

Introduction, Part 1: What is This Study and Why Do We Need It?

OPENING UP

1. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE “GOOD AT” EVANGELISM? WHY OR WHY NOT?

2. DO YOU THINK OUR CONGREGATION DOES A GOOD JOB AT MAKING AND GROWING DISCIPLES? WHY OR WHY NOT?

INTRODUCTION

In my recent poll of topics people want to study, by far the most common response (four times the next most common) was some variation of evangelism. How do I talk to my friends who believe different doctrine? What are some things I can say to get people interested in the church? How can I minister to worldly people? Another few responses were about specific points of doctrinal dispute (women’s roles in the church, homosexuality, etc.) but would fall under the same broad category of topics that might need to be addressed when talking to the lost. This is clearly a point of interest.

And it should be. Religious involvement is not just dropping in churches of Christ; it is dropping across the board in the United States. Not only are fewer people attending some sort of religious service, but fewer and fewer people even express interest in spiritual things. As more people become less interested in spiritual things, it will take a more disciplined, intentional, and prayerful effort from all of us to reach the lost.

But this study is just as much for me as it is for you.

I try to be honest in my self-evaluation, and it’s easy to see that evangelism is one of the aspects of Christian service that I struggle with the most. Maybe you feel the same. It’s not just you and me;

many Christians struggle with knowing how to be effective evangelists. What should I say, how should I act, how can I reach more people more effectively? These are important questions that come from a heart seeking to improve. The writer of Hebrews was plain about the need to mature into the ability to teach others:

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

- Hebrews 5:11-14

The only ones who don't teach are children. As we mature, we "ought" to become teachers in some capacity. We know of course that teaching is also mentioned as a particular spiritual gift or manifestation of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11) but the Hebrews writer doesn't make that distinction, instead contrasting the ability to teach with being a "child" in Christ. Hopefully we are all going to mature. Even in a passage that lists teaching as a specific calling, Paul emphasizes the need for *all* Christians to mature:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- Ephesians 4:11-16

Who is supposed to do "the work of the ministry"? Who are the saints? The word "saint" is the noun form of the Greek adjective translated "holy"; a "saint" is literally a "holy one". Further, the word "holy" means "separate from common condition and use; dedicated" (Mounce). Something that is holy is dedicated to an uncommon, sacred purpose. In Ephesians 4, we see what the holy purpose is that the holy people are dedicated to: the "work of the ministry"! While that work encompasses many different avenues of service, the Hebrews writer makes it clear that teaching is part of the work of a mature Christian. Paul himself continued in Ephesians 4 to emphasize the importance of maturity. Maturity shields the Christian from false teaching, human cunning, and "deceitful schemes". Maturity allows us to "speak the truth in love".

So, this study is not just for some of us; it is for all of us who want to “grow up in every way” in our service to Christ.

DISCIPLES GROWING

This is a two-part study, which we will conduct simultaneously. The dual nature of our study comes from the Great Commission:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Matthew 28:18-20

We will unpack this text in great detail in the next lesson, but note the two parts: “make disciples” and “teach them to observe all that I have commanded”. To teach someone else to obey Jesus, we ourselves must know how to obey Jesus. We need to know “all” the things he commanded. So while the first part of this study is evangelism (“make disciples”), the second part will be Bible study itself.

We just sort of assume that Christians know how to study the Bible, but that’s not really how it works. The Hebrews writer says that the immature Christian is “unskilled” in the word of righteousness. The ability to discern (make good decisions about right and wrong) is something that the writer says can be trained! So, we will do some of that training in this study. What attitudes do we need to have to properly understand the Bible? How can we use our study time efficiently and effectively? How can we move from understanding the text to applying it in our lives? These are some of the questions we will answer.

MAKING DISCIPLES

The process of maturing in our ability to use God’s word has a goal outside our own relationship with God: to help us make disciples! As we learn how to study the Bible for ourselves, we will as a result learn how to better study the Bible with others. But more than anything else, I want our study of disciple-making to change our attitude toward evangelism. As I have started putting this class together, I have noticed that my own approaches and mindset were not what they should be. Before we can be effective evangelists, we must change how we think about evangelism.

Maybe this doesn’t apply to you. Maybe you already think about disciple-making the way God describes it. If so, that’s great! But are you putting it into practice? As we relearn how to think about evangelism, we are also going to examine our motivations and hopefully learn how to apply these things in a practical way.

FURTHER READING

As I began to put the outline of this class together, I read many books. We know of course that human authors are secondary to the Word of God, but just as I hope my teaching is helpful to you, I suspect that the teaching of others can be helpful as well. So, here is a list of resources I have found to be useful:

- **Multiply** by Francis Chan
- **Becoming a Contagious Christian** by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleberg
- **Evangelism for the Rest of Us** by Mike Bechtle
- **Make Disciples!** by Terry A. Bowland
- **Reviving Evangelism** by the Barna Group

In the above books, the authors tackle the practice and discipline of evangelism in a variety of ways. I will be referencing each of them quite a bit, but I want to highlight a couple for you, in case they might be particularly helpful.

Evangelism for the Rest of Us is a book for introverts. How can an introvert evangelize effectively when so much of our thinking about evangelism is extrovert-focused? I think this book could be helpful for you if you consider yourself to be an introvert.

Becoming a Contagious Christian is perhaps the most practical of these books. We will address some of the material in this class, but not all of it. If you are so inclined, I think this book could be helpful as well.

If you are not familiar with the Barna group, they are an organization that focuses on demographics research. I have used their research many times before in classes and sermons. *Reviving Evangelism* is their most recent book on the subject, but they have published many research projects about how people think about Christianity and religion.

MARKET RESEARCH

Understanding the world we live in is a vital part of making disciples. Evangelism doesn't happen in a vacuum, it happens in the lives of real people with their own hopes, dreams, and philosophies. While we have discussed this text before, it bears examining again:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things

to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

What does it mean that Paul “became as a Jew” or “became as one outside the law”? To live like them, he had to understand them! He didn’t strive to become like them as an excuse to sin (note how he goes out of his way to say he was not under the Jewish law and that he was not outside the law of God), but he did “become all things to all people” for a specific purpose: “to save some”.

It is very tempting to withdraw into our church bubble and never engage with the world again. This is what many Christians do, and it’s one of the main reasons why they don’t succeed in evangelism. But while we isolate ourselves in our safe spaces, the world continues to change around us. I cannot stress this enough: one of the biggest reasons churches are shrinking is that Christians have failed to adapt to the shifting mindsets of those in the world. Both Jesus and Paul knew the importance of being able to relate to the lost:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

- John 17:14-15

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

- 1 Corinthians 5:9-10

Jesus specifically asks the Father *not* to take the disciples out of the world; how would they fulfill his command in Matthew 28 if they weren’t in the world?! Paul specifically tells the Corinthians to keep associating with those “of this world” because he knew the need to “become all things to all people”. This is what a book like *Reviving Evangelism* is meant to help us with; what does the world think about Christians, and how should that impact our methods? Don’t misunderstand; I am not suggesting that we change the *content* of the message. But I *am* suggesting that the way we present that message can and should change based on the context of our disciple-making efforts. To that end, here is a list of resources for those wanting to understand a bit more about the culture in which we live:

- **Reviving Evangelism** by the Barna Group
- **Why They Left** by Flavil R. Yeakley Jr.
- **unchristian** by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons
- **Churchless** by George Barna and David Kinnaman
- **You Lost Me** by David Kinnaman

Additionally, Pew Research has done a number of studies about what people think about religion and Christianity in general, as well as a number of doctrinal topics specifically, including a huge study called *The Changing Global Religious Landscape* published in 2017. To find these you will need to go to their website, or search for Pew Research on your favorite search engine.

Again, the goal of all these resources is to empower and enable us to be more effective in our effort to “make disciples of all nations”. Understanding the world around us is something we do “for the sake of the gospel”. The temptation to shove our heads in the sand in a huge danger, and one of the Devil’s best tools. He doesn’t care why we aren’t effective in our evangelism, so long as we aren’t. Jesus and his apostles knew this danger, and warned us of our Adversary:

For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

- 2 Corinthians 2:9-11

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

- Ephesians 6:10-12

The Devil doesn’t care why we fail. Maybe you lack motivation, maybe you aren’t sure how to go about this, maybe you aren’t disciplined in your own Bible study. Whatever the reason, I hope these two studies will help us overcome our common Enemy.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. HOW MUCH EFFORT DO YOU PUT INTO DISCIPLE-MAKING? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU PLANNED FOR EVANGELISM?

2. HOW MUCH EFFORT DO YOU PUT INTO PERSONALLY GROWING AS A DISCIPLE? DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE “SKILLED IN THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”? WHY OR WHY NOT?

3. WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK FROM INTENTIONAL EVANGELISM? IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFICALLY YOU HOPE TO LEARN IN THIS STUDY?

Introduction, Part 2: The Great Commission and The Cost of Discipleship

OPENING UP

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE A DISCIPLE? DO YOU DISPLAY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE TOWARD ANYONE OR ANYTHING OTHER THAN JESUS?

2. WHAT HABITS DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR LIFE THAT SHOW YOU ARE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

It is time to unpack the command at the heart of this study, a passage that is probably headlined in your Bible as “The Great Commission”:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Matthew 28:16-20

There is only one command in these verses, from a grammatical sense: the command to “make disciples”. In the Greek, all the other verbs in the text (go, teach, baptize) relate back to and modify the core command. To appreciate the seriousness of the command and understand how to measure our progress, we must first understand what it means to be a disciple.

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

The verb translated “make disciples” (*mathēteuō*) only appears four times in the New Testament, though of course the noun form of the word (*mathētēs*, meaning *disciple*) appears hundreds of times. Jesus used the verb one other time, when he asked his followers if they understood all the parables he had told them:

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

- Matthew 13:51-52

The same word *mathēteuō* is here translated “has been trained” in the ESV and NRSV, and “has become a disciple” in the NIV and NASB. I appreciate the ESV and NRSV rendering here, because it helps us understand what it means to become a disciple, rather than just giving us the normal word. Being a disciple foundationally meant learning from someone. To become a disciple, one had to first pick a master to learn from. In a first-century Jewish context, this would have probably been one of the teachers of the law who was particularly popular, or who had a strong identity as an interpreter of the law. Paul describes this process in his own life (though without using the word *disciple*):

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers...”

- Acts 22:3

Paul was a *disciple* of Gamaliel. He learned from Gamaliel and tried to emulate Gamaliel, though we know eventually his discipleship to Jesus superseded the original education from Gamaliel. Typically, one who chose to be a disciple oriented their whole lives around learning from and being around the master they had chosen.

Importantly, the master had some amount of say over who could and couldn't be their disciple. In a sense anyone could become a disciple of a public teacher, simply by listening to the public teaching, but true disciples received private instruction from the master that the masses were not privy to. This is what we see in the lives of Jesus's followers. Jesus did publicly teach, but often would withdraw only with his disciples to give privileged instruction, as he did with the parables in the chapter we previously read from, Matthew 13.

The goal of discipling was to create students who thought like and taught like the master. Jesus says as much:

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

- Matthew 10:24-25

Gamaliel was trying to create Jewish teachers and thinkers who interpreted the law like he did. That is exactly what Jesus was trying to accomplish as well! And while we don't typically use the word "disciple" in a non-religious context today, the same thing happens. A "Marxist" is a disciple of Marx. Even though Marx is dead, through his writing he posthumously creates students who think and teach what he thought and taught. The same could be said of any truly popular philosophizing YouTuber or blogger.

So when Jesus issues the primary command to "make disciples", what does that mean? We will only have succeeded when someone wants to become like Jesus! It's not just about people wanting to be saved or wanting to be a part of our congregational family; unless a person genuinely wants to learn everything Jesus taught in order to emulate him, a disciple has not been made.

Becoming a disciple is a much more involved and riskier proposition than "becoming a Christian" in the watered-down, traditional sense. Many people who attend church every week are not disciples. Many people who pray a lot are not disciples. Being a disciple means being dedicated to changing your thinking, worldview, and behavior. Perhaps this is why Jesus goes out of his way to make sure people understand exactly what is demanded of those who would become his disciples.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Many people literally followed Jesus in his travels, but were unwilling to be his disciples. Jesus knew this, and confronted this fake discipleship:

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

- Luke 14:25-33

Some first century masters probably didn't demand as much from their disciples as Jesus did. If a teacher of the law lived a life of comfort in Jerusalem, his disciples could expect to have some level of comfort as well. But Jesus travelled all over the countryside, and anticipated a lot of resistance from both the Jewish and Roman authorities. He knew that those who wanted to be like him would

face more difficulty than the average Jewish disciple. So he makes it plain what is expected of those who would follow him.

Does Jesus really expect us to hate our family? Of course, this is a classic use of hyperbole, exaggeration used to make a point. What is the point? If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, everyone else has to be second place in your life. Your parents cannot matter to you as much as Jesus does. Your children cannot matter as much to you as Jesus does. If thinking and behaving like Jesus leads them to hate you, you must be prepared to let go of the human relationship. How many of us have mentally prepared to do that if the situation arises?

The two parables illustrate the need to do exactly that. The builder and the king have to “count the cost” before starting the project, otherwise they will be in for a bad time. A would-be disciple of Jesus *must* consider what he or she is willing to give up for the sake of learning from and being like Jesus. If there is anything they can’t give up, they would be better off not even trying. Jesus makes it very plain: “any one of you that does not renounce all that he has *cannot* be my disciple”.

This should inform our fulfillment of the great commission, shouldn’t it? Evangelism is not about church attendance or national policy or even changing behavior. It’s about situating Jesus in people’s lives as the supreme authority and model. Unless we have accurately conveyed the cost of discipleship, we can’t expect to make disciples. And until a person is willing to forsake anything to become like Jesus, our job is not done! The task before us is monumental. But, Jesus gives us some instruction for carrying it out.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Let’s read it again:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Matthew 28:16-20

The command is to “make disciples”, but there are several verbs that modify and expand the scope of the commission. First, we must “go”. Disciple-making doesn’t just happen at home, in our families, or in our congregations (though it does also happen there!).

Second, we must baptize (immerse) them. Immersion accomplishes three things: it brings a person into contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus, it imparts the Holy Spirit, and it serves as an outward sign of a person’s dedication to being a disciple. It is the start of discipleship! But the process of disciple-making does not start with immersion (we will address this more later).

Third, we must teach would-be disciples “to observe all that I have commanded you”. If the goal of discipleship is to become like the master, then this is just as fundamental as the going or the baptism! In actuality, it will take a lifetime of study and devotion to even approach the mindset and behavior of the master.

Disciple-making is a process, not an event (more on this later, too). The process of taking someone who has no relationship with Jesus and turning them into a true disciple is a long one, outlined by the great commission. There is some amount of teaching that must happen before a person is immersed into Christ, but then there is a lot more teaching that must happen after. This is indeed the model exhibited by the early church:

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- Acts 14:19-23

They made disciples through their preaching of the gospel, and then they continued to strengthen the disciples they had made. They reminded them, as Jesus did, to count the cost (“many tribulations”). Thus, we arrive at the structure of this study.

DISCIPLES GROWING DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES

The process of disciple-making is the continual mission of the church. We do that through evangelism (teaching the lost who don’t know Jesus) and we continue the work through continual learning. The disciples followed Jesus for *years*, learning what he had to teach. Even three years wasn’t enough, and Jesus had to jump-start their ability to make more disciples by sending them the Holy Spirit.

How can I make this more plain? *You are not yet a finished disciple.* You are still in the process of becoming like the master. And since we only know the master’s teaching through the words written for us, true discipleship must involve *a lot* of Bible study. How good are you at studying the Bible? How often do you do it by yourself? Are you confident to study with someone else? These are vital skills for a disciple of Jesus!

He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained

will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

- Luke 6:39-42

Disciple-making isn't just about training others, it's about training ourselves! If we want to be effective disciple-makers, we have to be effective disciples first! As the study branches from this point, it's important to remember that studying evangelism isn't really separate from learning how to study the Bible. One feeds into the other. I hope this study will make better disciples of us all.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. HONESTLY EVALUATE YOUR MOTIVATIONS FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN. HOW MUCH OF YOUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY INVOLVES BECOMING MORE LIKE CHRIST (IN THINKING AND ACTION), AND HOW MUCH IS SIMPLY ABOUT DOING WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE?

2. HOW CAN A PERSON ATTEND WORSHIP WEEKLY, PRAY DAILY, AND SERVE OTHERS WITHOUT BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

3. WHY IS IT TEMPTING TO TREAT EVANGELISM AS AN EVENT, RATHER THAN A PROCESS? HOW CAN WE AVOID THIS MINDSET?

4. WHO IS THE GREAT COMMISSION FOR? HOW DO WE KNOW?