

The call for Discipleship

It's more than you know!

Matthew 28:18-20

Genesis 12:1-3

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"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in ^[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." - Matthew 28:18-20

"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." - Genesis 12:1-3

In a contemporary sense, the call for discipleship is the same as that of the ancients. It is to build our Christian character into the righteousness of God by becoming like him who called us through a vine and branch relationship (Jn 15:5). In ancient times, followers of God were called "righteous men" like Noah, Abraham, and Lot (2 Pet 2:6-7). Their inner person grew in righteousness in the likeness of God. Now in the gospel a righteousness of God is revealed through Jesus Christ through faith (Rom 1:17). The basic idea of the call for discipleship is to give an opportunity to all people to enjoy God's generous and abundant love through a personal relationship in the Holy Spirit. Based on our texts, let's examine two paradigms of discipleship ministry.

You are blessed: In Genesis 12:1-3, the word "blessed" or "blessing" is implied 5 times. Obviously, the main point is that the calling itself was a blessing. What does the word blessing mean? **First**, in Abraham's day, the Hebrews understood blessing in terms of a personal relationship. In time, Abraham would develop a personal relationship with God. King David is a good example of blessed living. He knew that he was a "blessed" man not because of his human achievement as a king, but because he knew God very intimately. David took such pleasure of knowing God personally that day and night he would meditate on his word (Ps 1). We know that Abraham was a rich man, but his ultimate purpose for life was to please God with his life. **Second**, the calling was mutual. God called and Abraham obeyed (Gen 12:4). It was expected that Abraham would readily say, "Yes Sir." It is like the president of the United States calling and offering you a position in his cabinet, and you say "What?" You don't want to play a fool

here, right? The consequential evidences of Abraham's life show that he would lose nothing if he decided to follow God. He gained much and became an exceedingly wealthy man. More than that, Abraham inherited a place in the kingdom of God. Truly, Abraham was a blessed man. **Third**, to become a blessing! For Abraham, the blessing was not for self-emulation. Abraham became a model in the sense that others may follow God in his footsteps. The world of Abraham was a confused culture. The tower of Babel epitomized rebellion against God (Genesis 1-11). Out of a chaotic world situation, God called Abram as a blessing. God's heart desire is to bless all people, including IIT students. Today, Jesus is calling us to bless the people of our world with his rule.

Make Disciples: In Matthew 28:19 "make disciples" is in the imperative. The word "disciple" in English literally means "learner" in Greek. The basic idea is to become like Jesus in every way possible. Greeks had such a strong idea that a disciple can become as powerful as his master. Let's look into 3 basic tenets:

1. Snatch them from Satan's counterfeit kingdom. Deliver the Gospel, the story of Christ's victory over sin and Satan. Assure them of the hope of God and guaranteed victory over the power of sin and death. What bothers you personally that you cannot live a righteous and blessed life? What robs your joy that you should complain at all times? Who told you that you are naked, that you should be deprived of God's love for you? What kind of lingering past sins are there that you cannot let go of? The disciples of Jesus are bearers of Jesus; they display the compassion of Jesus and the power of Jesus. We are not bound by our own inability to overcome hardship and difficulties in life. We are empowered by the Spirit of God in our daily living. Is that a blessed life or what? Not only the ancients, but you too can live a blessed life and be a winner. If not, you are a loser and that's bad news.

2. Teach them the compassion of Christ. Out of compassion, who would allow a tenant to live 12 months free of rent today? You show me a person of a compassionate heart, and I will show you what compassion looks like. I am very proud of being an American because this country produced many women and men of compassion during the last 300 years of our history. The symbol of the cross of Christ is shame and pain of being rejected. Nobody likes to be rejected by his own people because it is utterly painful to the bone marrow. Out of compassion, Jesus endured the cross at Calvary. The death of Jesus on the cross shows us his divine compassion that surpassed all human compassion. The neighbor next door to you who is struggling to pay his monthly mortgage on his home will surely like the compassion of Jesus when you go and tell them the Gospel.

3. To connect them into a personal relationship with the living God. Our main task is to help people establish a life-giving relationship with the living God through daily ordinary experiences. Daily ordinary experiences are important to us because we cannot know the

power of the resurrection outside of the real world. In other words, we must learn that the power of God that raised Christ from the death is available through daily ordinary experiences. I am convinced that what women and men need today is not cosmetic surgery or a professional counselor, but the power of the resurrection. The risen Christ knew it all. He sent his disciples with a command to make disciples of all people, and he is sending us with the same command. There are specific instructions on how to raise disciples. "Baptizing them...and obey everything." When it comes to helping one person spiritually, we are all familiar with the question, "How long is too long or how much is too much?" In the ancient paradigm, it took 25 years for Abraham to learn to love God in his being. But in today's generation, it shouldn't take 25 years to make a disciple because of high-tech communication systems. The important point is we must teach them the gospel as long as it takes. Abraham did not grow into maturity overnight. After 10 years he seemed to remain almost the same. He had a habit of telling others that Sarah was his sister. This was embarrassing to God. Discipleship is a process and not a one-time action. We should not push people to grow as disciples. God is making disciples in his own way. Our job is to support the work of God in the process. As much as we learn to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, so can we be successful disciple makers in our own generation because Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the age (20).

Discipleship begins at home: The first phrase in verse 19 "Go therefore" in ESV could have been better translated as "As you go or are going" (it sounds awkward, really). Here, the Greek nuance is that we are Christ's ambassadors in the world as disciples. We bear the image of Christ and display his compassion. In this sense we can say that discipleship is a lifestyle, not only an ideal aspiration. We can be a sanitation worker, a teacher, a technocrat, a doctor, a lawyer or anything for that matter. Our primary purpose of life is to grow and emulate the love of Christ as his disciple. In other words, we don't have to necessarily go overseas to make disciples. We can make disciples where we live. God blessed some of us with our children at home. This blessing comes to us with a responsibility. I am convinced that God's heart desire is to make disciples of all people beginning from our own children at home.

Out of his divine compassion, God called us into a blessed life to bring us back to the kingdom of his dear son Jesus Christ our Lord. He called us as he called the ancients into a rich and victorious life. No one should be deprived of discipleship into a loving, personal relationship with a living God. This blessed life is the main point of discipleship ministry. Today, the Gospel message is as urgent as ever. People here and there are willing to make a deal with their life in exchange for the blessed life of a disciple. I am sure they will respond and obey when we speak the Gospel with conviction. Disciples are made, not born. We must make every effort to make disciples. May God richly bless your discipleship ministry this year!