hear of people whom we have invested our lives in that choose to be a part of another church. My initial reaction is sometimes sadness, because I know that the relationship will likely shift, and the discipleship process will now primarily be led by someone else. However, I've learned that I don't need to feel so disheartened. I can trust that, when this happens, God will use others to continue the work of discipleship in their lives. I am not called to disciple everyone. There will be times when our role in helping someone grow in their faith is brief, much like Philip's encounter with the eunuch.

In my early years of ministry, I spent a lot of time thinking about different church growth strategies. While reaching more people is certainly part of our mission, I've come to a place where I no longer focus on growing "my church." My passion now lies in growing the Kingdom. It's not my job to get people to join Acts 433 Church; it's my calling—and yours—to share the Good News about Jesus. God will always

lead people to the place where they will be spiritually nourished. This doesn't mean they will always follow that lead right away—maturity takes time. Ultimately, God knows where they can be most effective for the Kingdom. We're all part of a much larger family, far bigger than our local gathering of believers.

### **The Path to Discipling Must Be Spirit Led**

In the sixteenth chapter in the book of Acts, Timothy has just joined Paul and Silas on their missionary journey. In Acts 16:5, it says, "and the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." Early church growth was not born out of a gimmicky event or a church giveaway designed to attract crowds.

The church was growing daily because of the continual, everyday sharing of Jesus.

People were being saved, not just from the ministry efforts of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but through the members of the entire church sharing the Gospel.

How can I be enabled to go out confidently and make disciples like the early church? In the text, it says, “They were strengthened in faith” (stereoō), which is of trust (or confidence) in Christ [instilled in others]<sup>52</sup>. Confidence in Christ is what led to people being saved (Acts 16:5). People who were being saved in great daily numbers were a work of the Holy Spirit as a result of Christians helping other Christians be strengthened in their trust in Christ. This is a perfect illustration of what discipleship in action looks like.

When things are going well, I often feel tempted to stay put, reluctant to embrace change. I’m sure Paul felt the same way, just as Philip likely did. But Paul had a mission—to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth (see Acts 9). As an apostle, he was called to be a “sent one.”

The difference between Philip’s story and Paul’s is how the Holy Spirit intervenes in each case. In Philip’s story, God sends an angel to guide him, while in Paul’s story, the Spirit blocks him from taking a seemingly smart path forward with the Gospel. There are

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<sup>52</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4732&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4732&t=KJV)

countless ways God works—sometimes sending an angel, other times blocking a path. But in every case, each impactful moment in Kingdom history is always led by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A part of a growing, strengthening walk of trust in God (Acts 16:5) is to keep moving forward from success to success, which sometimes takes us through some desert-like paths.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:6-7).

Here you have Paul and Silas, two of the greatest church planters this world has ever known, in an area ripe to have the Gospel preached, and yet the Spirit of God refused to let them enter the place they thought they should go.

They were refused the very thing (sharing the Gospel) they were sent out to do (Acts 16:6) at the place they thought they needed to be (Bithynia). There have been times when I am trying to do something good, in the place I think I am supposed to be, and it just isn't working out. If that has ever been your experience, then you are in good company. The Holy Spirit is trying to reveal something to you. Know that a closed door or a stop sign at Bithynia means God has something even better in mind, which will lead to your Macedonia moment. You don't have to understand with it is or what it might look like to stop and celebrate your new direction. Praise God that He is working something out of your detour.

Now, the word used for "preach" in Acts 16:6 is an interesting word choice. "The Holy Spirit kept them from preaching the Word." Usually, the word that is used in Scripture for preach is "kēryssō".<sup>53</sup>

However, a different Greek word is used instead. The Holy Spirit kept them from (laleō), meaning they couldn't even utter a single word.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2784&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2784&t=KJV)

<sup>54</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2980&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2980&t=KJV)

The Holy Spirit prevented them from even speaking a single word about Jesus. How is this possible? I know it wasn't because of the threat of prison or being beaten. In the book of Acts, they willingly went to jail and were beaten. They even rejoiced while they were in prison. It couldn't have been a physical condition like laryngitis because they had multiple people capable of preaching. As the story continues, the reason becomes clear.

"So they passed by Mysia" (Acts 16:8). Mysia means the land of beach trees.<sup>55</sup>

They just had success where they were at; the itinerary said they were headed through the land of beach trees, and now they are going to miss out on Mysia. Although in Luke's writing in Acts, he does not mention Ephesus, the chief city of Asia, it seems likely that Paul's heart was set on proclaiming the Gospel there.

Strategically, Ephesus was a smart place to share the Gospel. Ephesus was a great commercial, religious, and cultural center.

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<sup>55</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3465&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3465&t=KJV)

It made logical sense to go the route of the beach trees to get to the place where the Gospel would seem to spread the fastest, along a busy trade route.

However, the Holy Spirit postponed Paul's preaching there. In God's time, Paul went to Ephesus near the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21) and returned on his third journey as well. Just because you are prevented from doing something during a certain time in your life, it doesn't mean that God won't make a way to experience even better success when you get there later on.

After they detoured away from the land of beach trees, the next steps were revealed. Once again, we have a parallel to Philip's story in how God works. Maybe you have been waiting for direction from the Lord, and you are like, "What's the next step?" Be willing to move beyond your desired "land of beach trees" so that the next step may be revealed. God's Word is a lamp unto your feet, lighting up your path, illuminating your direction.

This means happiness is not a destination (land of beach trees), but joy is a path that is connected to God's Word (Jesus) [Psalm 119:105].

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them” (Acts 16:9-10).

Throughout the Book of Acts, the pivotal moments are described as coming from the Spirit. God’s strategy for world evangelism was Europe before Asia. Does this mean that God cares more about the Macedonians than the Bithynians? No!

Does God care more about the person you are discipling than the one you are not? No! We are not called to disciple everyone. Paul is not the ideal person to reach everyone with the Gospel. God so loved the people in Macedonia and Bithynia that He prevented Paul from going there first. Why? Because God was sending Peter. God knew that it was Peter who was better equipped to reach these people first (1 Peter 1:1).

Certain individuals are better equipped to reach certain people with the Gospel (evangelism), just as certain people are called to stay with and disciple certain others (discipleship). That is why it is crucial to follow the Spirit's leading. That is why Luke writes that the church was growing daily, because different people were reaching different people, and the whole church was involved in evangelism and discipleship, relying on the Holy Spirit.

If you continue to trace their journey to their God-led destination in Macedonia, Paul and his ministry companions are on their way through Phrygia, which signifies "dry"; this being a very dry and sandy country, and the region of Galatia.<sup>56</sup> God brought Paul through a dry land (Phrygia) to a place [Macedonia] which means "burning adoration".<sup>57</sup> There is a place that God knows that if you will bring the Gospel there, it will be a place of burning adoration (Macedonia) for the Word. The word "logos" is Jesus. For us to reach those with a burning desire to receive Christ, you first might have to go through the dry (Phrygia) route to get there.

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<sup>56</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5435&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5435&t=KJV)

<sup>57</sup>[www.thenamesdictionary.com/name-meanings/173569/name-meaning-of-macedonia](http://www.thenamesdictionary.com/name-meanings/173569/name-meaning-of-macedonia)

So, they reach the chief city of Macedonia, which is present-day northern Greece. When Paul arrives, the first place he goes to is a women's prayer meeting by the river. Verses 13-15 tell us: "On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God." Lydia was a worshiper of God who did not know of the salvation that is needed in Christ.

Believing in "God" alone does not guarantee salvation; true salvation comes only through Jesus (John 14:6). As the Scripture says, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she believed, she and her household were baptized. She then invited us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' And she persuaded us" (Acts 16:14-15). The story of Lydia closely parallels that of the Ethiopian eunuch—both had their hearts opened by the Lord, and both were baptized immediately after coming to faith.

So, the first members of this new church at Philippi are coming into being, a businesswoman and her household. Paul then encounters a demon-possessed girl who is enslaved by her owners and used by them to make money by fortune-telling. In verses 16-19, it says: "Paul turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers."

We are not told what became of the girl, but let's assume, since she was set free from demon possession, that she might have become part of the first church of Philippi. Now, as a result of Paul and Silas following the Spirit's leading, "the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks" (Acts 16:22-24).

Sometimes things will get worse before the plans of God are revealed. I wonder if, for a brief minute, there was a temptation to think that they should have gone on the other journey to Cyprus with Barnabas and John Mark. "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25).

If they had any doubts, they didn't show it—and if they did, they didn't last long. Faith isn't most visible when everything is going smoothly; it shines brightest when everything seems to be falling apart. It's in the middle of suffering, when you can still sing through persecution, that the glory of the Lord is most powerfully displayed. That's when people take notice—especially those who are also in chains—and opportunities for making disciples begin to unfold (Acts 16:25). Joy amid sorrow and suffering always captures the attention of those around you.

That prison had witnessed cursing, it had witnessed groaning and cries, pleading and groveling; but it had never witnessed songs of praise.

We can sing even in the darkest cell when we walk by faith, not by sight. Walk in the Spirit and rejoice in

your spirit, knowing that the salvation of the Lord can bring not only spiritual freedom but physical breakthrough as well (see James 5:13-16). Paul and Silas sang because they were already free in spirit—and that spiritual freedom ultimately led to their physical deliverance during a difficult situation.

“Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here” (Acts 16:26-28)!

A convicted felon is going to run when given the opportunity. The reason a convicted felon will run is that he/she is not free. But a changed life, a life where the Son has already set you free, results in a changed reaction because you don’t need to run if you have already been set free. “We are all here.”

“The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them” (Acts 16:34a). Can you imagine that? You are tasked with guarding the prisoners, and now

you are having the prisoners over for dinner at your house with your family.

“He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household” (Acts 16:34b).

So, who is the Macedonian man Paul had in his vision? We don’t know for sure, but the first mention of a Macedonian man is the jailer. Paul would never have met him had he not gone through what he did. So, the prison led to the purpose of God revealed, resulting in the salvation of many lives. What’s God’s plan? It is a plan of salvation.

Acts chapter 16 and Paul’s vision wasn’t solely about the man of Macedonia—it was about the many lives that would be touched along the way. The journey to reach one actually led through several. And believe it or not, the text hinted at this all along. There’s a good chance you may have overlooked it. Let’s go back and take a closer look at Acts 16:9.

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” “Help us,” plural. Who might “us” be? It was all of them: it was Lydia and her

household, the demon-possessed slave girl, the jailer, and his household.

The first church is planted in Philippi, and it started with a businesswoman and her household; possibly a former slave-girl; and a city employee, the jailer, with his household and probably some others freed from prison who would have joined. I am so inspired by this story because of what God did through such diverse people. Luke says the Lord opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14), in the name of Jesus, the demon-possessed slave girl was delivered (Acts 16:18), and the Lord shook the jail with an earthquake. The same power that created the church in Philippi is present by the Word and the Spirit of God today. Who might God be leading you to? We are not called to disciple everyone, but those the Spirit leads us to, we can be a part of something incredible.

The story of the church in Philippi doesn't end in Acts 16. Though small in size, the Philippian church was powerful and made a lasting impact.

Later, when Paul writes to the Corinthians to encourage them to give to the poor in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:3), he points to the churches in

Macedonia—especially the Philippians—as a remarkable example of generosity. Here’s what he says about them in 2 Corinthians 8:1–4:

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”

Churches that are planted by the power and grace of God and who continue in that grace will be known by their generosity because that’s what grace does.

Most church planting models advise building a large donor base before launching. They often suggest analyzing socioeconomic factors and choosing locations with high visibility and foot traffic—recommending places like Ephesus over less prominent regions like Macedonia.

I am so grateful the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and Silas from entering Bithynia. God had a plan that

would move Paul and Silas beyond the resources of Ephesus to plant a church with diverse people that would be a generous church, mindful of supporting other churches even when they did not have very much financial wealth. As a result, the needs of the believers in Jerusalem were cared for, because God's plans are always the best.

### **Being A Disciple Recruiter**

In the military, there are various rankings in leadership that include differing roles. A drill sergeant spends most of his/her time training/discipling recruits. A recruiting officer spends a considerable amount of time finding recruits to enlist for the drill sergeants to train.

One of my most impactful discipleship relationships began through a Christian woman I had never met, who lived in Texas. She came across our ministry online and, after praying, felt led to connect me with a pastor friend of hers in Kenya whom she believed I was meant to disciple.

When I first received her e-mail, I wasn't completely convinced that I was the right person to disciple her friend. We can go through a whole list of excuses for why others might be a better choice to disciple someone. In my case, language barrier, time zone, and lack of available time were at the top of my list, but the Holy Spirit will confirm God's leading as you pray. My reluctance was replaced with a passion to go forward into this discipling relationship. I learned from this experience how pivotal this woman was in helping to create a discipleship pairing. She was the recruiter, and I was the training officer.

We're not called to personally disciple everyone. If someone is open to being discipled but you're unable to take that on yourself, consider this: who do you know that you could connect them with? Sometimes the most meaningful impact we can make is through a thoughtful introduction.

Maybe you're already actively discipling others, and time has become the limiting factor in taking on someone new. That's a clear sign it's time to involve others. What a beautiful opportunity—to help fellow believers step into their life mission of making disciples, becoming disciple-makers themselves as we

take on the role of disciple recruiters. This is likely what the early church looked like in Acts 16, when so many came to faith and the church grew rapidly.

## Chapter 7

Know Something of Me:

Building Relationships is Key to Effective Discipling



I hope that this book has already begun to reshape the way you view discipleship and your calling to it. I also pray that God has brought people into your life whom you can help grow in their faith. As one definition puts it, “Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord.”<sup>58</sup>

That process can look very different depending on the relationship. For some, discipleship may be a single, meaningful encounter—like Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch. For others, it may unfold over many years, as with Paul and Timothy.

One of my favorite passages on discipleship comes from John chapter 1. It’s rarely highlighted in books or series on discipleship, yet the example Jesus gives here is foundational. Without it, we risk missing the heart of what effective discipleship looks like.

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about

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<sup>58</sup>What is Christian Discipleship? [www.gotquestions.org/Christian-discipleship.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-discipleship.html)

whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:43–45).

Philip follows Jesus, and then what does he do? Philip seeks out Nathanael and extends an invitation for him to follow Jesus too (John 1:45). This simple act will forever change Nathanael’s life. At its core, discipleship is about helping someone grow in their faith—and faith comes by encountering the Word, who is Jesus. True discipleship flows naturally from time spent with Christ. As we walk with Him, we’re compelled to invite others into that same relationship. It’s about building connections, forming relationships, and pointing people to Jesus through His Word.

You don’t need to be a gifted teacher to be effective at discipling others. In fact, discipleship isn’t a spiritual gift in itself—it’s a calling we live out by using the unique gifts God has given us. For example, if you have the gift of hospitality, maybe that means opening your home and creating space where Christ can be shared through conversation and love.

Philip simply introduced Nathanael to Jesus. What simple step could you take to connect someone to Christ today?

Some 2,000 years ago, the invitation to follow Jesus was given to twelve men. They all had jobs, families, hobbies, and very active lives. None of them were expecting the invitation when it came.

Over the next few years, everything about Jesus and His life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension would shape every single area of their lives.

Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:43-45).

Philip shares his faith, declaring that Jesus is the One they’ve all been waiting for. But just like Nathanael—and everyone else—each person must make their own decision about who Jesus truly is. When it comes to Jesus, there are only three possibilities: He is either Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

C.S. Lewis popularized Watchman Nee’s trilemma<sup>59</sup>: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus:

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<sup>59</sup>Watchman Nee. *The Normal Christian Life*. 1936.

I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

Jesus said He had the authority to forgive sins, that He had always existed, and that He intended to come back at the end of time. If He isn't God's Son, don't call Him a great moral teacher, as He would either be a liar or a lunatic.

If Jesus were a lunatic, He would be on the same level as a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be a liar, a devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher only.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Now it seems obvious to me that He was neither a lunatic nor a lying fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”<sup>60</sup>

Everyone must decide for themselves who Jesus is. This is the question that Philip indirectly shares with Nathanael.

Philip has already decided to follow Jesus, and now Nathanael is given the same opportunity. Nathanael’s response is not surprising—it reflects a common reaction that anyone who steps out to make disciples can expect to encounter.

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked (John 1:46).

Nathanael is skeptical about Jesus. He had in his mind what the Messiah would be like, and where He would come from, and Nazareth didn’t fit the bill.

Nazareth was a small town, no larger than two thousand people.<sup>61</sup> The Old Testament is clear that the Messiah would be from Bethlehem of Judea (Micah

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<sup>60</sup>C.S.Lewis. Lewis’s trilemma - Wikipedia

5:2). In verse 46, Nathanael responds to Philip's announcement by dismissing Jesus, saying that nothing good comes from Nazareth. He overlooks the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as his negative feelings toward Nazareth and its people have already clouded his judgment.

Because of this bias, Nathanael quickly concludes that Jesus must be a fraud—a false Messiah. His harsh view of Nazarenes leads him to stereotype them all as “no good,” including Jesus. This immediate reaction exposes Nathanael's prejudice, likely shaped by past experiences, and blinds him from considering that Philip might be telling the truth.

We shouldn't let people's negative reactions to Jesus discourage us from responding with grace. Notice how Philip replies: “Come and see.” I imagine his tone as inviting and playful, not pushy—like saying, “Come with me, and we'll find out if you're right.” This open invitation gave Nathanael the chance to explore Jesus for himself, even if his initial motive was simply to prove Philip wrong. Too often, we want others to believe first and then follow, but that's not how it

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<sup>61</sup>John Piper. Probability, Prejudice, and Christ | Desiring God. January 20, 2008.

works. The disciples came to faith by following Jesus—by investigating—and only then did they truly believe (John 1:46).

We do not possess the ability to save anyone. If I believe that a person's eternal salvation hangs on my abilities, then I will be paralyzed with fear and afraid to do or say the wrong thing. Consequently, I won't share the Gospel with anyone.

It's not up to us how others will respond to the Gospel.

Consider the following verses:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9).

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

When you introduce someone to Jesus, you are allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work of salvation. And when someone is saved, you also might get the chance to help them grow in their faith. Discipleship, too, is a work of the Holy Spirit.

### **Jesus' Interaction with a Prejudiced Skeptic**

"When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit'" (John 1:47).

Jesus breaks the ice with a joke that compliments Nathanael. What Jesus said to Nathanael is a play on words.

Let's break the joke down. "Here truly is an Israelite". Where did the Israelites come from? The Israelites came from the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name "Israel" (struggles/wrestles with God) was given by God to Jacob, whose original name meant deceiver or supplanter.<sup>62</sup> The name change happened after Jacob got into a wrestling match with God (Genesis 32:28).

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<sup>62</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3290/kjv/wlc/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3290/kjv/wlc/0-1/)

When Jesus said, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit”, He is making a joke that Nathanael comes from the lineage of Jacob, “deceiver,” but Nathanael doesn’t deceive. Jesus is calling Nathanael a straight shooter, a guy who tells it like it is. Jesus’ joke/compliment eased the tension, and it made Nathanael feel known.

Psychology Today wrote an article called “*The Core Need: The Need to Be Known and Valued by Self and Others.*” Gregg Henriques said, “First, being valued means that one is prized, admired, and/or loved, and that one’s interests are respected and honored.

Second, being “known” means that the individual can share their full experiences, private thoughts, and public image with important others.”<sup>63</sup>

What Nathanael needed to lower his defenses was to be truly known and valued—and Jesus did just that. “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Discipleship grows out of this kind of genuine knowing (John 1:48). Jesus replied, “I saw you while you were still

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<sup>63</sup>Gregg Henriques. “*The Core Need: The Need to Be Known and Valued by Self and Others*” [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-knowledge/201406/the-core-need](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-knowledge/201406/the-core-need)

under the fig tree before Philip called you.” The fig tree was a common place of prayer for the Israelites, and many scholars believe Nathanael was praying for the coming Messiah. God was already working in Nathanael’s heart through prayer, and Philip was part of the answer that led him to Jesus.

We often don’t know when the words we speak or the seeds we plant will take root and grow in the hearts of those who hear them.

When Jesus tells Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree (probably praying), Nathanael makes a connection:

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel” (John 1:49).

I want you to imagine that you are sitting under a fig tree, like Nathanael was, where God sees you and He hears you. Where is the last place that you prayed (your fig tree)? Did you know that God saw you there and He heard your prayer?

Do you believe that God is answering your prayer right now? He might have already sent a Philip across your path. If so, how did you respond? Were you first skeptical? Even if your response was less than stellar, remember the grace Jesus displayed towards Nathanael; He is also displaying it toward you.

Seeing how Jesus knew Nathanael and valued him led to his life being changed forever. May you receive the Savior's love for you today, and may that love compel you to share His love with others.

"Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

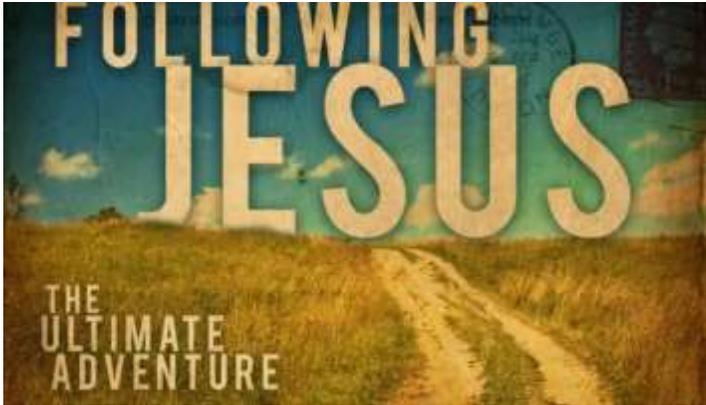
He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'" (John 1:50-51). Jesus started with a joke about Jacob's name change, and He finished by quoting a dream that Jacob had in Genesis 28:12 that would be fulfilled in Him.

The story of Nathanael is a reminder that Jesus sees us in our pain, in our places of doubt, anger, disappointment, and deepest longing. He knows you better than you know yourself, and He loves you unconditionally.

You've been called to the greatest adventure of all—following Jesus and inviting others to come and see Him for themselves. Their response to the Gospel doesn't depend on our skills or abilities; our role is simply to extend the invitation and let them discover Jesus on their own.

## Chapter 8

### The Importance of Being Discipled



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<sup>64</sup>Emery Horvath. Why Following Jesus is Difficult, Risky, and Adventurous  
[www.emeryhorvath.com/why-following-jesus-is-difficult-risky-and-adventurous/](http://www.emeryhorvath.com/why-following-jesus-is-difficult-risky-and-adventurous/)

Until now, the focus has been on discipling others. The reason is that there truly is a shortage of individuals who are actively involved in the Kingdom work of disciple-making. The George Barna Institute discovered the following:

“Only 1 percent of church leaders say “today’s churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers.” A sizable majority—six in 10—feels that churches are discipling “not too well” (60%). Looking at their own church, only 8 percent say they are doing “very well” and 56 percent “somewhat well at discipling new and young believers.” Thus, pastors give their own church higher marks than churches overall, but few believe churches—their own or in general—are excelling in discipleship.”<sup>65</sup>

If we want to be active in making disciples, we should consider being disciplined ourselves. 89% of those who have been mentored will also go on to mentor others.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>New Research on the State of Discipleship. Leaders and Pastors. December 1, 2015. [www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/](http://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/)

The need for discipleship is particularly crucial for pastors and church leaders. Their ability to make disciples is significantly diminished if they have never experienced being disciplined themselves. We tend to treat others the way we have been treated or guided. In essence, we replicate what we have become. Leaders can demonstrate the value of discipleship by actively being disciplined and openly sharing with their congregation how it has shaped their lives. Growth in faith should be a continual journey for all believers. A Christian mentor's role is to guide you toward spending more time with Jesus, as this time is the most vital factor in nurturing and deepening your faith.

"Discipleship is an ambiguous term in English. It can mean my discipleship, in the sense of my pattern of following Jesus and trusting Him, and learning from Him. That is my discipleship. It could mean that, or it can mean my activity of helping others be disciples in that sense of learning from Him, growing in Him."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Nicole Cronin. Mentoring Statistics: The Research You Need to Know. February 3, 2020. [www.guider-ai.com/blog/mentoring-statistics-the-research-you-need-to-know](http://www.guider-ai.com/blog/mentoring-statistics-the-research-you-need-to-know)

## **Are You Discipling Yourself (through the Holy Spirit)?**

When I was a new Christian, I was spiritually immature—just as everyone is at some point. I didn't yet know how to nourish myself from God's Word, so I relied on others to feed me spiritually. This often led to inconsistent nourishment and sometimes even unhealthy spiritual "meals." I struggled to properly understand and apply the Scriptures. The good news is that the Holy Spirit guided me—and He will guide you too—toward spiritual maturity, enabling you to feed yourself consistently. As Peter writes, "crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2b-3). By "pure" (adolos) milk, Peter means something unmixed and unadulterated—grace without any additions. When the Law is mixed into the spiritual nourishment we receive, it is no longer pure grace. A gospel mixed with works is no longer the true Gospel, because unmerited favor and earned favor cannot coexist.

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<sup>67</sup>John Piper. What is Discipleship and How Is It Done? January 25, 2016. [www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done](http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done)

The moment you introduce the idea of earning God's favor, you make it impossible to truly receive His grace. Disciples grow through grace, and we help others grow the same way. When grace is the foundation, those we disciple will come to "taste and see that the Lord is good."

Paul illustrates this process of spiritual growth through grace in his letter to the Corinthian church:

"Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)?

Paul reminds us that spiritual growth is a journey—from infancy to maturity—and that growth happens not through effort or earning, but through receiving and living in God's grace.

The church was fighting about who their teacher was. "For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere human beings?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:4-9).

“A deep spiritual walk with God takes some time after one becomes a Christ-follower. What is it about a person that makes them unable to digest solid food? It’s pride. Or to put it positively, the organ that properly digests solid food is humility. As long as a person is still largely influenced by a spirit of self-exaltation, he/she is not able to digest solid food. The throat of pride is too narrow and non-pliable to handle the solid food.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>John Piper. The Danger of Being Merely Human. February 21, 1988.  
[www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-danger-of-being-merely-human](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-danger-of-being-merely-human)

Solid food is the “depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10b). The depths of God or wisdom of God is a prime example of solid food, found in the book of Romans chapters 9–11.

If you want to teach Romans chapters 9–11 to new believers, you have to break it down finely, and that is exactly what Paul has done in 1 Corinthians 1–2.

“Meat is for matured Christians, people who have stopped pursuing the pleasures of self-confidence and self-exaltation and self-determination—people who now want only to boast in the Lord and give Him all the glory for whatever good there is in the world and their lives.”<sup>69</sup>

Be discerning about who teaches you from God’s Word—make sure they present the Gospel without blending in the Law.

God often brings different teachers into our lives at the right time. Each one contributes uniquely to our spiritual growth when we’re open and ready to learn. As Paul described in 1 Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” While teachers

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

may sow and nurture faith, true spiritual growth is ultimately God's work.

That's why having multiple, godly teachers steeped in grace is so beneficial. Some may plant the initial seed of the Gospel, others may nurture and strengthen you—but it is God alone who causes that seed to grow and bear fruit.

How many times have you told yourself, "I could use some good news right about now?" I have said those very words too many times to count. It is a reminder that when I need good news, I should share the good news of the salvation that Jesus offers to me.

As I verbalize my faith, I will see the power there is in speaking God's Word over my life. Proverbs 18:21 says: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Proverbs 4:22 also tells us that God's words are "life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh."

If you don't feel well, fill your body with God's medicine, the Word. As you feed on God's Word, you will find life and health flowing through your body again because this is what comes to us through Jesus, who is the Word. God's Word is spiritual vitamins for our souls and health for our bodies. We need God's Word daily.

There are a lot of ways that we can set up opportunities for the Holy Spirit to help us grow in our faith. Time in prayer, reading God's Word, listening to a sermon, reading a Christian book, fellowshiping with another believer, and worshipping with other believers these are some of the ways that we open ourselves up to spiritual growth.

"It has been said that the 18 inches from head to heart is the soul's longest journey. Our head knows the Good News is true, but our heart struggles to believe it. It's in this very gap between our head and our heart that we do battle to believe the promises of God."<sup>70</sup> Speak truth to yourself-powered by the Holy Spirit and armed with the Word of God.

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<sup>70</sup>Hayley Morgan. [www.hayleymorgan.com/preach-to-yourself](http://www.hayleymorgan.com/preach-to-yourself)

“Jesus Himself showed us how it is through our words that we can bring the power of God into our situations of sickness, adversity, and even death.”

- He cursed the fig tree; it withered.
- He spoke to the wind and waves; they were stilled.
- He spoke to sicknesses, and men and women were healed.
- He spoke life, and people were raised from the dead.

You can speak life and see life even when you seem to only see death.”<sup>71</sup> Jesus has given us power and authority just as He did for His disciples. God’s power is released into our lives as we speak God’s Word. Believing God’s Word and verbalizing it puts our faith into action.

It’s natural to feel ill-equipped when trying to help others grow in their faith. Yet those feelings of inadequacy aren’t necessarily negative—they remind us that our confidence shouldn’t come from ourselves. When we acknowledge our weakness, we’re positioned to receive God’s strength.

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<sup>71</sup>Joseph Prince. Choose Your Words and Change Your Life.  
[www.josephprince.org/blog/articles/choose-your-words-and-change-your-life](http://www.josephprince.org/blog/articles/choose-your-words-and-change-your-life)

In moments when we feel weakest, God's power shines most brightly. Rather than relying on our wisdom or ability, we can lean on His strength. What we offer to our disciples isn't our insight or talent, but God's power, wisdom, and Word flowing through us.

May our insecurities never hold us back from embracing the call to make disciples. Instead, may they draw us deeper into dependence on God—unlocking boldness, strength, and wisdom for Kingdom work.

When seasons come where we feel unready or unsure about disciple-making, let that be an invitation to receive. Actively seek others who can disciple you—so you can be ministered to through the Word of God. Let your vulnerability lead to refreshment, renewal, and rest for your spirit.

“Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12 NLT).

While Ephesians 4:12 names apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as responsible for equipping God's people, there's more to the story: God's people are destined for a specific purpose—and

each of us has already been entrusted with something unique.

As we look at the surrounding verses, it becomes clear how God Himself equips us for the mission of making disciples. These gifted leaders are placed among us not only to teach, but to train, empower, and prepare every believer to serve. This equipping is essential—not just for individual faith, but for the unity and maturity of the church community you belong to.

Ultimately, God builds His body through gifted leadership and charged discipleship—empowering you for Kingdom work and strengthening the congregation where you live and grow.

“However, He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say,

“When He ascended to the heights, He led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to His people.”

Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus as he quotes from Psalm 68:18 to say that every believer in Jesus has been given a very special gift, and the gift you

have been given is for you to do God's work, building up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:7,12).

Now, in Ephesians 4:7, it becomes clear that this gift is a gift of "charis", grace.<sup>72</sup> The very gift/talent you have been given comes directly from God and out of His grace. None of us should boast in our abilities. Our gifts are to be used to glorify God and build up others in the Kingdom.

You might ask, "What gift is Paul talking about here?" Paul answers it for us later on in the text.

"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers." Jesus gave the church exactly what the church needed so that the church would be fully equipped. "Their responsibility (now) is to equip God's people."

The Greek word for equip is "katartismos," which simply means equipping or complete furnishing.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5485/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5485/kjv/tr/0-1/)

<sup>73</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2677&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2677&t=KJV)

Think of it like an all-inclusive, fully furnished resort. Everything you need is at your disposal. While we might dream about going to a tropical all-inclusive resort, it doesn't guarantee that your stay will be perfect. Katartismos is different from perfect; it means you have been given everything you need to have successful Kingdom working experiences. Now that you have been fully furnished, it is up to you what you do with your furnishings.

The church's job isn't to make you perfect, because Jesus has already perfected you.

"For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14).

Your sin has been removed, you stand blameless before God, and so you are perfect in Him.

Your actions won't be perfect until you receive your glorified body in Heaven, but belonging to a grace-filled, Gospel-centric church will continue to ensure that you are fully furnished and well-equipped in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus has fully equipped the church to fully equip you. So, you'd be wise to belong to a church that equips you to be a disciple-maker. Why would you continue to hang out at a slummy (one-star) Law-based preaching establishment when there are churches that will fully furnish you with the Word? Many churches don't equip God's people, and therefore, many churches are not sharing the Good News of Jesus with the world.

Your responsibility is to receive equipping and be involved in, as Paul would write, to "do God's work".

The church equips and fully prepares you (katartismos) for your work (ergon), which is ministry or service (diakonia)—participating in the work of God's Kingdom.<sup>74</sup>

**What is your business?** This goes beyond your job—it includes your hobbies, interests, and how you spend your life. What do you do every day? If you're retired and love fishing, there's ministry there. Some of my most meaningful discipleship moments happened on a

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<sup>74</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/eph/4/1/ss1/t\\_conc\\_1101012](http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/eph/4/1/ss1/t_conc_1101012)

fishing boat. Do you enjoy knitting? How might you use that passion for God's glory?

I once met two women in their nineties who had very different outlooks on life. The first woman said she didn't know why she was still here—most of her friends had passed, and she struggled to find purpose. The second woman, however, was passionate about knitting and sewing, and she connected her hobby to Ephesians 4. She said, "I can knit and sew for the Kingdom."

Her granddaughter researched and found that homeless shelters lacked sleeping bags. So, this woman learned how to make them. She realized it was time-consuming and hard to do alone, so she started a club, recruited helpers, and gathered material donations from churches and local businesses. She saw her "business" as ministry—sowing sleeping bags for God's glory.

Together, they delivered the sleeping bags and built relationships with the people at the shelters. She joyfully shared her testimony and the love of Jesus with those she served. In meeting a practical need,

she also helped others grow in faith, showing how everyday passions can become powerful ministry.

I shared with the woman struggling to find purpose the story of the lady who learned to sew sleeping bags for the Kingdom. She admitted that sewing wasn't something she enjoyed. I said, "That's okay—what do you enjoy?" When I learned she loved music, I helped connect her with free concerts held at her living center.

One day, I visited and found her attending a live concert, sitting happily among a new group of friends. Her spirit was lifted, and her countenance had changed—she had discovered that she did have a purpose here on Earth. Her purpose had never really changed: God's will was to bless her through Christ and for her to continue Kingdom work.

As new friendships formed around their shared love of music, fresh opportunities to make disciples energized her life and brought her great joy in her final years. When I had the honor of officiating her celebration of life, many whose lives she touched couldn't attend physically, but a staff member from the living center

shared story after story about the profound impact she made on their lives.

### **Let's Talk About Your Gift**

"However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7).

Who did God give a special gift to? Each one of us through Christ. Every believer has been given a spiritual gift. God's grace is given out personally. First Peter 4:10 says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

I wrote another book called *Church Membership: God's Good Purpose Fulfilled in You*<sup>75</sup>, and in that book, there is a spiritual gifts assessment form that you can take to discover what your spiritual gift is.

The way that you make disciples is going to be different from the way that I make disciples. Disciple-making will always have the same three components of Word, relationship, and ministry.<sup>76</sup> We see that these three components are a reiteration of Jesus' instructions in Matthew 28:19-20.

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<sup>75</sup>Matthew Webster. *Church Membership: God's Good Purpose Fulfilled in You*. June 26, 2018.

<sup>76</sup>The Three Components. [www.discipleshipdefined.com/three-components](http://www.discipleshipdefined.com/three-components)

If you are in Christ, you have been equipped with a spiritual gift (Ephesians 4:7), and that gifting can be further built up by church leaders (Ephesians 4:12), to help you and others grow in their faith.

“He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:16).

The church is vital to you, and you are vital to the church, but the “special work” that you will do is not your own work. “Work” (energeia) is a supernatural power, a power that comes only from God.<sup>77</sup>

So, even the amazing things you will be a part of for the building of the Body, it is God’s supernatural working power through you (Ephesians 4:16).

Making disciples is a spiritual, supernatural work of God that happens through your life, where God uses the very gifting He has placed inside of you for His glory.

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<sup>77</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G1753&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G1753&t=KJV)

## **Are You Making Disciples?**

If you have yet to go and make disciples, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you belong to a church family?
- Does your church leadership equip you to make disciples?
- Have you entered into a relationship with another believer who is discipling you?

If you answered yes to the following three questions, chances are really good that you are already making disciples.

Some people have been making disciples informally for years; they just didn't recognize it as being discipleship. Remember, Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord."<sup>78</sup>

The likelihood of successful disciple-making significantly increases when a person is fully equipped by church leadership and has also been disciplined by another believer.

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<sup>78</sup>What is Christian Discipleship? [www.gotquestions.org/Christian-discipleship.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-discipleship.html)

## **Finding a Church Home to Equip You**

If you're struggling to find a church home that will equip you for Kingdom work, I warmly invite you to join us virtually at Acts 433 Church ([www.acts433.com](http://www.acts433.com)). Each week, we share grace-filled messages designed to encourage and inspire. We also offer the Grace Journey Discipleship Program, featuring courses to help you grow deeper in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Faith Journey is divided into three stages:

**Stage 1: Discover Grace** — An introduction to faith and foundational teachings.

**Stage 2: Grow in Grace** — Exploring deeper theological insights and spiritual disciplines.

**Stage 3: Share Grace** — Encouraging believers to mentor others and engage in ministry.

Pray and ask God to guide you to a community that teaches grace, helps you grow, and equips you to be actively involved in Kingdom work. If that place is Acts 433 Church, we would be honored to welcome you. God has blessed us with the opportunity to help believers around the world grow in grace.

Chapter 9  
Discover Discipling Within Your Inner Circle



Your inner circle plays an important role in the future success that you will have in disciple-making. Outside of time spent with God (in the Word and through prayer), those closest to you significantly impact your life and the lives of those you seek to disciple.

Collins Dictionary defines an inner circle as “a small group of people within a larger group who have a lot of power, influence, or special information.”<sup>79</sup> What this means is that your inner circle would be the people you spend the most amount of time with, your family, friends, and perhaps your neighbors and co-workers.

How might those closest to you help in your mission of disciple-making? Have you ever actively involved them in making disciples? Maybe they’ve already helped you in this process, but you haven’t recognized their efforts before. For example, if your spouse prepares an appetizer or brings you drinks while you’re discipling someone, they’re contributing by removing distractions and helping you stay focused. Be sure to sincerely thank them for their support.

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<sup>79</sup>[www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/inner-circle](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/inner-circle)

If a family member offers up their boat, home, tickets to an event, and you invite the person you are discipling, they were a contributing factor in your time spent with your disciple. How else might they continue to help you? How might you help them to make disciples, too?

### **Are You Discipling At Home?**

Our calling to make disciples will be in our communities but also in our homes with our loved ones too. I just mentioned that our family can help us help other people grow in their faith, but are we helping our family grow spiritually too?

“The spiritual leadership of your home is your job, commissioned by God. Family discipleship is part of the Great Commission.”<sup>80</sup> An important truth is the vital role parents and grandparents play in nurturing their children’s faith. This responsibility doesn’t rest solely with the church—it’s your primary role alongside the church’s support.

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<sup>80</sup>Adam Griffin. 10 Things You Should Know About Family Discipleship. August 17, 2020. [www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-family-discipleship/](http://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-family-discipleship/)

How have you partnered with your church to foster your family's spiritual growth?

The church usually spends just over an hour each week discipling children, but the majority of the time, your children are your disciples. Parents should actively look for discipleship opportunities to grow them, since they already have disciples in their home, or at least young people who visit, like college students or older family members.

Families who work together on making disciples are the ones who grow the most themselves. We learn the most as we help others. We depend on God more as we are involved in doing supernatural spiritual things.

### **Jesus Had An Inner Circle, Maybe Two of Them**

When people talk about Jesus and His inner circle, the twelve disciples are always mentioned. Among them, three were especially close, and of those three, one stood closest of all. John was that disciple—he leaned on Jesus' chest during the Last Supper (John 13:23). John's closeness came from his unique ability to receive Jesus' love more deeply than the others. This is why he often refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

It wasn't that Jesus had less love for the others; it was simply that John knew how to lean into Jesus' love. Jesus, upon His death, placed the care of His mother with John, His closest disciple and friend (John 19:26-27).

Scripture makes it clear that three of the disciples at certain points in Jesus' ministry were the only ones with special access to witness very specific events. The three disciples in Jesus' inner circle included Peter, James, and John.

There was, however, another group that was a part of Jesus' inner circle, too, and that included Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John 11:5). Because Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are mentioned separately from the twelve and even from the three closest disciples, it is probable that they were a part of their own inner circle with Jesus. Consider that Mary was the first one to see Jesus after He rose from the dead.

Lazarus was raised from the dead, and Jesus wept when He heard of Lazarus' death (John 11:35). Through bringing Lazarus back to life, Jesus proclaimed, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25). Martha used her gift of service by preparing meals for Jesus, creating a space where Jesus and Lazarus could recline together at the table (John 12:1).

We don't know why Jesus didn't include those three in the group of twelve disciples, but we do know they were close to Him and deeply loved by Him. Although they weren't chosen as part of the twelve, they were still called to follow Jesus. Their friendship with Him was distinct from His relationship with the twelve, which is why I believe they belonged to Jesus' second inner circle.

### **Why Did Jesus Select Three For His Inner Circle?**

When the three are mentioned in Scripture, they are usually mentioned in the same order.

The reason is that their names communicate the message of what Jesus was sent to do on Earth.

Peter's name means stone or rock.

James means supplanter.

John means that God is a gracious giver.

When you put Peter, James, and John together, it declares: the stone (Peter)—which the Law was written on- was supplanted (James) and replaced by God's grace (John).<sup>81</sup>

### **What Does Jesus Want to Reveal to the Three?**

"After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves" (Matthew 17:1).

Matthew wants to let us know it has been six days since the last recorded detail of Jesus' life for a specific reason. By doing this, we are instantly connected to the past six days and the heaviness of Jesus' words when He prophesied about His death and the kind of things the disciples would experience shortly thereafter. Jesus, in this moment, is preparing the inner three for more responsibility than the rest. The more you disciple others, the more you'll discover some disciples you want to invest extra time in developing. Everyone is unique, and some will grow into leadership roles in the future. These disciples

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<sup>81</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/1/t\\_conc\\_946001](http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/1/t_conc_946001)

deserve your focused attention. Invest deeply in those who are called to take on greater responsibility.

Jesus tells His disciples six days prior: “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom” (Matthew 16:28).

Eleven of the twelve were alive to witness this moment. Judas hung himself beforehand. Jesus ensures that His disciples will see His ascension and also be filled with the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Luke.

“Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:45-49).

Jesus models for us a key aspect of effective disciple-making, and that is by opening the disciples’ minds to understand Scripture. We can do this through the power of the Holy Spirit, teaching God’s Word!

## **The Ascension of Jesus**

“When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into Heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:50-53).

Jesus came to Earth as a servant, but He returned to Heaven as a King, “and they saw Jesus ascend into Heaven” (Matthew 20:28, Mark 16:19).

Daniel also saw Jesus arrive in Heaven 600 plus years beforehand in a vision: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14, NIV).

Jesus spoke differently after He was resurrected. He said, “All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been

given to Me” (Matthew 28:18), just as Daniel had prophesied. These are the words of a King. They are not the words of a prophet or servant.

When you do a word search for the phrase “won’t taste death” in Scripture, each one leads into the story of the Mount of Transfiguration.

The transfiguration gave the three disciples a glimpse of what was to come (like a movie trailer), while the Ascension left them looking heavenward in awe (the feature film) to come.

Look at the comparison between the Transfiguration and the Ascension.

The Transfiguration	The Ascension
Jesus ascends a mountain	Jesus ascends to heaven
A cloud overshadows them	A cloud receives Jesus
God the Father affirms Jesus	God exalts Jesus putting everything under his feet
Jesus shines like the sun, his clothes bright as lightening	Jesus dwells in unapproachable light
The disciples don’t want to leave	The disciples don’t want to leave

Sources: Matt 17:1-6, Luke 9:29-33, John 6:62, Acts 1:2,11, 2:9-10, Eph 1:20-22, Php 2:6-11, 1 Tim 6:13-16

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<sup>82</sup>Paul Ellis. They Will Not Taste Death. December 8, 2016.  
[www.escapetoreality.org/2016/12/08/they-will-not-taste-death/](http://www.escapetoreality.org/2016/12/08/they-will-not-taste-death/)

Luke 9 tells us that “Jesus brought them up the mountain to pray,” highlighting Jesus’ dependence on God the Father. Unlike the Law, which repeatedly commands “thou shalt not,” focusing on our strength—which we don’t truly have—this moment points to something different. In this season of grace, the great year of the Lord’s favor, we live in total dependence on God. I can’t do it on my own, but He can—and He did. Because of that, I can now do all things through Christ.

The three disciples are taken to prayer because prayer is dependence on God, invoking His power, grace, love, and goodness.

When Jesus transfigured before the three disciples, there were two well-known individuals who were there too: Moses and Elijah. Peter, near the end of his life, reflects on this moment and says in 2 Peter 1:16: “but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

As you behold the glory of the Lord, your life is forever changed. There is power for healing, freedom from addiction, and peace for a troubled soul.

The scene at the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and the three disciples is a powerful message for a Jewish audience. Two of the most important heroes in the Jewish faith are Moses and Elijah. "For it was through Moses the Law was given, and through Elijah and the prophets the Law was restored in their day" (John 1:17).

God declares something very important by having Elijah and Moses on the mountain that day. "While He was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5)!

God publicly declared His pleasure and delight in His Son on two occasions. The first was at Jesus' baptism, and the second occurred here at Mount Hermon. These two affirmations—"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"—took place in geographically opposite locations.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, which flows into the Dead Sea—the lowest point on Earth accessible by land, sitting about 1,400 feet below sea

level.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, Mount Hermon rises over 9,000 feet above sea level.<sup>84</sup> At both these extremes—the lowest valley and the highest mountain—God declared, “This is My beloved Son.” From the depths to the heights and everywhere in between, Jesus is the Father’s greatest delight. Just as Mary was highly favored for carrying Him in her womb (Luke 1:28), because Christ lives in you, you too are deeply loved and delighted in by your Father.

Peter says this about Jesus, “For He received from God the Father honor and glory” (2 Peter 1:17). The honor and the glory came when the Father said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” What that means is that as parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings, mentors, etc, we can give honor and glory through our words of affirmation. “You are such a joy in my life. I am so blessed in the time that we get to spend together.”

How often do we express that kind of love to others? As parents, our acceptance of our children shouldn’t be based on their performance, but simply on the fact

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<sup>83</sup>Anna Norris. 7 Intriguing Things You Didn’t Know About the Dead Sea. July 25, 2014. [www.fromthegrapevine.com/nature/intriguing-things-you-didnt-know-about-dead-sea](http://www.fromthegrapevine.com/nature/intriguing-things-you-didnt-know-about-dead-sea)

that they are ours—and we love them unconditionally. That’s how we honor them and show them their value—not by making them earn our love, but by giving it freely.

Even when our children make choices that hurt them or lead them in the wrong direction, our love remains. We correct and discipline them—not out of anger, but out of love. Sometimes love sounds like “no.”

“No, you can’t play in the street.”

“No, you can’t stay overnight at a stranger’s house.”

In the same way, when God says “no,” it’s not rejection—it’s protection. He says no because He loves us and wants to give us only what will bless us and bring us good.

### **Peter Misunderstands the Moment**

“Then Peter answered, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles” (Matthew 17:4).

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<sup>84</sup>Anna Norris. Mount Hermon Takes Center Stage in This Stunning Panorama. June 15, 2015. [www.fromthegrapevine.com/photos/travel/stunning-panorama-mount-hermon](http://www.fromthegrapevine.com/photos/travel/stunning-panorama-mount-hermon)

Peter is practicing one of the most joyous Jewish celebrations--the Feast of Tabernacles, which the Jewish people still practice today on October 15th.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites would build a temporary shelter, made of all kinds of plants, to commemorate the days when they were people who were wandering in the wilderness, living in temporary shelters. It was not their home; God had a Promised Land for them. The Bible says in John 1: "Jesus came and tabernacled (made His dwelling among us)".

Peter has an idea, let's make three temporary shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Luke's account says, "he did not know what he was saying" (Luke 9:33). What Peter was unknowingly doing was putting Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. This is a big error to place Jesus on the same level as the Law-giver and the Law-restorer.

Many believers in this world today want to do the same thing with Jesus. "If you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the Law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace" (Galatians 5:4). The Father will not allow Peter to continue in his error.

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

"Hear Him" is singular, not hear them as in Moses, Elijah, and Jesus (Matthew 17:5). Don't listen to the voice of the Law anymore, listen only to the voice of grace. What did the three disciples need to hear that day? What do disciple-makers need for their disciples to listen to? Grace. The Law (Moses) already served its purpose—bringing us to the end of ourselves. The prophet (Elijah) restored the Law. He has served His purpose. It is now the day of grace. Listen to the voice of grace.

The scene on Mount Hermon, where Jesus is transfigured before His disciples, stands in stark contrast to the day the Law was given. At Sinai, the Bible says there was a dense cloud (Exodus 19:9), symbolizing the weight and severity of the Law. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see a bright cloud—the shekinah glory, the very presence of God that once dwelled in the Holy of Holies.

For the first time, this glory overshadows people outside the Temple, pointing to what Jesus was about to accomplish: making a way for all to access the glory of God through Him. Where Jesus is, and where grace is found, there is always brightness. One cloud came with the Law to condemn through the Ten Commandments (through Moses), and the other with Christ to reveal His righteousness and the grace that sets us free.

Paul writes in Romans 3:20-22:

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the Law; rather, through the Law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the Law the latest revelation from God is grace coming through Jesus.”

The righteousness of God, this wonderful gift, has been made known. It is a gift apart from the Law, through Christ, to which the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) testify.

The Law testifies by saying, "Amen to the gift of righteousness." The prophets testify, saying, "Amen to the gift of righteousness." The names of the three disciples on the mountain with Jesus as He was transfigured before them, testify, "the Law was supplanted by God's grace!"

Matthew 17:6 "And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one" (Matthew 17:6-8).

After God the Father declares, "Hear Him," what is the very first thing Jesus says—now that the Father has drawn the disciples' attention to the voice of grace? Jesus approaches them with a gentle, personal touch and says, "*Arise, and do not be afraid.*" It's not a commandment. It's not the voice of the Law. What they hear is grace.

In Greek, the words “arise and do not be afraid” are in the active voice and the passive voice.<sup>85</sup>

Active voice means you’re the one doing the action. Passive voice means the action is being done to you or for you—you’re not the one initiating it. In Matthew 17:7, the word “arise” is in the passive voice. This means Jesus was telling His disciples, “Allow yourselves to be lifted by God.”

Jesus didn’t just touch them—He raised them up. In the same way, we’re called to let Jesus lift us. And when He does, we find ourselves standing on equal ground with Him, not because of our effort, but because we’ve been given His righteousness.

This is the heart of disciple-making: helping people be lifted by God’s grace, not weighed down by performance. Jesus died to give us His standing before the Father. This moment on the mountain with the three disciples is a powerful picture of that grace.

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<sup>85</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/7/t\\_conc\\_946007](http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/7/t_conc_946007)

## **What About the Other 9?**

We know what was happening with the three who experienced God's grace on the Mount of Transfiguration, but what about the other nine who were not with Jesus at this moment in time?

Matthew 17:14-16: "When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him."

Imagine a desperate father brings his son to you. Right in front of you, the boy has a seizure—tormented by demonic forces—and you're unable to help. How would you respond?

- (a) Conclude that it must not be God's will to heal everyone?
- (b) Tell the father that God can heal, but for some reason, He won't right now—maybe in eternity?
- (c) Assume the boy has unconfessed sin or lack of faith that's blocking his healing?

- (d) Declare that he's healed, even though he's still convulsing on the ground?
- (e) Feel helpless and unsure what to do?

These are the kinds of responses people often fall into—each forming a “camp” with their own explanation, while the boy remains unchanged.

If you chose (a), you've created a theology based on experience rather than the promises of God (see Acts 10:38; 1 Peter 2:24).

If you chose (b), you echo the voice of false comforters who say, “God healed in the past, but He doesn't do that much today.”

If you chose (c), you're suggesting sin can block the power of God, which would mean no sinner could ever receive the salvation of the Lord.

If you chose (d), you risk losing credibility, especially with a grieving father watching his son suffer.

If you chose (e), your response mirrors that of the disciples when they were faced with this very situation.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Paul Ellis. I Believe, Help My Unbelief. June 16, 2011.  
[www.escapetoreality.org/2011/06/16/i-believe-help-my-unbelief/](http://www.escapetoreality.org/2011/06/16/i-believe-help-my-unbelief/)

“When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet Him.” They were amazed to find the answer to their problems, not in themselves, but in the Lord (Mark 9:15). The reason the nine could not drive out the demon is that they tried in their strength. The answer was always in the Lord; it is in His grace that we receive power and authority to drive out demons. Healing and deliverance happen in the name of Jesus.

The disciples were baffled at not being able to heal this boy because they were successful in other places, driving out demons and “healing people everywhere” (Mark 6:13, Luke 9:6). Their past success made their current failure all the more bewildering to them.

Matthew’s Gospel says, “Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out’” (Matthew 17:19)?

Jesus’ answer to their question about why they could not drive out the demon and heal the boy might answer the questions you might have about why more people aren’t healed today. The answer is not their faith, but their unbelief. The two are different. Without a proper translation of Matthew 17:20, people have been led to believe that the “little faith” of the

disciples was the issue. The Greek word incorrectly translated "little faith" (Matthew 17:20) is "apistia," and it is the same word used by the boy's father (Mark 9:24) when he says, "help my unbelief."<sup>87</sup>

Some translators equate unbelief as meaning to having little faith, but Jesus clearly says right after this, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Little faith is not the issue. If little faith can move a mountain, it can surely heal one small boy. It's not about the size of your faith but whether your faith is handicapped by doubt and unbelief (Matthew 17:21).

Indeed, the disciples had faith to heal and deliver. They had performed many miracles and could not have done so without faith in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:16). So, what was the obstacle in this case?

In response to their question, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus answered:

"Because of your unbelief..." (Matthew 17:20)

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<sup>87</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/20/t\\_conc\\_946020](http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/17/20/t_conc_946020)

Jesus said to the boy's father, "Everything is possible to him who believes." But the father, like many of us, wants God to take responsibility for healing apart from our faith. "Lord, help us!" Yet Jesus said, "If you have faith, you can heal him." We think of healing the sick as being God's job, but He wants us to do it in Jesus' name for His glory (Mark 16:18).

### **Why was Unbelief a Problem for the Disciples This Time?**

In his book, *You've Already Got It*, Andrew Wommack identifies three different kinds of unbelief.

- There's unbelief that arises from ignorance

"I didn't know God heals the sick."

- Unbelief that arises from bad theology

"I don't believe God heals the sick any more."

- Unbelief that arises from our natural senses

"Look at the size of that tumor!"<sup>88</sup>

What kind of unbelief did the disciples display?

Wommack speculates that they may have been

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<sup>88</sup>Andrew Wommack. *You've Already Got It (So Quit Trying to Get it)*. November 7, 2016. Harrison House Publishing.

unnerved by the sight of a convulsing, frothing child. A seizure in a child is not a pretty sight, especially if there's a demon behind it. Natural unbelief is fueled by what we see and hear. When we receive a troubling report from an X-ray or scan, it's easy to assume the worst. In that moment, we begin walking by sight rather than by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Even if we have faith, unbelief can creep in—often sending us straight to the internet, searching for reassurance and hope. We may be speaking God's promises over our situation, yet at the same time, we're unintentionally feeding our doubts by focusing on our circumstances.<sup>89</sup>

### **How Do We Deal with Unbelief?**

And He replied to them, "This kind (of unbelief) cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).

Unbelief that arises from ignorance and bad theology can be corrected by showing people the truth (Mark 6:6), but overcoming natural unbelief may require prayer and fasting. If the internet is fueling your doubts, then stay off the internet! If your "faith sense"

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<sup>89</sup>Andrew Wommack. *God Wants You Well: What the Bible Really Says About Walking in Divine Health*. p.121,124. September 6, 2010. Harrison House Publishing.

is dull because of your natural appetites, then curb your appetites. Starve them.

“Your prayer and fasting won’t move God. Neither does it move the devil. Fasting and prayer will move you. It affects you... We don’t have a faith problem. What we have is an unbelief problem. Instead of trying to build bigger and bigger faith, we need to stop feeding unbelief.”<sup>90</sup> The nine disciples were not able to drive the demon out of the young boy because of their unbelief. Their unbelief came as a result of not being with and continuing to receive from Jesus. Prayer and fasting, spending time with Jesus, feed our faith in God’s Word.

### **Where Else Did Just the 3 Go?**

When Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law, He took James and John with Him into Peter’s house. “Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her” (Luke 4:38).

How often do we forget to bring Jesus into the situation when someone is suffering? Our first instinct is usually, “What can I do to help? Can I fluff your

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

pillow? Get you an aspirin?" While offering practical help is good and compassionate, the greatest thing we can do is invite Divine help. True healing—both physical and spiritual—becomes possible when we recognize someone's pain and turn to Jesus for help. That's when salvation and transformation can begin (Luke 4:38).

"So He bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them" (Luke 4:39).

What is interesting in this story is that all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) say almost the same thing, but there are some unique details to gain from each of them.

Matthew focuses on the touch of Jesus, and the fever was gone (Matthew 8:14-15).

In Mark, Jesus took her hand and lifted her up, and her fever was gone (Mark 1:29-31).

For Luke, Jesus bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her (Luke 4:38-41).

As we place all three Gospels together, we discover that Jesus bent over her, rebuked the fever, touched her hand, lifted her up, and the fever was gone (Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-41).

Luke says something really important that the other two left out. "Jesus rebuked the high fever".

"Rebuked" (epitimaō): to forbid.<sup>91</sup>

I would never stand by and allow my beloved child to suffer and remain sick—and neither does God. Now imagine you are the one lying in that bed, battling a life-threatening illness. The enemy has launched an attack on your life. As you lie there, weak and helpless, you hear the powerful voice of Jesus say, "I forbid this to continue any longer." He loves you deeply, and He desires to make you whole.

At His word, the fever left—and Peter's mother-in-law got up immediately (Luke 4:39).

And what did she do after being healed? She began to serve them.

That's the natural response to encountering the salvation of the Lord—lives are changed, and those who are healed or set free begin to serve. When we

receive His grace, we become ministers of that same grace to those around us.

Do you know what the word minister means? “She got up at once and began to wait on them.” To wait is the Greek word (diakoneō) meaning to serve,<sup>92</sup> and it is the same word used for “minister”. Ministry is service.

In this instance, the reason why Jesus only took the three with Him is not as clear as it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, but I believe part of the reason was to witness the response of Peter’s mother-in-law when she was healed. When we bring the Gospel, the glad tidings of salvation through Jesus, to those who are in need, we will witness those who are healed become ministers themselves.

Jesus often took Peter, James, and John to moments and places where He didn’t take the other nine disciples. For example, He brought these three when He healed the daughter of the synagogue ruler, and He took them with Him to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane—places the others did not go.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/luk/4/39/t\\_conc\\_977039](http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/luk/4/39/t_conc_977039)

<sup>92</sup>[www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1247&t=KJV](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1247&t=KJV)

<sup>93</sup> Ken Adams. The Three Disciples. July 2, 2018. [www.crossroadsonline.org/crc-blog/three-disciples](http://www.crossroadsonline.org/crc-blog/three-disciples)

## **The Results:**

Peter preached boldly at Pentecost, leading to the salvation of three thousand people and the establishment of the church, just as Jesus had promised (Matthew 16:18).

Throughout the Book of Acts, the other nine disciples fade from the spotlight, suggesting that Jesus' focused time with Peter, James, and John was intentional—preparing them for greater responsibility.

Peter and John healed a lame beggar at the temple and were brought before the Jewish council—the same court that had condemned Jesus just months earlier. Yet this time, “many who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

James was martyred for his faith when Herod had him executed (Acts 12:2). His death prompted the church to pray earnestly for Peter, who was also imprisoned and facing execution. Miraculously, an angel freed Peter from prison (Acts 12:7).

Later, Peter and John were sent to the Samaritans, who received the Holy Spirit through their ministry (Acts 8:14-15). The church flourished as the Gospel

spread—demonstrating how Jesus prepared these three disciples to lead and make more disciples.

**So, ask yourself:**

- Who are the people you invest the most time in?
- Who are the ones you take to places or assign responsibilities that you don't offer to others?
- Who are you entrusting with greater leadership?
- How is your inner circle shaping your mission to make disciples?<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 10

### Disciple-Making Post Pandemic

#### What Makes For a Good Disciple?



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<sup>95</sup>Sara Brown. How to Restart the Economy with a Post-Pandemic Workforce. April 14, 2020. [www.mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/how-to-restart-economy-a-post-pandemic-workforce](http://www.mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/how-to-restart-economy-a-post-pandemic-workforce)

## **Who Makes a Good Disciple?**

When we look at Jesus' example of choosing His disciples, it's easy to jump to the wrong conclusions about who we should focus on discipling. While Jesus disciplined more than just the twelve, the twelve were His primary disciples. His unique mission—to fulfill the Old Testament Law, open the way to salvation, conquer sin and death, and reveal God as Father—shaped His choice of disciples.

For example, in Matthew 15, Jesus makes it clear to the Canaanite woman that His ministry was first to the Jews, not the Gentiles. But after His death and the end of His public ministry, the door was opened to all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Importantly, Jesus didn't select the twelve based on their merits. So, who then should we seek to disciple?

I used to believe that discipleship was most successful when we focused on people who shared a lot in common with us. That may or may not be true—but the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed my perspective.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I never gave baking bread a second thought. Now, I love it and can't imagine life without it. Just a few years ago, if someone had invited me to join a baking club, I would have laughed it off—but today, I might look for one to join. My desire has shifted, and I have a genuine hunger (pun intended) to bake.

So, when it comes to the question, "*Who makes a good disciple?*"—the answer is anyone who hungers for the Word of God, for Jesus. It doesn't matter if they don't share your hobbies or interests; the connection that matters is Christ. If someone is eager to learn about Jesus, then you have the right ingredients for successful discipleship.

Just as I was indifferent to baking before, life experiences changed me and sparked a new passion. People's seasons change, opening doors for discipleship in unexpected ways.

During the pandemic, I spent a lot of time virtually with one of the longest discipleship relationships I have ever had. He's a pastor like me—but that's where the similarities end. Pastor Oscar is from Kenya.

His life is a lot different than mine in almost every way imaginable. His life challenges are vastly different, which makes drawing from past experiences difficult. When we communicate, there is a language barrier, and extra time is needed for further explanation and clarification. I always marvel at how Pastor Oscar can speak multiple languages. When you look at our discipling relationship from a human perspective, you might ask, "Isn't there someone better to disciple him?" However, God will pair us with others who are vastly different from us because we have a lot to learn in the process, too.

If you had to guess, you might even think Oscar is my mentor since he's older than I am. But our discipleship relationship is truly unique. So, what has made it flourish? The key is Oscar's deep hunger to know more about Jesus. Though his earlier Bible training included some mistaken teachings, discovering the truth of God's Word has set him free. Just as Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to understand Scripture (Luke 24:45), the Holy Spirit has used our time together to open Oscar's eyes as well.

Oscar shares the love of Christ with the people of Kenya all the time, and he currently has five pastors that he discipled himself.

Bringing Christ into my discipleship relationship with Oscar has never been a struggle—our entire connection is centered on teaching and growing in Him. You might think discipling a pastor is easy because they'd naturally want to learn more about Jesus. But my past experiences working with other pastors were often very challenging, which made me hesitant to disciple a pastor halfway across the world. Some pastors can be among the most difficult disciples because they're not teachable, believing they already know everything there is to know about the Lord. Others have lost their hunger for God's Word altogether. The demands and heartbreaks of ministry can harden hearts, like fresh cement baked dry in the hot sun.

Most people would feel intimidated discipling a pastor—and that's okay, because we're not called to disciple everyone. Whoever you are called to disciple, I've learned they don't have to look like you, share your interests, or come from a similar background. Just look at Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch—their

lives couldn't have been more different. Paul traveled to far-off places with vastly different cultures, yet he successfully planted churches and trained leaders in those diverse settings. He disciplined people who had far more differences than similarities with him.

So, who makes a good disciple? Someone whose heart the Lord has been preparing—ready to receive, grow, and follow Him.

### **Disciple from Anywhere**

“With the task of taking the Gospel to the world, all He (Jesus) needed was to revolutionize the hearts of a few, and they would impact the world.”<sup>96</sup>

We need God's power to be able to carry the Gospel into every part of the world. For it is only through God's power that rebels can be transformed and become disciples. This is precisely why Jesus commanded His disciples to wait to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4).

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<sup>96</sup>David Platt. *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

Before moving out to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth, the disciples had to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for this supernatural task."<sup>97</sup> So great is our need for the Spirit that we are commanded to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Going and making disciples can only happen after we are filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and we must rely on the Spirit in prayer (Jude verse 20). God's plan of redemption marches on, and He is using His Spirit in the lives of His people to do this work. The church's mission is too difficult to accomplish without relying on the Spirit."<sup>98</sup>

It didn't take many who were discipled by Jesus to impact the entire world. Today it is the very same thing. Think about the difference you can make as a result of discipling just a few people. Discipling can happen anywhere and at any time. You could even disciple someone online. What this means is that your next disciple might come from a different country. What an amazing experience that would be.

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<sup>97</sup>Francis Chan. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*. David C Cook Publishing. Colorado Springs, CO. 2012. 275.

<sup>98</sup>Francis Chan. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*. David C Cook Publishing. Colorado Springs, CO. 2012. 285,286..

During the peak of the pandemic, when the church could no longer gather physically, more people were reached with the Gospel than ever before. This shift highlights a potential change in mindset away from traditional, in-person methods of disciple-making.

Three of the largest online evangelistic ministries—Global Media Outreach, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Campus Crusade for Christ—together account for at least 200 million Gospel presentations online each year. All three organizations report a significant increase in the number of people seeking information about Jesus since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in early March.

We are seeing millions of people open to talking about faith in the face of fear,” said Michelle Diedrich, GMO’s seeker journey director, “and we’re ramping up to be available for them.”<sup>99</sup>

### **How Do I Find Someone to Disciple?**

Prayer helps us to be aware of the opportunities that are present every day. If you have a Facebook

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<sup>99</sup>David Roach. Coronavirus Searches Lead Millions to Hear About Jesus. Christianity Today. April 7, 2020. [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/april/coronavirus-searches-online-converts-pray-cru-bgea-wmo.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/april/coronavirus-searches-online-converts-pray-cru-bgea-wmo.html)

account, I am sure that you have seen at least one comment or post each day from someone who could use encouragement. There are ample outreach opportunities all around us, virtually and also in our day-to-day activities.

Reaching out takes a bit of effort. Instead of just hitting the thumbs-up emoji, consider adding a thoughtful comment to someone's post. If they respond, take the next step by sending them a private message. This opens up a more personal space for them to share in comfort and privacy.

You might say something like, "It seems like you've been going through a lot. If you'd like to talk more, I'm available on Facebook Messenger. I'd be happy to listen and see if I can offer any support." A message like this can mean the world to someone. Whether or not they choose to engage, you've communicated that someone genuinely cares.

I wouldn't recommend reaching out to every sad post you read. Before you log into your account, pray as Jesus set the perfect example for His disciples.

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to someone who could use a little encouragement. I guarantee that if you do this, you'll have no trouble finding opportunities to make disciples. The more you actively share the Good News of Jesus Christ, the stronger your spiritual muscles will become for disciple-making. Your next disciple is already being sent your way. I'm excited for you and the opportunity ahead! I'd love to hear how God is using you in this journey. Feel free to email your story of victory to [acts433church@gmail.com](mailto:acts433church@gmail.com) and share how God has been at work in your life as you help others grow as disciples.

Enjoy this incredible adventure of walking with others as they grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus.

Dr. Webster's entire library can be found at  
**[www.acts433.com](http://www.acts433.com)**