

Making Disciples Kept Simple

*How can making disciples ever be kept **simple**? Have you tried it?*

At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus clarified that the *way in* is also the *way on*. The way we come to Jesus for salvation (new life) is how we grow in sanctification (growing more like Jesus on our journey). Notice the two active responses Jesus calls all people to in Mark 1:15.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe** the good news!” (Jesus at the beginning of His ministry in Mark 1:15, **emphasis**).

This first public declaration is the pivot point of history since this message is aimed at the world of humanity. The coming of Jesus transitions *from* the OT *into* the NT life with Christ in which we currently live. Since Jesus embodies the Kingdom of God, His Kingdom comes “*near*” with Him with the potential to impact every man, women and child in every culture. *Good news* does not mean “daily news” but epic, life-changing news.

What are we personally doing with Jesus’ coming?

Many have a negative view of the word “*repent*” because they have heard it primarily taught in the context of our sinning. This not wrong, only secondary. The word literally means “*to change our mind*.” The coming of Jesus and His Kingdom calls us first and foremost to change how we view our lives.

First change our hearts about the **Source** of our life. Then about our **strategy** for carrying out this life of making disciples as we measure our personal strategy against NT revelation, not measured against culture.

The second word from Mark 1:15 is “*believe*,” the verbal form of the word “*faith*” (a verb calls for action). Now, sometimes we struggle to grasp what faith is. I read a great illustration from a missionary to the South Seas. He struggled to find an equivalent word for faith in their native language. The tribal chief came to the missionary one evening, worn out from his day. When the chief came in, he sat down with a contented sigh, resting his entire weight in his chair. The missionary exclaimed,

“That’s it! To believe is to rest all the weight of our lives on Jesus Christ. It’s not simply a mental belief of knowing, but truth that we act on.”

I have found the following a helpful lens for my journey with Jesus: **God’s part** and **my part** as I partner with the Spirit. Please don’t confuse the two. **God’s part** is to provide everything we need for living a life in full dependence on Him. A children’s song summarizes **my part**. “**Trust and obey for there’s no other way.**” The *way in* is also the *way on*.

That’s what Jesus means when He calls His disciples to His full Lordship as Master.

So, “*repentance*” means to change our minds about our **Source** and **strategy** for life. And “*believe*” is an action-word meaning to **do** what Jesus says out of complete trust in Jesus *alone*.

We do not *believe* with a merely mental assent, like “*I know for sure that chair will hold my weight.*” Knowledge alone does nothing to resolve our need for rest. Rest comes only through heart-obedience. Paul also points to this fundamental contrast between **dis**obedience and obedience as the difference between life and death.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

Jesus walked out His life with one *simple*, consistent response towards His Father...obedience. The second man is Jesus, the first human being to walk completely how God designed since Adam went rogue (*1 Corinthians 15:47-48*). Jesus is our Model and calls us to the same *simple* life. Our Father is serious about obedience because it's the only way His children can experience our marvelous destiny.

Then [Jesus] said, "Here I am, I have come to **do your will.**" He sets aside the first to establish the second (Hebrews 10:9, see also 10:7, **emphasis**).

Yes, making disciples is *simple*, yet only because our Team-of-Three has already provided everything needed. *Simple*, yes, yet only if we actively practice *His* strategy by engaging with our concerted effort.

After His death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus came to His eleven disciples. In a few words, Jesus gives a Big-picture synopsis of how He prepared His disciples for three years to take His *strategy* to the ends of the world. They must be deeply convinced of His way because of the challenges they would experience. Some call this the *Great Commission*. It is *great* because Jesus *commissions* whoever *will* with what unlocks the inner destinies of our lives.

Are you deeply convinced that the strategy Jesus used with His disciples to form them is timeless and for you today?

Read Matthew 28:16-20 now. What do you personally see in this text? Build this firmly into your life since this is also your call from the heart of Jesus.

Active learning is essential to make disciples of Jesus (learners), so "flip" learning. Dive into passages yourself as a learner, in the beginning without any outside helps except for your Trainer, the Spirit of God. Let's begin by looking for answers to the four following questions in Matthew 28:16-20.

Who?

In *Matthew 28:17*, Jesus calls people just like you and me. As followers of Jesus, our hearts are stirred to adore our Master with *worship* yet doubt still may assault our hearts at times. Don't be discouraged or disqualify yourself! We are still very much in-process on the way. Take heart! Look honestly at Jesus' 1st century disciples and be encouraged because they kept coming to Jesus just as they were, with both their faith and their doubts.

What?

Jesus gives us only *one* command in His commission. This is the lifelong calling for every follower of Jesus, even though we add our unique portion in our roles He assigns.

"Therefore....**make disciples** of all nations" (Matthew 28:19a, **emphasis**).

When you think "*nations*," don't default to our current political boundaries. Jesus calls His people to reach out to *all* "*people groups*" in order to draw in all kinds of people, without limitation from our personal favoritism or prejudice. Notice also, Jesus does not call us simply to make converts or church attenders, but "*disciples*." The word disciple means "*active learner*," an *all-in* choice to follow our Master, Jesus.

Jesus selected the very best possible *strategy* for making disciples. Today we may call it *relational apprenticeship*.¹ It's face-to-face, life-on-life, relational in small groups. It's timeless, unchanged by age or culture. And such a *strategy* for multiplying disciples bears luscious fruit.

It's both formal and informal, both gathering together and teaching on the way. *Relational apprenticeship* or *mentoring* includes knowledge. However, Jesus launches His people to engage directly in His Love-Letter in such a way that we take *truth* and *put* it into *practice* for active *ministry* and to form *maturing* character (Matthew 11:28).²

Why small groups?

A group must be small enough to impact lives through face-to-face modeling, yet large enough to tap into natural group dynamics. Jesus built to last, to impact the world in every generation and culture and people group, beginning with you and me.

Look how Jesus ministered in love and kindness, compassion and care, and also with power because of the Father's delegated authority. Jesus gathered Twelve yet seems to have broken these into three groups of four. So, I suggest aiming at an ideal group size for making disciples in cell groups of 3-5 people with Jesus as Disciple and the Bible at the center.³

"After Jesus had completed all that he intended to do on earth [He] left his little group of apprentices or "disciples" to keep on doing what he had been doing while he was with them, but now they were to do it worldwide. He told them to "make disciples of all nations" (all kinds of people) and to "teach them to obey everything" he had commanded them (a Dallas Willard devotional).

How?

Jesus describes His *strategy* for how to raise up and release disciples with these three words. ***Going. Baptizing*** into faith-communities those who say "yes, Jesus." ***Teaching*** each one through relational apprenticeship in an interactive faith-community so truth impacts our daily life.

"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, and **teaching** them **to obey** everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20, **emphasis**).

Evangelizing with the Good News of Jesus. "As we are going about on our way in life," share Jesus naturally with those without Christ in any way in which the Father is working.⁴

Enfolding those saved into local faith-communities. This points to the ultimate baptism, when the Trinity snatches us from death and gifts us with eternal life as He immerses us into His Family-of-Three at salvation.⁵ And it also points to the common way that people publicly express their commitment to Christ and to the local faith-community, with water baptism. We immerse or enfold in the name (their character) of the Father, Son and Spirit since we are saved into a Trinitarian relationship, eternal life (*John 17:3*). Healthy community is crucial for spiritual growth because God is a relational Community-of-Three.

Equipping to do as we teach, yet not teaching like the 21st century norm. Jesus specifically says "teaching to obey everything I..." Every word is crucial.

- "I" points again to the Lordship of Jesus as Master of our lives. He decides what's important. As we are about making disciples in the 21st century, Jesus is still the Master Teacher, so we all come as both learners and teachers to our SmallGroups of 3-5 people.
- The end-result is *obedience*, so we put truth into practice to encounter everyday life.
- Selective obedience has no place in such a life as a follower of Jesus. Your local faith-community needs the unique part you bring (***Ephesians 4:16***).
- *Teaching* has two broad aspects. Both are legitimate and valid, yet each moves towards different results. "Put in" by telling is best with large audiences to convey information

and to inspire. “Draw out” with questions is the style associated with *relational apprenticing*.⁶ Jesus utilized “put in” towards the *crowds* and “draw out” what God has already put in, mostly with His Twelve (see my website, “**Teaching for Transformation**”/“**Draw Out...**”). Jesus taught the Twelve together like this, and especially with smaller breakout groups of 3 or 4. The Gospels record over 300 questions that Jesus asked. BTW, this interactive, collaborative “draw out” style of teaching is within the range of every person in any culture, while “put in” by telling demands greater skill to be effective.

Again, this Lordship of Jesus is something we must yield to Him moment by moment. Jesus will not force Himself on us. Note! If we selectively choose what we will obey, then we have usurped Lordship from Jesus by imposing our own personal values, like Eve and Adam did in the Fall in Genesis 3.

“Out of My grace to you, expend your effort to do what I command,” says Jesus.

God’s grace requires our partnering choice to **do**, or we fall short (**Hebrews 12:15**). This is not self-effort. Self-effort fails...always...even when it seems to work by drawing large, energetic crowds. Jesus is about making disciples, not sizzle or hype, crowds or noise.

God’s creation design fashioned humanity for an interactive, ongoing partnership with God as Senior Partner in our incremental spiritual growth, like in nature. This is the best possible **strategy**, and so **simple**, yet too slow for the world-system, so often overlooked. However, a multiplying apprenticeship is powerful.

Do the math!

If you begin with three others, after one year there will be **four**. Not just church attenders, but followers of Jesus. If all four gather three more each, there are **sixteen** after year two (the original four times four). After year three, **sixty-four**, approximately the average weekly size attendance at churches in America today. **If none fall out**. That’s why Jesus built to last, from the foundation up. Follow His brilliant **strategy**.

The Great Commission encompasses all three dynamic channels for active responses for making disciples. **Intimate Worship** (28:17). **Compassionate Mission** (“going”). **DiscipleMaking Community** (“baptizing” “teaching to do all”).

Are we building to last, like Jesus?

Why?

These verses differentiate Jesus’ brilliant **strategy** and **source** for making disciples in SmallGroups of 3-5 from any other. It’s His **authority** for ministry and His “*always with you*” **presence** that sets off His **strategy** for making disciples.

Then Jesus **came** to them and said, “**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given **to me**. Therefore.... And surely **I am with you always**, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-+20, **emphasis**).

Jesus “*came*.” He initiates by coming to His followers. God always *initiates* because He has already provided all we need. We **simply respond** by partnering with the Spirit of God.

When I think about our lifelong calling that fulfills our amazing destiny, even my small part seems beyond me. “*Make disciples through relational apprenticing by **evangelizing, enfolding these into community and equipping them to obey all that Jesus taught.***”

Why can every follower of Jesus do this?

Simple! We don't do this alone. Since Jesus has "all authority," He delegates His authority to each of us to fulfill our unique God-Assignments. We are together on mission with our Team-of-Three and also together with our local faith-community. Jesus trains us up and sends us out (**Mark 3:14-15**) through relational apprenticing, face-to-face, life-on-life in faith-communities.

His "always with you" presence then accompanies us in the routine and the remarkable. And where Jesus is, the Father and Spirit also are so we can go about doing good (**Acts 10:37-38**). God fully prepares His people for their "on your way" God-Assignments.

When Jesus had fully trained His disciples, He commissioned them. "From the same **Source**, pass on the same **strategy** to multiply disciples in SmallGroups like Jesus." And do this to each generation until Jesus returns. Jesus' plan was and still is unchanged over the generations. And **simple!** So **simple** that most overlook His timeless plan.

"Touch the entire world as My people pass on to others through relational apprenticing what I taught My disciples."

[We] must not think of the task as one of making adherents to a particular brand of Christianity now current. If we do, we will then lose the cosmic viewpoint and see the task only in terms of religious organizations and political realities. Jesus...sent them to make disciples (students, apprentices) to him and, supported by his [authority and] presence, to teach them all that he had taught by word and deed" (Dallas Willard).

Jesus often reinforces this **simple** strategy of obedience of faith to His Lordship ("teaching them to obey"), as does the rest of the NT (**James 1:22**). Let's look at how Jesus underscores this **obedience** to His disciples/learners. Read **Luke 6:46-49** before continuing.

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and **do** not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46, **emphasis**).

What a grand question! How would you answer Jesus' penetrating question? "WHY?" What blocks you from an all-in, wholehearted commitment towards being and making disciples, if anything?

If a thinking person read the Gospel accounts of Jesus, most would consider Jesus kind and embracing, caring and compassionate. **And that He is!!** Yet we must also recognize Jesus as absolutely brilliant with the best **strategy** to experience life to the full. If not, we will tend to be infected by the world-philosophies, aiming at size and sizzle. Do we believe that Jesus is truly Lord (meaning Master) and the Teacher who is unfailingly spot-on? Then, **act** on it as a wholehearted, all-in follower of Jesus (who still stumbles at times). Jesus amplifies.

What could support us to confidently desire to yield to His Lordship as Master in every circumstance by putting into practice what He commands?

"As for everyone who **comes** to me and **hears** my words and **puts them into practice**, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built" (Luke 6:47-48, **emphasis**).

Jesus gives us three **simple** responses for our part in His **strategy** of relational apprenticing. This is how we equip in SmallGroups of 3-5 today in our culture. **Come! Hear! Put into practice by obeying everything Jesus commands!** Jesus remains the Master Teacher in every SmallGroup. Then His disciples become like their Master when fully trained, more like Jesus. Such equipping is both formal and informal, both on the way and gathered together, knowledge but especially truth put into practice. We are transformed through our **doing**, not just because we can recite

information, no matter how spot-on it is. This type of person will stand when the torrents of life hit.

If a personal reason arises in your mind that whispers “this is beyond me,” bring this to Jesus now. Check out what Jesus has to say.

What are some of the things that Jesus calls us to **do**? Here is a small sampling from His message to His followers in Luke 6. All these align with how Jesus releases fullness of life, yet radically clash with the world’s philosophy.

1. *Luke 6:27-28* – Love and do good to, bless and pray for those who do us dirt.
2. *Luke 6:31* – Treat others the same way that Jesus treats you.
3. *Luke 6:37-38* – Don’t judge or condemn others, but instead give to them generously.
4. *Luke 6:41-42* – When you see a problem in another, **first** use this insight as a mirror to look at **yourself**. Then go with compassion to help the other.

A relational apprentice is like his/her Master when fully trained (Luke 6:40).

*What is the **Source** and **strategy** for your personal life of faith? How are you **acting** on it?*

Have you **come** to Jesus at a point in your life to tell Jesus, “I’m all-in with you, come what may”? Then keep **coming** to **hear** through His Word and the inspired explanation that His followers wrote under the Spirit’s guidance (we call this the New Testament).

*The one crucial response of the three remains...**doing**...**putting into practice** Jesus’ words so truth encounters our lives.*

I’ll stop here for now because I don’t want to rob you of the pleasure of discovering for yourself more about making disciples in cell groups, as small as 3-5.

Respond as if Jesus is brilliant. Since He is!

If you want a printout of most of this page in order to read and soak in it, **click here**.

If you want to take steps beyond this article, go to my webpage, **Disciples Multiplying Disciples**, on *JimFredericks.Com*. It’s **simple!** And for many Western churches today it means turning our church ministry upside down, building from the inside out with cell groups as small as 3-5.

*However, what’s most crucial to making disciples is: “**What will you do now about Jesus’ commands?**”*

¹ I got this term from my pastor, Pastor Travis Twyman at Inland Vineyard Church in his August 14, 2022 sermon.

² Matthew 11:28 names two responses to experience the second rest, one “*found*” through discipleship. Take up Jesus’ yoke of serving others (ministry) and learn of Him as gentle and humble (maturity).

³ There is no magic number. But because the groups are interactive, teaching by mutually “*drawing out*” what God is stirring within, this demands smaller groups with more collaboration. Experiment for yourself. However as a general rule, the larger the group the less intimacy and openness. Large groups where the teacher “*puts in*” by directive teaching is crucial to growth. However, few can be effectively developed in the deep way Jesus has in mind through large groups. That’s the world’s way.

Why 3-5 in a group?

- The Trinity is three and we are made in His image.

- All the lists of the Twelve Apostles have the exact same four in each of the groups as I lined them up. And one scholar supposes there was a natural affinity between the four. We are sure of this for the first group, Peter and Andrew, John and James. They were pairs of brothers who were partners in the fishing business before meeting Jesus.
- I'm no expert, but what I've read on group dynamics, every person added to a group of three multiplies the interpersonal connections and makes a group less open.

⁴ Paul gives us threefold array of how to share our faith, *proclamation, power* and presence *evangelism*, selected based on what the Father is doing (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; John 5:17+19).

⁵ The 1st century uses this word translated "*baptism*" for immersing white cloth into royal blue dye. When the cloth comes out, it's no longer white cloth, but new. It's now royal blue cloth. Such is our identity in Christ. We become someone we never were before.

⁶ This was the Rabbinic way of learning. Read how Jesus learned at eleven at the temple. How many different aspects can you list? And remember that the Gospels record over 300 different questions from Jesus.

"After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:46-47).