

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

September 5, 2021

We Are Better Together
“Becoming Disciples Together”
Matthew 28:16-20
Rev. Mike Toluba

Learning something new can be hard. Right now, our daughter is trying out contact lenses. She is so brave! I have been wearing glasses for 30 years. Getting anything in my eyes is about the most uncomfortable feeling there is. It's not natural to put things in your eyeballs! One night, I was taking clean clothes to our bedroom, and I found our daughter sitting on the bed watching YouTube videos about taking out your contact lenses. She easily put her contact lenses in her eyes, but my wife said that they had spent an hour trying to get them out. I had absolutely no wisdom to offer, and I completely failed as a parent. I put my clean clothes away and snuck out the room without saying a word! Learning new things is hard to do.

During the first couple of weeks of Better Together, we focused on worship and fellowship. Now we are going to dig deeper into being present with each other by focusing on discipleship. A disciple is someone who follows the teachings and life of another until the student becomes like the master. For us, discipleship is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. I love this way that Dallas Willard envisions the process of discipleship.

We are becoming who we will be - forever.

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

There is a powerful image of discipleship in the Scripture that comes from the Great Commission at the very end of Matthew's gospel.

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:16-20 (New Living Translation)

The first thing that we realize is even the original disciples wrestle with doubts. These same eleven disciples spent a few years traveling around Israel with Jesus, they saw

Jesus do miracles, they watched Jesus die on the cross and come back to life. Here the disciples go to the mountain where Jesus is about to ascend to heaven. When the disciples see Jesus, some of them worshiped Jesus but some of them doubted! If the original disciples, who spent time with Jesus in the flesh, wrestled with doubts, we should never be surprised by the doubts and questions that we have about God.

One of the best ways to wrestle with those doubts is investing yourself in a discipleship community. Our church spends a lot of time and effort in creating small groups. These small group communities are so vital to keeping us rooted in Christ. It is an intentional community where we can ask questions, wrestle with our doubts, and seek answers together. It might be a Life Group, a Sunday school class, a Celebrate Recovery group, or another Bible study group. Being in a discipleship group is one of the best ways to grow in your faith. We experience so much love, support, and encouragement in discipleship groups.

As people called Methodist, we should actually be really good at discipleship. John Wesley designed a very robust and communal discipleship system so that people could work out their salvation together. It was a philosophy of thinking small: the smaller the group, the deeper the relationships, and the deeper the transformation in people's lives. The first level was the Methodist Societies. These societies were a larger community similar to a congregation for larger group worship. The class meeting was a smaller group more like a Sunday school class or a small group. The class meeting was a community for deeper fellowship and deeper spiritual formation than the larger society gathering could offer. The band meeting was a very small group of five or less people. This banded discipleship was about seeking even deeper relationships and seeking a fellowship with the Holy Spirit together.

I have been part of a discipleship band for about two years. I have talked about my discipleship band before, but I cannot talk about enough because it has been so good! Every week, we meet together, and we share openly and honestly around these five questions.

1. How is it with your soul? It's about pressing into how you are feeling. Focusing on your emotional health and spiritual health. It's an awareness about what God is doing in your life right now.

2. What are your struggles and successes? It's about being open and honest how you might be struggling. Vulnerability about our shortcomings is one of the best ways we can grow. We also celebrate our successes which often encourages other people to succeed in their own ways.

3. How might the Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life? This question assumes that God is actually speaking in your life. Sometimes there are so many things to say, and sometimes it is a struggle to say much at all. Our weekly band meetings have also helped me to be more disciplined about reading Scripture and listening for God's Spirit to speak in my life. I believe that God is speaking in our life

most of the time, but we are often distracted and cannot hear what God is speaking in the midst of our noisy, hurried, and overloaded lives.

4. Do you have any sin that you want to confess? It's hard to share about our sins with each other, but it is so important. Wesley's idea of Christian perfection is not a life that is free of mistakes; it's a life that is so full of love with God and others. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we're done wrong (1 John 1:9). Confession is so good for our souls.

5. Are there any secrets or hidden things you would like to share? It's about sharing the stuff that is hard to share. Sharing the kinds of things that you would only share with someone that you trust. I am convinced that if we build trust with others and invest time with others, so much transformation will happen in our lives.

If you are interested in learning more about how a discipleship band works, Seedbed has a great resource at <https://discipleshipbands.com>

It is so important for each of us to become disciples together. We not only need to be growing as disciples ourselves, but Jesus is calling us to go into the world and make disciples of others. Baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teaching people to be obedient to the way of Jesus. I love how Jesus actually offers a model of what disciple making looks like as He calls Peter and Andrew to follow Him.

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20)

The first step is come. You have to be one hundred percent committed to being with Jesus. Allow God to have His way in your life. Don't resist opportunities to be challenged to grow in your faith.

The next step is to follow. Seek out someone who is making disciples and learn from that person. Ask questions about disciple making. Learn from their journey as a disciple maker and soak up everything that you can.

Third, go fishing! Invite the people around you to come and follow Jesus with you. Love and encourage the people around you at every opportunity. Don't be afraid of rejection. You will definitely encounter people who are not ready or willing to follow Jesus yet. Don't give up inviting people into your life. Be persistent. A “no” from someone right now is not a “no” forever. Pray for the people who reject your invitation. Pray that Holy Spirit will begin to soften their hearts and be open to the invitation to follow Jesus soon.

You might be thinking that being a disciple or a disciple maker is too hard in our world today. So many people are far from God and are resistant to the Christian faith. We long for a day when people were more open to Jesus. So many people don't seem interested in anything that the church is offering these days.

The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians 'will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.

Dallas Willard
The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship

Maybe the problem is not the world. Maybe our problem is church. It's clear to me that a major part of the American church is not all that interested in being students who study, apprentices who learn, and practitioners who do. We need to rediscover how to be a disciple making movement again.

I offer you this discipleship challenge. If you are not in a small group community, then your challenge is to find a small group. Go to our Killearn Groups page on the website or the app and pick out a group to try out. If you need some guidance on finding a small group, reach out to Sheri Dodge or myself. Being part of a small discipleship community is one of the absolute best investments of your life.

If you are ready to go deeper in your discipleship, I want to challenge you to learn to be a disciple maker. Find someone who is making disciples of Jesus and learn from that person. As a disciple maker, you are going to need close fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It is time for you to start a discipleship band with three to five people to cultivate that fellowship with the Holy Spirit together.

Jesus invested the majority of his life in ministry with twelve people. From that small group of disciples from 2,000 year ago, there are 2 billion people who claim the name of Jesus today. We are God's Plan A to make disciples, and there is no Plan B. We have to get serious about being disciples who make disciples together!

Icebreaker I – How is it with your soul?

Icebreaker II – What are your struggles and successes?

1. Some of the disciples doubted... but they were still present. Do you ever let negative feelings or emotions justify not participating in worship?
2. What does it mean for Jesus to have all authority?

3. How should Jesus having all authority impact your life?
4. What is the significance of baptism?
5. Why is it important to recognize God as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?
6. Do you think making disciples is just limited to pastors or church staff?
7. In what ways can you fulfill the "Great Commission" in the context of your family? Work? Community?
8. How does it impact our hope knowing Jesus will be with us every moment of every day?
9. How do you need to experience Jesus' living presence in the coming week?
10. As you think about Jesus' "Great Commission," what holds you back from actively passing on the Good News of Christ? Pray for God to remove those obstacles and reveal opportunities for you to share the Gospel.