
WE ARE THE CHURCH

Marks of a Healthy Church

AN EXPECTATION OF DISCIPLINE

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on February 11, 2018

INTRODUCTION

It has become common to describe American Evangelicalism as “easy believism.” This phrase points to the often thin and nebulous beliefs of today’s Evangelicals. Many of those who claim Christianity in America today have little knowledge of biblical teaching and frequently live out of step with a biblical worldview. And yet, Christ has commissioned all Christians everywhere to be about the task of making disciples! In this message, we shall consider this commission and why it is essential to the good health of any local church.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“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” (Matthew 28:19-20).

It has become common to describe American Evangelicalism as “easy believism.” This phrase points to the often thin and nebulous beliefs of today’s Evangelicals. Many of those who claim Christianity in America today have little knowledge of biblical teaching and frequently live out of step with a biblical worldview. And yet, Christ has commissioned all Christians everywhere to be about the task of making disciples!

Discipleship is everything a Christian does as he/she follows Christ, and Discipling is a Christian’s active and intentional effort to help other people follow Christ too. This is the stuff of ordinary Christianity, and there are incredible benefits to discipling and being a disciple. However, this basic function of the Christian life is often avoided, misunderstood, and/or systematized among many local churches.

Healthy Churches expect the membership to be intentionally discipling one another. It is Christ’s clear command, and this is the relationship and process by which God grows us up in Christ. May God help us to be and to make disciples.

MATTHEW 28:18-20 (ESV)

18 And Jesus came and said to them,

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

19 **Go therefore** and **make disciples** of all **nations** [*ethnā* or *peoples*],

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

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

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

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Healthy Churches expect the membership to be intentionally discipling.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

- (1) DISCIPLESHIP IS CHRISTIANITY**
- (2) DISCIPLING IS THE FUNCTION OF EVERY CHRISTIAN**
- (3) HEALTHY CHURCHES EXPECT INTENTIONAL DISCIPLING**
- (4) APPLICATION: 3 DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS**

(1) DISCIPLESHIP IS CHRISTIANITY

“Discipleship is me following Jesus.”

- **A Christian is one who believes the Gospel of Christ**
 - The term itself connotes **association** or **union** with **Christ**.
 - Only the Gospel of Christ provides the context for such a union.
 - Sinners realize themselves to be sinners (Rom. 3:19-20).
 - Sinners receive the righteousness of God through faith/belief in Christ (Rom. 3:22-24).
 - Sinners are united with Christ and receive all the benefits of His life/death/resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5).

- **A Christian is one who enjoys the personal presence of Christ**
 - Jesus ends this commission in Matt. 28 with the promise, “***I am with you*** always, to the end of the age” (v20).
 - This promise leans into the very idea of “union,” but takes it far past mere justification (as emphasized above).
 - Here is a promise of union, support for the task, and assurance of success.
 - “*I am with you now, tomorrow, and all the way through to the end of this whole endeavor...*”

- **A Christian is one who submits to the Authority of Christ**
 - Jesus begins this commission in Matt. 28 with the statement, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**” (v18).
 - The beneficiaries, then, of Christ’s authoritative position are those who submit to Him.
 - One can hardly enjoy Christ’s statement if he/she does not like or does not want Christ to be authoritative over him/her.
 - John 3:36 – Jesus said, “**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.**”
 - Jesus equates belief with obedience here.
 - Obedience to Christ demonstrates belief in Christ.
 - One can hardly argue that they believe in Christ if they are unwilling to obey Him.

- **A Christian is one, therefore, who is a Disciple of Christ**
 - Christians were first called “disciples” (Acts 9:26).
 - **Disciple** – learner or follower
 - Kung Fu – *xintu* – apprentice, follower, pupil, student
 - Early Christians were also called “brothers” (Acts 11:1)
 - **Brother(s)** – *adelphos (adelphoi)* – fellow believer, one who believes Christ as we do
 - Christian = brother = disciple
 - The term “Christian” was first used as more of a derogatory distinction between Jews those “other Jews” who preached and followed Christ (Acts 11:26).
 - In the immediate context of this passage, both “brothers” and “disciples” are used to describe “Christians” (Acts 11:26-29).

- Let's consider for a moment...
 - Is this how you *understand Christianity*?
 - Do you *believe the Gospel* of Christ?
 - Do you *experience and enjoy* the *nearness* of Christ?
 - Do you *thoughtfully* and *intentionally submit* to the Lordship of Christ?
 - In other words, *are you a Disciple of Christ*?
 - *If not*, what do you think Christianity is?
 - How is *your version of Christianity* distinct from “*being a better you*”?
 - How is your version different from a spiritualized version of the *American dream* (i.e. “*God wants you to do well and be successful*”)?
 - Friends, shouldn't we let *the Bible define* what Christianity is?
 - Shouldn't we *pray* for and *strive* towards *whatever Jesus says Christianity is*?
 - Don't we have the *promises of Christ's presence* and all of His benefits if we do?!

Summary: **Discipleship (noun) is Christianity...**

(Segue) **Discipling (verb) is the function of every Christian!**

(2) DISCIPLING IS THE FUNCTION OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

- **Discipling is the active and intentional task of Discipleship**
 - *Discipleship is me following Jesus* (learning, applying, growing).
 - *Discipling is me helping others to follow Jesus...*
 - Me helping others follow Jesus is part of my own relationship with Jesus (“*make disciples*” Matt. 28:19).

- **Pastors/Elders are tasked with Discipling**
 - Pastors/Elders do the work of Discipling by ***preaching/teaching*** (2 Tim. 4:1-2).
 - Paul says that the word of God is that divinely inspired Scripture, which has the power to fully equip every Christian and bring them to full maturity (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - Then he says, “***Preach that word!***” (2 Tim. 4:2).
 - Pastors/Elders are also to ***exemplify*** discipleship and discipling.
 - One of the ways an elder is to “shepherd the flock of God” over which God has placed him is to “be an example to them” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).
 - Especially, pastors/elders are to be ***discipling disciplers***.
 - Paul said to Timothy, “***what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also***” (2 Timothy 2:2).
 - 1st generation – “***you heard from me***”
 - 2nd generation – “***you entrust [what you learned] to faithful men***”
 - 3rd generation – “***[those faithful men] will be able to teach others***”
 - 4th generation – the implication is that of those “***others they teach,***” some will be faithful men who will in turn teach others as well.
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- **Every Christian is tasked with Discipling too**
 - The Great Commission
 - “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” (Matt. 28:19-20).

- Specifically, **Older Christians** are to disciple younger Christians.
 - “**Older men are to be sober-minded... [and] sound in faith... and in steadfastness... urging younger men to be self-controlled**” (Titus 2:2, 6).
 - “**Older women are to be reverent in behavior... they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women...**” (Titus 2:3-4).
- Specifically, Christian **spouses** (esp husbands) disciple one another.
 - “**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...**” (Ephesians 5:25–26).
 - See also 1 Corinthians 7:12-16
- Specifically, Christian **parents** (esp fathers) disciple their children.
 - “**Fathers... bring [up your children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**” (Ephesians 6:4).
- Generally, Christians with **greater maturity** disciple those with less.
 - “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any [sin], you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness... Bear one another’s burdens...**” (Gal. 6:1-2).
 - “**Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it**” (1 Cor. 3:1-2).
- Generally, **Christians teach, warn, and sing** to one another.
 - Paul says to the Christians in Colossae, “**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God**” (Colossians 3:15–16).
- These last two general commands remind us **there is no hierarchy**
 - Discipling isn’t necessarily a defined “giver” and a “receiver”

- There is a ***general pattern of giving and receiving***
 - Contributing factors:
 - spiritual maturity
 - time served in the Christian life
 - active discipling

- Friends, let me ask you...
 - ***Are you a spiritually mature Christian?***
 - Do you have a good ***handle*** on ***God's word*** and a good ability to ***apply*** it to ***life***?
 - Does your life serve as a good ***example*** of an ***imperfect*** but ***intentional Christ-follower***?

 - ***If so, who are you discipling?***
 - ***Who are you helping*** to follow Christ as you do?
 - ***Who are you teaching*** all that Christ commanded?
 - ***Whose burdens*** are you bearing?

 - ***If you don't think you are ready for such things...***
 - Are you humbly ***admitting*** that you are not yet mature?
 - How are you actively ***seeking*** to grow?
 - ***Who are you looking to*** as an example of Christ-following?
 - ***Who are you asking*** to help you work through hard questions with you?
 - ***Who are you leaning on*** when the tough days come?

 - ***Friends, do you understand that this is what ordinary Christianity looks like?***

Summary: **Discipling is the function of EVERY Christian!**

(Segue) Healthy churches, then, ***expect discipling among the membership.***

(3) HEALTHY CHURCHES EXPECT DISCIPLING

- **Healthy Churches understand evangelism is discipling**
 - *“make disciples... baptizing them... teaching them...”* (Mt. 28:19-20).
 - ***Discipling is evangelism***, because the Gospel is the beginning, middle, and end of Christianity!
 - A note to Christians, ***“I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you...”*** (1 Cor. 15:1).
 - One ***“brother”*** is mentioned ***“who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel”*** (2 Cor. 8:18).
 - The Galatian Christians were in a desperate situation because they were ***“turning to a different gospel... distorting the gospel of Christ”*** (Gal. 1:6-7).
 - The Apostle Paul even talks about having his Gospel message checked by Christian leaders in order to ensure that his Gospel was actually the Gospel (Gal. 2:2).
 - The Christian life is defined as ***“striving for faith in the Gospel”*** and ***“living in a manner worthy of the Gospel”*** (Phil. 1:27).
 - If your understanding of ***evangelism*** produces ***one-day disciples***, then you may have a faulty view of evangelism.
 - Friends, do you think ***evangelism*** saves people and ***discipling*** what we do ***after*** someone is ***saved***?
 - Why do you think that?
 - Isn't the biblical response to the Gospel ***repentance*** (*turning from sin*) and ***faith*** (*trusting in Jesus*) an ***ongoing*** one?

- **Healthy Churches expect to benefit from discipling efforts**
 - Non-Christians expect to be engaged by church members.
 - New Christians who become church members expect to be corrected & refreshed by more mature members.
 - Unhealthy (sin-trapped) members expect other members to notice and lovingly strive to restore their health.
 - Healthy members expect to see spiritual growth over time.
 - Friends, do you **expect fellow church members** to be in **your business** (for your spiritual good)?
 - Do you **resist deeper** personal **relationships**?
 - Do your **non-Christian friends** expect that your **conversations** are going to frequently **involve** hopeful applications of the **Gospel**?
 - Do your friends know that **you deeply want them to be Christ-followers**?
 - When you know you are **chasing sin**, do you hope that a fellow church member will **notice** (so that you can **benefit** from their **loving efforts to restore** your spiritual **health**)?
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- **Healthy Churches expect to be actively discipling**
 - Since discipleship is Christianity...
 - Since discipleship is me following Jesus...
 - And since Jesus commissioned all His followers to help other people be followers too...
 - Healthy Churches are full of Christians who expect to put themselves out there and be actively discipling others!
 - Friends, **do you think church membership is mostly about you benefitting from others**?
 - **Do you know** that **membership** is **your pledge** to **others**?

(4) APPLICATION: 3 DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

- **Do you expect programs to do the work of making disciples?**
 - If so, why do you think that?
 - What biblical example is there of programmatic discipling?
 - What biblical command tells us to create a program for discipling?
 - Doesn't a programmatic approach hinder our ability to form deeper and more meaningful relationships?

- **Do you expect to be disciplined?**
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, who are you actively seeking to learn from and imitate?
 - If so, how are you making this expectation a priority?

- **Do you expect to inconvenience yourself in order to do the work of disciple others?**
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, who has God placed in your home for you to disciple?
 - If so, who has God placed in your life-routine for you to disciple?
 - If so, who are you actively discipling among your church family?
 - If so, how are you overcoming the obstacle of convenience?

Major Point: Healthy Churches expect the membership to be intentionally discipling.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/about/>

A Concern for Discipleship and Growth by Mark Dever (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFhH8Euc6H4>

Four Ways to Make Disciples by Mark Dever

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-ways-to-make-disciples/>

Disciple-Making is Ordinary Christianity by Erik Raymond

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/ordinary-christianity/>

Parenting is Discipleship by Josh Buice

<http://www.deliveredbygrace.com/parenting-is-discipleship/>