

MARK JENKINS MINISTRIES

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Our Obligation Of Discipleship

Dear Friend,

Over the past couple of years the Lord has been revealing to Debbie and me our obligation as Christians to disciple others. Yes, I said obligation. An obligation is something a person is bound or obliged to do and arises out of a sense of duty. As Christians, don't we have a duty to allow God to use us in the discipleship of other believers who are less mature in the faith? Isn't this the mandate our Lord Jesus declared before ascending into heaven? (Matthew 28:19)

“Go ye therefore and, teach all nations...”

The word “teach” is defined as: to teach, instruct, **to make a disciple**. Many churches believe that we are to make converts when actually we have been called to go and make disciples; disciplined followers. Jesus didn't say: “If you can squeeze out a few spare minutes in your busy schedules maybe you could consider discipling someone. If you have the time.” No, Jesus didn't sound that way at all. He said: “Go” and make disciples. If your boss at work told you to “Go” and do something would you think he was making a request or was he giving you an order? Clearly, Jesus has given us a mandate to “Go” and make disciples. How we go about obeying Jesus' mandate is something we will get into later in this letter.

Possibly, the choice of words used in the King James translation of Matthew 28:19, “teach all nations”, obscures Jesus' true intent and has allowed many believers to neglect their responsibility of discipleship. It's easy to say, “Well, Mark, I'm not a teacher like you so I'm not included in this verse.” Notice how Jesus didn't single out Teachers, He said “Go Ye”. In today's terminology Jesus might have said, “Everyone, go make disciples.”

Why did God make this a focus of attention for Debbie and me? God had to shake up our thinking in this area of discipleship because we had accepted a doctrine that was not squarely in line with the mandate given here by Jesus. The doctrine we had been taught focused expressly on the wonderful teaching

ministry of the Holy Ghost, but shied away from our individual responsibility to disciple, or mentor, others in the faith. Everything associated with the development of believers was said to be the responsibility of the Holy Ghost, leaving believers scot free of any responsibility regarding discipleship. If that were the case, Jesus would not have said go and teach, or make disciples, because the Holy Ghost would have taken care of that.

Notice how Jesus demonstrated the value and necessity of making disciples as He not only ministered to the masses, but also took the time to pour His life into twelve very ordinary men, eleven of which shook the world. Sure, it was important to Jesus to teach the multitudes and heal the sick, but it was equally, if not more important, that He instill within the twelve the principles of being a son of God. The Son of God, Himself, had to teach His disciples the principles of sonship so that when they were born again, sons of God, they too would do the same works Jesus did. (John 14:12)

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also: and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”

Jesus was not making this declaration to only these disciples, He was making this declaration to anyone who would believe on Him as the Son of God and become His disciple. As His disciples, (born again sons of God), Jesus expects us to do the same works that He did which includes: laying hands on the sick and seeing them recover, raising the dead, casting out devils, **and making disciples**. It’s interesting to me how His work of “making disciples” is generally not included in most people’s list of “His works” and yet isn’t that what the four Gospels are truly about; Jesus showing us “discipleship training” in the lives of the twelve disciples.

All too often we read a verse like John 14:12 and our attention immediately focuses on great miracles flowing through our hands. I have to wonder if our reason for envisioning miracles through our hands is always 100% pure. Is it about the people being ministered to or is there some small part of us that wants to hold on to some of the glory? You see, discipleship requires us to invest our life in someone else and it isn’t nearly as exciting as raising the dead nor does it garner the same notoriety. Big international ministries don’t generally receive recognition because of their focus on the one on one ministry of discipleship, but rather the miracles. Let’s be honest, it’s when the dead are raised or blind eyes are opened that the newspapers start showing up on the church house steps. Isn’t that what we have determined to be the measure of success of a ministry, the miracles, instead of the making of disciples?

The “greater work” Jesus said we would do isn’t some outlandish miracle that will sell more newspapers or go “viral” on the Internet, **it is the conversion of a spiritually dead person into a born again child of God.** That’s the one miracle Jesus **did not do** because He had not yet gone to the cross. With that in mind, wouldn’t it make sense that Jesus would expect us to not only see people born again, but to also accept our responsibility to disciple them in their new life with Jesus?

“No, Mark, I’m only interested in doing the works of Jesus that will bring me notoriety!” I’m sure no one is ever going to come right out and say this, but the truth of the matter is we are saying it by our actions, particularly ministers. When you hear ministers say things like, “I’m so busy, I haven’t the time to disciple or mentor anyone” what they are really saying is that it isn’t important to their bottom line. If Jesus had the time to disciple twelve men in three and a half years while ministering day in and day out to multitudes of people, without the aid of cars, public address systems, and huge venues, what excuse do we have?

Just to be clear, I am including myself in this group of ministers who believed I was too busy to disciple anyone. That excuse was much easier than taking the time to accept responsibility for discipleship **and becoming vulnerable by opening up my world to someone else.** It became much easier for me to tell someone to **go and pray** than to divulge my own personal challenges in areas they were struggling in and relating how God walked me through them, despite my shortcomings.

This type of one on one ministry requires us to communicate on a much more intimate level with a person. They are able to see into our lives in a way that most will never see because we tend to hide our imperfections by building walls, fearful of being looked down upon by our peers. Ministers are especially guilty of falling into this trap. In other words, for me to stand in front of a congregation and proclaim that I have faults is one thing, but for me to sit down, one on one, and spell out exactly what those faults are and how God has walked with me through conquering my faults is quite another. I discovered that as I let down my walls and became “human” to another person, that person was encouraged to press on through whatever struggles they were facing.

In the past, when I heard anyone outside our fellowship discussing discipleship I turned a deaf ear to their message. It always came across to me as something forced, like a program. You know what I am talking about; when a church organization decides that “this year we are going to focus on discipleship”. It’s almost like we think God wasn’t concerned about it last year, only this year. That is a good sign that what you are about to hear is a manmade program designed to mechanically accomplish something that someone decided was important. Believe me, God has a much better way than some mechanical program that will

run its course in 3 to 6 months and be placed on a shelf with all the other failed attempts to legislate God's plans.

What Debbie and I learned was that you cannot force these types of discipleship situations to happen. But, if you will follow Jesus He will lead you into them and they will be the most beautiful relationships you will ever have. God began teaching us this lesson on the heels of the most painful ministry experience of our Christian lives. We had no desire whatsoever to open ourselves up to anyone. We had built huge walls around our hearts for self-preservation. People we had opened ourselves to for years were used in the enemy's attempt to destroy us. It was at this point in our lives that God chose to teach us how to open our lives to another person for the purpose of discipleship.

It began when a friend of ours asked us to start a Bible study in his home. It seemed like a good opportunity to minister and I seemed to have nothing but time on my hands. We began a weekly Bible study, which showed signs that it might grow into something substantial. Then, the man who asked for the Bible study began to openly contradict what I was teaching. Slowly, the people began to stop coming. Finally, it was only Debbie and I and the man. I struggled with the notion of just quitting the Bible study, but the Holy Ghost arrested me every time I toyed with the idea.

We continued faithfully going and the weeks turned into months, until a turning point came. The man got an iPhone and Debbie had the idea of putting the Bible on his iPhone so he could listen to it whenever he wanted, which changed everything. Come to find out, our friend struggled to comprehend what he was reading so when he heard the words instead of having to read them he understood what was being said. Our friend's life completely turned around. He went from contradicting what I was saying to being a sponge trying to soak up everything I could give him. His spiritual development since then is nothing short of a miracle.

God has used our relationship with this man to teach me so many things. I look back and think what if I had given up on him and missed all the things God has taught me through his life. **I would have missed out on a friendship and some of the most valuable lessons of my life and he would have gone on believing a bunch of manmade doctrines that would have kept him in bondage the rest of his life.**

Instead, God used our experience with this man to teach me **the value of a single individual**. This is a lesson every believer must learn, that every person matters and every person is valuable to God. God does not overlook anyone, no matter who they are or what they have done.

What then is true success as a Christian? Is it in seeing limbs grow back and dead people raised to life, only for them to live a lackluster life as a believer because no one took the time to disciple them in the things of God and show them how to grow up spiritually?

This idea that “religion” has fostered of success depending on the number of souls converted, or even the full gospel view of success being the number of miracles performed, completely ignores the mandate given to us by Jesus of going and making disciples. Besides the lack of notoriety associated with making disciples, I believe discipleship is often discounted or overlooked because of the demand it places on our lives.

It will cost you something to make a disciple. In other words, making a disciple is more than just leading someone to Jesus and forgetting all about them, or laying hands on a bunch of sick people and then going back to the quietness of your home not to be disturbed by their cries for help when things don't seem to be going the way they should. Yet, for all the things making a disciple will cost you, the rewards go beyond words. There are no words to describe the joy I feel as I watch our friend grow in the things of God. His hunger for God's Word encourages me to press in to more of God. Our friend has no idea how much his growth has blessed me and even when he struggles at times it is his willingness to continue that blesses me the most. Our friend has truly become one of Christ's disciples.

What I am teaching here is not a program. I am not telling you to go out today and find yourself a disciple. What I am suggesting to you is this, begin expecting God to cross the path of your life with someone that He wants you to disciple. There are volumes that could be written about discipleship, but the one thing we must keep in mind is that we must allow the Holy Ghost to orchestrate the discipleship; otherwise it is just another program. Believe me, when the Holy Ghost is choreographing the relationship the results will be supernatural. In the end, God will have one more person who is rooted in the knowledge of the truth and equipped to go out and make other disciples. I believe that you too will agree that this is what Jesus intended for us to do all along, **“Go” and make disciples.**

~ Jesus Loves You!

Mark Jenkins