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## *Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge Resolution*

Matthew 28: 18-20

Happy New Year! Before we plunge into 2015, let's pause for one last backward glance. Around us are reminders of 2014. Banners from a year's worth of sermons. And this string art which represents the stories of our Chapel Hill folk last year: 55 people committed their lives to Christ or renewed that commitment; 68 people were baptized into our faith; 121 folks went through our membership process and joined our church. And 18 of our members and friends went to be with the Lord. These strings, these banners represent lives that have been changed by the Holy Spirit in this last year at Chapel Hill. Aren't you grateful for what God is doing in our midst?

Now, we look forward. A year ago, our session decided that our focus as a congregation will be this: we will be a church that makes disciples who make disciples. We will train our congregation, not only to be disciples of Jesus...but to be disciple-makers for Jesus. We sent a team of ten to a disciple-making conference. Your elders are in the middle of a 12 week study on disciple-making that meets every Wednesday morning from 6-7:30. Together, we studied the Sermon on the Mount to discover what a disciple of Jesus looks like. We concluded that study with Covenant Sunday when more than 800 of you turned in cards declaring how you will be more faithful disciples of Jesus.

We are in the process of training elders, deacons, coaches and LifeGroup leaders so that they can help us create a culture that replicates disciple-makers. And in the fall, we intend to launch a weekend evening worship service—probably on Saturday nights—that will create an intentional disciple-making community and provide an alternative for those who, for whatever reason, cannot be in church on a Sunday morning. Disciple-making!

And as a matter of fact, I spent my sabbatical focused on this issue. I asked myself this question: What would the Lord have me do with the next ten years of my ministry here? What kind of church would I want to hand off to the next generation of leadership? Here's where I landed: if ten years from now it could be said that Chapel Hill is a church that makes disciples who make disciples—if a growing number in this congregation could name their spiritual children and spiritual grandchildren—that would be for me the ultimate expression of our church's mission: "Working together to present everyone mature in Christ."

This not a one-year program; it is a ten-year plan to focus on what Jesus told us our focus ought to be in a passage we call "The Great Commission." On this first Sunday of January, when so many of us have made resolutions about ways to improve our lives... it is a chance for us as a congregation to be newly resolved: we will obey the call of Jesus to be disciple-makers.

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Our starting point is to ask a simple question of this familiar text: Did Jesus mean it? Did he really intend that every one of his followers would be a disciple who makes other disciples? I realize that some here this morning are not disciples of Jesus yet... and you would not call yourself that; you are exploring, listening, learning. Perhaps you came at Christmas and you wanted to find out more. We are so glad to welcome you! Obviously if you are not yet a disciple of Jesus yourself, then you can't make other disciples. But you can listen in on this important conversation! So eavesdrop!

But for those of us who are followers of Christ, it is too easy to sidestep this passage. To assume that it was intended only for the original 11 disciples or that it is the job of the institutional church or the paid professionals like me to obey this command of Jesus. But this morning—this year and for the next ten years—I want to pose this possibility to all of us: the Great Commission of Jesus is for every single disciple. We are all called to be disciple-makers for Jesus. So what does that stir in you?

The first step is to decide whether or not we are willing to obey his call. Don't worry about all the reasons you can't or the fears that well up inside of you. Assuming those issues can be dealt with, the first question is this: are you willing to be a disciple-making disciple of Jesus Christ? Let me say this: I don't know that there is any other kind. I think the fallacy of American Christianity is that we view discipleship as personal and internal: studying the Bible, praying, becoming better persons, following Jesus... going to heaven instead of going to hell! (That's always a crowd favorite!) And all those things are true! That is a part of discipleship.

But it is not the whole of biblical discipleship. The last piece—the part that completes the circle of discipleship—is disciple-making. It is only when we have passed on what we have received—when we can point to others into whom we have poured our lives and who, as a consequence, are walking in the Lord and discipling others—only then that we have completed the discipleship cycle. I say "cycle," because it never ends. We ourselves are disciplined, we grow, we continue

to disciple others, and we do it again and again. It is the most fulfilling way to live as a disciple of Jesus. And, I daresay, it is the only way to live as a true disciple of Jesus. A starting point for those of us who are willing be feel inadequate or fearful, is the resolution to say, "If the Holy Spirit will equip me and empower me I will be a disciple-maker for Jesus." Are you willing?

The next question then is this: what frightens you most about this call? Let's assume you are willing to obey Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples. You might be terrified, but you are willing? What frightens you most? There are five verbs... five action words that make up the Great Commission: Go, make, baptize, teach, obey. Which verb frightens you most? I'll wait. Take a look, and when you have your choice, raise your hand.

"... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...."

I want to tackle what I think is the most daunting verb in the Great Commission. And it is the smallest of all; a 2 letter word that, I think, strikes fear in the hearts of many otherwise willing disciples. Go! How many find "Go" to be the scariest of Jesus' commands? Here's why I think that is. We don't really understand the word. Some of us think that "Go" means leaving everything we know and love and heading off for some foreign country somewhere... probably a place that has terrible diseases or mean people. Wherever it might be, "Go," means not here!

Or we think that, at the very least, "Go" means that we have to leave the relationships we already have, look for people that we don't know, and share the gospel with them like making a cold call. It makes us feel like those telephone salespeople who disturb us every night. We don't want to be obnoxious, right?

So are those the only two options? Does obeying Jesus' call to "Go" mean either leaving the country for some foreign mission or leaving relationships we already have and finding a stranger to disciple? Well it might mean that for some, but it's not what Jesus actually said. The literal translation of the Greek word for "Go" in this text is a participle: "Going... in your going." In other words, "as you go—as you are traveling the journey of your life—in the course of your career and your family-making and the other things that define your life... "in your going" make disciples.

So the best translation for this word is this: Wherever you are, wherever God has placed you, that is where you do your disciple-making. You pay attention to those with whom you already have a relationship: family, friends, workmates, playmates... and in your "going" with them, you make disciples. Disciple-making is **not** the same as being a missionary. Disciple-making is not even the same as evangelism. ***Disciple-making is intentionally sharing your life with Jesus***

***with someone you already know and love in order to accompany them to a deeper place spiritually.***

This really hit me in my relationship with a squash partner. He is a friend, a believer, a member of this congregation... and yet, after years of working out together, I realized through our conversations that he was hungry to grow in his relationship with Jesus and I really hadn't paid attention. We played squash. But I realized God was calling us to something more. So without having to "Go" anywhere else—right there in a relationship I already had—we began to explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

It started about four months ago with the 90 Day Challenge. There are four gospels in the New Testaments, small books that talk about the life and ministry of Jesus. There are a total of 89 chapters in the four gospels—each chapter 1-2 pages in length. So if you start with Matthew and read one chapter every day, in 90 days you will have read all four gospels.

I invited my friend to do the 90 Day Challenge. Read one gospel chapter every day and ask two questions: What did I learn about Jesus and what does Jesus tell me to do? I suggested he write it down in a journal. Then every day, I emailed him a summary of what I had discovered in my own reading and an encouragement to be faithful. Here is what he shared with me one day, and I share it with his permission:

"So, I just sat down and read Matthew 6 to my youngest daughter. She loved it. We spent some time talking about "worrying" She summarized it by saying, "If we worry about things, we have a lack of faith." Stop worrying and ask God to take over. It's very easy for me to worry about both daughters' futures, both near and far. I am feeling more at peace in the Word of Jesus and sharing it with them now more than ever. I am starting to feel more relief knowing He has my back."

We are growing together as disciples of Jesus because I came to realize that "Go" in this case didn't mean Thailand or Cambodia or even the streets of Tacoma. It meant the squash court at the YMCA and a 90 day challenge to read the gospels together with my friend.

Again, disciple-making is not the same as converting someone. It is intentionally sharing your life with Jesus with someone you already know and love in order to accompany them to a deeper place spiritually. And by the way, it always goes both ways. You end up discipling each other!

So as a starting place in our call to disciple-making, I extend this 90 Day Challenge to you. Have you ever read through the four gospels of Jesus? This is a chance to do so together as a church. We have provided journals for you. And we will provide a brief daily blog to encourage and provide some background. You will find it on the front page of our web site. My challenge to everyone here is that we

make a resolution that really could change our lives and our church. Starting tomorrow morning, we will read all four gospels, one chapter a day—then, on the following Sunday, I will preach on a theme from what we have just read together the previous week. If we start tomorrow, we will conclude on Palm Sunday.

So how many are in? And if you are ready to take up a disciple-making challenge, why not invite one friend to join you in this journey? Read the chapter, share what you learned, and see what the Holy Spirit does through you.

That's the last thing to say: this is not about you! Not about your Bible knowledge or your clever answers or your determination to make disciples. It is about you making yourself available to the Holy Spirit "as you go along your way." That's what Jesus promised when he said, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." You are not doing this in your own strength. Jesus is with you! And actually, that is a promise we claimed when we were baptized! That the Holy Spirit of Jesus would enter us and clean us and save us and change us and use us as we go along our way!

This morning, as is our tradition, we are going to start a New Year by renewing our baptismal vows. If you have been baptized, I invite you to come forward, receive the sign of the cross in water on our forehead, and you will hear these words: "Remember your baptism and go!" I hope your response will be, "I will go!" And if you have not been baptized but want to commit your life to Jesus, we have elders who are ready to talk with you. At the end of the service of renewal, if any are ready to be baptized into the faith and into the church, we will do so.