

AHOW 2022 RETREAT BREAKOUT

THE MAKING OF DISCIPLES

INTRODUCTION

Today, all over the world, the followers of Christ are known as Christians. But who is a Christian? Where does the word Christian come from? Interestingly, the early Christians did not call themselves Christians, neither did Jesus use the word Christians to describe His followers. From the account of the scriptures, the believers were actually named Christians by non-Christians. While the record seems to indicate it was used in a positive way, it was still a nickname given by gentiles to believers. The word Christian comes from the Greek word “christianos” which simply means follower of Christ.

“And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Acts 11:26 (NKJV)

Before this time, the most common word the early believers used to describe themselves is the word disciple. (Luke 6:13). It was started by Jesus; His followers were first called disciples. The choice of the word disciple is a very significant one, it was meant to describe God’s intent for us as Christ followers. The word disciple comes from the Greek word, “mathētēs” which simply means a learner or a student. Primarily we are called to learn from Christ. (Matthew 11:28-29)

Most people believe a disciple is a follower (probably because of the religious context), but in reality, it means a student—as in, “one who studies.” It is very much like an apprenticeship, where someone is learning a trade or craft from a master. The goal of Jesus is to raise disciples who will in turn raise other disciples. The assignment He gave to the church is not just to raise members but to make disciples. That is why this subject is a very important to study and fully understand.

Matthew 28:19-20 “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.

In this retreat, we will try to understand our call as disciples of Christ, the marks of a disciple, and some of what Jesus expects from us, His disciples.

SESSION 1: THE CALL TO BE DISCIPLES

As believers, we are not just called to simply accept Christ, attend church faithfully, and live our lives as we please. We are called to become disciples.

Discuss your understanding of the word disciple.

The only kind of Christian who can glorify God best is called a disciple. A disciple is a committed follower of Jesus Christ, committed to learning from Him (through the Holy Spirit and others) to master His way of life and to teach others to do the same. Jesus commands His disciples to make disciples because only disciples can reflect the kingdom lifestyle and penetrate the world. Many Christians think they are just called to believe, but Jesus called us to a higher calling. That call is the call to discipleship.

What Does it Mean to Be a Disciple?

The call to discipleship is a call to become a full partner with Christ, energized by the Holy Spirit, and fulfilling our destiny, and doing our part in the Great Commission. Being a disciple requires a greater level of commitment than just believing. Of course, it takes believing to become a Christian, but it takes commitment to become a disciple. This is what Jesus refers to in Luke 9:23-26:

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? 26 Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” Luke 9:23-26 (NKJV)

From this passage, Jesus makes three clear demands on anyone who wants to become a disciple. The demands are specific and unambiguous. You either take them or leave them. They are a must for anyone who wants to follow Jesus as a disciple.

1. Deny self.
2. Take up your cross daily.
3. Follow Him.

Discussion Questions

1. *Discuss what each of these demand mean*
2. *What does Jesus mean by losing your life to save it in verse 24?*
3. *Why do you think this concept is difficult to understand and practice by many people?*

Denial of Self

The Greek verb translated here as “to deny” is *aparneomai*. Although this word can simply mean to deny the truth of a statement, it almost always has overtones of association or connection to a person. Denial in the New Testament is the intentional disassociation from a relationship with a particular person. Another translation might be to “disown” or “renounce.” For example, this is the verb used when Peter “denies” Jesus. He denies that he knows Jesus or has any association with him.

Self-denial, then, is intentional disowning of the self, or stepping away from relationship with the self as primary. Jesus is not making a statement about whether the self is bad, but about who we are most closely associated with. Who is our primary allegiance to—Him, or ourselves?

The call to be a disciple is a call to deny self – to no longer live for ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:15 “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

The call to deny self goes beyond abandoning a life of sin. While it is true that sin is a product of self, self is much more than sin, it is stubborn or willful adherence to one's own desires or ideas. *“Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23 (NLT)*

Dying to self does not mean self-mutilation or self-punishment. It means surrendering our own will to His will. The will of Jesus becomes more important than my will and His desires more important than my desires.

Taking up Your Cross Daily

Let's begin with what Jesus didn't mean. Many people interpret “cross” as some burden they must carry in their lives: a strained relationship, a thankless job, a physical illness. With self-pitying pride, they say, “That's my cross I have to carry.” These are not what Jesus meant when He said, “take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Remember, Jesus made this statement about taking up one's cross before he was crucified. Although the metaphor would certainly gain a fuller meaning after his death, it must have meant something to his listeners beforehand as well.

At the time of the New Testament, crucifixion was reserved specifically for offenders who had rebelled against authority. To “take up one's cross” referred to the practice of forcing a condemned person to carry

the cross beam to his execution site. This showed that although he had rebelled against authority, the condemned person was now so completely conquered that his last act in life would be to carry the instrument of his demise to the place of his death. It was a show of complete and utter submission. A call to bear one's cross as part of following Jesus, then, is a call to be as submitted to Christ as the condemned criminal was to his death.

Therefore, when Jesus calls for self-denial and cross-bearing, he's claiming authority. Following Christ means disowning the self and giving allegiance to Him instead. And it means giving him allegiance down to the very depths of our being.

Follow Him

Our modern-day definition of "following someone" is very different from what it was two thousand years ago, especially in the western world. Today, to follow someone is to be their fan, follow them on social media, like their post, buy their memorabilia, etc.

When we turn our attention to what the Bible shows us about how to follow Jesus in our daily life, two things stand out immediately: understanding and obeying his teaching and following his example. Of course, we already learned that following His example is impossible without denial of self and carrying our cross. Denial of self is necessary because the teachings of Jesus run contrary to the desires of our flesh. Carrying the cross is necessary because the teachings of Jesus run contrary to the world's system.

1 Peter 2:21 - To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

SESSION 2: THE MARKS OF A DISCIPLE

One of the challenges of today's Christianity is that it is shallow and hardly makes much difference in people's lives. Many surveys that measure moral values sadly reveal that Christians hardly perform better than unbelievers in most surveys. Whether they look at the issue of attitude toward sexual purity, cohabiting, commitment to marriage, or integrity, many of these surveys reveal that Christians don't do much better than their unbelieving counterparts. Why is this so? I believe it is because the church has abandoned its primary mission of making disciples and has replaced it with the easier job of making good members. We must counter our culture's gospel of consumerism with the true gospel that produces disciples.

Christianity is not a fan club. Jesus does not want cheerleaders or groupies. Following Christ is not about t-shirts, slogans, or hashtags. Jesus calls us to be children of his Father. He calls us to abandon a life of self and become His disciples. Unfortunately, many churches today are content with producing good church members, whereas we are commanded to make growing disciples. What is the difference?

A good church member could be defined as someone who:

- Attends church regularly
- Serves in ministry
- Give consistently and sacrificially
- May even lead in some capacity of the other

A growing disciple could be defined as someone who:

- Arranges his or her life to be with Jesus
- Intentionally pursues the character of Jesus
- Increasingly loves what Jesus loves
- Is committed to the mission of Jesus because of his or her devotion to Jesus

The sad thing is that a person can be an excellent church member and yet not be a disciple. In fairness, growing disciples will automatically be good church members... true disciples will attend, serve, and give faithfully. However, those things are secondary to their life in Christ, not primary. Serving, attendance, giving, etc., flow out of their discipleship (total commitment) to Jesus, not their commitment to the church. The church must return to the business of making disciples.

Are you a disciple or just a good church member?

So, what are the marks of a true disciple? How do we recognize and differentiate a disciple from just a good church member, and what lifestyle must one embrace to become a disciple?

I. A disciple is committed to lifelong learning

2 Timothy 2:15 *"Study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman [tested by trial] who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth." (AMP)*

The word disciple comes from the word discipline. Webster defines a disciple as "a pupil or follower of any teacher or school." A true disciple is not just a student or a learner but a follower who applies what he has learned. Discipline comes from the Latin word "disco," which means to learn or get to know, a direct kind of acquaintance with something or someone. Discipline refers to the process by which one learns a way of life. A disciple was like an apprentice who was learning a trade or craft from a master. Such learning required a relationship between the master who knew the way of life (discipline) and a learner (a disciple). Within this relationship, the master leads a learner through a process (the discipline) until the learner can imitate or live like the master.

A true disciple of Jesus Christ is not just satisfied with attending church regularly; he is committed to lifelong learning. Continuous learning takes three different forms:

- Ordered learning - well-designed path of study of a discipline, which allows for a solid knowledge base to be laid and a serious path to be followed for long term mastery of the discipline or subject. An example of this is AHOW School of Discipleship using *The First Principles*.
- Regular discussion of scriptures with others. Acts 17:17
- Personal commitment study of scriptures and spiritual books. 2 Timothy 2:15

II. A disciple is committed to acquisition of wisdom

Proverbs 4:7 “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

There is a difference between learning that is focused on acquiring knowledge and one that is focused on acquiring wisdom. Knowledge is information in the head; wisdom is a way of life. The true mark of disciples is not just how many scriptures we know (though that is very important) but our commitment to applying them in our lives.

In Proverbs 4:1–8, he tells his son that he should pursue wisdom above all else. And it should be a lifelong pursuit. Therefore, our goal in education, and especially in biblical education, ought not to be just acquiring knowledge but to process biblical truth in a way that produces wisdom—which centrally involves developing the ability to think biblically.

A true disciple constantly examines his or her life in the light of the word of God. He recognizes that *“everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”* Matthew 7:24

Discussion Questions

1. *With so much access to information today, why is there such a low level of knowledge of scripture among to believers us today.*
2. *What is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom. Discuss practical ways to convert knowledge gained to wisdom in our lives.*

III. A disciple is willing to accept the discipline of the Lord

Hebrews 12:5-6 “And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.

1 Corinthians 9:27 “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. NKJV

It is not a coincidence that the words disciple and discipline look so similar. A “disciple” is one who is “disciplined.” This can refer to

- Self-discipline, as when Paul says he disciplines his body to keep it under control (1 Corinthians 9:27).
- receiving discipline or correction from others when we go astray, whether from parents (Ephesians 6:4), other believers (Galatians 6:1)
- Receiving discipline from God (Hebrews 12:5, 7–8, 11). Discipline, especially in the sense of correction, is vital for being a disciple.

Discussion Questions

- *What do you understand by the concept of being disciplined by the Lord?*
- *How does a believer know when they are being disciplined by the Lord?*

Jesus calls believers to confront one another as part of the more extensive process of church discipline (Matthew 18:15–20). Correcting a brother or sister when he or she sins is a biblical requirement. So is

accepting the correction of others and repenting of our sin. In fact, one who fails to accept correction is to be treated as—and understood to be—an unbeliever (v. 17).

IV. A disciple understands the need for accountability and spiritual community

Galatians 6:1-2 “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

1 John 1:7 – “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Discipleship is not possible without a spiritual community and accountability. In fact, every disciple must have a "discipler," who is someone who holds them accountable in their work with Christ. Some people will use the word mentor instead of a discipler. While there is overlap between the roles of a mentor and discipler, there are still a lot of differences. In general, a mentor's role is to help you achieve what you already want to accomplish in a faster and most efficient way; a discipler's role is to help you to be more like Jesus by loving, teaching, counseling, and confronting, when necessary, (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

A spiritual community is also a necessity in discipleship. The Christian life as described in the Bible is only possible in the context of a community. There are so many “one another” passages in the Bible (John 13:34, Romans 12:10, Romans 12:16, Romans 14:19; Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:19) that make a community a necessity for a true disciple.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss more similarities and differences in the role of a mentor and a discipler.
2. Do you think someone can be a true disciple without a church community?

V. A disciple is committed to the Great Commission

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus instructs His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

This biblical mandate, commonly known as the Great Commission, instructs Christians to move outward and make disciples, establishing them in faith and initiating them into fellowship. Discipleship is at the heart of the Great Commission. The Great Commission is written to the disciples, and the thrust of it is to make disciples. Hence a true disciple is committed to the Great Commission.

The Great Commission reveals the priority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When you become a disciple of Jesus, you will adopt His priorities. You will support it and advance it. Anything involving bringing new souls to the kingdom, whether locally or in faraway countries, will excite you.

SESSION 3: BECOMING A DISCIPLE MAKER

The Great Commission, in essence, describes the primary assignment of the church: to make disciples of all nations. The church is not in the business of making members but making disciples. But who is the church? Is the church a building or just its leadership? Every sincere believer will agree the clear answer to these questions is NO. The church is neither the building nor its pastor; it is all of us. For “All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Hence every one of us must be involved in carrying out the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20 “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Remember, Jesus directed the Great Commission to the disciples. The disciples are called to make more disciples, which leads to the multiplication of disciples. This is the essence of the Great Commission. Let’s look at the two critical elements of the Great Commission:

I. Bringing New Believers to Christ – “Baptizing them”

To baptize is to lead new believers to declare Jesus publicly. Of course, the first step to disciple-making is to lead the individual to the saving knowledge of Christ. Baptism finalizes that process for an individual and incorporates them into the body of Christ.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:27 (NKJV)

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink [a]into one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV)

Every disciple must be involved in and committed to leading the unsaved to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ by sharing the gospel and facilitating the process of bringing them to Christ. Unfortunately, this is another area where the church is failing badly and another sign that the church is not raising disciples. According to the data from the evangelism statistics by bible.org:

- Ninety-five percent of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ.
- Eighty percent of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ.
- Less than two percent are involved in the ministry of evangelism.
- Seventy-one percent do not give toward the financing of the Great Commission.

If you want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be committed to soulwinning. Here are ways a disciple can be involved in bringing new believers to Christ:

1. Living strategically; letting your lifestyle make the gospel attractive - *Titus 2:10 - and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*”
2. Sharing the gospel to the unsaved. *Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*
3. Practice “Come and See” - facilitate an unsaved person’s encounter with Christ by inviting them to church - *John 4:28-29 “The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, 29 “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?”*

Acts 1:8 is also part of the Great Commission: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The Great Commission is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be Christ’s witnesses, fulfilling the Great Commission in our cities (Jerusalem), in our states and countries (Judea and Samaria), and anywhere else God sends us (to the ends of the earth).

Discussion Questions

1. *Why do you think less believers participate in soulwinning and discipleship today?*
2. *What are the things you think the church can do to get more people to participate*

II. Teaching them to obey everything He commanded

Not only must a disciple be involved in soul winning, but a disciple must also be involved in discipling the new converts. In fact, being disciplined and discipling others is the lifestyle of a disciple. Apostle Paul addresses this in his writing to His disciple Timothy in the passage below:

2 Timothy 2:2 “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. (NLT)

From this scripture, we can clearly learn that:

- Every disciple must be someone being taught
- Every disciple must be someone teaching others
- Every disciple must be someone teaching others to teach others

We can call this "layered discipleship,"; as you are being taught, you are also teaching someone. The teaching being referred to here is not just teaching that takes place on the pulpit from the pastor; it is teaching that takes place on the pews and in between, in living rooms and zoom meetings. It is what I will call 360 degrees teaching.

Colossians 3:16 “Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.” (NLT)

1 Thess. 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (NLT)

It also involves holding each other accountable to practice what is being taught by encouraging, loving, praying for, correcting, and confessing to one another. (James 5:16, Hebrews 3:13, James 5:16) This is how “the message about Christ, in all its richness,” can fill our lives.

Remember, the goal of Christian education, especially in biblical education, is not just to acquire knowledge but to process biblical truth in a way that produces wisdom—which centrally involves developing the ability to think biblically. This process is better done as a community through apprenticeship, discussion, debates, etc. Growing in Christ involves helping each other to grow through “layered discipleship”

Are you being helped by someone to grow?

Are you helping someone to grow?

Are you helping someone to help someone to grow?

Acts 17:11 “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

The Berean church was considered nobler because the message taught was being discussed, examined, and confirmed by them daily.

In conclusion, every believer must be someone being disciplined by another person while also discipling someone else. Being a disciple maker means you are actively involved in the process of bringing the unsaved to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and also in the process of establishing them in their faith while being disciplined yourself by others. This is what the Great Commission is about; DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES.

How can we as a church community help each other to grow, learn more from each other and practice top and bottom discipleship more?