

How Do You Make Disciples?

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During the time that He was on this earth physically, Jesus Christ spent the majority of His time instructing and teaching. He selected twelve men to follow Him and they accompanied Him, for the most part, everywhere that He went. These twelve developed deep, meaningful relationships with Christ and received an intense and focused training, directly from Him. They were also given the understanding to absorb what they were being shown and the things that were being revealed to them. They were with Jesus all the time and they were constantly being schooled and taught by Christ Himself. These men were called disciples and later they came to be known as apostles.

These men were specially selected and specially called. They were set aside for a very important purpose. Christ spent extra time explaining to them and helping them to understand the things that He was teaching them. They were to serve a very important purpose and He wanted them to be as prepared as they could possibly be. These men had a very important commission; they were to be the primary means by which the gospel was to be spread out into the world.

After he was resurrected, Christ appeared to His disciples so that they would believe that He had risen, just as He had told them that He would. He wanted to leave no doubt in their minds that He was who He said He was and all that He had spoken to them was the truth. Before He ascended the final time to His father, Christ left these men with some final words and admonition.

Matthew 28:16

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

This passage has been called the great commission and many organizations and groups have taken this passage and used it as a mission statement. Each of them have their own interpretation as to what it takes and what it means to make disciples. What exactly is a disciple and how does one go about making one? Is there some sort of miraculous change that takes place all at once? Is there some sort of power that can be possessed to just make someone a disciple? What is the definition of a disciple?

DISCIPLE. From the Greek verb manthano (man-than'-o) which means "to learn, to be apprised of, to increase one's knowledge," there are derived the words mathetes (math-ay-tes') which means "a learner, a pupil, (to be a disciple) one who follows the teaching of someone else," thus, a disciple; and matheteuo (math-ayt-yoo'-o) which means "to follow the precepts and instructions of another," thus to be his disciple; also, "to make a disciple, to teach, to instruct (to disciple)." We must be careful to note that the Greek word for "disciple" does not carry with it the idea that that person who is named a disciple is necessarily a saved person. The word does not contain any implications of salvation. A person may learn something from someone else and yet not put that knowledge into practice or make it a part of his life. See John 6:66 in its context for an example of an unsaved disciple, and Matt 10:1, for an illustration of saved (the eleven) and unsaved (Judas) discipleship. The word merely refers to one who puts himself under the teaching of someone else and learns from him. For the noun, see your English concordance. The verb is found in Matt 13:52 (*instructed*), 27:57; 28:19 (*teach*); Acts 14:21 (*taught*). In the case of the word "disciple" the context must rule as to whether the particular disciple mentioned, is saved or unsaved, not the word itself.

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So we can see from this, that the word disciple really does not carry any special spiritual significance to it at all. We can see an example of that in John 6. Christ had just finished speaking and was explaining about the true bread from heaven. Some of those with Him did not understand.

John 6:60

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

⁶⁶ From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

So there were some there among them at this time that did not agree with, or just could not understand what Christ was saying. Whether they thought He was a false prophet, or for whatever other reason they may have had, they left Him.

The word disciple as it is used in scripture, in one instance is referring to someone who promotes and follows the doctrines of another. In the other instance, it is referring to a student, or someone who is learning, or being taught. That is an important distinction. In scripture, even though these words carry different meanings, both of them are translated as the same word, disciple. In the example that we just read in John, those that left were students and not the core group of disciples that stayed with Christ throughout His ministry. Those that stayed with Him constantly were those who promoted and followed His doctrines.

What Christ is actually telling His true disciples in Matthew 28:19, is to disciple, or to teach, all nations. He is telling them to go out and educate and school people in the word of God and the practice of God's law. The true intent of this passage becomes a little vague, due to the way it has been translated.

The Fenton translation of Matthew 28:18-20, is much closer to the original Greek and provides a greater understanding of what Christ is saying here.

Matthew 28:18

¹⁸ Then Jesus, approaching them, spoke, saying, "Every power has been given to Me in heaven, and upon earth. ¹⁹ Go you out, therefore, and instruct all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and then I am with you through all time, even until the completion of the age."

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The Wuest translation of the New Testament also expands on this passage and conveys a clearer meaning of Christ's intent.

Matthew 28:18

¹⁸⁻²⁰ And Jesus, having come, spoke to them, saying, There was given to me all authority in heaven and upon earth. Having gone on your way therefore, teach all the nations, making them your pupils, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to be attending to carefully, holding firmly to, and observing all, whatever things I enjoined upon you. And behold, as for myself, with you I am all the days until the consummation of the age.

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Christ's intent is not to literally make disciples, but **to disciple**, to teach, to instruct, to educate and to nurture and support. Discipling someone does not cause some sort of instantaneous transformation, it is a process, just as conversion is a process. It is not something that just happens instantly, or something that occurs in a moment, it happens over a period of time. You cannot just lay hands on someone and transform them. It takes patience, wisdom and discernment, and it takes the Holy Spirit, because it involves a transformation of the mind and the heart. We **do not make** disciples...God does!

We are powerless on our own. We can guide and support and help, but it is God ultimately that changes the heart. It takes an opening of the mind and an understanding provided by God, to those who are truly seeking Him, to begin to understand His word. God inspires the hunger for the spiritual food that He provides, however He provides it and along with that He grants understanding of His word to those who truly seek the truth and truly long to understand.

1 Corinthians 2:14

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul tells us here that it is not natural for man to receive the truth from God. There is a spiritual process involved. God does the calling...God makes the selection; God is the one who puts the thought into someone's mind to respond to Him and God opens the mind to understand what He is giving. God draws whom He chooses to Christ.

John 6:44

44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, '*And they shall all be taught by God.*' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

This is a partnership between God and His Son. It is a deliberate effort on their part and it is the method that God uses to call people into His service. Where are we told to go out and to beg and to plead with people to turn their lives over to God? The answer is that we are not and we just read why...that is God's job! Are we smarter than God? Do we know the entirety of God's plan in every detail? Do we know someone's heart? Do we know how to open someone's mind and inspire a hunger and a thirst for God's word and God's way of life? God knows how things will happen and who He wants and where He wants them.

We just read Christ's own words and He gave God all of the credit for those who come to Him. Christ understood very well how the whole process works and His part in it, God does the calling and the opening of the mind and then those who respond come to Christ. God prepares them to receive what He wants them to understand and then each individual takes what they have been given and decides how to act on it. God prepares a place for each person if they will accept it.

1 Corinthians 12:18

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? (each person has their part and their place) 20 But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another.

God is very methodically choosing those whom He will call in this phase of His plan. There is a very specific purpose and reasoning behind what God is doing at this time. It is a blessing beyond belief that God has called each one of us and revealed His truth to us. I hope that we all understand that and never take it for granted. God has already worked all of this out ahead of time and all things are progressing exactly as He wants them to. God has had a plan from the very beginning and everything is steadily moving forward towards the culmination of that plan.

James 1:16

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

On the Day of Pentecost, after Christ's resurrection, the apostles were gathered as they had been told and an incredible scene was witnessed by all who were there. God's power was poured out on them and Peter stood and preached a powerful sermon. After the first Passover, Israel received the physical law at Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost. Now, after the fulfillment of the Passover, after Christ had become our Passover for all time, the spiritual law of God was received and God poured out His power on them and His law was written in their hearts and minds.

Acts 2:36

³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel (notice he is speaking to all of Israel, not just the Jews) know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart (Why were they cut to the heart? Because God opened their minds and made them receptive to Peter's message. God gave them the understanding!), and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"(instruct us, teach us, show us).

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, (Notice what it says here!) as many as the Lord our God will call." (God has to be doing the calling!)

When I first began to understand God's word and God began to open my mind to all of the things that He wanted me to see, I wanted to share it with everyone! I was overjoyed and felt like I had just discovered the greatest treasure and the greatest truth in the entire world and I had. My first thought was that everyone needed to know this! I tried to tell my family and I tried to share it with friends. I tried to share it with others I knew who said they were Christians, but guess what? They did not understand at all, in fact some of them were hostile to what I wanted to share with them and did not want to hear any of it at all.

I just could not understand that. Here I was letting them in on the greatest truth and knowledge that they could ever know, or possess in their lifetimes and they were not even interested at all! I could tell that some of them listened just to humor me and then changed the subject as soon as possible. It took a while for that to sink in and for me to understand why they were not completely overjoyed and receptive to God's truth as I was. It is because God was not calling them! You just cannot understand God's truth unless He wants you to! People will deny the truth of God's word even when you plainly show them in scripture the proof of what you are saying. God has to open the mind for things to happen. When I lost a job over the Sabbath, one of my Christian friends gave me a sermon on why I was wrong to observe the Sabbath and hold on to it so tightly.

Many people believe that Christ's mission on earth was a big evangelistic campaign. Contrary to what all of those people believe, Christ did not intentionally go around trying to convert people; that was not His purpose in coming here. He preached and He taught God's word and about God's kingdom. Some responded, while others ridiculed and mocked Him and even called for His death. Christ's primary purpose was not to bring the masses to salvation. How many people were actually converted during Christ's ministry?

Acts 1:4

⁴ And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; ⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So here is a very important event, so important that Christ commanded His disciples not to leave Jerusalem, until the promise was fulfilled. They were all to remain there and wait for what was coming.

Acts 1:12

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of James*. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Matthias Chosen

(*cf. Ps 109:8*)

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said,

So here we see that out of all the people who had heard Christ's teaching, out of all of those who had seen the miracles He performed, out of all of those who had followed Him wherever He went, there was about a hundred and twenty gathered there with the disciples. If Christ's main purpose for coming to this earth was to get everyone here saved, then you would have to say that during the time He was actually here, He was not very successful was He?

People can have a superficial understanding of God's truth. You can be taught the basics of salvation. You can be baptized and you can be taught how to recite a prayer and to memorize scripture, but without God's spirit and the understanding that He grants to those whom He is calling, you cannot understand the mysteries of God and the purpose of what He is doing on this earth and the future that is in store for all of mankind.

Those things are of the utmost importance, you have to understand what God is doing and how. The truths of God are spoken of as mysteries several times in scripture. It is important that we understand God's plan for man and how He is bringing it about, because it helps to keeps us involved and moving forward.

It gives us the faith and the hope that we need to never, ever give up and to look to the fulfillment of God's promises. God has promised us an incredible future, there will be rewards for us and it is just simply not being offered to everyone on earth at this time. That does not mean that those whom God has chosen and who have responded are better than anyone else, but God has chosen them for reasons that only He knows and they have believed and have faith in Him, His word and His promises which can never fail.

1 Corinthians 2:6

⁶ However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹ But as it is written:

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

¹⁰ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Christ often used parables in teaching the principles of God and of His kingdom and of His own future. Not all of the people who were at these different gatherings understood the teaching and the lessons that were contained within His parables. The disciples did not understand why Christ did not just speak plainly to the people and they asked Him why He spoke in parables.

Matthew 13:11

¹¹ He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given (this is spiritual discernment). ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

*'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;*

*¹⁵ For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'*

¹⁶ But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

God was not calling everyone there at that time and it was not His intent that everyone would respond to Christ's teaching and it is still that way today. There are many people that hear the word of God and the truth of God, yet it still means nothing to them. There are many people that understand the truth about the Sabbath, but they still refuse to change their day of worship.

Philip had been selected as a deacon and was ordained to that position, but God had other plans for him. God used Philip as an evangelist and he went about his job enthusiastically. There are a couple of examples in scripture of Philip going out to preach and evangelize and especially there is one very interesting account where Philip has an encounter with an Ethiopian.

Acts 8:26

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

You can give someone the tools, but they are meaningless unless they understand how to use them. There is a Chinese proverb that says "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime". There is a lot of truth to that. Just because you give someone a handful of wrenches, it does not make him a mechanic.

Discipling is a process and if you are going to be involved in discipling someone than you have to be committed and you have to be prepared to answer a lot of questions. You cannot just give someone the tools and then just walk away; there is more to it than that and even more so if you are discipling someone with whom you already have an acquaintance.

God sent Philip specifically to this place and at this specific time to meet up with the eunuch and to work with him. The eunuch had been reading a prophecy of Christ in Isaiah, but was unable to understand it completely. Philip began explaining the word of God and preached Jesus to him. The eunuch believed and wanted to be baptized.

37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."

And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

The eunuch went on his way rejoicing because his mind had been opened and now he understood the truth of God's word. He was on his way to a truly meaningful relationship with God. The eunuch was truly seeking God and God responded by opening his mind to understand and to believe what he was being shown.

Not everyone is so open and accepting of God's word. We cannot force anyone to respond to God's truth. It is pointless to try and bring God's word to those who are not interested and in some cases, openly hostile to God; there will be future opportunities for many of them. God's word should not be forced on those who are not interested. Some of the greatest examples from the gospels are of those who came to Christ willingly.

Remember the leper and the centurion of Matthew 8? The paralytic in Matthew 9 and also the ruler whose little daughter had just died and the woman who had the bleeding problem that came to Him as He was going to the ruler's house? There are many more examples as well; all of these came to Him willingly, because they believed on Him.

Christ already knew that the message the apostles would bring would not be popular. He knew there were those who would reject them and persecute them. He knew that ultimately they would all pay a heavy price for being His followers and preaching His word and doctrines. Christ gave His disciples instructions to follow when the word they were bringing was rejected.

Matthew 10:11

¹¹ "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. ¹² And when you go into a household, greet it. ¹³ If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

God takes the rejection of His word very seriously. Many of the prophets of old were rejected and driven out, because the people did not want to hear what God had to say. People who are involved in a life of sin do not want to hear that they are doing wrong; they do not want their shortcomings pointed out to them. The message that Jesus Christ brought was not popular at all and He was openly hated and despised. God's word is precious, it is holy and true and not to be treated casually and with disrespect.

Matthew 7:6

⁶ "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

Christ's meaning here is clear. God's word is not to be taken where it is not wanted. It is not to be squandered, or wasted, or sown where there is no hope of it sprouting. In other words, it would not be wise to stand up in a middle of a mosque and try to preach Christ to those people. That is the meaning He is trying to convey here. God will reach those people in a different way and a different time.

Discipling means setting a good example, there is no room for hypocrisy in someone who teaches God's word. Christ set the example for all to follow. He lived a sinless life overcoming the weakness of His flesh and then gave Himself freely for all of mankind, not just those that are chosen and called at this time. James gives a warning about those who desire to be teachers.

James 3:1

¹ My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

That is a very sobering statement and one that should be considered very carefully. I take that very seriously. There are a lot of false ministers and false teachers out there, that will have some very serious charges to answer to.

1 John 2:3

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. ⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Christ said that people were to be taught to observe all things that He had commanded. It is important that people understand the full word and truth of God, so that they come to the same knowledge and understanding that God desires for all of us to have. The Sabbath and the Holy Days are a very important part of understanding God's plan for all of mankind, since by observing them we are rehearsing and kept in remembrance of God's plan every year.

Sometimes we need to stop and reach back and remember how wonderful and exciting it was to start to understand God's Holy Days and His Sabbath, the truth about His Spirit that lives in us all, about the millennium and the resurrections and the knowledge that there will still be a chance for people in the future. I still learn new things all the time. I was just going back over the Exodus and connected some new things with Passover that I had not seen before. It is awesome and people need to learn all of these things to truly connect with God and His Son.

Matthew 5:17

¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

To disciple someone is to teach them...to educate them...to instruct them and to guide them. It is something very important and not to be taken lightly or approached in the wrong way, or with the wrong spirit. We all have different spiritual gifts and not all of us are teachers and we are not all equipped to go out and to teach others. God has given us different gifts as it pleases Him and it is all for the good of the whole, for the edification of the body.

Ephesians 4:11

¹¹ And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

So, how do you make disciples? Well first of all, you do not really “make” them you teach them and guide them. Discipling is a process and it can be a lengthy process. It involves education and commitment and growth, but the way that you move that process forward is this:

To teach sound doctrine, set a good example, be ready with an answer for the hope that lies within you, provide a loving and nurturing environment, be committed and above all, let God’s Spirit guide you in everything that you say and do. We can’t make disciples, only God can do that, but we can play a part in that process!