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Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge *Slowing*

Mark 9:2-8; 10:17-22

Good morning Chapel Hill! I'm Pastor Bill. We're continuing in our series *Disciple-Making 101*—looking at the way Jesus makes disciples. The first four weeks we looked at how Jesus made disciples by being intentional, relational, unflappable, and hospitable. Last week we started using “ing” words, and we said Jesus makes disciples by entrusting. This week we are look at Jesus making disciples by “slowing”.

We've also been doing a 90 Day Challenge for those of you who are new with us. We are reading through all 4 gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—over a 90 day period, one chapter per day. How many of you were able to do all or most of your reading this week in Mark 8-14?

Today we are looking at how Jesus makes disciples by “slowing”. Why do we have to practice “slowing” to make disciples? Can't we run the race a little faster to make disciples? You would think with all of the technology available today, we could somehow make disciples faster so we can finish the Great Commission more quickly.

Just like making stew in a crockpot, there are some things that cannot be rushed or microwaved and making disciples is one of them.

Dallas Willard, one of the spiritual giants over the last 50 years in the area of discipleship and spiritual formation, said on the first day of my Doctor of Ministry course to a group of pastors and missionaries, “Eliminate hurry from your life.” We all sat there for a few moments trying to absorb that idea. I think some of us thought that was a little like asking a mouse to cut cheese out of their diet.

Willard gave people two assignments to practice in order to learn this habit of eliminating hurry—one was to sleep 10 hours a day. We were taking this course at a retreat center and we were not allowed to come out of our rooms until 8:00am each morning. For some of us that felt like an eternity.

The other assignment he gave us to eliminate “hurry” was to memorize Col 3:1-17. We all know v. 17: “and whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We also

had to memorize the other 16 verses in those two weeks, and I came to realize that I don't memorize things quite as easily as I used to.

What I realized as I practiced getting extra sleep and memorizing that Scripture was that I was actually able to eliminate hurry from my life. And I found life was much more relaxing and enjoyable, with a great sense of God's peace, presence and joy.

This morning we are going to look at how Jesus practiced the fine art of "Slowing" to make disciples. I am going to look at a couple passages from Mark where Jesus slows down to disciple others. I'm going to use the acrostic "SLO" to help us remember a few things about the practice of slowing.

The "S" stands for:

Simply Your Life—Mark 10: 17-22

In Mark 10 we read the story of the rich young man. You remember the story... Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and a man came running up to him, knelt down and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, 'Why do you call me good, only God is good.' But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.' The man replied, "Teacher, I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

Then comes one of the most amazing phrases in the New Testament... Mark writes, "Jesus looked at him, and loved him." Jesus could see right through the young man and discern the real issue in his heart. "'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, for he had great wealth."

Jesus is not judging the man for being wealthy. Jesus slows down to speak lovingly and honestly into his life to show him that his wealth is getting in the way of knowing and serving God. His wealth was a "rival god" competing for priority in his life. The rich young man needed to simplify his life by letting go of his wealth in order to follow Jesus. Jesus extended the invitation for him to follow him. But he knew the man could not follow him until he sold his possession and gave them away, thus slaying the rival god at work in his heart! Unfortunately the man wasn't willing to let go of his riches so he went away sad.

One of the reasons the American Church isn't growing and making more disciples is because we have too much money and too much stuff that really distracts the Church from doing greater work for Jesus... like making more disciples.

This week 120 Chapel Hill high schoolers and adults are going to be exposed to people that don't have very much stuff, and some are going to be impacted by that reality. Some may even decide to become pastors and missionaries and give their lives to helping others, because they realize, in part, that Jesus is more important than money and all the stuff money buys—that will eventually accumulate and wind up on shelves in our houses, in our garages, living rooms or storage units.

If we are going to become a “disciple-making” church, we have to simplify our lives. We need to “declutter”; we have to get rid of things that ultimately get in the way of the disciple-making process. And it's not just about our money and possessions—our calendars need to be “decluttered” in order to make room for disciple-making.

This reality came into sharper focus for me with an experience I had recently. I was driving to St. Joseph's Hospital in Tacoma to make a pastoral visit. I had never been there so I had my GPS on. I accidentally missed the Sprague Street off ramp so I had to go to I-5 to get there. When I was at the 705 “City Center” off ramp—where there is a lot of construction being done—I glanced down at my GPS then looked up in the rearview mirror. What I saw horrified me! A car moving perpendicular to me crashed into the concrete barriers right behind me. As I moved along, in a split second I watched parts of the car break apart and then go airborne because of the force with which it hit the barrier. I watched the car roll a couple time in the air going backward before it crashed to the ground. I couldn't stop because I was on a narrow off ramp, and the traffic was moving along at 60 mph. As soon as I exited the off ramp, I pulled over and tried to calm down after witnessing that horrendous crash. I realized that if I had been a couple of seconds earlier, that car would have crushed my car against the concrete barrier. Ever since that experience, I seem to be thinking more seriously about what really matters. And my conclusion is that except for my relationship with God and my relationships with people, everything else passes away. And it could happen at any moment. So as his followers we don't want to be wasteful with the short amount of time God gives us here on planet earth.

So now you can understand better why I feel so passionate about simplifying our lives to do what really matters.

The “L” stands for:

Listen to Jesus—Mark 9:2-8 (NLT)

“Six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.

Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him. 'Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them.'

This is the Word of the Lord.

When biblical scholars examine the Transfiguration, they love to see the parallels and connections between the Old and New Testaments. Moses and Elijah are major Old Testaments figures: Moses representing the Law—the 10 Commandments—and Elijah representing the Prophets. Jesus, Moses and Elijah together make up a type of "salvation-history summit conference." It is not really clear in the Transfiguration what purpose Moses and Elijah play. Neither one says anything. Since they do not speak but later fade from view when the voice of God speaks from the cloud commanding obedience to the Son, one must interpret the scene to mean that Jesus completes their work and surpasses them. Jesus' word and deed transcends all past revelation.

In the Transfiguration story God's word to the disciples can't be more straightforward and direct. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." 9:7 (NLT)

So here we see Jesus making disciples by slowing down, taking his followers to a solitary place on a mountain top, where they can clearly hear and experience God speaking to them, and the word they hear from the Father is: Listen to Jesus.

So, to make disciples we have to slow down and listen to Jesus. How do we hear the voice of Jesus in our lives?

Traditionally, the Church has taught that we hear God's voice in four ways:

1. Scripture
2. Prayer
3. Circumstances
4. God's people.

We don't have time this morning to talk about each of these ways we hear Jesus speak to us, but clearly many of you are hearing from the Lord as you read Scripture in the 90 Day Challenge. Some of you are seeing things through your reading of the gospels that you've never seen before, and that is creating a level of fresh enthusiasm and excitement in your faith.

One illustration of that happened recently when one of our members called in to the church and asked if a pastor could come and visit her roommate who was in the hospital with Stage 4 cancer. Our member was doing the 90 Day Challenge and sharing her insights from Scripture with her roommate. The woman in the hospital had never done much Bible study and wanted a visit from one of our pastors—even though she had never attended Chapel Hill and was from a different faith background. This woman was captivated by the enthusiastic, loving faith of her roommate who was sharing Scripture with her as part of the 90 Day Challenge.

As the pastor on call, I had the opportunity to respond to that request. I visited with the woman, and clearly she had a great deal of anxiety about her situation. We talked for a short while and then I asked if I could pray for her and if she wanted to surrender her life to Jesus? Even though she was from a Christian Tradition, the language of having a relationship with God and surrendering to Him seemed foreign to her. The word “surrender” seemed to speak to her and she mentioned something about “needing to let go of control.” We prayed together, and I left shortly thereafter.

A number of days later I talked with our member to find how her roommate was doing. She said that she had “let go of control” and was experiencing more peace in her life and her circumstances.

That illustration was a good example of how one of our members was reading Scripture, hearing the voice of Jesus in her life, sharing that with a friend, and making a big huge difference in the spiritual well-being of her friend.

To make disciples for Jesus you have to slow down and **S**implify your life, **L**isten to Jesus, and lastly, the “O” stands for:

Obey Only Jesus—Mk 9:8 (NLT)

“Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them. ”

On the Mount of Transfiguration, when the cloud dissipated, the only person Peter, James and John saw was Jesus. Moses and Elijah were gone.

The transfiguration was crucial for Peter, James and John’s understanding and maturation as Jesus’ disciples. Jesus wasn’t just another religious giant in Jewish history. He was the Messiah, the long-awaited holy and anointed one who is the savior and light of the world. Every other religious figure in history takes a “back seat” to Jesus.

As we continue to grow in our understanding of what it means to “make disciples” we must come to grips with the truth that Jesus is the one authority that we all

must submit to. He is the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” He is the “alpha and the omega,” the beginning and the end”. One of the reasons we are doing the 90 Day Challenge is because it focuses on the gospels—on the words and actions of Jesus—who is our Lord!

I’ve noticed that people in the Church love to exalt their favorite “religious authority”, Bible teacher or religious character. Or sometimes Christians will give equal or greater credibility to other “authoritative voices” in the culture over Jesus. That was a problem at the church in Corinth. Some believers there called themselves “followers of Paul,” some called themselves “followers of Peter”. Still others called themselves “followers of Apollos”. Paul had to redirect their attention to the true authority. Paul called himself a man who planted the seed, and he called Apollos a man who watered the seed”, but Paul made it clear that God gave the increase. Jesus is the One who makes things grow.

So in some of our texts this week Jesus practices “slowing” to make disciples. How do you need to practice “slowing” to make disciples for Jesus?

Were just about to enter the Season of Lent which traditionally is a time to reflect on your life and ask God to speak to you about things he wants you to know and do.

Do you need to:

Simplify your life by “decluttering” your schedule or giving away your money and possessions to make more time available to disciple others? Or do you need to...

Listen more carefully to hear the voice of Jesus speaking into your life through the scriptures, prayer, circumstances or God’s people? Or do you need to...

Obey only Jesus. Do you need to elevate Jesus to a higher level than all the other “voices” in your world—your supervisor, your spouse, your parents, Fox News, TBN, your favorite Bible teacher?

Because someday at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.