

Lesson #1 What Is a Disciple?

Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked up to a handful of men and said, “Follow me.” Imagine being one of those original disciples. They were ordinary people like you and me. They had jobs, families, hobbies, and social lives. As they went about their business on the day Jesus called them, none of them would have expected his life to change so quickly and completely. The disciples could not have fully understood what they were getting into when they responded to Jesus’s call. Whatever expectations or doubts, whatever curiosity, excitement, or uncertainty they felt, nothing could have prepared them for what lay ahead. Everything about Jesus—His teaching, compassion, and wisdom; His life, death, and resurrection; His power, authority, and calling—would shape every aspect of the rest of their lives. In only a few years, these simple men were standing before some of the most powerful rulers on earth and being accused of “turn[ing] the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). What began as simple obedience to the call of Jesus ended up changing their lives, and ultimately, the world.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? As you will discover, the answer is fairly simple, but it changes your life completely. The word disciple refers to a student or apprentice. Disciples in Jesus’s day would follow their rabbi (which means teacher) wherever he went, learning from the rabbi’s teaching and being trained to do as the rabbi did. Basically, a disciple is a follower, but only if we take the term follower literally. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is as simple as obeying His call to follow. When Jesus called His first disciples, they may not have understood where Jesus would take them or the impact it would have on their lives, but they knew what it meant to follow. They took Jesus’s call literally and began going everywhere He went and doing everything He did. It’s impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). That’s the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process. Yet somehow many have come to believe that a person can be a “Christian” without being like Christ. A “follower” who doesn’t follow? How does that make any sense? **Many people in the church have decided to take on the name of Christ and nothing else.** This would be like Jesus walking up to those first disciples and saying, “Hey, would you guys mind identifying yourselves with Me in some way? Don’t worry, I don’t actually care if you do anything I do or change your lifestyle at all. I’m just looking for people who are willing to say they believe in Me and call themselves Christians.”

Seriously? No one can really believe that this is all it means to be a Christian. But then why do so many people live this way? It appears that we’ve lost sight of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The concept of being a disciple isn’t difficult to understand, but it affects everything.

1. Up to this point in your life, would you call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ? Why do you say that? Do you see evidence of your faith as described in Luke 6:40?

How Do I Become a Disciple?

To understand how to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, it makes most sense to start where Jesus started. While it is true that He said to the disciples, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19), the Bible records one message He proclaimed before that. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus said,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Try taking this phrase literally. If someone warned you to be prepared because a king and his army were coming, what would you do? You would make sure you were ready to face him. If you weren’t prepared to fight this king, then you would do whatever it took to make peace with him. The word repent means “to turn.” It has the idea of changing directions and heading the opposite way. It involves action. In this context, Jesus was telling people to prepare themselves—to change whatever needed to be changed—because God’s kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) was approaching. So how do we prepare to face this heavenly kingdom? How do we make sure we are at peace with this coming King?

Jesus says we need to repent. This implies that we all need to turn from the way we are currently thinking and living.

Romans 3:23 explains that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Every person reading this sentence has done things that are evil and offensive to this King. Romans later explains that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Because of our sin, which is an offense to God, we should expect death. But then comes an amazing truth. “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The death penalty we should have faced from this King was actually paid for by someone else. The King’s Son, Jesus Christ! The Scriptures then say, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is all about who Jesus is and what He has done. Part of our repentance is to turn from believing that there’s anything we can do to save ourselves—for everything was accomplished by Jesus Christ. The thought that someone else has paid for our crimes is strange to most of us because it defies our natural way of thinking. And the idea that we need to trust in another person’s sacrifice on our behalf is even more foreign. But understand that while it is strange to us, it is consistent with God’s actions throughout the Scriptures. We get a picture of this when we read the book of Exodus. In this story, Moses warned Pharaoh repeatedly about what God would do if he did not repent. It climaxed when God said He would bring death to the firstborn of every household if they did not repent. Meanwhile, He told His people that if they put the blood of a lamb over their doorposts, His angel would pass over their homes and not kill the firstborn of that house. So even in the story of the exodus, we see that people had to trust in the blood of a lamb to save them— and this was the only way they could be saved.

2. Read Ephesians 2 carefully and take some time to consider the truths it presents. Do you trust in the death of Christ for your salvation? Do you ever struggle with believing you need to do something to save yourself?

The Lord of Grace

Salvation is all about the grace of God. There is absolutely nothing that you can do to save yourself or earn God’s favor. Paul said, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). No one can brag about his or her good deeds because our works cannot save us. Salvation comes through the grace

of God as we place our faith in Jesus Christ. All salvation requires is faith: Do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is? But keep in mind that while this is simple, it's not easy. Faith in Jesus Christ means believing that He is Lord (according to Rom. 10:9). Have you ever thought about what that word Lord means? We sometimes think of it as another name for God, but it's actually a title. It refers to a master, owner, or a person who is in a position of authority. So take a minute to think this through: Do you really believe that Jesus is your master? Do you believe that He is your owner—that you actually belong to Him? Paul is so bold as to tell us: "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1Cor. 6:19–20). The same Lord who by His grace set us free from sin and death now owns us. We belong to Him, and He calls us to live in obedience to His rule.

The problem is, many in the church want to "confess that Jesus is Lord," yet they don't believe that He is their master. Do you see the obvious contradiction in this? The call to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is open to everyone, but we don't get to write our own job description. If Jesus is Lord, then He sets the agenda. If Jesus Christ is Lord, then your life belongs to Him. He has a plan, agenda, and calling for you. You don't get to tell Him what you'll be doing today or for the rest of your life.

3. Evaluate your approach to following Jesus. Would you say that you view Jesus as your Lord, Master, and Owner? Why or why not?

It All Comes Down to Love

But don't get the impression that following Jesus is all about joyless sacrifice. More than anything else, following Jesus boils down to two commands, which He said were the most important commandments in the Old Testament Law: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 22:37–40) It all comes down to love. Peter expressed it well for people like us, who didn't see Jesus on earth but follow Him nonetheless: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).

Following Jesus is not about diligently keeping a set of rules or conjuring up the moral fortitude to lead good lives. It's about loving God and enjoying Him. But lest we think that we can love God and live any way we want to, Jesus told us very clearly, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The love for God in the first commandment is made practical in the love for our neighbors in the second commandment. John actually told us that if we don't love the people that we can see around us, then we don't love God, whom we can't see (1 John 4:20). True love is all about sacrifice for the sake of the ones you love: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16). When we understand love in this light, it's not difficult to understand that love for God and obedience to Jesus Christ cannot be separated. God's love changes us from the inside out and redefines every aspect of our lives.

4. As you look at your life, how would you say that your love for God is shown in your actions? (If you're having trouble coming up with an answer, take some time to think through some changes you may need to make in your lifestyle.)

Lesson #2 Count the Cost

As you work your way through this material, you will be challenged to consider what it means to be a follower of Jesus. You will think through what the Bible teaches and its implications for the way you live your life today. Everything you study will be for the purpose of applying it to your life and teaching other people to do the same. But before you set out to teach other people to be disciples of Jesus, you need to examine your heart and make sure you are a disciple. Read the following words from Jesus slowly and carefully. Understand that Jesus is speaking these words to you. Think about what Jesus is saying and how it should affect the way you approach this material and your relationship with Him. After you have read this section, use the questions below to help you count the cost of following Jesus.

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25–33)

1. If you choose to obey Jesus's call to follow, what might it cost you? (Avoid being vague. If following Jesus would cost you specific possessions, comforts, or relationships, list them below.)

2. What might hold you back from following Jesus at this point? Are you willing to let go of these things if necessary?

3. Before you end this session, spend some time in prayer. Ask God to work in your heart and prepare you for what is ahead. You don't need to have all the answers or know specifically how God will use you. He simply calls you to follow wherever He might lead. As you pray, be honest about your doubts, hesitations, and fears. Ask Him to give you the strength to proceed and follow Him no matter what the cost. In other words, place your faith in Him.

Lesson #3 The Command to Make Disciples

Imagine your reaction if someone came back from the dead to speak to you. Seriously, try to imagine that right now. What would you feel? How intensely would you listen? How seriously would you take his or her words? Think about what this must have been like for the disciples. They were working their everyday jobs when a mysterious teacher asked them to follow Him. As they followed, they saw Him challenge religious leaders, embrace sinners, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. They knew that He was not an ordinary man. At various times and to varying degrees, people saw Him as the Messiah who would bring salvation for God's people. But He never quite fit anyone's expectations of what the Messiah would do or say. The disciples walked beside Jesus through all of this. They watched as the blind were given sight. They heard Jesus forgive the hopelessly unrighteous and restore the lives of the broken. They helped pass out bread and fish as Jesus miraculously fed huge crowds. The disciples seem to have been more aware of Jesus's true identity at some points than at others, but they followed Him until the end, believing that He was the one who would restore the fortunes of God's people.

And then He died. Just like that. It was over. It seemed that Jesus could do absolutely anything, that He had power over sickness, death, every person, and every thing. By this power, Jesus was bringing the healing and redemption that the world so desperately needed. But the disciples' hopes of a better world died as Jesus was nailed to a Roman cross. And so the disciples spent three days in confusion and disillusionment. Everything they had hoped for was gone. Perhaps they had wasted their time following this mysterious person for three years. Then it happened. He came back from the dead! When Jesus reappeared on the third day, all of their hope came rushing back! Now there could be no doubt! Now that Jesus had conquered even sin and death, He would certainly fix this broken world. Jesus would accomplish what everyone was longing to see. There could be no stopping Him. Once again, He surprised everyone. Instead of telling them that He would immediately transform the earth, Jesus gave His disciples one final command and ascended into heaven. Just like that, out of nowhere. What was the command? Essentially, He told them it was their job to finish what He started. They were to take the message that Jesus declared and exemplified in and around Jerusalem and spread that message to the very ends of the earth: 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. (Matt. 28:18–20)

1. Stop for a minute and read Matthew 28. Try to place yourself in the disciples' shoes as they witnessed these things and heard these words from Jesus. How do you think you would have reacted?

The Great Commission and the Church

So what comes to your mind when you think about Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations? Many read these words as if they were meant to inspire pastors or missionaries on their way out to the mission field. But have you ever considered that maybe Jesus's command is meant for you?

As we read the rest of the New Testament, we see God's people working together in obedience to Jesus's command. They reached out to the people around them, calling them to obediently follow Jesus.

The disciples went about making disciples, teaching them to obey everything that Jesus had commanded and baptizing them. Some of them even moved to different areas or traveled around so that they could tell more people. They took Jesus's words seriously—and literally. Reading through the New Testament, it's not surprising to read that Jesus's followers were focused on making disciples—it makes sense in light of Jesus's ministry and the Great Commission. The surprise comes when we look at our churches today in light of Jesus's command to make disciples.

Why is it that we see so little disciple making taking place in the church today? Do we really believe that Jesus told His early followers to make disciples but wants the twenty-first-century church to do something different? None of us would claim to believe this, but somehow we have created a church culture where the paid ministers do the "ministry," and the rest of us show up, put some money in the plate, and leave feeling inspired or "fed." We have moved so far away from Jesus's command that many Christians don't have a frame of reference for what disciple making looks like.

2. Assess your church experience in light of Jesus's command to make disciples. Would you say that your church is characterized by disciple making? Why or why not?

More Than a Program

So what does disciple making look like? We have to be careful about how we answer this question. For some of us, our church experience has been so focused on programs that we immediately think about Jesus's command to make disciples in programmatic terms. We expect our church leaders to create some sort of disciple-maker campaign where we sign up, commit to participating for a few months, and then get to cross the Great Commission off our list. But making disciples is far more than a program. It is the mission of our lives. It defines us. A disciple is a disciple maker.

So what does this look like? The Great Commission uses three phrases to describe what disciple making entails: go, baptize people, and teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Simple, right? It's incredibly simple in the sense that it doesn't require a degree, an ordination process, or some sort of hierarchical status. It's as simple as going to people, encouraging them to follow Jesus (this is what baptism is all about), and then teaching them to obey Jesus's commands (which we find in the Bible). The concept itself is not very difficult.

But the simplest things to understand are often the most difficult to put into practice. Let's start with baptism. In your church setting, baptism may not seem like that big of a deal. Maybe that's why so many Christians today have never been baptized. But in the early days of the church, baptism was huge. Baptism was an unmistakable act that marked a person as a follower of Jesus Christ. As Jesus died and was buried in the earth, so a Christian is plunged beneath the surface of the water. As Jesus emerged from the tomb in a resurrected body, so a Christian comes out of the waters of baptism as a new creation.

When first-century Christians took this step of identifying themselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were publicly declaring their allegiance to Christ. This immediately marked them for martyrdom—all of the hostility that the world felt toward Jesus would now be directed at them. Baptism

was a declaration that a person's life, identity, and priorities were centered on Jesus and His mission. Depending on where you live in the world, you may not see the same reaction to your choice to be baptized, but that act of identifying with Christ is essential, no matter where you live.

3. Have you identified yourself with Jesus through being baptized? If so, why do you think this was an important step for you to take? If not, what is holding you back from being baptized?

Just as baptism is more significant than we might have thought, so teaching people to obey Jesus's commands is an enormous task. Realistically, this will require a lifetime of devotion to studying the Scriptures and investing in the people around us. Neither of these things is easy, nor can they be checked off of a list. We are never really "done." We continually devote ourselves to studying the Scriptures so that we can learn with ever-greater depth and clarity what God wants us to know, practice, and pass on. We continually invest in the people around us, teaching them and walking with them through life's joys and trials.

We never "finish" the discipleship process. It's much like raising a child: though there comes a day when she is ready to be on her own, the relationship doesn't end. The friendship continues, and there will always be times when guidance and encouragement are still needed. In addition to that, God continually brings new people into our path, giving us fresh opportunities to start the discipleship process all over again. Following Jesus by making disciples isn't difficult to understand, but it can be very costly. Jesus's teachings are often difficult to stomach. By sharing His teachings, we are often rejected along with His message. Jesus said: If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (John 15:18–20)

It's easy enough to understand, but it can be extremely costly.

4. Would you say that you're ready to commit yourself to studying the Scriptures and investing in the people around you? Why or why not?

Lesson #4 Equipped to Do the Work of Ministry

Unfortunately, disciple making has become the exclusive domain of pastors (and missionaries). Salesmen sell, insurance agents insure, and ministers minister. At least, that's the way it works in most of our churches. While it's true that the pastors, elders, and apostles in the New Testament made disciples, we can't overlook the fact that discipleship was everyone's job. The members of the early church took their responsibility to make disciples very seriously. To them, the church wasn't a corporation run by a CEO. Rather, they compared the church to a body that functions properly only when every member is doing its part. Paul explained the function of the church in Ephesians 4:11–16:

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ ... we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Paul saw the church as a community of redeemed people in which each person is actively involved in doing the work of ministry. The pastor is not the minister—at least not in the way we typically think of a minister. The pastor is the equipper, and every member of the church is a minister. The implications are huge. Don't think of this as merely a theological issue. See yourself in this passage. Paul said that your job is to do the work of ministry! Jesus commanded you to make disciples! Most Christians can give a number of reasons why they cannot or should not disciple other people: "I don't feel called to minister." "I just have too much on my plate right now; I don't have time to invest in other people." "I don't know enough." "I have too many issues of my own. I'll start once I get my life in order." As convincing as these excuses may seem to us, Jesus's commands don't come with exception clauses. He doesn't tell us to follow unless we're busy. He doesn't call us to love our neighbors unless we don't feel prepared. In fact, if you read Luke 9:57–62, you'll see several individuals who gave excuses for why they couldn't follow Jesus at the time. Read the passage and take note of how Jesus responded to them. It may surprise you. God made you the way you are; He has provided and will continue to provide you with everything you need to accomplish the task. Jesus commands you to look at the people around you and start making them into disciples.

Obviously, only God can change people's hearts and make them want to become followers. We just have to be obedient in making the effort to teach them, even though we still have plenty to learn ourselves.

1. What excuses tend to keep you from following Jesus's command to make disciples? What do you need to do in order to move past these excuses?

Taking the First Step

Being a disciple maker means that you will begin to look at the people in your life differently. Every person in your life is created in the image of God, and Jesus commands every one of them to follow Him. God has placed these people in your life so that you will do everything you can to influence them. Following Jesus means that you will be teaching other people to follow Jesus.

Take some time to consider your first step toward disciple making. Whom has God placed in your life that you can teach to follow Jesus? Maybe God is laying someone on your heart you don't know very well. Your first step could be building a relationship with that person. Maybe it's someone you've known for years, and God is calling you to take that relationship to another level. God has placed you where you are, and the people around you are not there by accident. Keep in mind that the Great Commission calls us to every type of person, to those inside of the church as well as to those outside, to those who are like us and those who are very different. Everyone needs to understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

2. Whom has God placed in your life right now that you can begin making into a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Working Together to Make Disciples

God wants you to view the other Christians in your life as partners in ministry. God has not called you to make disciples in isolation; He has placed you in the context of a church body so that you can be encouraged and challenged by the people around you. And you are called to encourage and challenge them in return. As you begin this study, think about how you will proceed. Are there Christians in your life you can study this material with? Are there mature believers you can approach with the questions that will inevitably arise? The goal is for you to think through this material and let these truths saturate your mind, heart, and lifestyle. But you'll get a lot more out of this if you have other people to talk with, be challenged by, and work together with. Human beings are simply not designed to function in isolation.

3. Whom has God placed in your life for you to partner with in making disciples?

4. Spend some time praying that God will make you into a committed and effective disciple maker. Confess any feelings of unpreparedness and insecurity. Ask Him to empower you for the ministry He is calling you to. Ask Him to lead you to the right people to partner with and the right people to begin discipling.

Lesson #5 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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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?

5. 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.

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

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

8. 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.