

BEING AND MAKING DISCIPLES

Before leaving this earth and ascending back to Heaven, Jesus gave His final command (the Great Commission) to His disciples:

“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)

This has been the defining task of every church in every age: to proclaim that Jesus is God’s appointed King and Savior of all people everywhere and to call people to repent and follow Him. God’s will is that we become disciples (students) of His Son, Jesus Christ, that we learn to trust and obey Him. This is clear.

It is the second question that will require a little more thought and reflection: *how* do we grow and mature as His disciples and *how* do we help others become disciples? We do not need to think too hard on this. Jesus makes this clear also. We become and make disciples through baptism and instruction. Each of us must first renounce our old and self-centered ways, repent and believe and be washed of our sins. But that’s just the first step. Once we have come to Christ, now we must be taught. We have to learn an entirely new way of thinking and living.

This may take time, but it is not optional. When someone signs up for the military, he must first renounce his civilian ways and be “baptized” into the service. But that signing ceremony means nothing if the soldier forgoes bootcamp and skips any further instruction. So it is with disciples, we are to be continual learners.

Now for the third question: how do we learn, *by what method?* Truly, we must become students of the word. Like the first disciples who devoted themselves to the Apostles Teaching (Acts 2:42). We must become well-acquainted with the Scriptures for this is where we find the actual teachings of Christ. God’s Word is our bread and we are to always read, study and memorize as much as we can. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...” (Colossians 3:16)

But that is not enough in itself. You see, Jesus’ command is not that we would just learn His commands, but that we would learn to OBEY His commands. It is one thing for me to read and study and even memorize the manual for my car. It is far more important that I learn how to properly drive and maintain this vehicle. That’s why discipleship requires more than just learning the Scriptures. We need one more thing. Consider the Apostles’ instructions on this matter:

Be *imitators* of me as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Brothers, join in *imitating* me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the *example* you have in us. (Philippians 3:17)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate* their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an *example* in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

So I exhort the elders among you... shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being *examples* to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

To really learn the way of Christ, we all need examples. We all need mentors. We never really learn the Christian life until we can see it lived out before us. It is like learning any skill or trade. If you wanted to become a doctor or plumber or chef or martial artist, you would start by taking

classes to learn the basics, but most of your time would be spent as an apprentice or intern – working side by side with someone of more experience in the field. Over time and guided practice, you would grow in your proficiency and eventually become a master. This is how discipleship works. We become mature Christians by attending to the Word *and* by imitating and practicing the faith with good and experienced mentors.

Final question: *where* do we find such mentors? This may be the easiest to answer. They sit right next to you in church. A mentor is simply someone who is further along the path than yourself. Someone who has already gone through and survived and learned valuable lessons from the stage of life that you are presently in. Are you a teenager dealing with peer pressure? Connect with that solid Christian college student. Newly married? Talk to that faithful older couple. Dealing with troubled kids? We've got folks who have dealt with all kinds and have learned a thing or two from this painful experience. Suffering grief and pain? You are not alone.

I think you get the idea. God has blessed MSBC with an abundance of mentors. We have so much to learn from one another. It is my hope and prayer that we will all take full advantage of the resources that God has graciously provided us. So, before we go into all the world, let's start by being disciples and making disciples of one another.