

# Discipleship 101: Who Makes Disciples?

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*[This is the second installment of multi-part series on discipleship. Future posts will answer other questions related to discipleship]*

## 1. [What is a Disciple](#)

In our pursuit of understanding discipleship and applying it to our lives, we ask the question today: Who makes disciples?

To that basic question, there are at least two answers, one corporate, one individual. First, churches make disciples. Second, mature believers make disciples. Let's consider both.

## Churches Make Disciples

At the institutional level, God has created the church to be a disciple-making community. This is not to say that parachurches, Christian camping, publishing houses, or Christian radio cannot be involved in the process. Many of these institutions have contributed mightily to making disciples. That being said, the local church is the ordained means of defending the gospel, proclaiming salvation, and making disciples. In other words, as Ephesians 3:10 – 11 insist, the church is the wisdom and purpose of God for accomplishing God's will on the earth.

Moreover, consider the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). It is not simply a charge to individuals; it is given to the twelve (well, eleven) apostles who would form the foundation of the church. These twelve, who would plant myriads of churches, were commissioned to instruct every subsequent generation to gather together (through baptism) and make disciples. Churches should see themselves as households equipped and commissioned to see children born in their midst. These spiritual newborns are then to be nurtured and admonished. This is discipleship 101. And , it's best environment and location is within the life of the local church.

Churches would be served, therefore, by asking: If Jesus came today and evaluated our church, what would he find? What are his expectations? The answer, from Scripture, is simple. Jesus would ask, "What are you doing to make disciples?" After all, his great commandment ("love one another" in John 13:34–35) and his charge to bear fruit (John 15:7–8) are both directly related to discipleship. His expectation for his churches is to hold out the gospel to a lost and dying world, and see men and women repent and become Christ-abiding disciples of Jesus Christ.

According to Jesus' own teaching, he is not impressed with our activities, our fancy fellowships, and endless programs. These things make us busy but are useless if they do not make disciples. It's worth remembering, Jesus has not called us to be active in Christian "things" variously defined. He's given us the specific task of making disciples. Since Christ is in

the business of making disciples, that is what he will expect us to be doing when he visits. On this, God's word is clear.

Big or small, churches are called to make disciples. This is the corporate answer to the question.

## **Mature Believers**

At the individual level, mature believers are the ones who make disciples. As in life, full-grown, healthy adults have babies, so mature Christians "give birth" (or rather, serve as attending nurses to the birth from above) to new Christians. While young Christians, infants in the Lord, can and do witness with great zeal and effectiveness, it is mature believers who are in a position to "disciple" newborn Christians.

The Great Commission includes a call to teach all that the Lord has instructed. New believers don't know what they need to know, and for this reason Scripture repeatedly calls older believers to mentor younger believers. Think of Paul with Timothy, Titus, and Silas, or Barnabas with Paul or John Mark. Titus 2 gives instructions for older women to teach younger women; older men, likewise, are to be models for younger men.

Thus, all disciples should strive for maturity, such that they can disciple others. This is not an optional calling, this is part and parcel of being a follower of Christ: true disciples make disciples. Sadly, as Hebrews 5 laments, many who should be teachers are in need of learning the elementary truths again.

As a way of examining ourselves, we can assess mature believers as those who exhibit Christ-like character and who are actively discipling younger believers (or looking to disciple someone). Discipling others shows Christian love, an understanding of God's purposes in the world, and a self-sacrificing, others-centered spirit, which proves the sincerity of Christ's disciples—just like Jesus said in John 15:7-8.

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

By contrast, maturity should not be measured by the number of years a person has gone to church or even by how many studies they have led. Church participation and leadership do not prove maturity. Maturity is measured by one's personal Christlikeness and their spiritual reproduction.

May God continue to raise up disciple-makers in this generation and in our church, that more and more disciples would be born, raised, and sent out.

For Your Glory and his joy, Pastor David