

Making Disciples

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in My name ... teaching them to observe all things I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19 & 20).

'Jesus did miracles and taught until the day He was received up into heaven, after He had given commandments through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these apostles He showed Himself alive after He suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God' (Acts 1:1 to 3).

Making disciples of all new believers is a direct command of Jesus Himself, spoken forty days after He rose from the dead and just before He ascended to heaven. There is no verse in the Bible instructing us to plan outreaches but we are told to make disciples and to baptise everyone in Jesus' name then we must teach new converts to obey the commands Jesus gave the twelve disciples. People everywhere have to adhere to the doctrine of the Lord and to set an example by good behaviour. 'Teach the things which fit sound doctrine ... in all things show yourself an example of good works ... showing all good fidelity to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things' (Titus 2:1, 7 & 10). Mature disciples are to teach new converts to be disciples and thus produce more disciples. Christians must grow spiritually and produce spiritual fruit. Eleven of the twelve disciples became apostles and their new converts continued the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42).

In the days of the early church, the concept of water baptism was not new to the Jews. Jews had used the ceremonial bath (a mikveh) for cleansing themselves before the Sabbath Day for hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth. They would bathe in the specially designed bath to wash away sins before the Sabbath and before offering a sacrifice (Numbers 19:7). Mikveh was the word used to describe the ceremonial baths full of living (flowing) water (mayim hayim) where 3,000 new converts were baptised in a single day (Acts 2:41). The Hebrew word for the act of being plunged into water is 'Tevilah'. What the Jewish new converts would not have been used to, was the baptism was a once only occasion to symbolise their death to their old lives and their resurrection to new life and they no longer had to use the mikveh before every Sabbath because baptism was the complete spiritual cleansing, and that was a real challenge to some Jewish people. So too, the Jews did not need to sacrifice an animal to be righteous, they only needed to repent and believe Jesus was their One Atoning Sacrifice for all time (1 John 4:10). It was a big step for some Jews to follow Jesus. Once Jews became believers in Jesus, discipleship was no obstacle. Studying the Tenach (Bible) was part of their lives, they had good morals, they understood the pressures of being 'different' and they were aware of what God wanted from them. Obeying a righteous and holy God was the way they lived. Another real challenge they had to face was the transition from the Law as a means of righteousness, to grace and constant forgiveness without the need for any animal sacrifices. Jesus did not do away with the Laws of Moses, but He did do away with the Law as a means to achieving righteousness (Romans 10:4). We can only achieve righteousness by faith, by accepting the blood and cross of Jesus.

The Gentiles were and still are entirely different from the Jews. Many Gentiles in the early church responded to the Gospel and were baptised but teaching them to obey God, the Bible and come under church discipline was an unending challenge. They had lived spiritually dead lives, they worshipped idols and false gods, they were promiscuous, undisciplined, thieves, criminals and many disliked the Jews. Some of these problems with Gentile converts are mentioned in the New Testament. Gentiles today are not all that different than they were 2,000 years ago. Gentiles in our day do not worship wooden or clay idols, they worship other idols like movie stars, singers, sports competitors, their pets and various forms of materialism. Until the 1960's most people went to church and were taught Christian values in the home and at school. Unfortunately for society, those values are rarely being taught and children are growing up to be lawless. They do not have the basic Bible beliefs so when they do go to church, they find it extremely difficult to adjust. Sadly, many people bring their false 'gods' (of materialism etc) with them into church and they live a life of constant compromise.

What exactly do we teach new Christians? They have to be taught to study the Bible for themselves and not rely on the pastor for all their scripture teaching. They need to know the importance of praise and worship, prayer, baptism in water and in the Holy Spirit, fellowship with other Christians, the spiritual aspects of communion, tithing, not to compromise with sin and like the early disciples were taught right from the beginning, to expect trials, suffering and afflictions (Acts 14:22). Jesus said, "Enter in (to heaven) by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to eternal life! Few are those who find it" (Matthew 7:13). Two different forms of Christianity has emerged and the gulf between them is growing wider and louder. One form is the 'Broad Christianity' where there is constant sin and compromise, money

grabbing, hyper-grace teaching, King James only theology, they teach prosperity theology, rapture theology, they ignore the needs in Israel, teaching instead the replacement theology, they accept evolution, abortion, homosexual behaviour, same-sex marriage and other abominations. They live lives of individualism, materialism, consumerism and reject any notion to deny oneself. They will not submit to God nor will they obey the guidelines set out in the Bible. They will not switch off their 'phones during church, they will not give up smoking or alcohol. They have no idea how to obey Jesus and most have no desire to obey God. They refuse to 'Pick up their cross and follow Jesus', rendering their own lives spiritually worthless. By seeking to have their own lives the way they want it, may cause them to loose out on eternal life with God. However, if we give up our lives in submission to God, then we will find eternal life (Matthew 10:38 & 39). They believe 'once saved; always saved' and some live lives worse than people who never go to church. They believe if they suffer hardship then it is always the devil's fault but will not examine their hearts to search out sin. They are consistent spiritual babes who will not grow up or mature in God. Those 'Broad' Christians are increasing all over the earth like an unholy flood. However, where the devil sends a flood of unrighteousness, the Lord will raise up a standard against it. 'When the enemy will come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him' (Isaiah 59:19).

The other form is the 'Narrow Christianity' where people live righteously. They know in their hearts, Jesus is the One and Only Way, Truth and Life (John 14:6). He is the only way to heaven and these Christians live sacrificial lives, being obedient to His every Word, evangelising wherever possible, living lives that honour God and give Him glory. They cleave to that which is good and abhor evil (Romans 12:9). They deny themselves, carrying the cross of Jesus everywhere (Matthew 16:24). These Christians are very unpopular, especially amongst 'Broad' Christians. Narrow Christians must teach Broad Christians how to obey Jesus' commandments. We must make the truth known to them; show them if they continue on their pathway, they could be lost for eternity. Jesus told us the way to heaven is to walk on a very narrow path. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The only way to find the 'narrow gate' is by submitting to God, reading the Bible regularly, spending much time in prayer, getting closer to God, and obeying the guidelines set out in the Bible – keeping His commandments. If the Bible says, "Do not do that," then we must not do that. If He says, "Go and do this," then we must go and do it. What ever He tells us to do, we must do it (John 2:5). We must obey Him, not in legalism but in love. Churches need discipleship training and new Christians need to be willing to be taught and they need to accept, sometimes there will be pressure.

Training new Christians to be disciples is vitally important for their spiritual growth, for the growth of a stable church, for the sake of evangelism, and so well-trained disciples are thoroughly equipped to go out and reach the spiritually lost. Disciples must be taught how to study the Word of God for themselves. 'Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and for instruction in righteousness, so the man (or woman) of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16 & 17). There are some churches who provide mentors, however those same mentors will not be there on the mission field or in a different church should a new disciple be led to fellowship somewhere else, so it is better to teach a new disciple to stand on their own spiritual feet, depending solely on the Holy Spirit for guidance (John 16:13). Some churches have ministries to be sure people remain involved, making it less likely a busy person will become idle and fall away, but do they become busy people or disciples?

New disciples need practical teaching in church every week, not gimmicks or to be 'entertained'. They need to be taught how to be silent so they can hear the small voice of God. He does not yell or speak through storms or raging fires (1 Kings 19:11 & 12). God's voice is usually a whisper, just a hint or an inner thought that gives peace. New disciples need to learn how to hear and discern the Lord's instructions so they can obey. Giving a new Christian an easy ministry could help them learn the ways of God and the discipline of their new church life. They need to be encouraged to exercise their faith so it grows. Teaching new disciples to learn God's ways, not just His acts can be a stabilising factor that will last a lifetime and will help them get to know God in a deeper way and so we can be pleasing to Him. The Israelites knew God's actions, but Moses wanted more. He wanted to know God's personal way of doing things; how He reacted, how He worked. "If I have found favour in Your sight, please show me now Your ways so I may know You, so I may find favour in Your sight" (Exodus 33:13). Jesus spent over three years training His disciples. God intends for all His people to have discipleship training. It becomes more important when people have had no childhood teaching on Christian values, principles and lifestyle. Every church needs to be actively teaching and discipline new converts, regardless of their age group. People in the 80's age group who come to know the Lord, are still babes in Jesus until they spiritually mature. Spiritual maturity has no age group. Some people who have been Christians for 60 years can have difficulties with their spiritual life, just as people who have been Christians for 60 days.

New disciples need to realise, when times are tough they cannot always blame the devil. Sometimes the Lord gives permission for evil spirits to annoy us like with Apostle Paul, who was buffeted by an evil spirit to keep him humble so he did not become proud of the revelations the Lord was giving him. 'By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations (given by God) and so I should not be exalted excessively (become proud), there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of satan to torment me so I should not be exalted excessively. Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times it might depart from me but He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses so the power of Jesus may rest on me' (2 Corinthians 12:7 to 9). There are times when God Himself uses very difficult circumstances to discipline and chastise us, and we are not to resent the discipline of the Lord, but submit to it, even rejoice in it. Chastening and scourging are very painful but as children of the Living God, we must endure it. 'Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you to test you as though a strange thing happened to you, but because you are partakers of the sufferings of Jesus, rejoice so at the revelation of His glory, you may also rejoice with exceeding joy' (1 Peter 4:12 & 13). 'My son, do not take lightly the chastening of the Lord nor faint when you are reproved by Him, for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline you endure? God deals with you as with children and what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ... All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been chastened' (Hebrews 12:5 to 11).

If new Christians think their new life in God is going to be an easy run, they must learn very quickly, living a true, narrow, disciplined Christian life is the hardest life on earth. The first thing they will have to learn to cope with is persecution. 'Yes, all who desire to live Godly in Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12). When we choose the Lord, our family may refuse to have contact with us. That can be devastating but Jesus said if we put anyone before Him we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37) so we must put the Lord first even if it does cost us our family. Many Christians are ostracised by their families and friends when they turn to Jesus. Parents sometimes reject their God-fearing children; adult children reject their parents; friends and neighbours turn away from new converts, just like Jesus said would happen if we confess our relationship with Him. Jesus said, "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death ... Do not think I came to send peace on the earth. I did not come to send peace, but a sword. I came to set a man at odds against his father, a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. The enemies of a believer will be those of their own household" (Matthew 10:21, 34 to 36). "Do you think I have come to give peace on the earth? I tell you no, but rather division. From now on there will be five in one house, divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12:51 to 53).

When one woman was asked by God to leave her seven children with her husband to go and preach the Gospel to a particular town in the US, the woman refused to go. After five of her children died, the woman agreed to go, fearing for the lives of her remaining two children. She went and preached the Gospel in the town and within a couple of years every person in the town were saved or had moved away. If Christians think God does not insist on obedience they need to think again. If we disobey God, He will take action. We must put Him before our families. God told another woman as a young orphaned teenager, it was not His will for her to marry and have children but to serve Him all her life and her eternal rewards would be great. The young woman happily agreed and went to tell her pastor, what she thought was rather exciting news. The pastor berated her and said God never told people that and told her to marry. Not having parents to turn to, she trusted the pastor. The woman did marry young and had children but over time she lost all her children. The woman now serves the Lord full time as a dedicated disciple and regrets listening to the pastor who had been wrong in his assumption. Had she obeyed God from the beginning, it would have saved her years of grief and heartache. A couple with three children were called to be missionaries in India. The couple obediently packed up, were prayed over and left for their mission field. For a few years all went well until some Hindus were enraged by the couple's success in leading many Hindus to Jesus. Hindus surrounded the husband and two sons and their car was set alight, killing the three of them. The devastated widow and her only remaining child, a beautiful daughter, continued doing what God had called them to do. When we are His disciples, He really does insist on unswerving, total commitment and absolute obedience, and it just might cost us our families. For anyone to think, "God would never do that," needs to study the Bible and see just what the Lord did expect from some dedicated people. Being a true disciple is extremely hard.

When our lives are truly dedicated to the Lord and His purposes, sometimes our lives can be very lonely and isolated. One reason is to keep us unstained with pleasures of this world, wholly dedicated to increasing the Kingdom of God and strengthening our relationship with the Father. The other reason for isolation is Broad Christians cannot understand our total dedication to the Lord and they back away, often telling us we are too 'radical' or too 'extreme'. The fact is, the Lord wants every person to be wholly dedicated to Him in every area of our lives. We must have one fact settled deeply in our hearts; we must deal directly with the Father and not with people. Those who obey that intense calling to live a disciplined life will be led into humility, service to Him and service to other people in ways that make Broad Christians cringe in disgust. For example, how many people would be prepared to rub soothing ointment on the foot of someone with gangrene, who had already lost two toes and the smell of the condition, overpowering? God will not allow Narrow Christians to follow Broad Christians but we must stay on the very narrow path He has lit up for us so we will in due time be able to enter the narrow gate of heaven. To stay on that narrow path brings eternal rewards and an extremely close relationship with Jesus. We must never measure our walk with the Lord by other people because our individual walk is unique to us. Many times we will see the Lord allowing other people to do things He has told us not to do. Other times we will see others do really good things for the Lord but He will say that is not for us. He has other plans for us.

Many Broad Christians stand up in church and boast about themselves, their work for God, their successes or they may be openly successful people, but the Holy Spirit keeps the Narrow Christians quiet about their ministry. The Lord may allow others to be honoured but He may keep Narrow Christians hidden so their fruit produces more fruit quietly in the shadows of other ministries. Other people may even receive credit for the hard work Narrow Christians have done, but that is okay because God knows all our works and they will be rewarded in due time. Some people may be great speakers and draw a crowd of thousands but the Lord keeps Narrow Christians small, humble and out of the limelight. When Narrow Christians seem to be forgotten, neglected, silenced, overlooked or disregarded, they can rejoice because they are counted worthy to suffer with Jesus. Some people are wealthy or may have money and financial assets left to them, but it is possible the Lord will keep His disciples poor so they will have to depend on Him for their every need. Remember, Jesus was once homeless (Luke 9:58). If a Christian starts off wealthy, there is every chance God will tell them to give it all away to follow Him (Matthew 19:21 & 22), even if it means a lifetime of poverty and constant moving around. The Holy Spirit keeps a strict watch over Narrow Christians and may rebuke them for the smallest things other Christians do all the time and they never feel convicted. He deals with His disciples in ways He never seems to deal with others, but they need to keep in mind, God is sovereign. He has a right to do with His own children whatever He pleases and He does not have to explain His actions to any human, although when we perpetually live in His close inner circle, He almost always tells us what He is doing and why. 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing unless He reveals His secrets to His servants' (Amos 3:7). People who have their own Godless agenda often regard Narrow Christians' good works as evil. Sometimes the things Jesus did and said were scorned by people and it was said the good works Jesus did was done by the devil (Matthew 12:24). When Narrow Christians are accused of being crazy, they can be comforted because some people thought Jesus had gone insane (Mark 3:21). When foolish bureaucrats thwart the Narrow Christian's purpose to help someone in need, when their own Godly desire is thwarted by a Broad Christian, when Christian advice is disregarded, when scriptural opinions are mocked, and when Narrow Christians can eventually take all this in their stride and are able to pray for them, the Narrow Christians have overcome and have won the victory. When they are able to cope with the sometimes difficult aspects of the will of God, they are His disciples.

Some people who live disciplined lives find it very hard to fit into a modern church that preaches a watered down Gospel with no anointing. Some pastors refuse to preach about sin and judgement and ignore the blood and cross of Jesus. Those churches are in apostasy and the congregations are riled by people who stand for the truth. They are more like hyped up circuses than church services that are meant to be based on the Bible. Some have evil, deceptive hoaxes like 'gold dust' falling from the ceilings, which has now been exposed as being fine gold-coloured plastic that can be bought in any toyshop. Those churches and the congregations are often watered down, lukewarm Broad Christians who live carnal lives, driving the genuine, deeply committed disciples away. Often disciples are accused of 'church hopping' when they cannot find a God-fearing church. What can genuine disciples do about this? They must realise, their relationship with God does not depend on any church. Their relationship with God is based on Jesus and depends on our willingness to seek God for ourselves. It is good to fellowship but when there are no genuine Christians around, we must rely on the Lord for our fellowship. Some genuine believers have actually been 'cursed' by pastors because they chose to leave the church rather than be tainted by the sin in the church. Those lukewarm churches sometimes have homosexuals in leadership or demon-possessed people in charge of prayer groups. One church had a paedophile in charge of the teen church and the head pastor refused to

remove him even after his evil actions were exposed. Jesus prophesied about those weak, powerless churches. He warned us some people would suffer terrible oppression, persecution, many would fall away from God, they would betray the genuine believers and only those people who endure to the end will be saved. Jesus referred to the lukewarm people as dead bodies or carcasses and the leaders as vultures swooping down, gathering together to devour them. 'They will deliver you up to oppression and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for My name's sake. Many will stumble and fall away and will deliver up one another and will hate one another. Many false prophets (pastors) will arise and will lead many astray. Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold but they who endure to the end will be saved ... Wherever the carcass is, that is where the vultures gather together' (Matthew 24:9 to 13 & 28). Lukewarm Christians have a tough judgement ahead of them. "I know your works (how people behave and what they do for God). You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15 & 16). We only have two choices; become disciples or become God's vomit.

A disciple is someone who has 'crucified' their desires and lives to please God. 'We have become united with Jesus in the likeness of His death and we will also be part of His resurrection. Our old life was crucified with Him so the body of sin might be done away with and we are no longer in bondage to sin' (Romans 6:5 & 6). 'I have been crucified with Jesus and it is no longer I who live, but Jesus living in me. That life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me ... Those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit ... I will not boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Galatians 2:20; 5:24 & 25; 6:14). Jesus did not want to die the terrible death of crucifixion but went ahead in obedience to God. Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup (of torture and death by crucifixion) from Me. But not My will but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). 'Jesus, in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and petitions with strong crying and tears to God who was able to save Him from death, and having been heard for His Godly fear though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things He suffered' (Hebrews 5:7 & 8). Disciples need to learn obedience by the things we suffer. Making disciples is always a challenge but mature Narrow Christians have no choice but to train them. It was a commandment from Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus is not something we claim, it is the way we live and something precious we need to share with others. It is only by the grace and mercy of God we have become disciples. Many people are called to be disciples but only few choose to go ahead and deny themselves because many believe the cost is too high (Matthew 22:14). Remember Jesus said only a few will find the narrow gate to eternal life. The world has many people who attend church, but there are not enough true disciples. This next story may or may not be true but the essence of discipleship is unmistakable.

A pastor we will call 'Jerry' had been invited to take the position of head pastor to a church with close to 10,000 parishioners. On his first day in the new church, before Jerry had been introduced to anybody, he changed out of his good clothing to make himself appear to be a poor homeless man. He mingled with the crowd as the church began filling with his new flock. Only three of the thousands of people said hello to him. He asked people for some loose change so he could buy some food but not one person would give him any money. He went inside the church to sit down at the front but was told to go and sit at the back. He greeted many people but received only stares and was frowned upon; everyone judging him by his appearance. As Jerry sat in the back of the church he listened to all of the church announcements then the elders went to the front and with excitement, introduced the new pastor of the church to the congregation. The congregation stood up and looked around, clapping with joy and anticipation as the man they thought to be homeless stood up and began to walk up the aisle to the front. Instantly the clapping stopped as everyone in the church stared. He walked up to the altar and took the microphone from the startled elders.

Jerry quoted from Matthew 25:34 to 46. 'The King will tell those on His right, "Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. When I was hungry you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me water. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me."

The righteous will ask Him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and gave You a drink? When did we see You as a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothed You? When did we see You sick or in prison and came to you?"

The King will answer, "Most certainly I tell you, when you did these things for one of the least of these My people, you did it for Me."

Then He will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you did not give Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me no water. I was

a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.”

Then they will also ask, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison and did not help you?”

The King will answer them, “Most certainly I tell you, when you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it for Me.” These people will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’.

After Jerry recited this passage of scripture he looked towards the congregation and told them what he had experienced that morning. Many began to weep and many heads were bowed in shame. Jerry said, “Today I see a gathering of people but not a church led by the Lord Jesus. The world has enough people but there are not enough disciples. When will you people become disciples?” Then he dismissed the church service until the following week.

Welcome to the difficult life of a true disciple. This is the reality of the life of a disciple. If we read the New Testament carefully we can see how much the apostles suffered. They were persecuted sometimes to death, they were hated by many, they were flogged, beaten, stoned, left for dead, imprisoned, chained up, shipwrecked, starved, they were thirsty, exiled and yet they kept on loving, obeying and worshipping God. Discipleship is not by any means an easy life and many people will reject us because of our commitment to Jesus. This is why Jesus said, “You will be hated by all men for My name's sake but those who endure to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). Only those disciples who endure their difficult life right to the end will be saved. Jesus did not say, those who enjoy an easy life would be saved. How many church-going people are true disciples and how many go because they are ‘religious’ or use church for their social scene? When unsaved people see our lives, would our life be enough to draw a lost soul to Jesus? Could an unsaved person recognise the Lord in your life because of the love you show them? Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you. Love one another just like I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are My disciples if you have love for one another’ (John 13:34 & 35).

Amen and God bless you.

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