

Vision Sunday Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing Matthew 28:18-24

What is the measuring stick the church uses to evaluate itself? There are many different measuring sticks used to measure a church's success. Some use attendance, others how well their Sunday service went, then there is the size of the budget, and the number of people who get saved, or how many baptisms there are in a year. Those may be good indicators of the health of a church but they are not the measuring stick Jesus gave the church. If we measure ourselves with the wrong measuring stick we may be doing well according to that measurement but it is the wrong measurement stick! The measuring stick Jesus gave us is making disciples. Several years ago, the elders recognized that we were doing lots of good things but we needed to be more effective at making disciples so we found a ministry called Real Life who is focused on making disciples in the local church. We gleaned many helpful ideas for making disciples. But this is what we have found out. Making disciples is hard and demanding work but it is worth it, because it is Christianity. So today I want to start by reflecting on "Keeping the Main Thing, the Main Thing" from a familiar text, Mathew 28:18-20. Here we find three truths about making disciples: First, Jesus has given us a plan; Jesus has given us a process; and Jesus has given us a promise.

The Plan Jesus Gave Us Jesus gave us a clear plan, make disciples. All of us are called to make disciples. It is what we are called to do as a church and as individuals. Making disciples is not for special people, certain personality types, or really gifted people. It is the main thing he gave us to do. Jesus starts out with "Go." That is, I am sending you out to do what I did with you, make disciples. That is my plan A and there is no plan B for the church. So what is a disciple? First of all, a disciple is a Christian. The most succinct text that describes a disciple is when Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men (Mat 4:19)." This text describes a disciple in three ways: someone who follows Jesus, someone who is formed by Jesus, and someone who is faithful to Jesus' mission. So first of all, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus, we see this in Jesus' invitation, "follow me." To follow a master in that day meant to put yourself under their teaching, to learn from them, engage with them and their teaching. Jesus took this one step further, following him meant coming to him for salvation (Mar 1 :15). Following Jesus also meant you became part of the community of disciples, the group of followers who were intimately connected to Jesus and to each other. So, a disciple follows Jesus and secondly, a disciple is formed by Jesus. This is seen in the promise Jesus makes, "I will make you." A disciple seeks to become like their master, his teaching shapes the disciple's life. As we follow Jesus we are formed by Jesus to be like Him (Ro 8:28; Eph 4:13). This is discipleship or the process of sanctification. So, a disciple follows Jesus, is formed by Jesus, and third, a disciple is faithful to Jesus' mission. As a disciple follows Jesus, they are formed by Jesus, and as a result reproduce or make disciples. Jesus promises to make us into fishers of men or as he says here, make disciples. So, disciples make disciples. Making disciples is simply taking ownership of another person's spiritual development. So, the definition of a disciple is someone who follows Jesus, is formed by Jesus, and is faithful to Jesus' mission. The measuring stick Jesus gave us is to make disciples. Jesus gave us a plan and Jesus also gave us a process.

The Process Jesus Gave Us Jesus also gave us a process for making disciples that has five characteristics. The first characteristic of the process is being intentional. We see this when Jesus tells the disciples to "Go." Making disciples is an intentional process by taking ownership of the spiritual life of others. Jesus was intentional when he chose twelve men to develop. The second characteristic is being gender specific, Jesus worked with other men. He chose twelve men to invest spiritual, emotional, and relational energy to reproduce his life in them. The third characteristic of the process is that making disciples is centered around the local church. Jesus instructs his disciples to baptize and teach. In baptism, a disciple is identifying with faith in Jesus and his church. Teaching implies one is sitting under the teaching of the

local church. To be a Christian disciple is to be part of the local church. The fourth characteristic of the process is spiritual formation or spiritual growth, Jesus said "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." The goal of teaching is worship and obedience. The last characteristic of this process is accountability. Accountability is essential to a life of obedience and spiritual growth. Accountability includes the confession of our sin to others who encourage us and who hold us responsible for our sin. The Promise Jesus Gave Us Making disciples can be overwhelming and intimidating. Many of us have never been disciplined so we feel inadequate to disciple others. Or we do not think we are spiritual enough or know enough or have the right personality to disciple others. Imagine the insecurities in the minds of the disciples. This was a ginormous task, make disciples of all nations. Most of them had probably never been out of their own village until they traveled with Jesus. Jesus knew this so he gave them two promises. The first is found in verse eighteen, "All authority has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples." He gives the command to make disciples because of his authority. Jesus recognizes that the plan is humanly impossible so this plan is based upon his authority, which is the right and power to accomplish the plan. He is the great doer in our doing. The second promise is, "Behold! I will be with you always, to the end of the age (20)." In our going and making, we have the promise of Jesus' presence. With his presence comes the resources to do the plan. He is with us by his Spirit who fills us and empowers us to overcome our inadequacies. Making disciples is not optional, it is Christianity,

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What do you think of when you think of a disciple or discipleship?
2. Have you ever been disciplined or disciplined anyone?
3. How did David define a disciple? Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Based upon this definition, are you a disciple?
5. Would you add anything? Why?
6. Do you remember the five characteristics of the process for making disciples?
7. What do you think of these five characteristics?
8. Have you ever taken responsibility for the spiritual growth of another person?
9. What do you think of the statement, disciples make disciples.
10. Are you faithful to Jesus' mission?