

Making Disciples I

"Therefore go make disciples of all nations..."¹

Anyone who has ever attempted to make disciples will understand what a monumental task this is. Those who have never even begin to understand what disciple making is, will see this as simply preaching the gospel and saving souls, as well as church growth.

Jesus made disciples. He did not just preach the gospel so that people might repent and believe, nor did He just heal the sick and drive out demons, but throughout His ministry, He disciplined a few individuals to show them the secret of His ministry. Everyone knows the twelve disciples whom He called apostles, but He also had other disciples... that is, individuals whom He called to Himself to follow Him.

Compared to preaching the gospel, healing the sick, driving out demons and doing miracles, the making of disciples has to be the greatest of all challenges for anyone.

To preach the good news, you only have to speak of what you have been taught, what you may have heard and even know. To drive out demons, heal the sick and do miracles, you only need a mustard seed of faith and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are given freely to all who are baptised with Him.

However to make a disciple, you need a teachable individual who is prepared to learn and become that which you want him to become. Discipleship is not education. Students enrol in colleges to learn what they can, all they can, to become what they want to be with that which they have been taught, and in most cases, that which they have bought. Most, if not all, educational institutions sell their knowledge and skills to those who can afford them, and people buy from them to learn to become what they want to be to fulfil their own dreams and visions.

Discipleship is to take someone to teach him what you have in order for him to fulfil your dream and vision. In fact, it is a training of a servant for yourself. As such, the individuals must be one and ones who have little or no personal ambition for themselves, but whose ambition is for the one who is disciplining them.

As such, it is no wonder that most of Jesus' disciples were ordinary fishermen and tax collectors of His days, men who were not the most personally ambitious and capable. Indeed, the men of His days who had a reputation of being 'men of God' were rarely His disciples, and if they were, they were secret disciples, for fear of rejection and ejection by their peers, like Nicodemus.

Yet Jesus who spent disciplining many for two years, including the twelve, only managed to produce eleven men who would still desert, disbelief and disobey Him at the moments of His greatest despair and triumph. It was two years spent with no small frustration as He watched all but the twelve leave Him in the first year, and then to have to raise up some more in the final months of His ministry as He journeyed from Ephraim to Jerusalem for His destiny on the Roman cross. Two years spent showing them all that the Father had shown Him, not just that which was public, but also that which was private.

It is hard to comprehend how He must have felt as He listened to them argue about who was the greatest among them on the eve of His torture and death. What went through the Lord's mind as He, having just dismissed Judas and knowing that Judas was going to betray Him, listened and watched Peter argue with the others as to which of them was the greatest? How do you suppose they were trying to grade themselves? Were they comparing themselves with the number of sermons they had preached, or how many they had healed and how many demons they had driven out when they were sent out by the Lord? Or were they comparing themselves based on how many times the Lord took them aside to be alone with Him away from the others? Did the three consider themselves greater than the others because He took them into the room of the dead girl, and with Him up to the Mount of Transfiguration? Even on the eve of their graduation as His disciples, He still had to teach them to how to love one another.

¹ Matthew 28.19

To make disciples of all nations is the last command. It is not the 'great commission'; it is the greatest challenge.

To preach the gospel to all creation, creatures and mankind is a walk in the park, especially in today's environment. Your news message can be flashed around the world in a matter of seconds, and it is up to people to believe or disbelieve the report. You do not have to convince them.

To heal the sick and drive out demons is easy compared to making disciples. As I have said, you only need to be a believer preaching the gospel and these signs will accompany you. Anyone who is a believer can do it anytime. The sick was being healed and the demons were being driven out within a month after I believed.

To preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a testimony is more of a challenge, but still a far easier work than the making of a single disciple. For to be able to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, one only needs to have experiential knowledge of the power and the joy, peace and righteousness of the Holy Spirit, and to talk about it while sharing some food and drink, even the body and blood of Jesus.

However, to make a single disciple, you would have to find an individual or individuals who are suitable. A task that even Jesus did not attempt, for His disciples were all chosen for Him by the Father, for no one could come to Him unless the Father drew him. Jesus chose His apostles with the knowledge of all things, which He had. Anyone of us contemplating to make an individual disciple must make our choices with far less knowledge, unless it is the Holy Spirit who helps us. Now even if the Holy Spirit were to show you the persons who are suitable for discipleship, you yourself must be a disciple first. That is, someone else must have disciplined you for Jesus first.

Going to church to worship and praise God is not discipleship. Going to a Bible study is not discipleship. Studying and reading the Bible is not discipleship. All these are merely a small fraction of what discipleship is. It is not until someone teaches you and shows you the secret of their relationship with God, that discipleship begins. It is not until the person you want to follow invites you to follow him to see where he lives so that you may see how he lives, that discipleship begins. They may do this in real time as Jesus did with His twelve, or they may do this teaching and relating to you what they have done, but they must then be able to show you. A true discipler is able to teach his disciples what and how to do what he does. Not just demonstrate that He can do it to impress them to follow him.

Jesus raised disciples for His own cause. We who take on the challenge to make disciples must raise up disciples for His cause, not ours, which is a much harder thing to do. For not only are you going through the trouble of making a disciple, you are making him or her for someone else and not for yourself. As such, those who make disciples for Jesus have their loyalty proven without words, but by their actions and by their 'children,' that is, those they have disciplined. For disciples are proved by the loyalty they show to the One for whom they are disciplined. That is why Paul objected when the early believers said, "I follow Paul," and others said, "I follow Apollos."² Paul for one understood the true meaning of making disciples for Jesus.

Now as if making a single disciple is not difficult enough, the Lord's command is: "...make disciples of all nations..."³ If an individual is difficult to disciple, how much more difficult a nation? Those who dare embark on such a task have truly undertaken to attempt a greater thing than what Jesus has done. But be encouraged, for with God nothing is impossible, and He is with us through His Holy Spirit.

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² 1 Corinthians 3.4

³ Matthew 28.19