



January 18, 2015  
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*Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge*  
*Relational*  
Matthew 8-14

So, we come to the end of week two of our 90 Day Challenge. If you are visiting today, we have challenged our entire church to do a simple thing: read one gospel chapter every day and write down the answer to two things: What did I learn about Jesus? and What did I learn about disciple-making? If you need extra journals, we printed another 200 and they are available in the back. If you do this simple thing—read one gospel chapter every day—by Palm Sunday you will have read all four gospels about the story of Jesus.

I'm excited about how something so simple has taken hold! Gig Harbor is buzzing about the 90 Day Challenge. I asked my son Cooper, who is at Whitworth, if he'd like to do this by email. He said, "Yes" and we have had the most significant ongoing spiritual "conversations" in his 19 years. It's been awesome! So how are you doing? How many read at least some of our chapters this week? How many read all seven? Our blog? Good for you! Keep it up! God will bless this commitment.

Each week, the sermon will be based on a theme from the previous week's chapters focusing on how Jesus made disciples. Of course, because we are all at different levels of spiritual maturity, we will do this in different ways. But there are key principles to disciple-making that we learn when we watch Jesus at work.

Last week, we discovered that Jesus was intentional. He didn't just float along, hoping to bump into somebody. He had his head on a swivel, looking for the people God wanted him to invest his life in. If we are going to be disciple-makers for Jesus, we have to live our spiritual lives on purpose... not just bounce around like a pinball. I know that last week, one woman went to another after the sermon and said, "Will you disciple me? I want you to be my spiritual mentor!" That's living life on purpose. Intentional.

I experienced a very tense intentional moments last week in Orlando. I was with a gathering of large church pastors. One night at dinner we were being waited on by Charles. (He had me try gator tail... it was good!) After Charles served us, one of our group started to say grace. But first he said, "Charles, we are about to pray for our food. Is there anything we could pray for you about?" It was one of the longest, quietest moments I've ever experienced in a restaurant. Charles looked like a deer in the headlights! I admired my friend for his gutsiness, but, wow, it

was quiet. But he didn't give up. "Charles, how would you like us to pray for you?" Another long silence... and finally Charles said, "Silently?"

Very intentional... and a little uncomfortable. But you know what happened? By the end of the dinner, Charles did share things from his life and, as we left, he called out across the restaurant, "God bless you!" I'll bet that was a first! Disciple-makers are intentional.

This morning, we look at a second essential quality in disciple-making. If you are going to obey the call of Jesus to make disciples, you must be relational. Jesus made disciples by being with people. Now this may seem like the biggest "duh" in the history of sermon-writing. How else could Jesus make disciples if he weren't with people? Duh! But it is easy for us to forget how Jesus lived. He immersed himself in the lives of others. He didn't have to. He could have appeared on the Mount, delivered the Sermon, and disappeared into a cave like a guru. He could have called his disciples and sent them out to minister on his behalf. But that's not how Jesus did it. Remember his other name? Emmanuel... God with us. And Emmanuel was as good as His name.

We may miss it when we read the Bible a few verses at a time, but just think back over this last week about all the amazing experiences Jesus shared with people. He was in Capernaum, in Peter's house, in Galilean villages, in Gentile villages across the lake, beside a tax booth, in a boat... three times. He healed a leper, healed a servant, healed Peter's mother-in-law, healed a paralytic, healed a hemorrhaging woman, healed two blind men, healed the man with a withered hand and cast out a bunch of demons.

He calmed a storm, walked on water and fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. He battled with the Pharisees, was rejected by his home town, grieved the execution of John the Baptist. He encountered great faith, great doubt, great opposition, great pain, great grief and great fear. He trained his disciples and sent them out. He bragged on John, chewed out Peter and cursed Capernaum. And at least twice, he withdrew because he was exhausted and needed rest. And after all this, who wouldn't!

If this last week of readings teaches us anything, it is that Jesus' disciple-making was relational! He made disciples by being with people. And twice we read what drove Jesus to live a life of intense, relational ministry. See if you can spot it.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 9: 35-36.

When Jesus heard [of John's execution], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Matthew 14: 13-14

Why did Jesus spend time with people? What drove him into the midst of their brokenness... living life with them, teaching and healing and delivering them... to the point that he could hardly grab a moment alone? Did you see the word? Compassion! It was Jesus' deep compassion for people that drove him. They were not projects to him; they were persons, individuals... created and loved by God and worthy of his undivided attention. Jesus made disciples by being relational!

I have been thinking disciple-making for nearly a year now. I focused my sabbatical on this topic. Trying to figure out what I needed to do to lead this congregation to embrace disciple-making as our core mission. But I found out that God wanted to do something in me to make me a better disciple-maker. And it all came to a head in a disciple-making conference three months ago.

Our team was seated in a small group. After spending the first day with our leaders, they said, "Okay, we're throwing out the script. You have obviously read the material, you've done your homework; we don't need to convince you to be disciple-makers. So we're going to tell you what we think is your biggest issue: You aren't as relational as you think you are."

The more they talked, the angrier I got. I thought, "These guys are full of it!" Here was a circle of friends and colleagues. We have shared a lot of things with each other. We've been transparent. But the more we talked, the more I realized they were right. We weren't as relational as we thought we were. We were willing to go so deep and no further. And when we came back from that conference, this is the issue we continued to grind on. Are we really relational as a staff? Do we take the time to really be with those people around us every day? Do we even care to? When we say, "How are you doing?" and someone offers a half-hearted, "Fine,"... are we happy to let it pass, or do we stop right there and dig in to what is really going on in their life?

And I realized how much of this was my issue. I am so task-oriented as a leader—so production-oriented, and I set such a fast pace—that too often, I don't make the time to really be with people. And I didn't like what I was discovering about myself as a staff leader.

Then I turned to my role as pastor, and I realized something else: I had become a rancher instead of a shepherd. A shepherd lives with his flock, knows them by name, cares for them personally. A rancher runs a big spread and has lots of hands working for him. He may never climb into a saddle because he has employees who do. Of course, I have to delegate. We have more than 2,000 people who call Chapel Hill home. I can't take care of everyone. But I realized that I had come to hide behind the bigness of the church as an excuse for not being a shepherd; and that because I could not take care of everyone, it didn't mean that

I could not care for some... that because I could not call everyone, it didn't mean that I could not call one, or five, or ten.

And then I remembered, I went into this business because I wanted to be a shepherd. I wanted to know my flock and care for them. But over the years, I have outsourced more and more of my shepherding responsibilities and become more of a rancher. And a rancher, by definition, is not relational. He can't be.

The only way I know to change my heart—in addition to prayer—is to change my habits. So I have begun new habits. When someone answers, "How are you?" if it seems inauthentic, I stop right there and press in: "No, how are you really?" Every week now I am trying to call five people who have not been in church. It is amazing how a phone call—saying you've been missed and asking if there is anything that can be done—can make such a difference. I'm writing more notes. I'm shaking more hands on Sunday morning. In short, I am doing things that strengthen my relational muscles... that force me to slow down and be with one person at a time.

I'm not the only one. All of us are paying more attention to being relational, but I was the one who needed it most. And I'll confess, just telling you this makes me nervous. Because I am in fact only one person... because it is not possible for me to shepherd every member of this congregation, and because, in fact, I think it is good that this congregation cares for itself. We have elders and deacons and lay people who have a ministry of compassion. That's a good thing! But most of all, I'm nervous because I don't want to set myself up for failure because I can't meet your expectations.

But as I look ahead to the next ten years, I want the Holy Spirit to make me a better shepherd. Or maybe, to restore the passions that called me into ministry in the first place. I want to be a better shepherd, and I want to raise up a church full of shepherds. Ironically, the better I do at raising up shepherd-leaders—folks who really care for the person next to them in the pew—the less shepherding I will need to do, because you guys will hog it all before I get a shot! We dream of a time when every person in this church is a part of a LifeGroup shepherded by a relational leader who will notice when someone slips away. They will call to find out what's wrong before I even have the chance to do so.

But I want to be this kind of a pastor. I want to be a shepherd and not a rancher. Honestly, I like being the shepherd of a big and growing flock. But I still want to be a shepherd who looks out upon the congregation, in the same way Jesus did, and sees them with eyes of compassion... sees them, not as projects, but as precious souls entrusted to my care.

I have spent a lot of time in confession this morning. But as I've told you before, I always have to preach the sermon to myself before I preach it to you. Or more accurately, the Holy Spirit has to preach it to me first. And the Holy Spirit has

been preaching to me—and to Cyndi—big time... calling us to a ministry of deep, genuine, compassionate relationship.

Jesus made disciples by really being with people. Just think of that list of activities again. It's not like he wasn't getting stuff done... not like he wasn't productive! But you have the sense that, in every single moment whoever he was with at the time... he was really with them. Really listening, really looking into their eyes, really empathizing with them. That was Jesus' way... the Great Shepherd who touched thousands of lives on this earth one person at a time.

So how about you? Do the people in your life have the sense that you are really with them or are you just around them? When a person answers your question, do you really listen to them—not only their words but the unspoken emotions of their heart? Would your spouse, your kids, your parents, your friends say that when you are present, they have your undivided attention and interest? When was the last time you were in the home of a member of your LifeGroup, or took someone to coffee just to check on them? Or made a phone call or sent an e mail to tell someone you were praying for them? What one thing could you do this afternoon to be more relational?

If we are going to live lives of discipleship and disciple-making, it starts with relationship... being with people. Are you willing to change your habits so you can change your heart? Will you ask the Holy Spirit to give you a genuine passion to know and be known by those who matter most to you? If you will, that will be the beginning of a life of fruitful disciple-making.