

What Does It Mean to Make Disciples?

Scripture: Matthew 28:19; John 8:31

Code: B130207

In describing the purpose statement of the church, many people point to Christ's instruction in the Great Commission to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

But depending on whom you ask, you might find a wide variety of interpretations regarding what it actually means to "make disciples." Most churches today understand it as a command to evangelize the world—to lead people to faith and repentance in every corner of the world and spread the gospel as far as possible.

And while there is certainly an evangelistic aspect to Christ's command, His instructions go beyond just spreading the gospel. The verb translated as "make disciples"—*mathēteuō*—is beautifully complex, carrying more meaning than simply accumulating converts. It communicates the idea of a *learning believer*—someone who is growing in his faith and his love for the Lord.

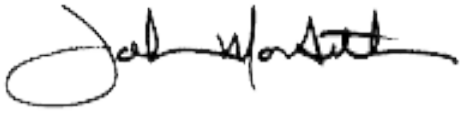
Jesus' words emphasize not the *moment* of salvation but the *lifetime* of sanctification that follows. He made the same point in John 8:31 when He said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." It's the difference between a one-time profession of faith and a lifetime of spiritual growth and increasing godliness—between counterfeit and genuine conversion.

But if the mission of the church is to make growing, learning believers in all nations, why do many congregations limit their efforts to filling seats—often by meeting felt needs with worldly gimmicks? That strategy might attract non-believers, but how does it promote the spiritual growth of the believers already in their midst? How can you stress the vital importance of sanctification when you're aggressively chasing the trends and interests of a spiritually bankrupt world?

Too many popular preachers and churches today claim they're not interested in reaching believers—that their sermons and services are intended solely for unsaved seekers. They even actively discourage believers who want to dig deeper into the riches of Scripture—who hunger for more than just the most basic elements of the gospel, if they're even getting that much.

But those churches have little hope of ever prompting people past the moment of salvation into a life of sanctification. In fact, they're far more likely to lead men and women to shallow faith, stunted spiritual growth, and, sadly, false conversion.

As defined by Christ's command to His disciples, the purpose of the church is to make learning believers—men and women whose lives reflect a deep commitment to and love for the Lord, His Word, and His people. Are you actively helping your congregation grow in this clear and critical purpose for the church?



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