

## **The call to be and make disciples**

Matt 4:18-22, 16:13-16, 28:16-20

// At the age of fifteen, I found myself trying out various ways that I might be able to express myself. I think it's quite common of most teenagers to look for things to identify themselves with. I had a friend who was into skateboarding, and I would talk about skateboard stuff with him.

I tried to wear clothes that would make me different to everyone else. I played a lot of video games with my friends and we'd talk endlessly about the latest games and consoles, and who have completed what game the fastest.

But nothing really stuck. I listened to a lot of music, and I think that's always stayed with me, but all these things seemed a bit trivial, with no real purpose that I could look to and think "Yes! This is what I'm all about!"

But a short while after all that, I found that I was developing a desire to grow in my faith. I'd been calling myself a Christian for quite a long time, but I knew that something else needed to happen to go further.

And something did happen - eventually I had what I can only describe as a dynamic encounter with the living Jesus Christ. And I've never been the same since.

I wonder if you've ever met someone whose nature and character struck you so hard that they inspired you to be a better version of yourself? I certainly have, I can think of a few, and they are the kinds of people who, if they were to call me on the phone today and said "can you come and work with me on this", I would do it, *hands down*.

Obviously there would need to be some prayer and discussion with my wife first, but on a purely reactionary level I wouldn't even have to think about it. There are some people out there who have proved themselves, who put trust in others, who display outstanding leadership.

But whether these people ever do invite us to take part in whatever they might be doing, they continue to be a source of inspiration to us.

We follow them on Twitter, we read their books, they continue to influence us.

// So I wonder just how it felt for those first disciples, when Jesus arrived at the waterside and called out to them: “Come, follow me.”

I have no doubt that these fishermen were already well aware of Jesus as a person who people were drawn to, and the response to a personal invitation to follow him would be what we might want to call a “no-brainer”.

And so this is where it begins - with an encounter. This encounter might look different for each one of us, but an encounter with Jesus demands a response.

Some pursue him, some reject him. For those of us who pursue and accept him, we are brought - sometimes violently - into a new way of living, on a new path with a new destination.

**Peter** dropped his fishing nets and followed. He had his ups and downs, but Jesus set him apart as the one on which he would build his church. He was headstrong, and Jesus’ love and forgiveness empowered him to do great things for the Kingdom.

**Zacchaeus** was so short he had to climb a tree to even be able to see or hear what Jesus was up to, but Jesus called him by name and invited himself round to his home to eat.

Whatever was shared over that dinner conversation must have been dynamite, because Zacchaeus turned 180 degrees from being a cheating tax collector, to the most generous man in town.

To follow Jesus does not mean we are expected to know it all. Actually, it’s the opposite - to follow Jesus is to recognise that WE don’t really know very much at all, but JESUS can be trusted with everything. And that’s what being a disciple is all about - being willing to learn, at every stage. It’s not about putting in a certain number of hours until we earn our licence. In this life, we keep learning, we keep growing, and we keep moving forward.

I'm not sure about you, but I sometimes feel that the word "disciple" has taken on some negative traits. It's probably come from the rise of various cults and various brainwashings where people have been misled down a false and dangerous track.

But the word itself, certainly the greek word from which we take our translation, is MATHETES. Its meaning is closer to a pupil an apprentice to a master craftsman. And our English word "disciple" comes from the latin DISCIPULUS, which means a learner or a student.

As disciples of Jesus, it's not quite time to lose those "L" plates just yet!

The picture of apprenticeship is really helpful as a way of reminding us that we are all in training. None of us have made it yet. In fact, there's nothing like time and maturity to give a greater sense of perspective.

There was a time when the religious leaders were trying to find a way to trap Jesus, and so they brought before him a woman who had been caught sleeping with someone who wasn't her husband. The religious law of the day stated that she should be put to death by stoning.

According to the law, that was the just and right thing. But when the religious leaders asked Jesus what should be done, he just started to draw on the ground. We don't know what he wrote, and it probably doesn't matter, but you can bet that Jesus' failure to deliver an immediate answer was infuriating. In the end, his reply was this: "If any one of you is without sin, cast the first stone."

Of course, at this everyone began to slip away, and John's gospel tells us that they left the scene one at a time, from the oldest to the youngest.

There's something about age that makes us more aware of our weaknesses, and that we actually don't have all the answers. When we're young, we're sure we know all the answers! Even if we don't know, we behave as if we do, and we certainly don't want to be given answers from anyone else if they stop us doing what we want to do!

As we follow Jesus and seek after His kingdom, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, it's as if the more we know of Him, the more we realise we DON'T know!

// And this is where revelation and realisation comes in.

It's one thing to decide to follow Jesus, but it's another matter entirely to KNOW Him and to spend time with Him so that we truly begin to be transformed.

When Abi and I were first going out, like any new young couple we wanted to spend as much time together as we possibly could. And there was this sense of fascination, we wanted to know what we thought about things, about life and art and music and ideas.

And the more time we spent together, the more I came to realise how little I really knew about her. She had lived her life up until that point without me being a part of it, and I remember being overwhelmed with this need to know everything she had ever done so that I could know her as well as I possibly could.

But it doesn't work like that. You can't just download information off a person. You can't create an intimate relationship overnight - which is why people who live their life pursuing one night stands find themselves unsatisfied on a level that can be saddening and confusing - intimacy requires time, investment, patience, and vision.

I recently heard a story about a man who visited a farm and was given the opportunity to plough a field. When he asked how he should do it, he was given one simple rule: find a point on the opposite side of the field and DON'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF IT FOR A SECOND. And as a first try at ploughing furrow in a field, he made a reasonable job of it.

Developing a relationship needs vision, commitment, and consistency.

In a marriage, I'd suggest that the "point on the horizon" is as simple as WE STAY TOGETHER DESPITE IT ALL.

If that's the reference point, then all other decisions get made with that goal in mind. Of course, none of us is perfect. Sometimes we do take our eyes off. But we need to know where we're going - just as someone once said "aim for nothing and you'll hit the target every time."

And so as disciples of Jesus, we look to Him. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "fix your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

It's as we fix our eyes on Him, as we follow Him closely each day, that we discover more of His grace and glory. Just as the first disciples walked with Jesus and came to recognise Him as the Messiah, we too are given the opportunity to know Jesus and see Him for who He is.

When Jesus asked Peter directly "Who do you say I am?", his response was "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." For all his ups and downs, I'd say this is a real high point in Peter's faith journey.

For many, Jesus is at best a historical figure who gave some good teachings. But for those who have come to recognise and know Jesus as the Son of God and the saviour of the world, we can't just stay still with that knowledge. And we certainly don't stay the same. We are changed forever.

// We have been called to be disciples. To bind ourselves to Jesus and his teaching, to be His apprentices, his learners. Jesus has set the standard for life, and has blazed a trail for us to follow that goes beyond death itself and into eternity with Him.

Just as He said to those fishermen 2,000 years ago at the lakeside, "Come, follow me", He continues to call us today. But now he calls us into eternity. He calls us to live as He lived, in humility and with purpose. He lived the perfect life, He died, and He was raised to life again to pave the way forward for us. He sits in heaven and continues to call us: "Come, follow me."

But let's not get ahead of ourselves, because before Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, He gave a final command: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

It's clear that we are not expected to keep our faith to ourselves. On the contrary, we are expected to share it. And this is where it gets really exciting - just as we have encountered Christ and He has revealed His truth to us, we take Him with us wherever we go. When we go to others and we share our food, we give our time and our generosity, we are taking Christ with us. So the hope here is that the people we are with will find Christ in us, that they will believe, and they will share His truth with others.

This is what we call disciples that make disciples that make disciples that make disciples.

I wonder what "Go" might look like for you?

When Jesus said "Go", a better translation might be "While you are going..." - as in, make disciples WHERE YOU ARE RIGHT NOW. Don't think you have to wait until you have 'got' somewhere.

In fact let's push it a bit further, and this is moving into sketchy paraphrase territory here, but maybe we should read this command as "Go (about your own business) and make disciples along the way."

As I've already mentioned, our call is to make *disciples* - not mere converts or church members. We're called to welcome people into a living faith which brings change, restoration, forgiveness, and transformation. We all need that.

It's ongoing. We don't become Christians, become 'transformed' and then just tread water. We keep growing together.

One commentator says this:

*"The only way a local church can be 'fruitful and multiply' (instead of growing by 'additions') is with a systematic discipleship program. This is the responsibility of every believer, and not just a small group that has been 'called to go.'"*

There's one final point to consider; the heartening encouragement "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This is unconditional. It's a promise and a fact. Jesus calls us to follow Him and He will be there right alongside us through thick and thin. He will be with us to the end of the age - that gives us hope that there is a plan!

We might not be able to see all the way ahead, but He does. Just like ploughing that field, we need to keep our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus as we trust that He is the one to follow - there is no other! He calls each one of us to follow Him with commitment and faithfulness.

So wherever you are at today;  
if you're only just discovering Jesus and He's calling you to "come and follow",  
if you're on the road of discovery and deepening your intimacy with Him,  
or you're looking for more ways to share Him and your faith with others...

*May you know our risen Lord Jesus Christ in a new way today,  
may you find a fresh revelation of the love of our Heavenly Father,  
and may His Spirit rest upon you now bringing healing and restoration.*

**Chris Marsh // 13th October 2013**