

# Discipleship Essentials: A Biblical Call to Making Disciples

## Introduction of Book: A Word from the Author:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer chided the church two generations ago because we were settling for what he called “cheap grace.” He said that we were practicing a brand of Christianity without a cross.

Michael Wilkins comes to the same conclusion from a different angle. In his survey of Christian groups, people will readily identify themselves as “Christians,” but be quite reluctant to call themselves “disciples.” Why might this be? Being a Christian is easy. The only thing required is that we acknowledge our need of a savior and receive the gift that I cannot earn and do not deserve. But if I identify myself as a disciple of Christ, then I am making a statement about the quality of my followership. Being a Christian is a statement about what Christ has done for me; being a disciple is a statement about what I am doing for Christ.

Our problem is that Christian leaders have sent the message that it is alright to be a Christian without being a disciple of Christ. We expect that only a small percentage of Christians will “graduate” into the category of discipleship... George Barna and George Gallup consistently tell us that their polling demonstrates that in terms of moral values and lifestyles choices there is little difference between Christians and non-Christians. We are compromised at the core... The church has settled for a “program approach.” Pastor stand in front of their congregations announcing the latest enrichment opportunities while the same 20 percent show up. “You all come!” we shout. They stay away in droves.

Disciples, though, are made in relationships through personal, eyeball-to-eyeball invitation. How different this is from our normal approach to the program church! When I begin a new discipleship group of three or four, I approach a potential participant only after having prayed for a sense of call to this person. I say to them something like, “I have been praying about who to ask to join with me and a couple of others on a journey together as we grow together over the next year to live more fully into what it means to be a disciple of Christ?” Oh, how different it feels to be issued a personal call rather than a mass invitation!

Almost every week for the last twenty-two years, I have had at least one of these groups in my schedule and it is always the highlight of my life. –Greg Ogden, 4/07

## A Biblical Call to Making Disciples:

When Jesus commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), He spoke the mission statement for the church. Jesus told the disciples to do what He had done during His three years of ministry. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few into whom He poured His life.

### Christ’s Method of Disciple Making:

Internalization: By focusing on a few Jesus was able to ensure the lasting nature of his mission... Why didn’t Jesus simply continue to expand his growing entourage and create a mass movement?... Though Jesus ministered to the needs of the crowds, He knew they were fickle. The same ones who shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday were shouting “Crucify Him” five days later... Disciples cannot be mass produced but are the product of intimate and personal investment... His kingdom should be founded on deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of a few, not on the shifting sands of superficial impressions on the minds of many.

Jesus had enough vision to think small. Focusing did not limit His influence – it expanded it. When Jesus ascended to the Father, He knew that there were at least eleven who could minister under the authority of his name. The concern of Jesus was not with programs to reach the multitudes but with men the multitudes would follow.

### Paul’s Approach to Disciple Making:

Paul adopted the same goal and methodology. Paul’s version of the great commission is his personal mission statement, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works within me.” (Colossians 1:28-29)

Following Jesus’ method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. He knew that solid transmission of the faith would not occur as readily through speaking to an audience... Paul envisioned an intergenerational chain of disciples linked together through personal investment...

The Bible teaches us not only the message of our faith but also the method by which that faith is to be passed on to future generations. We are called to do God’s work in God’s way. The manner in which the Lord works is that life rubs against life. We pass on Christ-likeness through intimate modeling. Paul said, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16) and “You become imitators of us and of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

Disciple Making Today:

Discipling then is a relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple or disciples in order to encourage, correct and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.

The three ingredients necessary to produce maturity in Christ are: Relational vulnerability; the centrality of the truth; and, mutual accountability.

One must decide where he/she wants their ministry to count – in the momentary applause of popular recognition or the reproduction of Christ's life in a few chosen men who will carry on His work after he/she is gone. Without the focus of small discipling units a solid foundation is difficult to build.