

How a Family Makes Disciples

Great to see you guys this morning. My name is Jeff and I am one of the pastors here at City Church. If you have a bible with you, turn with me to Matthew 28. If you're joining us for the first time today, we are almost through a series called *Church is a Family*. In this series, we've been unpacking the ins and outs of how God intended a church to function. And specifically, how God intended our interpersonal relationships *within* the church to function. So the very first week, we explained that by far, the most popular metaphor in the bible to describe our relationships with one another is that of a *biological family*. And so we spent time talking about what "family" would've meant to Jesus—how in his day, family was actually an even *bigger* deal than it is today, because their culture was a very *familial* society. And so far we've covered how this family is called to love one another, how to fight well with one another, and how to pray for one another.

And today we are going to look at the purpose of God making us into a family. What is it that we have been given to accomplish and work toward together? And this is a big one because this comes from Jesus' last words to us before he ascended and peaced out into heaven. Before we look at exactly Jesus' last words are, I want to pause and just think about the idea of parting words. Your last words to someone should be significant, it should carry meaning and matters of importance. Like your last words to someone should not be "Don't forget to floss." Your last words has an impact on your legacy. And we see this in movies and books.

"You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing." - Charlotte's Web

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." Winnie the Pooh

"So long as the memory of certain beloved friends lives in my heart, I shall say that life is good." - Helen Keller

Or the movie that is etched into our souls for its hauntingly beautiful music,

"Promise me, Rose. And never let go of that promise." - Jack Dawson (Titanic)

And we all remember what Rose did with that.

“I’ll be back.” Terminator

And he delivered, he kept coming back. Maybe a few more times than any of us wanted him to. Maybe we wish he would’ve said something like “you know what guys, this was a pretty good movie, let’s just leave it here and not make any more that ruin it.”

The point is this: Last parting words are significant. And all the more if it’s Jesus’ parting words with us. Would not be a stretch at all to say this is the thing Jesus wants his disciples to not only remember, but to devote their entire lives to. So let’s take a look at it. Matthew 28:18.

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Which, if you are wondering, is how you say “Jesus is Lord” in first person. V19. In other words, “I’m in charge here, and here’s what I want *you guys* to do next:

“Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

So there it is. Jesus parting words to us as his disciples are go and *make* disciples. The most accurate translation in our day would be something like "apprentice." Your goal as a disciple is to apprentice under Jesus, to become like him. Historically, theologians call the parting words of Jesus, the Great Commission. And it’s a pretty straight forward commission: Go and make disciples, go and help other people become more like Jesus.

Now, the question is how, how do we go about doing just that. Let’s take a look at v19.

Go therefore...

In light of who Jesus is and what he’s told us to do, he says “go therefore.” Now, several scholars have noted that based on the original language, it might be a little more accurate to translate this as something more like “as you are going, make disciples.” Meaning as you are going about your everyday life, you should make disciples. **Making disciples is not something you need to take a break from everything else you are going to do. So you don’t need to quit your job so that you can make disciples—you just need to understand that part of the purpose of your job is to make disciples. It is something that everything else you are doing is *for*.** Your job

exists to make disciples. Your friend group exists for making disciples. Your hobbies exist for making disciples. **Making disciples is not something you add to your everyday life—it's the purpose behind everything in your life.** And I think that's so important to understand, because **so many people I know feel like they don't have enough time to make disciples. But according to what Jesus says here, making disciples isn't about how much free time you have. It's about how you think about everything you're already doing.**

So think with me about how Jesus made disciples. Jesus made disciples as he was walking along the road, as he was sitting at dinner with people, as he was interacting religious leaders. Jesus didn't say 'hey we need to take a break from traveling and eating with people so that we can devote more time to making disciples.' He just saw opportunities to make disciples everywhere in the things he was already doing. **Jesus didn't see discipleship as something he had to take a break from everyday life to do. He saw discipleship as something everyday life was for. He saw all of the things he was already doing as the perfect environments for making disciples.**

I see this happen on a weekly basis. Marcus, one of our pastors, every week grabs lunch with the guys in his LifeGroup. His thought process is: "I'm planning on eating lunch today, other guys in the LifeGroup also happened to be planning on eating lunch today, let's eat lunch together!" So that's what they do, everyone bring their own lunch and meet at his office on UT. They eat, they talk about sports or second coming of Payton Manning. They talk about life and what is going on with each of them. And because that's a natural rhythm of life they do, each of them are able to start getting a glimpse into one another's life and know how to better encourage one another to become more like Jesus.

Is that how we see our lives and relationships? Let me ask you a question: If everyone in your LifeGroup contributed to other people's spiritual growth exactly like you do, what would the health of the group look like? If I could sit down with your LifeGroup leader and ask them, 'is your LifeGroup more or less healthy because of this person's presence in it,' what would they say?" If I asked people in your LifeGroup who has contributed significantly to their relationship with Jesus, would your name come up?" That's a somewhat revealing way to look at it, isn't it? And I'm not trying to heap shame on any of us—I'm just trying to help us think critically about if we are currently making disciples or not. Now maybe some of us really **want** to be making disciples, and we just don't know **how** to go about it. And that's one thing—we're going to get to by the end, **how** to go about making disciples. But if you don't even **want** to make disciples, if you don't even

desire to do it, then it might be that you're not a disciple of Jesus yourself. Because being a disciple **of** Jesus means **making** disciples, like Jesus did. Make sense?

Let's keep going .v19

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"

Now, this is an interesting part of the passage because it opens up the pool from which we "make disciples" to pretty much every human alive. By Jesus saying disciples should be made "of all nations," he's saying that *they are now to make disciples of anyone and everyone*. Jewish or not Jewish. Religious or not religious. And by saying that the first step is "baptizing them," he implies this, which is really important for us today: even if someone hasn't decided to follow Jesus yet, they are still a potential disciple to be made. Making disciples includes helping someone follow Jesus better, but it also can be helping someone *begin* to follow Jesus in the first place. Making disciples means helping people grow in their relationship to Jesus, and helping them *begin* a relationship with Jesus.

Now, there are differences in how we go about it. Generally, a disciple-making conversation with someone who doesn't follow Jesus yet is gonna look a little different than with someone who does. Here's what I mean: if you get together for lunch with your co-worker Joe who doesn't follow Jesus and go "today, I'd like for us to discuss the idea of progressive sanctification together," Joe's gonna get up and find somebody else to eat lunch with. Because you're weird and that's not where he's at yet. But just because he's not ready for something like that doesn't mean he's outside of the category of people to make disciples from. You could probably still ask him how he deals with frustration at work. You could probably still talk to him about how *you* deal with frustration at work in light of who Jesus is. You could probably still ask him about his relationship with his wife if he's married, and talk to him about how you think about marriage in light of who Jesus is. That convo is gonna look different than a conversation with someone in your LifeGroup who follows Jesus already. But don't miss this: it's still discipleship. It's just discipleship at a different stage. Making disciples is anything you do to help someone become more like Jesus. Even if that's before they fully know who Jesus is. If they don't *know* Jesus, that just means that the first step in their discipleship is helping them get to know Jesus.

When you start to follow Jesus, you begin to see every relationship in your life as an opportunity for making disciples. Every relationship we have is a potential disciple-making relationship. Every conversation we have is a potential disciple-making conversation. Because we are called to make disciples of all nations. Next verse.

Teaching Them...

In order to make disciples, you have to teach them something. It's right there in our passage, part of making disciples is to teach. Which means in order to be making disciples, you have to impart something, you have to actively offer something to them that they didn't have before. And that takes intentionality. It takes effort. It takes listening well, and responding well to what you hear. It takes being willing to ask some follow-up questions. It takes effort—you have to actually engage.

Now, I know that some of you when you hear "teaching," you start to panic a little. You think to yourself, "well I don't feel like I have anything to teach. I don't feel like I know enough to teach other people when it comes to following Jesus." But here's where it's important to make sure you read the rest of the sentence. What does it say it is that we are teaching people? Everything we *know*? Everything we already practice and perfectly embody? No. Everything *Jesus commanded us*. So, hear me out here: what we are called to teach people is not everything we know, not everything we live out perfectly—but rather everything that Jesus said. Which means your ability to disciple people is not limited to only stuff that you know and do perfectly. It can be anything Jesus said.

So if you don't feel like you know enough to teach someone, talk to them about what you're still learning from the bible. If you don't feel like your life is put-together enough to model for someone else, teach them something in a book you read lately that you're still processing and learning to live in light of. Talk to them about a podcast you're listening to about following Jesus and something that it mentioned. Not knowing enough or not being perfect enough are not a good reason not to make disciples, because ultimately it's not necessarily what we know that we're teaching. It can be something we are still learning ourselves. And if your response to all that is "well I'm not really learning much currently to have anything like that to say." Okay, but we shouldn't neglect one part of following Jesus because we're already neglecting another. The response isn't "I can't make disciples because I'm not living as a disciple." The response is "well let me start living as a disciple so that I can make disciples in the process." Imagine your car mechanic came up to you and said you need to change your brakes but you responded with "Well, I haven't changed my oil in the last 3 years, no use in changing my brakes." We don't want to do that. Make sense?

So back in South Carolina where I was one of the pastors of a church, I had a friend named Willie. Willie was in a homeless situation, he had been addicted to cocaine for 30 years, he's had an incredibly hard life. But he started coming around our church. He got into a LifeGroup and started learning what it looks like to follow after Jesus. One week, the guys in Willie's LifeGroup were confessing their struggles with lust and porn, Willie realized this was also something he needed to repent of as well. So the following week, Willie came to LifeGroup, excited, telling the guys that he wanted to repent and and grow to look more like Jesus, so he got rid of his porn collection. Willie literally said "I have no use of this stuff anymore, so I gave all of it to my friend Nicholas who wanted it." Unsurprisingly, Nicholas did not turn down Willie's porn collection. Willie eventually learned that that wasn't the best idea. As he continued coming to LG, he learned more and more what it looked like to follow after Jesus. 6 months after Willie gifting his porn away, on a Sunday, Willie was serving on the Hospitality team. He noticed after the gathering was over, a woman was sitting by herself in the back crying. Willie walked up to her and sat next to her and started talking. Willie said to her, I bet you've had a hard life. The woman answered yes, and Willie went on saying, let's trade stories. So they did for the next hour, sharing the pains that each of them have experienced. At the end of it, Willie said, you know, I'm far from perfect, and I'm still rough around the edges. But you know what, the people at this church have accepted me, they will also accept you. And if they accept both of us, surely that means Jesus who died for everyone will accept us as well."

Jesus used Willie tremendously to disciple that women that day. He continued to do so through Willie's life. And it wasn't Willie got his act together and knew everything there was to know about the bible. He was just sharing the things that God was teaching him moment by moment with people he come in contact with. In his own way and at the stage he was at, Willie was making disciples.

Now I wonder sometimes we are intimidated by the concept of teaching others is not so much we don't know enough about Jesus to teach others, we are intimidated because we aren't sharing life deeply enough with others to know what they need to hear so we don't know what to say to them. It's hard to teach someone if you don't know where they are at in life or what they need to hear. So perhaps, for some of us here today, we need to look at our calendars and ask ourselves, are we walking deeply and sharing life with people to where we can actually speak into one another's lives? Next verse.

...and behold, I am with you always...

As we endeavor to do all Jesus said to **do** in this passage, we absolutely cannot miss the **promise** that empowers all of it: that he will be with us always, even to the end of the age.. I want us to look at what Jesus said in John 15.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus here is talking about “bearing fruit”. He’s making the point that our ability to “bear fruit” comes directly from us abiding in the vine. He says that on our own, by our own effort alone, we can do—and I quote—nothing. The ability to successfully make disciples and help people become more like Jesus comes from Jesus, not from ourselves.

In order to get anywhere with making disciples, you need to realize that Jesus was the only perfect disciple-maker. Jesus executed everything about the process flawlessly. He knew exactly when to speak, and exactly when to stay silent. He knew exactly when to ask questions, and exactly when to make assertions. Jesus was the perfect disciple-maker. And you need to know that God is no longer taking applications for that position. And if you have committed your life to following Jesus, you get credit for his perfection in it.

Which is good, because here’s what I will absolutely promise you: as you attempt to make disciples, it will often be awkward, frustrating, tiring, and at times overwhelming. And if you are adding to all that the pressure you feel to be an perfect disciplemaker, that’s gonna be really overwhelming. So hear me on this: God does not need you to perfectly make disciples. In fact, he doesn’t need you period. He can use anyone make disciples, and even you making disciples is actually him making disciples, through you. All he asks of you is to simply join him in the process. To abide in him, and through abiding in him, join in his disciple-making. That’s what we’re invited into.

Jesus said to some of his first disciples as he called them, “follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” The call of Jesus is to follow him. And if we follow him (not just say we do, but legitimately build our life around following him), he will make us fishers of men. What you’ll find is that as you abide more and more in Jesus, as you

follow him, you won't be able to let that terminate on yourself—you'll want more people to experience it.

But to use Jesus' analogy: here's the thing about being a fisherman. Lots of fishermen struggle at times to catch fish. Plenty of fishermen don't catch fish every time they go out fishing. But not a single fishermen I'm aware of doesn't at least *try* to catch fish. Not a single fishermen is completely content to never catch fish. That's the whole point. And making disciples is the whole point of discipleship. So you will fail at times to make disciples. You'll try to, and it won't go well. And that's fine. But what Jesus is telling us is that no legitimate disciple is content to not even try. True disciples, make disciples.

So why, why was Jesus' parting words to us. Why is this so important to Jesus? Why is it so important to him that we make disciples? Because it's a reflection of Jesus' entire life. He left heaven to come to us. He made it his own responsibility for our spiritual wellbeing. And he took that responsibility all the way to the cross to make us right with our Heavenly Father. This matters to Jesus because he came on a rescue mission to save us into God's family. So it only makes sense his parting words to us is to continue that mission, to join Him in that mission, to continue to make more disciples, to continue for us to be made more into His image and taking responsibility for the spiritual well being of those around us.

So on that note, before we close, let me give you just a few quick tips on how to kickstart the process of making disciples. Some of you already have some ideas running through your head, some questions you can ask people and ways you can hop right into helping them become more like Jesus. For others of you, maybe you just feel like you have no clue where to start. If you're in that second category, try this one simple thing. The next time you're with another follower of Jesus, I want you to just ask them the question what is something you want to grow in? Just ask that question. Now, be prepared, because they may not have an answer immediately. But just ask them that. But once they answer, do a couple things. First, ask "how can I help?" Or you may immediately notice a way to help. And here's the catch: actually follow up with them. Set another time to hang out and talk about it again in a week or month. The next time you see them, ask how it's going. Set a reminder in your phone to text them and check in. Those things aren't all discipleship is, but doing those things will start to create an environment where discipleship can happen. So if you don't have any clue where to start this week, start there. And pray that God uses it and breathes life into it.

Whether it's through something like that, or just seeing our everyday lives for the purpose of discipleship, let's go for it. Let's get after it. For the good of our city, for the good of our church, and for our own good—let's make disciples.

Pray with me.