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Mission: Make Disciples

February 16, 2020

Daily Devotions

Day One

On December 26, 1960 Vince Lombardi and his Green Bay Packers stood in defeat as the Philadelphia Eagles beat them 17-13 – a game in which Green Bay was favored to win. A couple months following that crushing defeat, Lombardi stood in front of his men as they prepared to embark on the 1961 football season – men who, months earlier, had championship dreams slip through their fingers.

What do you say to a group of men who had laid it all on the line last season only to come up four points short? How do you get them ready to play a whole new season? Lombardi started training camp with something in his hand that needed no explanation.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “This is a football.”

With those five words, Lombardi made his point loud and clear. If you want to win a championship, you’ve got to know and execute the fundamentals. He challenged them each day to nail the basics of the game. Six months later, the same group of men gathered together to hear another one of Vince Lombardi’s speeches. This time it was to celebrate their NFL Championship and their 37–0 victory over the New York Giants. By remembering the fundamentals, they had become the best in the league at the tasks everyone else took for granted.

With that story in mind, take a few moments to reflect on some of the things you think make a *good church*. What are the fundamentals to a good church? Jot down your answers below:

Okay...question: Did discipleship come to mind?

There’s a Christian writer/speaker by the name of Neil Cole who I heard recently make a really convicting statement. He said, “Ultimately every church will be evaluated by only one thing, its disciples. Your church is only as good as its disciples. It does not matter how good your praise, preaching, programs, or property are. If your disciples are passive, needy, consumerist, and not moving in the direction of radical obedience, your church is not good.”

That quote says that churches should be making disciples, but it also talks about what kind of disciples a church is making. As a church, we have got to get discipleship right.

This is what Jesus commissioned his followers to do. Before Jesus’ ascension, he looked at his followers and said in **Matthew 28:19-20**, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”

Discipleship is to the church what the football is to the game of football. It's at its heart. It's at the core. That's why as a church, we are going to commit ourselves to making disciples and that's why as a church we have included it in our mission. The third part of The Creek's mission statement is to "Make Disciples." If we are known for anything, it has to be that the folks at The Creek make disciples of Jesus who love God passionately and love people intentionally.

As we go about the next couple of days, we are going to look at what discipleship is, but for now spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the following questions and sitting with the passage below:

1. What thoughts/feelings do you have towards discipleship? What does that word mean to you?
2. What is your history regarding "making disciples?"
3. Re-read **Matthew 28:18-20** slowly three times. What words or phrases stand out to you after reading and re-reading it? What do these verses reveal to you about Jesus' heart for discipleship?

Day Two

As we read yesterday Jesus once said, “As you go, make disciples...” These words were some of the very last ones he uttered before ascending to Heaven and, as we know, final words say a lot. But to do that, we have to know what it means to be a disciple. That’s what we are going to explore during the next couple of days.

When Jesus first began his public ministry, he began with a sermon. Read **Matthew 4:13-17**.

At the beginning of this passage, we meet Jesus as he is packing his bags and moving from the small town of Nazareth to the more happening region of Galilee. He did this to begin his ministry and, by doing so, to fulfill a prophecy in Isaiah (**Matthew 4:15-16**) that tells us how, in the area of Galilee, a great light would dawn on a people living in darkness. Jesus is the great light that dawns on a broken and hurting world.

This is the kind of passage that will wake you up if you hear it right – kind of like a spiritual brake check.

Americans are increasingly dissatisfied with their way of life. Loneliness and suicide have been steadily rising. Life expectancy has declined for the third straight year. We are hurried and busy, discontent, lacking purpose, unfulfilled, riddled with vices, and so on.

Perhaps these are signposts that, *we too*, are a “people living in darkness” that are in need of “a great light” to dawn.

It’s in that kind of cultural climate that Jesus says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (**Matthew 4:17**).

But what exactly does Jesus mean by that? Perhaps this illustration adapted from Dallas Willard will help: “There are some people still around who remember what it was like to first encounter having electricity come into their homes. Crazy, right? If you ask them about it, they’ll talk all about how the electric company bringing electricity to their farms and homes changed fundamental aspects of their every day living...just. like. that. **snaps fingers**”

How they experienced daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it had been changed *drastically* for the better. Electricity is something we take for granted, but for these folks, it changed everything for them! They had to believe in it and make the proper adjustments in their lives to really utilize it and rely on it to its fullest capability.

Essentially, these people were faced with a similar announcement to what Jesus gives. As author Dallas Willard writes, these people would have heard something to the effect of, “Change your life! Electricity is here! Put away your kerosene lamps, turn from your iceboxes and cellars, your scrub boards and rug-beaters, your manual sewing machines, and your radio with dry-cell batteries! A new way of living has opened up!”

This is what Jesus means when he says “repent” and when he talks about the “Kingdom of God.” Jesus is saying that a *new way of living* has opened up. God’s rule and God’s reign is here. Rethink everything. Adjust your life practically to rely on it.

Jesus offers an invitation to base your life on God and his ways. And he *knows* that in doing so, it will lead to a truly well-lived life. Jesus says that the ways of the world are easy and lead to destruction, but God's ways are well-worth the effort, leading to an eternal kind of life (**Matthew 7:13-14**).

That's why Jesus wants us to go and *make disciples* – because a new way of living has opened up. A light has dawned and there are far too many people living in darkness.

We'll talk more about making disciples in the days to follow, but for us to make disciples, we ourselves need to first *be disciples*...

1. How does Jesus' invitation to repent and rethink your life in light of God's kingdom sit with you? Explain your thoughts.
2. How would you describe the *quality* of your life? What words or phrases would you use? Are you satisfied with your life? Why or why not?
3. What would it look like for you to practically adjust your life to rely on God's kingdom?
4. In what ways have you already done this? In what ways do you still have yet to do this?

Day Three

Yesterday we saw that Jesus invites us to radically re-order our life to fall in line with God's vision for the good life – his Kingdom. This is important because Jesus isn't the only one with that sort of invitation. Here's what I mean...

Think about Daniel...like Lion's Den Daniel...from the book of Daniel...in the Old Testament. After being taken into Babylonian captivity we read that his name was changed, he was told to eat different foods, he had to learn a new culture, he was told to worship other gods, and one time he wasn't even allowed to pray to God – he was only allowed to pray to the king!

While the invitation to discipleship wasn't as explicit as Jesus', we can see very quickly that Babylonian culture was trying to disciple Daniel. Daniel's contemporaries wanted him to become just like them. The culture was trying to inculcate him. Fortunately, Daniel had habits built up in his life (being with God and obeying God's law) that helped him to remain faithful despite the cultural pressure closing in on him.

Part of making and being disciples means realizing that our culture and our world are doing their best to disciple *us*. As theologian Ronald Rolheiser writes, "Culture today is so powerful and alluring that it often just swallows us whole. It's beauty, power, and promise generally take away our breath and our perspective. The lure of present salvation – money, sex, creativity, the good life – has for the most part entertained, amused, distracted, and numbed us into a state where we no longer have a perspective beyond that of our culture and its short-range soteriology."

We are shaped by all kinds of different people (parents, teachers, friends, heroes, etc.); all kinds of different experiences (how we were raised, past trauma, past hurts, past joys, present circumstances, etc.); and all kinds of different cultural scripts (commercials, music, movies, philosophies, ideologies, etc.).

Not all of these things are bad, but in realizing that we are creatures shaped often times by the water we swim in, we must always consider what is in accordance with the way of Jesus and what is not regarding how we think, how we feel, and how we act.

We might ask ourselves questions like the following to help:

- Does my life align with God and his kingdom? In what ways does it? In what ways does it not?
- Am I really loving God with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength?
- What does how I allocate my time say about how I love God and love people?
- What does where I spend my money say about my love for God and my love for people?

Like the tide that gently carries an unaware swimmer, our culture has the potential to gently pull us farther from the way of Jesus. It's through training, reflection, and intentionality to become disciples of Jesus that we are able to make sure our lives are pointed in the right direction (we'll get that on the ground a little bit tomorrow). For now though...

1. In what ways do you feel pressured to live, act, think, or feel a certain way by the culture around you (be it culture at large, your family, etc.)?
2. Pick two or three of the questions from the list above. Reflect on your answers and think about what in your life or the culture around you impacts the answer you gave.

Day Four

Ok, if we are learning to disciple under Jesus and not under the world, what does that look like?

Let's look back at Matthew and read **Matthew 4:18-22**.

After Jesus has finished preaching the gospel, he began calling people to "follow him." In the verses you just read, Jesus comes across two groups of people and invites them to be his disciples.

Jesus was a 1st century Rabbi (or Teacher). In fact, many times throughout the gospels he is referred to as such (see **Mark 10:51**; **Luke 19:39**; and **John 1:35-39, 3:1-4, 6:25**).

Rabbis would teach, interpret the Hebrew Scriptures, and would take certain people "under their wings" to show them how to live a life pleasing to God. These people were called disciples.

When Rabbi Jesus calls these fishermen in Matthew 4, he is calling them to disciple under him. A disciple is a student, learner, follower, or apprentice – kind of like how today one might apprentice under a master welder or how a student fresh out of college might student teach under a more experienced educator. Discipleship was a bit like that...except it went a little deeper.

Put simply, a disciple oriented their life around three main goals: (1) being with their Rabbi, (2) becoming like their Rabbi, and (3) doing what their Rabbi did.

1. Be with their Rabbi

Disciples in Jesus' day weren't like students in a classroom, showing up a couple times a week for a lecture. They wanted to be with their Rabbi 24/7.

Rowan Williams frames it like this: "What makes you a disciple is not turning up from time to time. Discipleship may literally mean 'being a student' ...but it doesn't mean turning up once a week for a course (or even a sermon). It's not an intermittent state; it's a relationship that continues...If you said to a modern prospective student that the essence of being a student was to hang on your teacher's every word, to follow in his or her steps, to sleep outside their door in order not to miss any pearls of wisdom falling from their lips, to watch how they conduct themselves at the table, how they conduct themselves in the street, you might not get a very warm response. But in the ancient world, it was rather more like that. To be the student of a teacher was to commit yourself to living in the same atmosphere and breathing the same air; there was nothing intermittent about it."

Jesus' original invitation in **Matthew 4:19** is an invitation to himself. He says "Come, *follow me*..." If Jesus is our Rabbi and we are his disciples, this means that one goal we should orient our lives around is ***being with Jesus***.

2. Become like their Rabbi

Rabbis in Jesus' day also wanted to mold their followers into the kinds of people who naturally do the same kinds of things and live the same kind of life that they themselves lived.

Jesus' call as a Rabbi is the same. His call doesn't end with just being *with* him. He also wants to help his disciples **become** the kind of people that would look, live, and love just like himself (Notice, in

Matthew 4:19 how Jesus says, “I will *make you* fishers of men...”). If Jesus is our Rabbi and we are his disciples, this means that one goal we should orient our lives around is *becoming like Jesus*.

3. Do what their Rabbi did

Rabbis in Jesus’ day also expected their disciples to learn to do the kinds of things that they themselves did. Jesus, as a Rabbi, was no different. If Jesus is our Rabbi and we are his disciples, this means that the final goal we should orient our lives around is *doing what Jesus did*.

- Jesus prayed, so we pray.
- Jesus disciplined others, so we disciple others.
- Jesus read the Scriptures, so we read the Scriptures.
- Jesus cared for the sick and the broken, so we do too.

You get the point...

As disciples of Jesus, we apprentice under Jesus by being with him, becoming like him, and by doing what he did.

1. Do you see Jesus as your Rabbi (Teacher)? Why or why not? If yes, what have you learned from him? If no, how has this devotional challenged your thinking on seeing him in such a light?
2. In what ways have you seen yourself grow to become more like Jesus?
3. Which of the three aspects to being a disciple (being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, doing what Jesus did) are you most naturally drawn to? Which do you find hardest? Explain.
4. What do each of these three aspects of being a disciple look like for you practically?

Day Five

When we look at Jesus' life and ministry, we quickly see that he was for something bigger than himself – Jesus was about seeing justice and peace invade the earth. Part of apprenticing under Jesus is taking up that same mantle.

Read Matthew 4:23-25.

Did you notice what Jesus does here? He doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk. His proclamation of the gospel went hand in hand with his manifestation of the gospel. Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom being now available to all was made obvious through his healing, exorcisms, and restorative work in Galilee. That's because in God's government, Satan, sin, and death have no say in any matter. Only Jesus does and Jesus speaks healing, shalom, justice, and peace over a spiritually, socially, and culturally broken world.

We quickly see later in the gospels that Jesus sent his disciples to accomplish the same things he began doing in his ministry!

Read Luke 9:1-2.

For Jesus and the disciples, it was their demonstration (with their hands and feet) of the gospel that gave credibility to their proclamation of the gospel. And I believe the same thing could be said for us too. We walk the walk of life in Christ so that, when the time is right, we can talk the talk with those who need to be told about Jesus.

But what does this walking look like? In our day and age, it means more than just personal piety (which is good and needed!). But Jesus' life was also characterized by loving the broken (as we just read in Matthew). As his disciples, we need to move out into the brokenness around us to give our message any sort of credence.

Pastor Jon Tyson writes that, "As a result of human sin, systemic evil, and spiritual warfare, our world is broken and far from God. Although God created the world to be good and holy, our world and our city are full of hatred, violence, division, pride, greed, injustice, addiction, pain, disease, and death. Our city desperately needs to be healed, restored, and renewed. Only God can bring about the renewal we long for, and he has chosen to do this through the proclamation of the gospel – 'the good news of the victory of Jesus' – and the advancement of His Kingdom through His people."

In a culture that's all about personal renewal, God is inviting his people to join him in the restoration of all things (see **Ephesians 1**). As Paul puts it in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, "Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." He continues in **verse 20**: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us..."

What followers of Jesus have known since the inception of Christianity is that God has called us to join in the mission of God – to be light in the midst of the darkness.

It's with this realization undergirding them that you get people like William Wilberforce, Sojourner Truth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, St. Theresa of Calcutta, Chuck Colson, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and many, many more who dedicate their lives to breaking down evil in our world.

1. How does putting discipleship in the context of renewal change how you think about it?
2. In what ways do you think manifesting the gospel in your life impacts your credibility in sharing the gospel with others?
3. What would it look like for you to practically “do what Jesus did” and join him in this aspect of his mission?

Bonus: Encourage people in your group to do some research on some of the people listed above and see how they engaged in renewal. Share your findings with your group and then talk about experimenting with ways in which your group might be able to follow in their footsteps!