



# THE PRIORITY OF MAKING DISCIPLES

THE MESSIAH AND OUR MISSION  
IN MATTHEW 28:16-20

Danny D. Clymer,  
General Editor

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## Foreword

In the late 20th century, a classic commercial suggested, “When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.” As disciples of Christ, we have known for centuries that when Jesus talks, *some* people listen. It is not only unbelievers who do not listen, but unfortunately, there are disciples of Jesus who do not always listen. Or maybe it is just a misunderstanding of what Jesus says. In Matthew 28:16–20 Jesus says to “make disciples,” not just “be disciples.” Of course, one must be a disciple to make disciples, but the latter seems to be the challenge.

This volume is offered to encourage disciple makers. Fourteen church leaders who have served in New England as disciple makers are the authors of these 12 sermons and the appendices. As you will see, each preacher has made disciples in the least churched and most secular part of the United States. Their commitment to hear Jesus, and their faithfulness to make disciples, are the reasons they are writing.

One goal for writing these sermons is to show the diversity of backgrounds of the preachers: small town, suburban, and urban; multicultural, black, and Caucasian. Jesus made no distinctions. He simply said to all disciples, “Make disciples.” Another goal of this volume is to let the name of Jesus be most prominent. What the biblical text says is the title for each sermon. We want the true Author to be heard. The one exception is the last sermon, which serves as a summary for the entire text.

If funding allows, our hope is to give a copy of this publication to every preacher in New England. It is our prayer that some, if not all, of these sermons will be contextualized and proclaimed in each church and community. To be clear, this book of sermons is not another “how to” book. Its purpose is to draw attention back

to the teachings of Jesus, whose mission was to seek and save the lost. Matthew 28:16–20 speaks for itself. It contains a focus on the Master and the message all disciples are to know in order to MAKE DISCIPLES.

— *Danny D. Clymer, Londonderry, NH*

# 1

## Then

Matthew 28:16a

Jason McConnell \ \ Franklin, VT

### Introduction

No one in my family ever took me to church — not even on Christmas or Easter! My family didn't own a Bible, and I never heard any of the famous biblical stories like David and Goliath, Daniel in the lions' den, or even the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I always thought Good Friday was good because it was a random day off school, and Easter was the happy spring holiday when I celebrated the hatching of Cadbury chocolate cream eggs.

I remember feeling embarrassed when Adam and Eve came up in conversation at my elementary school lunch table. I inadvertently revealed my religious ignorance when I asked, "Adam and Eve who?" My classmates looked at me like I was from another planet when they realized that I really didn't know who they were talking about. The only thing I knew about Christianity was what I had seen in horror movies. Crucifix-wielding priests, delivering the demonically possessed, gave me the impression that all religion was irrelevant — and weird. I honestly knew more about the devil than I did God.

By the time I was 16 years old, I was an angry agnostic alcoholic. I wasn't sure if I believed in God, but if he did exist, I resented Him. I didn't understand how a so-called loving God could let bad things happen to good people, or why He allowed me to experience so much tragedy in my young life. So, I pushed away the idea of a personal God and pursued a life of pleasure.



At the pinnacle of my impiety, my best friend and drinking buddy was involved in a horrendous drunk driving accident. He rolled his Jeep into a ravine; it flipped a dozen times before it hit a tree and stopped. By all accounts, he should have died, but he escaped with only a few minor bumps and bruises. When I saw him the next day, his face was still pale from shock. He said, “I think God spared my life!” I didn’t argue with him.

As a result of this miraculous deliverance, he began attending a little country church just a few miles away from my house. I drove by the church every day, but I didn’t know anything about it. A few months later, I heard a rumor that my friend had become a Christian and that he was now planning to become a pastor. I didn’t believe it at first, but when I stopped by his house with a six-pack of beer one night, he confirmed the reports. He told me that he was “born again” and that God was “calling” him into the ministry. Then he invited me to come to church. I declined, but he was persistent. He eventually wore me down until I promised that I would go one time. The next Sunday, he picked me up and took me to his church.

Church wasn’t at all what I was expecting! The people were not only normal, but they were warm and welcoming. I was amazed by the way they genuinely seemed to love each other. The pastor was young, and he preached in a way that I could understand the Bible’s relevance to real life. As he preached about the perils of sin and humanity’s desperate need for a Savior, I thought he was speaking directly to me. That day, I knew that I needed Jesus, but I wasn’t ready to respond to the call of discipleship.

I was so impressed by the church, however, that I decided to go back the following week — and the week after that. Over the next few months, I got drunk every Saturday night, but I always got up in time to go to church on Sunday morning. Through the witness of my friend, the pastor, and the whole church, I began to see God for who He really was. The gospel of Jesus Christ became clear, and I finally heard the call of discipleship. On a cold Saturday night in February, I reached a high point in my

discipleship journey; I finally professed faith in Jesus Christ and later was baptized.

When I woke up the next morning, I couldn't wait to tell my friend and the pastor what had happened to me the night before. As soon as church was over, I cornered them and recounted my story. They smiled at each other and said, "We knew it was just a matter of time before this happened to you." With confusion on my face, I asked, "How did you know this?" They said, "Ever since the very first day you walked into this church, everyone here has been praying for your soul! Welcome to the Kingdom of God!" I felt a cold chill run down my spine and my eyes welled up with tears. I had become a true disciple of Jesus Christ!

### **A Disciple-Making Church**

As the weeks wore on, everyone in the church surrounded me with love and support, and my new faith began to grow. An older couple started hosting me for dinner after church every Sunday. They taught me how to read and understand the Bible. A small group of men taught me how to pray at the Wednesday evening prayer meeting. And I learned how to serve by watching worshipers of all ages use their spiritual gifts to help others in the church and community. I didn't know it at the time, but I had stumbled into a real deal disciple-making church. The church building was dilapidated and the sanctuary was disheveled, but the church embodied discipleship by mentoring people like me in every aspect of Christian life.

It was less than six months later that my pastor approached me and said, "Well, you've been walking with the Lord for a while now; it's probably time for you to preach your first sermon." Although I was intimidated by the prospect, I didn't know any better! I thought this must be a rite of passage for every new Christian at every church, so I answered, "Okay, but I don't know how to do it." During our weekly meetings, the pastor not only trained me in the fine arts of hermeneutics and homiletics, but he taught me how to live a holy life, how to evangelize my

friends and family members, and how to think with a Christian worldview.

My first sermon went pretty well. The content was solid, but the delivery was lackluster. Even so, everyone in the church was encouraging and affirming. People began asking me if I had ever thought about becoming a pastor. I had never considered this before, but I began praying about it. A while later, when I preached my second sermon, I sensed the mysterious voice of the Holy Spirit saying to me, “This is what you are going to do for the rest of your life!” And sure enough, I have continued preaching since that day!

It wasn’t until I moved away for college and began attending other churches that I realized how special this little country church was. The people in this church took discipleship seriously. They didn’t buy into some pre-packaged evangelism program. They didn’t outsource their discipleship to parachurch ministries. They didn’t sell their souls to a newfangled church growth strategy. They didn’t even sit around and talk about how to make disciples; they just did it! They simply believed Jesus’ Great Commission and put its components into practice.

### **The Components of Discipleship (Matthew 28:16–20)**

After Jesus rose from the dead and met up with the 11 disciples in Galilee, He took them up onto a mountain and delivered his now-famous Great Commission sermon. In Matthew 28:16–20, we read Jesus’ words:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

There was nothing particularly complicated about this ministry model. Jesus wanted His disciples to believe that He was the King of heaven and earth. And since He had sovereign authority to reign over His whole Kingdom, it was His prerogative to use His disciples to expand His Kingdom. A knowledge of Jesus' divine authority gave His disciples the confidence they needed to proclaim the gospel and make more disciples.

The main component of the Great Commission is to "make disciples." This term literally means to bring someone into a teacher/pupil relationship. In this context, it means to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, whereby they would learn Jesus' way of life and become His faithful followers. This imperative command dominates the passage.

Jesus directs His disciples to make more disciples with the threefold method of "going, baptizing, and teaching." The meaning of the term "going" has caused considerable debate among biblical scholars. Since Matthew uses the participial form, some have concluded that it has the force of "as you go" or "wherever you go." While the term certainly encompasses this sense, it also implies a deep compassion for lost souls and a deliberate effort to build relationships with sinners for the sake of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes "going" may include something as simple as initiating a gospel conversation with a classmate or coworker, or it may be something as complicated as making a commitment to become a foreign missionary.

The next component of discipleship is "baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When a person has understood the gospel in such a way that it produces repentance from sin and a true relationship with Jesus Christ, the believer will make a public profession of faith by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism (immersion under water) is the ordinance that outwardly identifies individuals with Jesus, and is a mark of true discipleship. The reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is given to

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1. D.A. Carson, *Matthew, Expositors' Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 595.

distinguish an authentic Christian baptism from other types of baptisms. Jesus' statement about the three distinct persons of the Godhead would help the early church understand the nature of God and differentiate Christian orthodoxy from heresy.

“Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” is the final but ongoing component of discipleship. Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to teach Jesus' commands to other disciples. As a rabbi would take on a young pupil and convey the teachings of the Old Testament Law, a disciple will enter into an intentional relationship with another disciple and instruct him or her in all facets of the Christian life — everything from basic biblical truths to Jesus' specific teachings, to ministry skills that can be used in service to others.

The disciples at my little country church walked me through all of these components of discipleship. They listened to me and loved me for who I was. They met my physical needs while they ministered to my spiritual needs. They went out of their way to build a relationship with me for the sake of the gospel. They showed me my need for a Savior and introduced me to Jesus. They helped me repent from my sins, profess faith in Jesus Christ, and be baptized. One by one, they all taught me how to study the Scriptures, sacrifice and serve, pray and preach, and be a follower of Jesus Christ.

God used this little church of 50 or 60 people to disciple so well that many people heard God's call to become ministers in other parts of the world. Over a period of ten years, this little church sent ten people into full-time vocational ministry. I was number seven. Can you imagine that? A church that disciplined people so well that it never grew in numbers.

This is one example of what a church can do when it takes the Great Commission seriously. Some churches get bogged down by elaborate strategies and complex programs. But true discipleship is really quite simple — Going, Baptizing, and Teaching. A church does not have to be large or even be located in a favorable demographic area to make disciples. The people just need to be

willing to live out Jesus' Great Commission with authenticity, courage, and conviction.

### **The Call of Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew**

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:16–20 is the culmination of Jesus' call of discipleship. It contains a clear and concise formula for making disciples, but this process has already been displayed throughout Matthew's gospel. Matthew shows us many examples of how Jesus employed His own ministry method. It is interesting to view the Great Commission through the lens of Matthew's whole gospel.

#### *Calling the First Disciples (Matthew 4:18–22)*

In chapter 4, Matthew takes us back to the beginning of his public ministry. After Jesus was baptized and tempted by the devil, He launched His ministry in Capernaum, a town located along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. While He was walking along the beach, He encountered two brothers — Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew. Since these men were professional fishermen, it is no surprise to find them casting a net into the water. From the shore, Jesus yelled, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (ESV). A short time after this, Jesus came across James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were cleaning their nets after a night of fishing. Jesus extended the same call of discipleship to them.

Notice how Jesus practiced the Great Commission before He ever preached it. He intentionally initiated discipleship with these two sets of brothers. He didn't sit back and wait for people to worship Him as the long-awaited Messiah. Instead, He applied the “make disciples” command to the going, baptizing, and teaching of the Great Commission. Although He already had a prior relationship with these men through their connection with John the Baptist (John 1:35–42), Jesus met these fishermen on their turf and connected with them on their level. He extended the call of discipleship in terms they understood. He

would teach them how to “catch” men and bring them into the Kingdom of God.

In light of Matthew’s whole gospel, I wonder if this text is trying to teach the Christian church that it is more important to practice the Great Commission than it is to preach it. It is certainly easier to talk about discipleship inside a comfortable church than it is to go and get our hands dirty by initiating relationships with the rough and rugged outside the church. Are we willing to establish relationships with people who are different from us for the sake of discipleship? How about our local churches?

*Calling of Matthew (Matthew 9:9–13)*

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, the author records his own call to discipleship. He was an improbable prospect to become a Jesus follower because he was a tax collector. As employees of the oppressive Roman government, tax collectors were considered sellouts by their own Jewish people, and they had a repugnant reputation for excessive extortion. As we see in Matthew 9:10, tax collectors were usually lumped into the same category as “sinners.”

But as Jesus did with His first disciples, He went to Matthew and extended the simple invitation: “Follow me.” And to everyone’s shock and awe, Matthew left his lucrative career as a tax collector and became a follower of Jesus. He was so excited about his newfound faith that he invited his whole network of “tax collectors and sinners” to a dinner party in his home. He wanted all of his unseemly associates to meet Jesus and hear the same call to discipleship that he did.

Interestingly, when the Pharisees saw Jesus eating with people of ill repute, they asked His disciples why He ate with such uncouth characters. But Jesus overheard the question and responded with the clever quip, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12–13).

Once again, we see Jesus applying His own Great Commission by “going” and “making disciples” among the people on the

fringes of society. He was coordinating a cohort of unlikely candidates to form His inner circle of 12 disciples. As they traveled together, Jesus was teaching them to obey everything he commanded them (Matthew 28:20). Just in Matthew 9, we see Jesus teaching them about fasting (9:14–17), evangelism (9:35–38), and he showed them how to heal the sick (9:27–31), raise the dead (9:18–26), and drive out demonic spirits (9:32–34).

Once again, the Christian church can take its cue from Jesus' discipleship. As we go, will we associate with the unseemly in our society? Are we willing to compromise our clean reputations to "make disciples" among people of ill-repute? Do our hearts break for the broken and broken-hearted in our communities? Are we willing to follow Jesus' example by having dinner with a sinner for the sake of the gospel? Will we do our part to heal the sin-sick souls in our world today?

### *Sending Out the Twelve (Matthew 10)*

By the time we get to Matthew 10, Jesus had assembled His full team of disciples. Their names are listed in Matthew 10:2–4: "These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

Certainly no one but Jesus would have seen such potential in four fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, and six "nobodies," but these are the 12 men whom Jesus called to be His disciples. They were neither wealthy nor famous; they were not particularly talented nor well educated. In fact, they were as average as could be. But Jesus employed His Great Commission model and called them to a life of discipleship. He personally invited each one, built intentional relationships with them, and taught them everything they needed to know about faith and life.

In Matthew 10:1, we see that Jesus "gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness." In Matthew 10:6–7, Jesus commanded them to, "Go . . . to the



lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ” Notice how Jesus’ words in Matthew 10 resemble His words in Matthew 28. This was the great commission before the Great Commission!

Every time I read this passage, I remember the words my pastor spoke to me when I was 17 years old, “Well, you’ve been walking with the Lord for a while now — it’s probably time for you to preach your first sermon.” I’m sure the Twelve didn’t feel ready to drive out demons, heal the sick, or preach about the Kingdom of heaven, but Jesus empowered and unleashed them anyway. Why? Because this is discipleship! Jesus knew that they needed an opportunity to use their unrefined gifts for gospel ministry. The Twelve would make their fair share of ministry mistakes, but they would eventually go on to turn the world upside down.

Like the Twelve, I went on to make a lot of mistakes in my ministry, but at least the church gave me an opportunity, and they guided me along the path. It is amazing to contemplate the impact that a single church can have on a community (and maybe even the world) when it actually puts Jesus’ Great Commission into practice!

## **Conclusion**

As I continued to grow in my faith and received training (formally and informally) for ministry, God eventually called me to be the pastor of two small churches in rural Vermont. Over the years, I have tried to implement the same discipleship method that I learned from my little country church, which is simple obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission. I am thankful that so many people in my current churches have caught the vision for meeting sinners on their own turf by building intentional relationships, speaking in terms that unbelievers understand, loving the unlovely, sharing the good news about Jesus’ death and Resurrection, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them how to care for people’s needs. They understand that by reading and understanding the Bible,

fasting, praying, preaching, and evangelizing they will ultimately make more disciples!

Our churches haven't yet experienced the rushing waters of revival, but we have witnessed a steady stream of conversions and growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ! We have farmers and teachers and truck drivers and nurses and students who live out the Great Commission in our community every day. And over the last ten years or so, God has used our little churches in northwestern Vermont to send out missionaries, pastors, parachurch workers, and marketplace ministers who are making disciples all over the world. Our churches have undergone periods of growth and decline, but we have tried to maintain our focus on building God's Kingdom rather than on growing our church. Our goal is to be obedient to Jesus' Great Commission and leave the results to God. We just want to keep proclaiming the gospel so that people hear the call to discipleship.

### **Addendum**

During my first year of service as pastor of two small churches in rural Vermont, I encouraged the members of our fledgling youth group to invite some of their high school friends to a meeting. A few weeks later, the youth group almost doubled in size. Among the new students who came was a sophomore named Rebecca who immediately impressed me with her sharp intellect, quick wit, and good sense of humor. As Rebecca integrated into our youth ministry, she also began attending our church on Sunday mornings and the youth Bible study that my wife and I hosted at our home on Thursday evenings. Rebecca developed a heart for lost souls during our mission trips to Philadelphia and Montreal.

By her senior year, Rebecca was discipled to the point that she became one of the leaders of the Thursday evening youth Bible study. This role caused her to ask even deeper theological questions, and she expressed an intense desire to grow in her relationship with Jesus Christ. As a result of this, I invited Rebecca and two other students to join me in a small discipleship group

where we would study theology and ministry skills at a higher level.

By the time Rebecca graduated high school, she was regularly using her spiritual gifts of leadership and evangelism to minister to people in our church and community. She went on to study Bible and philosophy at Wheaton College in Illinois. During college, she spent two summers doing youth hostel ministry in Europe and Russia. When she graduated from college, she sensed a call to full-time foreign missions. She has served as a missionary teacher at the Christian International School of Prague in the Czech Republic ever since. During the summer of 2017, my family and I had the opportunity to visit her and watch her thrive in her current ministry. It has been a joy and privilege to play a part in her discipleship journey!

# 2

## The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had told them to go

Matthew 28:16b

Michael Bailey \ Bloomfield, CT

After His Resurrection, Jesus returned to Galilee where He met His first disciples — Peter and Andrew. The place where He bid them to come was the place of His final earthly command. But not all who had followed Jesus were there. His disciples went from thousands to 12 and now to 11. Judas, one of the 12, was absent.

### A. Who Is Judas?

Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, is the one who sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and set the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion in motion. Judas ultimately hung himself because the priests refused to take back the "blood money" for which he sold Jesus.

Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they took counsel and

bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me" (Matthew 27:3–10; ESV).

Judas undoubtedly spent countless hours with Jesus and witnessed His work up close, yet he was lured by 30 pieces of silver. He exchanged his position in Jesus' "inner circle" for worldly desires. This is a reminder that one's physical location is no indication of where your heart lies. And as representatives of Jesus Christ, we must be mindful of how easily we can find ourselves in Judas' shoes. It seems as if many in this day and age are trading Jesus and the message of the Gospel for "silver" — the silver of power, fame, wealth, and popularity. Many of us are willing to sell our Christianity to the highest bidder.

As preachers, we have to take some responsibility for the dilution of the gospel. Too many of our messages have focused on God's blessings and not the person of Christ. The late 19th-century Presbyterian minister, Charles Finney, highlights this fact in one of his sermons saying:

If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discernment, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in Christianity, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Rev. Charles Finney, *The Decay of Conscience*, December 4, 1873, New York, NY, [https://www.gospeltruth.net/1868\\_75Independent/731204\\_conscience.htm](https://www.gospeltruth.net/1868_75Independent/731204_conscience.htm).

What Jesus came to do had no price. He couldn't simply write a check or swipe His debit card to pay for our sins. Instead, He had to sacrifice His life. And it is through the blood-bought work of Christ that our lives are truly transformed. When we fail to internalize this message, we are at risk to exhibit the same characteristics as Judas and exclude ourselves from God's promises. The consequence of forsaking Christ is eternal damnation, but there is an earthly penalty as well.

Our societal conscience depends on the gospel message because any foundation not rooted in Christ is in danger of collapse. But, if our confidence is in Christ, we can proudly share what the great hymnist, Edward Mote, wrote in verse 1 of "The Solid Rock."

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.<sup>2</sup>

In order for us to meet God face-to-face we must put our hope in Christ.

## **B. The Meeting at the Mountain of Galilee**

Can you just imagine this meeting? Seeing the risen Savior? Many scholars have concluded that this mountain was the same one where Jesus was transfigured. He was transformed into a more glorious, radiant, and beautiful state, as told in Matthew's Gospel.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter

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2. Edward Mote, *The Solid Rock*, 1834.

said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead” (Matthew 17:1–9; ESV).

It can be said that on this mountain the disciples were transformed themselves. No longer just watching Jesus’ power at work, but commissioned to use that same power to do great works in His name. We can experience the same transformational power when we submit to Christ and dedicate ourselves to following Him.

I want to be a follower of Christ because it grants me access to the meeting where I can experience the love and glory of Christ. Knowing that Christ’s love changes you and revolutionizes the world, don’t you want to experience this wonderful state and place? This is why it’s key that we regularly “meet” with Christ through prayer, fasting, and study.

### **C. We Need Jesus**

Being a part of the gospel’s journey makes a world of difference, as we have direction by way of the Holy Spirit. We see great demonstration of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, particularly chapters 1–2, as Jesus ascends to heaven and leaves us His presence. The Greek and Hebrew words for “spirit” can also mean *wind* or *breath*. I like to think about the wind of the Lord blowing us, the breath of the Lord resuscitating us, and the Spirit of the Lord living on the inside of us, all important as the 11 prepare to go to the mountain (John 20:21–22; Acts 1:8).

Matthew 28:16b carries great significance. While we may become discouraged by the absence of Judas, who walked and talked with Jesus, much like the other disciples, we can celebrate the fact that the other 11 disciples obeyed Jesus at this time in God's history. It was not in Jerusalem that Jesus told them to go, but to a mountain in Galilee of all places. Their faith, with all of their misunderstandings about Jesus, led them to this mountain.

I was always taught in Sunday school that grace is the Lord's unlimited favor through the gospel, and we will never experience grace in its full propensity unless we obey Christ. I was also taught in Sunday school that mercy is the withholding of what I deserve, which is death and destruction because of my sin. And the sin of man is what separates us from Jesus Christ. This sounds very drastic, but it's real. Jesus came and fulfilled a plan of success in spite of the world's destiny of disaster. But it's through the gospel and God's great love that we are no longer separated, but reunited with Christ. The Apostle Paul says,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,  
or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day  
long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35–39; ESV).

This love is beautiful and so simple. It was Thursday that He ate His last supper. He went to the garden to pray but was arrested. He was tried and found guilty although He was innocent. But, it was His mission to die for the guilty so that we



could stand before the throne innocent. They beat Him, ripped His clothes, and put a crown of thorns on His head. They nailed Him to the Cross. They gave Him vinegar when He was thirsty, and pierced Him in His side to ensure He was dead. While He hung on the Cross in agony, Jesus still showed love when He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He died so that we can experience the greatest love.

They thought they killed Him, but no man killed our Savior; He laid down His life willingly. It was love that got Him up Sunday morning. He told them that He had all power, and instructed His disciples to share the Word and to do great works with that power that came from the Resurrection.

And now the call is to us. We are to go and make more disciples, to extend the invitation to meet Christ. We may not be physically meeting at the Mountain of Galilee, but wherever we meet Him can be a place of transformation. When we bow our hearts to Jesus and proclaim that we want to follow Him, the scales fall from our eyes and all things become new. Then the cry of our hearts will be,

I want to be a follower of Christ.  
 I want to be one of His disciples.  
 I want to walk in the newness of life,  
 So let me be a follower of Christ.

What do I have to do?  
 What do I have to say?  
 How do I have to walk each and every day?  
 Tell me what does it cost, just to carry the cross?  
 So let me be a follower of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

### **Addendum**

Currently, I am discipling a few young men from different parts of the world who live in close proximity to me in Connecticut. I am intrigued by each of them and their stories. I like to believe

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3. Joseph W. Harris, “I Want to be a Follower of Christ,” 2008.

I am a positive voice in their lives, but I also realize they are impacting me all the more. One particular young man whom I have spent a great deal of time with is a former semi-professional football player.

He sought me out by way of his mother because he was in a downward spiral after the death of his sister. His sister was killed in a car accident, and he was burdened with a myriad of negative emotions as a result. But perhaps the most crippling was unforgiveness. He would often challenge me by questioning God's justice.

As of now, the person who was at the wheel of the car that fatally hit his sister is a free man. One could argue that he received a "slap on the wrist" by merely being sentenced to community service. It is natural to believe that in this particular situation, justice wasn't served. But instead, the driver was shown undeserved mercy by the judge. These situations can make you quite angry and hateful when you feel that justice has been withheld. Through our conversations, I have been encouraging him to discover the power of forgiveness and the nature of Christ. He has been teaching me that we do ourselves a disservice when we try to measure justice according to our earthly scale.

There is a great need for the gospel to spread throughout the world because it is a reminder that we all are guilty of sin, yet Christ has set us free. The blood-bought work of Christ allows each of us to be declared not guilty of crimes we surely did commit. When we recognize the grace and mercy that has been extended to us, we can more willingly extend forgiveness to others. Our relationship with Jesus Christ doesn't make it easy to forgive, but it makes it possible. Jesus allows us to trade the burden of unforgiveness for His yoke of freedom.

This young man recently accepted Christ as His Lord and Savior and was baptized. He has married his college sweetheart, and together they are expecting their first child. The work of the Lord is coming to fruition in this young man's life. Again, I must confess that I am learning more about the power of the love of

Jesus Christ and the presence of His Spirit through this particular young man — learning to love someone who has essentially impacted your life through tragedy.