

The Key to Discipleship

In order to understand the Key to Discipleship we must first discuss where our desire to make disciples comes from and Who Is Jesus.

WHERE DOES OUR DESIRE TO MAKE DISCIPLES COME FROM?

So where do you think our desire to make disciples comes from?

- Our friends
- Our pastor
- Our family
- Our church
- Our denomination

Where do you think the original disciples desire to make Christ known came from?

- Their family
- Their friends
- Their tradition

How about the millions of Christians who came before us, where did their desire to make disciples come from?

Jesus commanded His disciples to go and make disciples in Matthew 28. This scripture is known around the world as the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20 "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

The great commission is commonly used by ministries to clearly communicate their mission statement. This desire to make disciples, to make Christ known in their community is the sole reason that many Christians ministries exist.

It's important to understand that after Jesus was crucified on the Cross He was buried and resurrected on the Third day. But before Jesus returned to His place in Glory, He gave one last command to those who had followed Him.

He told them that as they were going, to make disciples to pass on to others those spiritual truths that Christ had taught them.

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This scripture holds great significance because it is the exact point in history when Jesus turned over the gospel to mankind, it is the point in time when the Creator of the Universe turned over the most significant message in history to His creation.

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

The desire for those original disciples to go and make disciples came from Jesus. Our desire today to go and make disciples also comes from Christ. Our desire to make Christ known in our schools, jobs, communities and families doesn't come from a cool song on the radio or a great discipleship training course. Our desire to go and make disciples comes from Jesus.

WHO IS JESUS?

When I began working on our original discipleship program in January of 2005, there were several things that weren't clear. I didn't know how it would be distributed or how long it would take to produce, or even how many people would actually use it.

The only thing that was clear in the beginning was that *any* discipleship training discussion started with Lordship. We had to discuss who Jesus Is. In my opinion everything about making disciples starts with who Jesus Is.

The 'Great Commission' begins with **ALL authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** This fact that Jesus Is Lord is important, it is so important that Jesus starts the great commission with that very statement.

Jesus wanted His followers to know **I AM IN CHARGE HERE**. Wherever I send you whatever ministry opportunities I have planned for you. I have prepared for you.

Think for a second about Jesus, what images, stories or thoughts come to your mind?

What is your perception of Christ; do you see Him in the present or in the past?

Obviously, our claim to be a Christian implies that we all believe that Jesus Is Lord. However, many of us think of Jesus in a historic sense and not in the present. To put it bluntly, sometimes we see Jesus in the past, not the present.

Without a firm understanding of whom Jesus Is; it could be very hard to make disciples. Paul described Jesus to the church in Colossi like this:

Colossians 1:15-20 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on

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earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

Jesus Is Lord. He is not our co-pilot or our homeboy. He is not a great man or a great prophet. Jesus is not a great teacher or priest. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty. He is the present, the past, and the future. He is Lord of everything. **All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”**

His Lordship has not diminished over time or grown outdated. **Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”**

The same Jesus that walked with Peter on the water the same Jesus that met with His disciples at the last supper the same Jesus that we read about in the Bible the same Jesus with **‘all authority in heaven and on earth’** that same Jesus is with us today.

That same Jesus wants us to also **go and make disciples**

THE KEY TO DISCIPLESHIP

The title of this course is **The Key to Discipleship** as in single not **keys** as in multiple things. You may be asking, is there really just one thing that I need to know about discipleship?

Of course there are many things you will learn in your journey to make disciples for Christ. With that said, I believe that there is one thing that is more important than anything else when discussing discipleship.

So what does any of this talk about Jesus have to do with our ability to make disciples? The short answer is EVERYTHING. The fact is our ability to make disciples is directly correlated with our relationship to Christ.

Jesus referred to the process of making disciples as **bearing fruit**. In John chapter 15 Jesus explained that there is a simple process for bearing fruit.

John 15:4-5 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit

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of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"

The key to making disciples is we must abide in Christ and Christ abide in us. If that is true, then what exactly does "abide in Christ" mean? I think that I can explain this using the same example that Jesus used in John chapter 15.

Branches that bear fruit have a relationship with the vine that allows what's in the vine to pass through the branches and ultimately bear fruit. In the same way we also need to have a relationship with Christ that allows Christ to flow through us to others.

Something else is also worth noting about the relationship between the branch and the vine. Branches don't mandate how, when and where to make fruit. The branches can't tell the vine, hey I want to make an orange today.

As Christ branches we must be willing to submit to His Lordship even if we don't immediately agree with His discipleship plans. It's entirely possible the Lord may have us invest our lives into people that are not like us.

At some point in this discipleship journey many will experience what I like to call an "Ananias Moment."

Think about this story in Acts chapter 8:

Acts 8:1-19

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**"**

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!**"**

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"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, **"Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."**

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

But the Lord said to Ananias, **"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."**

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

This is a great story! so here is Ananias praying to the Lord...and then the Lord of all of creation says "Ananias...and Ananias says "yes, Lord?" Then the Lord told Ananias to go to Saul (who is Saul the guy known for killing the Christians right) The Lord told Ananias to go to Saul and do what??? That's right! pray for him! disciple him!

So, why on earth would Ananias leave the safety of his house and go pray over Saul? Why would he leave to go and minister to Saul, the guy who held the coats of the very people that stoned Steven to death?

I believe the answer to that is pretty simple and holds great significance for us. I believe that Ananias was able to overcome his fears and go to Saul because of his relationship with Christ.

I suspect at the end of the day, after all the reasoning was over, Ananias could come to only one conclusion! JESUS IS LORD

Ananias was abiding in Christ and it was his relationship with the Lord that gave him the confidence to go minister to Saul.

Why is 'the key to discipleship' so important?

Why is this so important? The answer to that is simple; Satan does not want any of us making disciples. Satan doesn't want you or anyone else making Christ known. So he will place obstacles in our paths to keep us from making disciples.

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An obstacle to discipleship is anything that keeps us from fulfilling God's calling on our lives. An obstacle can be physical, financial, emotional or relational. One thing is for certain, obstacles are a regular occurrence for anyone trying to make disciples.

Look at what Jesus said in John 16:33

Jesus said “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

I know this won't come as a shock to most of you, but when you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior your feet did not immediately begin walking on the streets of gold. Instead we remained here in this world and **'In the world you will have tribulation'**. Jesus knew that in this world we would encounter obstacles to making disciples.

I would like to share a personal story about an obstacle that I encountered. In 2002 I was licensed into the gospel ministry by my home church and given the title of staff evangelist

I immediately began teaching evangelism techniques to local churches in our community. This wasn't a paying position but it did give me the credentials I needed to get my foot in the door.

The Lord seemed to immediately anoint our efforts and we were able to invite hundreds of people to take their first step of faith by putting their hope and trust in the Lord.

It was really cool to see all of these people come to know the Lord; we saw people come to know the Lord in grocery store parking lots, local beer stores, and even at the local schools.

All of that early success went straight to my ego and I became very arrogant and self-centered. I thought I had this whole discipleship thing figured out.

I remember going to our church one Sunday morning and my pastor made an announcement that someone had purchased shirts for the staff. They were like golf shirts with their name and the name of our church.

Great, if all the staff members are going to get new shirts then surely since I was a staff member I would get one.

After talking with my pastor I found out that staff members meant paid staff members. Since I wasn't paid then I wasn't getting a shirt. It hurt my feelings that I wasn't considered and didn't receive a new shirt.

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I remember gripping to my wife for hours that night over those \$12 shirts. Most people would get over it but you obviously don't know me very well.

I didn't get over it; every day that went by I just grew more and more bitter about those stupid shirts. Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months.

Remember all of that cool ministry stuff that had been happening? Well that ended abruptly. Instantaneously, everything I was doing in ministry came to a complete stop.

No one called to invite me to speak at their church. No more "chance" meetings with people searching for the Lord.

Everything stopped!

I had hit an obstacle to making disciples and wasn't willing to take the steps necessary to overcome it.

I was at home pouting, I wasn't making disciples and I wasn't equipping the saints. For months all I did was sit around and gripe about everything under the sun and not once lifted a finger to do anything about it.

One night my friend Justin came over to the house to talk with me about my ministry or the lack thereof. He knew about the shirt and he knew I wasn't fulfilling the great commission, he knew I wasn't making disciples.

When I answered the door Justin didn't start the conversation with small talk. I'll never forget it, he looked me straight in the eye and simply said

"Gary, were the nails not big enough, did Jesus not hang on that cross long enough for you?"

Wow! I realized that I had sold out my Lord and Savior over a \$12 shirt!

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 6:12** **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.**

Satan had used my ego and arrogance to trick me into quitting on my Lord. Immediately I repented and asked the Lord to forgive me of my arrogance and humbly use me where possible to help people make disciples.

Satan would like to do the same for you; he would like to convince you that it's just not worth it. Satan will try to convince you that the people in your life have already

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made their decision and your efforts to talk to them about Jesus won't matter. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Don't let an obstacle cause catastrophic damage to your relationship with Christ or your relationship with others.

Remember that this discipleship process is a journey. Every journey we take in this life has obstacles. Listen to these words found in 2 Corinthians and allow them to encourage you on your journey.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Obstacles to making disciples will just be temporary inconveniences unless you allow them to become something else. Our light affliction is temporary but for many eternity hangs in the balance.

Jesus has turned over the process of making Him known to us. He has called us and equipped us for this time and this place to make disciples.

I quit on the Lord over a \$12 shirt, don't make the same mistake that I made. Trust me, Satan isn't going to sit down beside you one morning and say "hey I bet today I can do something that will stop you from making Christ known." It doesn't work that way, it will be very subtle.

So, will the greatest story ever told end with you?

Will making Christ known in our schools, businesses and communities end because someone hurt your feelings?

Will the greatest story ever told end because someone at church plays the music too loud or too soft or too fast or too slow?

Or will the gospel message stop because of how someone dressed or spoke?

Our desire to make disciples comes from Jesus. Jesus Is Lord, Lord of everything seen and everything not seen. The key to making disciples is we MUST continue to abide in Christ.

Many of you may be facing obstacles to discipleship today. Maybe there have been obstacles at school, or at work, or in your community.

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Remember this, Jesus the Creator of the Universe could have chosen anyone but He chose you.

You can make disciples

Jesus Is Lord

Until we meet again, thank you for your service to the saints.