

## Pillar IV

### *Train disciples of Jesus who gladly reflect the holiness of God in all of life.*

The purpose of the church's programs and the point of her ministries is to make disciples and disciple-makers. It is easy to give lip service to this reality. However, actually training and mobilizing a body of disciples who are engaged in making disciples requires a bit of work. But the church serves its members best when it equips them and then sends them into their homes, their communities, and the world to make disciples of Jesus Christ. This will require that Christians work hard to put down the notion that the church exists to meet their every need. This will not be easy since the church has for too long been training members to think of themselves as consumers. Os Guinness has written:

The exaggerated half-truth about the church's "needing to meet need"...breeds unintended consequences. Just as church-growth's modern passion for "relevance" will become its road to irrelevance, so its modern passion or "felt needs" will turn the church into an echo chamber of fashionable needs that drown out the one voice that addresses real human need below all felt needs. After all, if true needs are a first step toward faith and prayer, false needs are the opposite. As George Macdonald observed..., "that need which is no need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life."<sup>1</sup>

Disciples of Jesus are those who learn all they can about their Lord so they might imitate Him in every area of life. It is the church's commission to make disciples of the Lord Jesus for the glory of God. The purpose of the church is not to find out what people desire and then provide that. Jesus said:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.*  
- Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus characterized the act of disciple-making in five ways:

#### **1. Disciple-making is an imperative.**

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

Before sending His disciples out to make more disciples Jesus first reminds them of His authority. He does not possess *some* authority or even a great deal of authority. Jesus makes claim to all authority in both heaven and earth. And among His final words to His disciples this One whose authority is supreme calls them to go into all the world and make disciples.

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<sup>1</sup> Guinness, Os, *Dining with the Devil* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1993) p. 67.

## **2. Disciples are to be sought throughout the world.**

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*

One of the most radical elements to be found in the New Testament is that God's salvation through Jesus Christ is extended not only to Israel but to all nations. Christians today take this news for granted. However, in the apostle Paul's day it was scandalous. But Jesus himself promised that salvation would extend far beyond national Israel. He told his followers that he had "other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). Jesus was not implying that He had disciples that are to be found outside faith in Him. Rather, in speaking to Jews Jesus was clear that He would amass followers outside of national Israel. God has promised to save people throughout the world from among every people. "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

## **3. Disciples are to be grafted into the community of faith.**

*...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*

For those who think that baptism is merely a ritual that has little bearing on the life of discipleship let them remember Jesus' words. Baptizing disciples is not a suggestion. While we reject the notion of baptismal regeneration we nevertheless affirm the importance of baptism in faithfully following Jesus. Baptism is a physical sign of membership into the covenant community. It is the means by which disciples publically identify not only with their Lord but with the whole company of Christ followers.

## **4. Disciples are to be trained to obey Jesus' commands.**

*...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

Disciples obey their teacher. How much more true this is for the disciples of the Son of God. They study His words and ways so that they might imitate His love for the Father, His compassion for sinners, and His zeal for holiness. Teaching therefore is essential to the blessed work of disciple-making. Teaching for discipleship must incorporate three elements. 1) *It is biblical teaching.* The only place where we find the teachings of Jesus is the Bible. What is more, since the Bible is a Christ-centered revelation then all of the Bible will in one way or another point the hearer to Christ. 2) *It is comprehensive teaching.* We must not selectively leave out texts of Scripture that may make certain people uncomfortable. Our mandate is to teach everything Jesus commanded. 3) *It is teaching with an eye toward obedience.* Knowledge alone puffs up. Faithful teaching of the Bible always urges the hearer toward greater obedience to Christ. This obedience is not legalistic bondage or thoughtless fanaticism. Rather, a disciple obeys Jesus out of grateful love. It is a worshipful response to grace received.

## **5. Disciple-makers are promised the comforting presence of their Lord.**

*And behold I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Before sending them out, Jesus told the twelve, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves..." (Matt 10:16). Sheep are not welcome companions to wolves. They become food. The world can be a dangerous place for followers of Jesus intent on producing more followers of Jesus. The promise Jesus makes to his disciples to be with them to the very end was not simply flowery words but a necessary word of hope and confidence to those who were entering a hostile world with an unpopular mission.

## **How does discipleship happen?**

### **1. Disciples are made not born.**

We speak of “making disciples” because no one is born a follower of Jesus. The ways of Christ are incomprehensible to the unconverted. Disciple-making involves deliberate action. The church must never assume that its programs make disciples. Rather a utilitarian approach must be taken to programming. “Does this ministry truly help us make disciples of Jesus?” If not then the program must be changed, replaced, or dropped.

### **2. Discipleship happens as God-given “means of grace” become a glad labor.**

God has graciously provided means by which we grow to become more like Christ. Often referred to as “spiritual disciplines” these means include worship, prayer, Bible intake, giving, fellowship, and service. These means must not be approached legalistically. They are not magic keys that will ensure “the victorious life” if properly used. Rather, they must be approached as a glad labor that will, by God’s grace, develop Christ-like character and cultivate a deeper love for God.

### **3. Discipleship occurs in the church.**

Don’t be confused by this statement. Buildings are not necessary for making disciples. But the church, the body and bride of Christ is essential. This is not because God is unable to raise up followers on His own. Indeed, God is able to raise up a people from the stones upon which we walk. Rather, in His own perfect wisdom, God has chosen to use His people as the means by which men and women are trained to follow Jesus.

Beyond the mere act of going into the world the church is called to graciously enfold within its caring fellowship all those who would come after Christ. Disciples are not grown in isolation but flourish only in the company of other followers of Christ. Who will teach a new believer what it means to follow Jesus except those who are disciples themselves?

### **4. Discipleship happens in multiple contexts.**

Every Christian ought to be involved somehow in the task of disciple-making. It happens in part when a preacher faithfully proclaims God’s Word from the pulpit. But so much more is needed for disciples to be made. Faithful teachers and small group leaders are needed to minister the Scriptures in a context of greater accountability. Christians with all manner of gifts help make disciples by building redemptive relationships with lost neighbors or those Christians who are young in their faith. A Christian’s living room or kitchen table can become among the most effective locations for disciple-making. The work of making disciples happens in front yards, golf-courses, coffee shops, long drives, and, yes, Sunday School rooms.