

The Heart of a Disciple Maker

Why do you want to make disciples?

Have you ever asked yourself that question? The answer is incredibly important. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should be focused on making disciples. But if we don't do it with the right motives, we are wasting our time. Worse yet, we could be doing more harm than good. Ministering to other people has been a deadly trap for seemingly godly people throughout the ages. If God cared only about outward appearances and religious activities, then any effort toward ministry would please Him. But God tells us repeatedly that He cares more about the heart than the externals. If God cared only about religious activities, then the Pharisees would have been heroes of the faith. They were continuously engaged in ministry: they vigorously pursued outward demonstrations of godliness; they made sure the people around them kept themselves holy, and they diligently taught the law of God. And yet the Gospels present the Pharisees as villains. Jesus's harshest words were reserved for these religious overachievers: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:8–9)

The Pharisees devoted their whole lives to religious activity. They must have seemed so impressive to the people around them. Yet Jesus came along and declared that it was all in vain! An important theme that runs throughout Scripture is this: "The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Clearly, God wants us to pursue certain actions, but as we put God's commands into action, our motivation makes all the difference.

Q1 Take a moment to examine your heart. In all honesty, why do you want to make disciples? Do you struggle with wanting your actions to be noticed by others?

Teaching Is Dangerous

Ask yourself again: Why do you want to make disciples? Maybe your decision to be a disciple maker has been reluctant. Perhaps the only reason

you are still working through this material is because Jesus commands you to make disciples, and you don't want to be disobedient. You're not sure if you have much to offer, but you know you should let God use you however He desires. Or maybe you've always seen yourself as a leader. You have a message that the church needs to hear, and you're ready to teach anyone who will listen. You don't need motivation; you just want to be better equipped. For those of you who are reluctant, remember that God wants you to minister out of joy, not mere obligation. God wants us to enjoy the privilege and pleasure of ministering to others. He wants us to be cheerful when we give (2 Cor. 9:7), and He wants us to lead others willingly and eagerly: Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly. (1 Pet. 5:2) For those who are eager to lead, remember that God wants us to be cautious as we lead. Remember that you will be teaching people about the Bible and guiding them into godly living. The Bible takes the role of a teacher very seriously, and so should we.

James gave us a terrifying warning about the power of the tongue. While we can speak truth and bring life to people, he warned that our words can also cause incredible damage. The tongue is untamable, James said, capable of diverting the direction of our lives, producing deadly poison, and "setting on fire the entire course of life" (James 3:6). Indeed, James even accused the tongue of being set on fire by hell! If you look at your heart and find even a trace of desire for the glory and prestige that come through teaching and leading other people, take some time to let James's warning sink in. Think about what your tongue is capable of. As a disciple maker, you could make a huge impact for the kingdom of God. Or you could lead people horribly astray.

Q2 Read James 3:1–12 and meditate on James's warning. How do these powerful words affect you? How might you need to adjust your approach to making disciples?

Love Comes First

Paul added a challenge from a different angle. In the most beautiful terms, he said that gaining knowledge and power—even sacrificing our own bodies—is completely worthless apart from love:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1–3) The result of loveless ministry is serious: “I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal ... I am nothing ... I gain nothing.” In other words, even the most impressive and sacrificial actions are worthless if they are not empowered by love. Are you the type of person who would teach someone without loving them? Don’t be quick to answer. Many good pastors have confessed that they got so caught up in the busyness of ministry that they went through the motions without loving their people. Most of us have to work hard to keep love at the forefront. What do you think and feel when you are in a group of people? Are you overly aware of the ones who are wealthy, attractive, or have something they can offer you? Do you worry about what people think of you? Or do you look for ways to love and opportunities to give? A sure sign of a loveless heart is seeing people as a means to your own ends—they listen to you, give you affirmation when you want it, stay out of your way when you don’t, etc. Teaching other people with this type of mentality is bound to be sterile and unfruitful. According to Paul, every time we try to teach someone with this mentality, we can be sure that we have become nothing more than a clanging gong or resounding cymbal; we have made ourselves both annoying and irrelevant. Fulfilling Jesus’s command to make disciples is about more than having the right theology or well-developed teaching points. Remember that if you “understand all mysteries and all knowledge” yet don’t have love, you are nothing. Earlier in the same letter, Paul said, “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God” (1 Cor. 8:2–3). It’s not about what you know—or what you think you know—it’s about love. If you’re not willing to

make loving God and loving people your highest priority, then stop. Seriously, walk away until you've settled this one essential point. Lack of love is the unmistakable mark of death: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14).

Making disciples isn't about gathering pupils to listen to your teaching. The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them. Jesus's call to make disciples includes teaching people to be obedient followers of Jesus, but the teaching isn't the end goal. Ultimately, it's all about being faithful to God's call to love the people around you. It's about loving those people enough to help them see their need to love and obey God. It's about bringing them to the Savior and allowing Him to set them free from the power of sin and death and transform them into loving followers of Jesus Christ. It's about glorifying God by obediently making disciples who will teach others to love and obey God. So the question is, how much do you care about the people around you? When you stand in a crowd, interact with your family, or talk to people in your church, do you love them and long to see them glorify God in every aspect of their lives? Honestly assessing your heart and asking God to purify your motives need to become habits in your life.

Q3 Up to this point, would you say that your desire to make disciples has been motivated by love? Why or why not?

Take some time to consider your existing relationships—family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc. The way you think about and interact with the people that God has placed in your life can tell you a lot about your heart. Think about your relationships and ask yourself how well you love those around you. By assessing your current relationships, you should be able to identify areas you need to work on.

Q4 Describe your love for the people God has placed in your life. What evidence can you point to that shows that you love the people around you?

Q5 In addition to praying fervently, what practical steps can you take to increase your love for people?

Teaching by Example

One of the worst things you can do is teach truths that you are not applying. We call this hypocrisy, and it's the most common criticism of Christians in America. You could argue that it may be better not to teach at all than to teach truth without applying it to your own life. Jesus gave some harsh warnings toward the religious leaders who were doing that very thing. He said: Do and observe whatever they [the scribes and Pharisees] tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. (Matt. 23:3–5)

Hypocrisy has damaged many, so let's run far from it. James also gave a strong warning against this type of thinking. He said that if we hear the Word of God, but don't do what it says, we are merely deceiving ourselves (James 1:22–25). He went on to say that religion without practical action is worthless (vv. 26–27). Let's be realistic: a self-deceived teacher who practices worthless religion is probably not the best candidate for a disciple maker. Maybe the clearest explanation of teaching by example can be found in the book of Hebrews: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7). The author of Hebrews actually called us to consider—literally, "to examine carefully"—the outcome of a teacher's lifestyle. We can get so caught up in examining a person's doctrinal positions that we overlook his or her pattern of life. But this is essential because Hebrews calls us to imitate the faith of these people. If you are going to make disciples, you need to be putting your faith into practice so that the people around you can imitate your faith. Because of this, being a disciple maker demands your entire life. The job description of a disciple maker is the same as that of a disciple of Jesus Christ. It requires everything. It means following Jesus in every aspect of your life, pursuing Him with a wholehearted devotion. If you're not ready to lay down your life for Christ's

sake, then you're not ready to make disciples. It's that simple. This doesn't mean that you need to be perfect before you start. Perfection is a lifelong process that won't end until eternity (see Phil. 1:6 and 3:12–14). But it does mean that you need to “count the cost” (see Luke 14:25–33) and allow God's truth to change your life. Making disciples is all about seeing people transformed by the power of God's Word. If you want to see that happen in others, you need to be experiencing such transformation yourself.

Q6 Would you say that your life is being transformed by the truth of God's Word? Why or why not?

Q7 What changes do you need to make in order to live the truths that you will be teaching other people?

Q8 The things you've been thinking through in this session are not easy to address—there are no “quick fixes” here. End your time with this session by praying that God will give you the proper motivation to make disciples, increase your love for Him and the people around you, and empower you to live out the truths that He has called you to teach to others.