

MAKING DISCIPLES – BEARING FRUIT

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

Some of the last instructions Jesus gave his disciples before he left them to return to heaven are the words we read a few moments ago, in Matthew 28 – “Go ... and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt. 28:19). The issue that we must address as believers today is this: what does it mean to make disciples and what are we doing to accomplish this task? This morning I would like to address that for a few minutes as we also look at the ministry of Village Missions and how we as a part of Village Missions can be involved in making disciples.

We are going to begin by looking at what a disciple is, then consider the need and process for making disciples. Then I will share a bit of what is happening in Village Missions today, and finish up by looking at how we can be a part of that work.

What is a Disciple?

If you look up “disciple” in the Mirriam-Webster dictionary this is what you find:

Disciple: one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another: as

- a. one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ's followers according to the Gospel accounts
- b. a convinced adherent of a school or individual

A disciple is a follower, one who is convinced of the truth of the teaching of another, and who helps to spread that teaching.

In the time of Jesus there were many teachers and rabbis who developed a following of people who believed in them and adhered to their teaching. They were known as disciples. The forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist had many disciples, and in John 3 some of them came to him concerned because many of his disciples were leaving him to become disciples of Jesus – see John 3:25-30.

So, as followers of Jesus Christ, our commission is to go and make more followers. We are to make disciples. That leads to the next question...

How do we Make Disciples?

Jesus' commission gives us at least the framework to answer that question. There are three things that are necessary.

The first is evangelism. That is the “Go” part. It is necessary to take the message to people—to give them the gospel so they can hear and understand and respond to the claims of Jesus Christ.

The second is baptism. Baptism has a twofold purpose or significance to it. It is a step of commitment and consecration by the one being baptized. It is a symbol of their commitment to leaving the world and following Jesus. It is the outward sign of the repentance and change which has taken place inwardly in their heart and life. But it is also a way of welcoming new believers into the body of Christ and the fellowship of Christ.

So, we take the gospel to the lost. When they respond to Christ, we welcome them into the life and fellowship of the body. The third step is “teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus) have commanded you.” Just a simple statement, but so difficult to carry out. This is where we so often fall down. I know that I have come short in this area over my years of ministry.

What does it mean? How do we teach others all the doctrines of Christ? The Apostle Paul gives us an important clue in the book of 2 Timothy. These are instructions to a young pastor, but I don't think they can be relegated only to pastors. He says in 2 Tim. 2:2, “...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

The making of a disciple involves building into the life of another person the truth and the knowledge we have learned so that they, in turn, can invest in the life of another person and so on.

Ron Sallee, the Village Missionary in Machias, WA who started the Contenders Bible School many years ago, tells how the concept of disci-

plishment was reinforced in his mind by the pattern we find in nature. In the book of Genesis, when God created everything, we read that the plants and the animals brought forth fruit or offspring *“according to their own kind.”*

If that is the pattern in the natural world, should it not also be the pattern in the spiritual world. As believers and followers—that is, disciples—of Jesus Christ, we ought to be bringing forth fruit after our own kind. In other words, we should be producing more disciples. We do that by investing in the lives of others, building them in faith and doctrine, until they reach maturity and are able to repeat the process in others also.

Village Missions and Discipleship

So, now the question is, what does this have to do with Village Missions? What is happening in our mission today, and how are we aiming to use this discipleship process to further the work and ministry of Christ in rural Canada? I want to take you on a bit of a journey this morning as we consider the past and the future of Village Missions.

Back when we joined VM 36 years ago, the mission was growing. There were new missionary couples every year. New fields were being opened. Pastoral graduates from Bible Colleges like Nipawin Bible Institute, Millar Bible Institute, Peace River Bible Institute and others were choosing Village Missions as a way to get involved in ministry across our country.

Somewhere along the way, things changed. The dynamics of ministry changed. The changes in society led to greater frustrations in ministry and burnout among pastors and missionaries. Fewer students were going into pastoral programs. And those who were tended toward specialization as youth pastors, or music ministry or other such areas. It seemed like VM was not getting many new missionaries from the Bible Schools any more. The same was true for other church and mission organizations.

A few years ago a new realization began to hit home. As more of our missionary pastors and mission leadership team retire, without new missionaries to take their place, our beloved mission will cease to exist.

Something needed to be done. Through the movement of God, the Board of Village Missions has launched what we are calling “Forward Again 2015.” There are a number of areas involved in this campaign:

1. An intense focus on prayer to the Lord of the Harvest to send workers into his harvest fields. We can only go forward on our knees.
2. An increase to the minimum base salary of \$500 bringing the monthly minimum to \$2200. It was felt that the low salary was a definite hindrance to recruiting new missionaries.
3. A commitment to recruiting and sending out ten new missionary pastors in the next two years.

There is a significant cost in all of this. In order to cover the cost of the salary increase for those fields who are not self-supporting, as well as ten new missionaries and increased recruiting costs, the goal is to raise \$285,000. That is a substantial amount. It is this “Forward Again 2015” campaign that your special gift to VM will be going toward this year.

There is one other area involved in this campaign. That is the Contenders Discipleship Initiative. This is where we come back to the idea of making disciples.

Contenders Discipleship Initiative

Recruiting new missionary pastors from the Bible Colleges will continue. However, given the minimal results in that area, the Mission began looking at something that was already happening on one of their fields in Washington State.

- Ron Sallee - Contenders Bible School – a program of concentrated study providing the equivalent of a Bible College education in just two years. Over the past 20 years, the School has sent out about 15 couples into ministry, most with Village Missions
- If we could do that in our churches all across North America, we can raise up new missionaries from within our churches. The idea is investing in the lives of individuals and couples we know, training and preparing them for ministry with Village Missions.
- Because of their connection with the ministry of VM and the mentoring process, they already know and understand the VM ministry.

Conclusion

So that is a glimpse at what is happening in our Mission. Last winter we had 15-18 people taking the first course of the Contenders Discipleship Initiative. There were many others involved in other places as well. More are starting this year – mention Garrington.

As we close this morning, I want to come back to the concept of making disciples. You see, making disciples isn't just for pastors or missionaries. Every one of us should be bringing forth fruit after our own kind. We need to be teaching others, building into the lives of others helping them to grow so that they can in turn build what they have learned into someone else.

Think of Paul and Timothy – Paul the mentor, Timothy the student. Yet Paul encouraged Timothy to take someone else and begin to invest in his life, so that he in turn to pass it on to someone else.

We all need a Paul in our life—someone who takes us under their wing to teach and build us up, to help us grow to maturity. But at the same time we all need a Timothy—someone that we can take in and work with, passing on the things we have learned.

That is the process for building the church of Jesus Christ. And that is what Village Missions wants to see happening over and over all across our land. Let's be a part of it.

(Mention the offering for VM – pray about what God would have you do and bring your gift next week.)