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Acts 2:42 “How to Make Disciples”

Intro. Last Sunday I shared with you the mandate of Jesus to make disciples. The command was given in His Great Commission and so this mandate is very important. I also shared some of the means whereby we are to make disciples. We are to go, share the gospel, baptize those who repent and trust in Christ as Savior, teach them the Word of God and exhort them to be careful to obey God’s Word. Also pointed out that discipleship is best accomplished through mentorship, where the disciple maker spends time with the disciple, not only teaching, but also demonstrating how a Christian is to live and serve.

Today, I am going to share additional ways that we are to make disciples. I challenge you to learn how to be a disciple of Jesus, and also learn how to make disciples of others. One common and vital way we become and make disciples is:

I. THROUGH CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

While one-on-one discipleship is important, Christian fellowship with the larger body of Christ is also vital for discipleship. As we just read, Acts 2:42 says of the early church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Every one of those core discipleship practices took place in the context of being with other believers, but I will focus on that word “fellowship.” The word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*,¹ which also means, “association, close relationship; joint participation, sharing.” A newborn baby needs close association with loving parents to develop properly. Even so as a Christian you need to maintain a close, loving relationship with God’s people to grow into a mature disciple. You need the support and fellowship of other believers. You cannot stand alone. Just the other day I read 1 Cor. 16:17-18, “I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for ... they refreshed (*anapauo*) my spirit and yours....” Christian fellowship recharges are spiritual batteries. When we gather with other believers, we combine our gifts and abilities in the body of Christ to make disciples. Some teach. Some sing. Some exhort. Others comfort. In fact, most of the believers in the church today got what help they have received primarily in the local church. You cannot grow in your faith alone, or even with just one disciple-maker. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.” Indeed, Hebrews 3:13 says, “but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Just north of San Francisco is a majestic forest of Sequoia trees. Some reach 250 feet in the air and have lived for 1500 years. That forest is not far from the ocean and endures strong winds and storms and yet continues to stand tall. How can such tall trees not be toppled over by strong winds, especially when you consider that their root structure is rather shallow? The answer is no Sequoia grows alone. It is able to stand against the storms of life because their roots are so interconnected with each other. [Illus.#C-1315]

This aspect of the discipling process is why Hebrews 10:25 says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” We are all members of the same body of Christ

¹ This is the only time it appears in Luke's writings.

and interdependent (1 Cor. 12-14). So people need to abandon the life of a private faith and live in community with other believers. In the context of Acts 2:42 we see that we gather for worship and teaching (v.42, 46-47), fellowship by sharing a meal (v.42, 46) and by praying together (v.42). We also fellowship by serving together. In Phil. 1:5 Paul thanked the Philippian believers, “for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Furthermore, Scripture is full of “one another” statements. Have you noticed that? We are to love one another (John 13:34). We are to greet one another and show family affection to one another (Romans 12:10; 16:16). We are to serve one another (Galatians 5:13). We are to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). We are to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21). We are to admonish one another (Colossians 3:16). There are many other examples. The “one another” commands cannot be lived in isolation; they must be lived with “one another.”

I know that dealing with people can be difficult, even Christian people. But we have seen that true discipleship can only take place in the context of Christian fellowship. Will you make a commitment to participate in Christian worship as well as Christian fellowship, especially in the context of a small group? Also, we need to be mindful to reach out to those who are on the margins of Christian fellowship, like those who struggle with physical, emotional or mental illnesses. They also need Christian fellowship.

Currently, we are going through a viral pandemic together. We are being ordered by the government to stay home as much as possible, and we haven’t worship together in six weeks, and we could easily have at least six more weeks of these conditions. Yet we do need to be creative and find ways to fellowship in different ways. Gather with your spouse or family, put your phone on speaker phone, and call someone, or video chat with another Christian couple or family using FaceTime, Duo, or Zoom. We had twelve meet on Zoom Wednesday night for our online prayer meeting. I love to see and hear from my brothers and sisters in Christ. We can still meet in groups of 10 or less, especially at church since the governor’s executive order still allows you to travel to your “church.” Four of us met Friday morning and had fellowship and prayer. We had no physical contact and stayed about 6 feet away from each other, so there was little risk. If you want to reduce risk even more, set up for your group meeting outdoors. Or invite another individual or couple to meet you for an outdoor walk with social distance, for outdoor exercise is still permitted. Taking a walk together can be great fellowship. I think of Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13ff). This past week we learned that DHS conducted experiments and found that heat, humidity, and especially direct sunlight kills the virus quickly both on surfaces and in the air. Of course, if you or a member of your household has an underlying health condition that would put you or them at higher risk of death from COVID-19, feel free to avoid such small group gatherings. Instead, use the electronic means of fellowship. However you do it, understand the importance of continuing to have fellowship as a vital aspect of Christian discipleship.

Another means of discipleship is:

II. BY TEACHING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

It is not my intent during this series to get into detailed content of what we are to teach our disciples, though I will to some degree, including today. Yet the book *Transformational Discipleship* dealt with the topic of teaching our identity in Christ, and I wanted to share with you this aspect of discipleship that I learned, and add some of my own thoughts.

Do you realize that how you view your identity greatly influences the kind of person you become? If you grow up being told you’re dumb, sorry and no good, you are much more likely to become such a person. If you grow up with positive affirmation, you are much more likely to

become what you are told you are. This is one reason why it is important to give your child a good name, and if their name has a good meaning, be sure they know what their name means.

Sanctification in Christian growth is the process of becoming who we already are in Christ, and we need to teach that truth to our disciples. It is about living out our identity in Christ. Let me give you some examples. The apostle Paul called believers “saints” some 37 times in his letters. Even to the carnal Corinthians, Paul said they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). Most were not living very saintly, but Paul reminded them of their calling to be saints. That was a necessary foundation for his appeal to live a sanctified life. Now turn to 1 Peter chapter 2. Peter said in v.9, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...” He said in v.10 that you “are now the people of God...” In v.11 he says that we are “sojourners and pilgrims.” Is that how you view yourself in relationship to this world? If so, it will make a big difference in whether you embrace worldly values and beliefs. 1 John 3:1 says, “Look at how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God’s children. And we are!” (HCSB). I am a child of God! That is incredibly special. And since I am a child of my Heavenly Father, I am to live like Him. Ephesians 5:1 says, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” Another example is the fact that we are called the “bride of Christ” (Ephesians 5). Thus, when we choose to seek satisfaction and pleasure in the things of the world or people other than Christ, we commit spiritual adultery.² So you see, the foundation for obedience and a transformed life is our understanding of who we are in Christ. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul appealed to the believers to live out who they have been called to be by God, “I, therefore, ...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” When we really understand who God has made us to be, the automatic response should be to declare how great God is, not how great we are.

By the way, have you thought about what the devil is up to when he is described as “the accuser of the brethren”? (Rev. 12:10). He is not only accusing us to God; he is the accuser in our own minds. He wants to convince us that we are guilty sinners, trapped in sin and powerless in the face of temptation. Yet Romans 8:37 says, “... we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” That was said shortly after he asked in v.34, “Who is he who condemns?”

Now we have some preachers on TV who are not proclaiming the gospel, but are proclaiming feel-good psychology. They are telling even unbelievers to have positive thoughts about themselves, to have a can-do attitude. That is *not* what I am talking about today. I am not telling unbelievers to lie to themselves as a psychological ploy. Only those who have realized how deeply sinful they are and have repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord can view themselves as saints, children of God and holy priests of God. And having a biblical view of yourself is indeed an important step in becoming who you are in Christ.

Let me give just one of many examples from the writings of the apostle Paul. In Romans 6:6 he says, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, ...that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” Then in v.12 he exhorts believers to live out who they are in Christ. He says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Since you have died to sin, you can now be victorious over sin.

So we need to teach our disciples who they are in Christ and call upon them to live consistently with that truth. Disciples are to learn and live out this important truth in their lives. If I view myself as a man of God instead of a man of the world I am going to live more like God than the world. Do you see how important this is?

Another way we make disciples is:

² see James 4:4, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

III. BY TEACHING PERSEVERANCE THROUGH TRIALS

Turn to Acts 14:21-22. There we see that Paul and Barnabas “made many disciples, ... strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” Note that the word translated “made ... disciples” (*matheteuo*) is the same verb used as the primary command of the Great Commission. So here we see that part of discipleship includes teaching the following:

A. True Disciples Persevere in the Faith - Notice in v.21 that they were “exhorting them to continue in the faith...” This is right in line with what Jesus taught in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” One of the dangers of new believers is that the newness will wear off, and too many will fall away. Jesus’ parable of the sower also illustrates this (Mt. 13:5-7, 20-22). If left alone, the average Christian will backslide from the Lord.

Let me tell you why you should persevere in the faith. Jesus said in John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me... for without Me you can do nothing.”

So I call upon you to be a true disciple and persevere in the faith. Don’t quit. Don’t give up. Stay true to Jesus. He persevered until he completed His mission. Follow His example.

We also see from Acts 14:22 that:

B. True Disciples Persevere through Trials - We have seen that as part of the disciple making process the apostles warned new believers in the last of v.22, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus was the first to tell His disciples similar words. In John 16:33 He said, “In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” That word “tribulation” literally means “pressure.” It refers to adverse conditions that cause stress. Becoming a Christian does not mean that all your troubles are going away. When a person is saved, he suddenly realizes that he is in a war. Satan is against you. Unbelievers will push back if you become a rebuke to their lifestyle and unbelief. You will likely face at least verbal persecution if not physical persecution. And just because you have become a Christian does not mean that you will not experience the tribulations that are commonly experienced in this fallen world. Christians still get sick. We have already seen that we can get the coronavirus. We can have accidents and experience financial setbacks. Christians can still experience family problems. You *should* experience less problems due to personal sin, but not all of your problems will go away now that you have become a Christian. As we have seen, you will also experience some new problems. So be prepared and willing to suffer as a Christian. Christ suffered for us; we should be willing to suffer for Him. Tough days may be ahead for the whole world. Will you persevere through such tribulations and stay true to Jesus?

So we see here that we have a responsibility to warn new Christians, not only of the possibility of tribulation, but the necessity of it. Notice that Paul said we “must” go through many tribulations. You see, learning to overcome trials is a necessary part of growing in Christ. When we go through suffering we tend to trust and rely on God more than ever. 2 Cor. 1:9 says, “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.” Notice that God will allow great difficulties to come that we might be led to trust in Him, and not ourselves. Furthermore, it is especially in such times that we pray and see God work. God uses trials, pain, and suffering to lovingly put His own into a posture of weakness, resulting in deep transformation. And just as the resistance of a workout is the only

way to strengthen muscles, even so trials and difficulties play a vital role in strengthening the believer, and building character (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

When was David closest to God? Was it when he was comfortable in the palace or when he was being persecuted by King Saul? He committed adultery while in the palace, but he pursued God when he faced persecution. He wrote some of his greatest Psalms during this time, like Psalm 57. The pain put David in a posture to run to God. The cave was not David's refuge; God was. Transformation occurs when someone runs to God in the midst of pain. So our first reaction should not be to flee suffering, but flee to God in the midst of our suffering.

We have seen that disciple-makers must teach our disciples both the expectation of suffering and the role of suffering in our development as Christlike disciples. Furthermore, God not only uses suffering in our lives but also in the lives we are seeking to reach for Christ. It is in time of suffering in need that people are more open to the gospel. We are going to see that in the days ahead.

Finally, we also make disciples:

IV. BY TRAINING THEM FOR SERVICE

Turn to Eph. 4:11-12. There Paul says, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The word translated "equipping" (*katartismos*) is used in Mt. 4:21 of mending nets. The word means to make complete, to qualify for usefulness. In Luke 6:40 it refers to a student learning what his teacher knows, and becoming more and more like his teacher.

We should be able to see from these verses that pastors and others are to equip God's people to do the ministry of the Lord, and not to try to do everything themselves. Indeed, notice that pastors are to train the saints "for the work of ministry." Yes, it is God's will that you *work* for Him. Do you see that? We are not talking about just coming to church, sitting down, and becoming a spectator while the professionals and others minister. There is a place for actively listening while others minister to us. But there is more. You are to do a "work of ministry," or a "work of service" at other times. God expects every believer to be involved in some form of Christian service, and we are to teach that truth to our disciples. Unless you are serving the Lord and others, you are not a disciple of Jesus! And look on down to v.16. There Paul says, "by which every part does its share...." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the believer is to learn the Word of God "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Heb. 13:21 says, "make you complete (*katartizo*) in every good work to do His will." Yet in the average church 20% do the work, while others observe and are ministered unto. We could use more volunteers for our National Day of Prayer event. Let Dan Turner or Drew know if you're willing to help.

Yet Jesus did not just train His disciples by teaching, but also by sending them forth to do what they had been taught (Mark 6:7). Like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly by pushing them out of the nest, Jesus pushed His disciples out into the world to try their own wings. Recall how he not only sent out the 12 but also the 70 as well (Luke 10:1). He also practiced follow-up and accountability after sending them out (v.17ff).

Once you agree that it is God's will that every Christian learn to serve in some ministry, the next step is to receive training and equipping. The leaders can offer training and mentoring, but you have to participate. Will you do so?

And what kind of ministry should we be trained for? One vital ministry is:

A. Evangelism – In Mt. 4:19 Jesus He said to Peter and Andrew, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Jesus trained His disciples to witness both by example and through teaching. Jesus said in Jn. 15:8, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” The normal order of life for a disciple is to produce spiritual fruit. The fruit can come in the form of personal character or in the form of new believers. Yet too often the gospel stops when a person receives Christ. The gospel does not move on through that person’s life to others.

It is so important to get the young Christian involved in evangelism immediately. They should not break off relationships with their old friends except in actual participation of what is sinful or wrong. He should pray for them, invite them to church or Bible study, and see to it that the gospel is shared with them. He or she has better access to those unsaved friends than a pastor would. Every time a person becomes a Christian a whole new world of evangelistic opportunities is opened. They have family members, neighbors, coworkers etc. Furthermore, Jesus also taught His disciples that effective evangelism requires the filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). After all, salvation is ultimately the work of God (Jonah 2:9; Jn. 6:44).

B. Other Service – In 1 Cor. 12:4-5 Paul says there are various ministries in the church and a variety of spiritual gifts to carry out those ministries effectively. There are at least 20 spiritual gifts listed in the Bible, so God not only wants you to serve, but he wants you to do so effectively by discovering your spiritual gift and by being trained to exercise your gift in some ministry. This is indeed one vital aspect of discipleship.

Conclusion: So I call upon each of you to be a disciple. Grow through fellowship, by learning and living out your identity in Christ, by perseverance, and by being trained. Then take what you have learned and make disciples of others in the same ways that you have been discipled. The strength and growth of our church will depend on us putting these principles into practice.

Sources: Max D. Barnett, *A Vision for Developing Disciplemakers: Life’s Great Task* (Norman, OK: The Real Purpose of Life Publications, 2017); Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Ravell Company, 1963); Stephen Felker (notes from his expository sermons on Acts 2:42-27; 14:21-22; Eph. 4:11-12); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, & Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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