

Discipleship Study for Small Groups

Week 1

The Commission to Make Disciples: Matthew 28

Week 2

What Disciples Look Like: Matthew 4 et al.

Week 3

Disciples and Churches: Acts 11:19-26

Week 4

Whose Ministry? Ephesians 4

Week 5

Reaching the Lost: Colossians 4:2-6

Week 6

Me, a Teacher? Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 6:4, etc.

Week 7

Evaluating My Progress: 1 Timothy 4, Unbeliever, Infant, Child, Young Adult, Parent; what step forward am I going to take toward being a more mature disciple and a more effective disciple-maker?

Discipleship Groups

Week 1: Matthew 28:18-20 – The Commission to Make Disciples

Welcome to your Discipleship Group! By choosing to be here, you have chosen to grow in your walk with Christ and to learn about being a disciple and the task of making disciples Jesus gave to the church. So make the most of this time: Participate in the group discussion and with your partner(s) throughout the week. May the Holy Spirit enrich your faith and equip you for every good work.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

When did this conversation take place? Why does he give his disciples this commission at this time? How does the resurrection of Jesus support his claim that “all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me”?

How does the authority of Jesus challenge us? How does it encourage us? In what ways does this provide the “therefore” of the great commission?

The commission itself (vv 19-20a) is grammatically made up of one main verb (“make disciples”) with three supporting verbs that further clarify the task (“going... baptizing... teaching...”). That being the case, what is the primary mission Jesus leaves his disciples with?

What is a disciple (come up with at least 2-3 answers among the group)? We will unpack this word further next week, but how do you think making disciples is different from merely the concept of making “converts” or “church-goers”?

Why is “going” a necessary part of the great commission? Where are we going?

Read Acts 1:8. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth represented ever widening circles of influence for the apostles. Where is your Jerusalem? In what ways do you still have to “go” to a place where you live?

Who do you know who has “gone” to a wider circle, on a state, national, or global scale? Three years previously, these Jewish fishermen etc. probably had no idea of going to the ends of the earth. What gave them the drive to go? Would you be willing to leave your home to make disciples if you were called?

What does it symbolize to “baptize them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (see Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:26-29)?

When we baptize a person, what things are we believing to be true about them? What needs to be accomplished in that person before they are baptized? Why do you suppose Jesus commands us to perform this ritual?


Is there a difference between teaching people Jesus' commands and teaching them "to obey" his commands (is there a difference between teaching someone the game of basketball and teaching them to play basketball)? What is involved in the process of "teaching them to obey"?

If we completed this task in a person, what would their life look like? How long do you think this disciple-making process is likely to take? What means are you using to learn to obey Christ yourself? What is one means you personally could use to teach others to obey Christ?

When Jesus says to teach them to obey "everything I have commanded you," does this include the command to make disciples? How is this a self-perpetuating command?

You may have tried this before. Would you rather have someone give you \$1000 every day for a month or give you \$1 on the first day of the month, and then double your money every day after that for the rest of the month? If you chose to take the \$1000 every day for a 30-day month, you would of course have \$30,000 at the end of the month—not too shabby. But if you took the \$1 the first day of the month and doubled it every day of the month, by the end of the month you would have \$536,870,912. If one person in the church makes 1000 disciples every three years, we would praise him as a great evangelist—but if he could make just two disciples who after three years were each equipped to make two more disciples, who in three years were able to make two more disciples, within a hundred years, the whole population of earth would be reached. Is it better to have one highly trained individual who saves as many people as he can, or for one disciple-maker to make other disciple-makers? Which method did Jesus use?

The ministry of most churches, of course, is a kind of mixture of the two methods. Raising up a mature disciple is a long and multifaceted process, and very rarely, if ever, is one person fully responsible for the total development of a single person. We work together, using our different gifts, spheres of influence, and relationships in order to:

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- *go* to an unbelieving world,
 - *communicate* the saving message of the gospel,
 - *lead* people to the choice to become disciples of Jesus,
 - *establish* the foundations of their faith,
 - *nurture* them to maturity, and
 - *equip* them to go and make disciples themselves.

Two questions we will work to address in the next six weeks are: 1) where am I in the process of moving from unbeliever to mature disciple-maker, and 2) what can I practically begin doing to help others along this process? Share with your group one thing you hope to gain from our study of discipleship. If you aren't sure what you want from this study, maybe one thing you could pray for is a clearer understanding of what God is growing you to be. Spend some time as a group praying for God to help us to grow in these ways.

Homework for next week: Read Matthew 4-5 and discussion questions.

Discipleship Groups

Week 2: Matthew 4:19 – What is a Disciple?

Review: Would you rather have \$1000 every day for a month or \$1 the first day and double your money every day for a month? What is the application for disciple-making?

Read Matthew 4:18-22

The life Jesus calls his disciples to is summed up by this command to “follow me.” It begins with the need to “come,” and Jesus says, over time, “I will make you fishers of men.”

To begin with, then, what is involved in the call to “come” to Jesus? What do you have to believe about Jesus to come to him?

“Coming” implies movement from one place to another. What was Jesus calling his first disciples to leave behind? **Read Matthew 8:18-22.** What excuses do people make for not coming to Jesus? Have you come to Jesus? What was that choice like? What did you have to leave behind?

What does Jesus promise to those who come to him (Matthew 11:28-29)?

“Follow me,” on the one hand, means being with Jesus. When Mark 3:14 says Jesus chose twelve apostles, the first reason is “so that they might be with him.” Two thousand years after Jesus ascended into heaven, how can we still be “with” him? What practices do you commit to to be with Jesus? What do you most enjoy about being with Jesus?

Following Jesus only works if we learn from him and let him lead. A disciple is above all a student committed to learn from a master. What essential means of learning is illustrated in Matthew 5:1-2? How do modern-day disciples learn from their Master’s teaching?

Read Matthew 5:38-39; 43-44 (compare also 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32; 6:2-3, 5, 16). What do we do when our master’s teaching runs counter to what others tell us, conventional wisdom, or even our own preconceptions? Are there difficult teachings of Jesus that you are not sure how to apply in your own life?

Read 5:13-16. What kind of result should it have when we’re following our master’s teaching?

Read Matthew 10:24-25. Complete the phrase from the passage: “It is enough for a student [or disciple] to be_____.” In what ways are to expect to be like Jesus? Have you ever faced insults or persecution from others for being like Jesus? Share an example. How does Jesus say we should respond to this kind of treatment (see 10:26; 5:11-12)?

As we read last week, one final way in which Jesus teaches his disciples to be like him is by preparing them to take over his ministry of going and making disciples, i.e. “I will make you fishers of men.” First, he keeps them with him so he can model it for them; then, he sends them out for the first time on their

own (the twelve first, then the seventy-two) and debriefs them on their return (Luke 9:1-10; 10:1-24); then finally after three years, it is their turn: “As the Father sent me; I am sending you” (John 20:21). Do you see disciple-making ministry as the goal you are growing toward as a disciple of Jesus? Share one way you could begin participating in disciple-making ministry (evangelism, Sunday School, parenting, reading the Bible with a partner)? Who could you learn from as a model and mentor in that kind of ministry, the way Jesus modeled it for his disciples?

Immediately before Matthew 10 where Jesus sends his disciples to preach the gospel, he also tells them in chapter 9, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (vv 37-38). What “mission fields” do you know of that you could pray for, whether your neighborhood, workplace, or the work of a missionary you know?

A disciple is a student, someone committed to learning. We’ve talked about several ways that we learn and grow as disciples, from the choice to come to Jesus, to living in fellowship with Jesus, learning to conform our lives to his teaching, and growing in our ability to make disciples as he taught us. Take a moment to consider what particular area of growth you would like to commit to (or one you are currently working on). Sit down with a partner or two and share with them how you would like to continue to grow (after all, growth works much better in fellowship with others). Take some time to pray for one another to grow in as disciples, and commit to pray for that person for the rest of the week.

Homework for next week: Read Acts 11 and the discussion questions. Contact your partner at least once during the week (outside of church, by phone or visit) and have a conversation about what steps you have taken, or could take, toward your commitment to grow.

Discipleship Groups

Week 3: Acts 11:19-26 – Disciples and Churches

Review: Have at least one person in the group share a decision that they made to help them grow as a disciple.

Have you ever wondered why and how your church was started? What might have been the goal of those first members who came together to become a church?

Read Acts 11:19-26

How did the church in Antioch begin? Who were the men who began it? How is disciple-making foundational to the existence of the church?

Do you think disciple-making always leads to a church? If not, what would an alternative look like? What is the church?

In what way do we see cooperation between different churches in this example? What did Barnabas do for the church in Antioch?

Read Acts 9:23-30. In what ways did Barnabas fill an important disciple-making role in Saul's life? How was the church in Antioch important in Saul's life? How was he important to them?

Why do you think we meet together as a church? What role do you expect the church to play in your life? What role do you expect to play in the life of the church? How can it help to form you as a disciple of Jesus? Since Jesus has called you to make disciples, what can the church do to help you do that?

Read Acts 2:42-47. Why did the church in Jerusalem “devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching”? Can you think of more than one form that may have taken? What are ways in which you can devote yourself to the apostles’ teaching?

What role did fellowship (literally, sharing things in common) play in the life of the first disciples? Why was it important? What ways can we nurture fellowship between disciples? Do you feel connected with other disciples? What other sorts of fellowship would you like to have?

What does it look like to be “devoted to... prayer” as a disciple and as a church? In what way was it “the Lord” who “added to their number daily those who were being saved”? What is God's role? What were some reasons their hearts were “glad and sincere” and “praising God”?

Our church constitution says “The purpose of membership is to strengthen this congregation in its fellowship, ministries, and beliefs, and to strengthen its members through encouragement, instruction, and accountability in faith.” If you are a church member, do you think you are responsible for the lives and faith of other members? In what ways yes or no? If you missed a week of being at Discipleship Group, would you want to see others following up with you and encouraging you to come back? Would

you be willing to do that for others? Pray as a group for the mutual strength that you can provide one another to grow in Christ.

Homework for next week: Read Ephesians 4 and the discussion questions. Follow up with someone this week you missed seeing at your Discipleship Group or at church and see how they're doing.

Discipleship Groups

Week 4: Ephesians 4 – Whose Ministry?

Review: How do disciples lead to churches? Why do we have churches?

Read Ephesians 4:7-16

What does v 7 mean that Christ has “apportioned” grace to each one of us in this passage? In what ways might your portion of grace be different from someone else’s?

What purpose is ascribed to the “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers”? What were some of the different roles of these first century church leaders? In what ways were they the same? Who are some of the leaders in our church? What is their common goal in leading the church?

What would it look like for the whole church to “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God”? What would it look like for us to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”? Try to envision it; what would you see?

What kind of works of service could ordinary people of God do to move toward this vision? Is there anything you feel like you need in order to be prepared for these works of service? What could you do to be better prepared for building up the body of Christ?

What dangers come from not being grown to maturity (v 14)? What are some dangers to our church, both from without and from within, if we are immature in our faith?

What “truth” do you suppose v 15 is suggesting we speak to counter the “deceitful scheming” of the world? Where can we turn to hear this truth spoken to us? Why does love compel us to speak this truth to one another? HOW does love demand that we speak this truth?

Have you ever had an injury in one part of your body that caused complications or aches in other parts of your body? Why does this happen?

What happens to the body of Christ if there are parts hurt or not working properly?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-27. How is it affirming to you and to others to understand that “God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be”? What are some of the less visible parts of the church that deserve special honor?

Are there any parts of the body that don’t “speak the truth in love”? What are some less visible ways of building up the faith of others in the church (i.e. besides preaching or teaching a class)?

Read Romans 12:1-8. What gift have you seen in someone else in the church that they use well for building up the body? What is a gift you think you might have?

Why is it necessary to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” as you use your gifts in service to Christ? What are some practical means you can use to be continually transformed so that you can use your gifts faithfully and effectively?

Talk with your partner(s) about practical ways you personally can build up the church toward being more like Christ. Feel free to ask for suggestions. Pray for one another that God would show you how to serve and give you wisdom and strength to serve well.

Homework for next week: Read Colossians 4:2-6 and discussion questions. Make time this week to talk to your partner about how your chosen area of growth is going.

Discipleship Groups

Week 5: Colossians 4:2-6 – Reaching the Lost

Review: How does the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 (week 1) and Ephesians 4:7-16 (last week) connect all disciples to the work of disciple-making?

How many people can you think of who were influential in bringing you to faith in Christ? Who was involved who were not professional evangelists or pastors?

Read Colossians 4:2-6

What are some things about which we can be thankful in prayer? How can prayer be watchful? What are we to be watchful of (see Matthew 25:10-13; 26:41; 1 Peter 5:8; Acts 20:29-31)?

What does Paul mean when he asks that they pray “that God may open a door for our message”? Why is it important for God to open a door (see John 6:44; Acts 16:14)?

Are there places where you are currently praying for God to open a door (an unbeliever or mission field)? Are there other places you want to begin praying for regularly?

Besides praying for the receiving end of the gospel message, Paul requests prayer for the giving end. Who do you know that you could pray for the gospel to be spoken clearly through them (consider several possibilities)?

Read Acts 4:29. Have you ever tried sharing the gospel with someone and met resistance? What was your response, immediately and in the following weeks? Do you find occasions to pray as the apostles do in this passage?

The process of making disciples has to begin with “going” as Jesus taught us. For most of us, times when we actually speak the full message of the gospel to someone do not come every day or maybe even every week, but we do have interaction with unbelievers. What is one context where you regularly have this contact? What are some ways you can “be wise in the way you act toward outsiders”? What does it mean to “make the most of every opportunity”?

What does it mean for our conversation to “be always full of grace, seasoned with salt”? Do you feel like this reasonably describes the way you carry conversations? What is one way you could make your conversation more graceful or “salty”?

Do you feel like you “know how to answer everyone”? Do you have to know all the right “answers” in order to know how to answer someone? How do you respond to a question you don’t know the answer to?

What might lead to a conversation where someone asks you about your faith? What might need to be true of you and how you interact with unbelievers before such a conversation comes up?

Do you feel able to explain the gospel of Jesus to someone who doesn't understand it or doesn't believe it? Assuming such an ability is important, how would you develop it? What other parts of our faith should you be ready to explain? How could you become ready?

In these five verses in Colossians 4, Paul challenges ordinary believers to at least three ways every Christian can be involved in reaching the lost: 1) praying, for the unbeliever AND those who share the gospel, 2) living wisely in every interaction with unbelievers, and 3) being able to explain our faith when the conversation does come up. (If you are doing the first two, you will probably find occasions where you need to be ready to do the third.) Which of these are you already doing? Which do you want to start working on this week? If you haven't already, at least commit to praying for one or two people who are not following Jesus. Share your answers your partner(s). Encourage each other throughout the week to keep growing in this practice.

Share with your partner a brief (1-2 minute) summary of the gospel in your own words that you think an unchurched person could understand for salvation. Afterward ask your partner if there are phrases that need further explaining (e.g. what does it mean to "put your faith in Jesus"?) or if there were important points you ought to add. Could it be simplified? Pray for God to open specific doors to the gospel (people you know) and that you would be ready if the opportunity to share comes.

Homework for next week: Create a list of people you have contact with who don't follow Jesus and begin praying for them. Meet up with or call your partner during the week and see whether they have started their list. Read Colossians 3 and the discussion questions.

Discipleship Groups

Week 6: Colossians 3:16 – Me, a Teacher?

Review: Have you had any contact with unbelievers this week that might be moving toward the gospel? What were some important elements of leading someone to faith in Christ you came up with last week? Have someone in the group share a summary of the gospel.

Read Colossians 3:16

What does it mean for the word of Christ to “dwell in your richly”? To what degree do you feel this accurately describes you?

How do you think Paul expected the Christians in Colossae to practice this command? What practices are you committed to that cause the word of Christ to dwell more richly in you? Are there other practices that you would like to develop?

Part of the process of making disciples includes “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 20). What are some formal (structured or official) ways that Christians teach one another? What are some informal ways we teach one another? What sorts of things do you think Paul meant for us to teach one another?

Read Ephesians 6:4. What is a parent’s responsibility in their children’s spiritual formation? If you are a parent, how prepared do you feel for this task? How might you be strengthened in this task?

Read Titus 2:3-5. What sorts of things were older women to teach younger women? Do these appear to be biological mother/daughter relationships? By what means and in what setting do you imagine this instruction taking place?

Whom might you teach? How could you begin building a new relationship where teaching could take place?

Returning to Colossians 3:16, does “admonish one another” have a different meaning from “teach one another”? What might be a situation where admonition would be called for (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; the word for “admonish” in v 12 is translated “warn” in v 14)?

Why is it necessary to teach and admonish “with all wisdom”? What would be a foolish way to teach and admonish one another? Where are we to get this wisdom?

Why do you suppose teaching and admonishing one another is described alongside of singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”? Where does this gratitude come from? How are we to do these things “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (v 17)?

Meet with your partner(s) and share one way you could teach and admonish others that you are already prepared for, and one way that you could learn how to teach and admonish others better. Pray together that God would give you gratitude in your heart and lead you in speaking the truth in love to build up the faith of others.

Homework for next week: Pray for God to give you the opportunity to invite someone to church for Easter (be specific about whom you have in mind). Tell your partner whom you would like to invite and have them join you in praying for that person (or people). Read 1 Timothy 4 and discussion questions.

Discipleship Groups

Week 7: 1 Timothy 4:15-16 – My Progress

Review: What has been the most exciting place where you have grown or encouraged someone else to grow over the past seven weeks?

Read 1 Timothy 4:15-16

What “matters” is Paul telling Timothy to be diligent in (see vv 11-14)?

Paul assures him that if he gives himself wholly to them, his progress will be evident. Are there ways that you’ve progressed over the course of this study? Are there other ways you’ve been progressing in your discipleship over the past year? How has that progress come about?

“Watch your life and doctrine closely” (NIV); “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (NASB). As we began this study in week 1, this passage reminds us that we are both disciples and disciple-makers. What does Paul say is at stake in v 16?

Read Hebrews 5:11-14 (compare 1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

Scripture describes a process of growth in Christ from infants who still need to be taught the basics of Christian faith to adults who have learned to train themselves and are able to teach others. The following categories don’t describe age but Christian development:ⁱ

| Spiritual Stage | Commonly characterized by... |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Dead (not yet born again) | Disbelief in God or the supernatural; or may believe in God but that there are many ways to God. They may live in rebellion to God and his commands or believe that they are good enough and don’t need a Savior. |
| Infant | Belief in Christ but largely unaware of what the Bible says about life and the purpose of a Christian. This person still holds many worldly perspectives with some biblical perspectives being added to the mix. |
| Child | Some growth, even the ability to learn through their own disciplines, but still mostly centered on their own faith. They may be excited about having deep Christian relationships and the benefits they receive from them, but as yet little focus on helping others grow. They have biblical knowledge but may be unsure how to apply it wisely; their views can be somewhat rigid due to incomplete knowledge of biblical issues. |
| Young Adult | Desire to serve for the good of others and the glory of God. They know how to nurture their own faith but have also shifted from thinking only about their own preferences and faith to saving others and helping their faith to grow. They are disciple-makers, but may not be strategic about it. They tend to do things themselves and often see one right way to do things. |
| Parent | Ability to think in terms of what a team (rather than an individual) can do together. They think in terms of reproducing disciples: not only making disciples but training disciple-makers. They empower others to serve. |

Considering these stages, are there stages of growing as a Christian that are difficult to get past? What makes them difficult to move past? What would be helpful in moving forward?

What stage of this discipleship process do you see yourself in and why? What do you need to do to move forward in your growth?

Over these seven weeks, we have talked about a number of steps that every Christian can take toward maturity as a disciple and a disciple-maker. Every Christian is at the same time moving toward Christ and helping others to move toward Christ. As we conclude our Discipleship Groups, what next steps do you want to commit to? Choose at least one, but not more than three or four so that you can stay focused on your task. Consider which of these you are already doing, and which areas you may be lacking in:

Maturing as a disciple

- (Re)dedicate my life to Jesus
- Begin a regular habit of reading scripture on my own
- Establish a daily time set aside just for prayer
- Join a Sunday School class
- Find a mentor or partner to encourage me to grow over the next year
- Start reading a book (or list of books) about Christian faith

Making new disciples

- Commit to praying for a list of unsaved people
- Intentionally build grace-filled relationships that could lead to sharing the gospel
- Practice sharing the gospel briefly and clearly
- Invite a friend or family member to come to church with me
- Pray for God to create an opportunity to share the gospel soon with a friend or family member

Strengthening disciples

- Call, visit, or send a card to someone who has been missing from church or Sunday School
- Be a partner or mentor to someone to encourage them to grow
- Tell a leader I want to teach a children's class or Junior Church
- Help my family establish regular devotions at home
- Lead a Discipleship Group the next time around

Take some time to choose next steps on your own, then meet with your partner(s) and share what you intend to do. Be as specific as possible about who, when, etc. so that you are likely to follow through.

Homework: Implement your own plan for growing as a disciple and answering Jesus' commission to make disciples.

ⁱ Adapted from *Real-life Discipleship* by Jim Putman (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 187-191.