

MAKE DISCIPLES

DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES 5



This is the Great Commission to which all disciples are called.

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A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Make Disciples

Make Disciples
Disciples Making Disciples Part 5
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Make Disciples

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Welcome to *Make Disciples*

Jesus' mandate to His disciples is clear: "Make disciples."

Jesus is filling the world with Himself. He is doing this through His Church as each disciple grows to become more like Jesus, and as we lead others to Him and make disciples of them and our fellow believers.

Each of us is called to this work, so we need to prepare and learn the skills necessary for fulfilling the Lord's mandate.

Here is Part 5 in our series, "Disciples Making Disciples."

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study, *Disciples Making Disciples*, that you might grow in Him and His calling every day of your life.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Every Believer a Teacher

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.15, 16

Excellent teachers

We return to a theme we have already visited in this series, namely, the calling of every believer to teach the things of Christ to others. All disciples of Jesus “ought to be teachers” and make disciples, so we *all* must give more careful consideration to just what this requires of us, and how we may fulfill this high and holy calling.

Over the centuries the Christian Church has been favored with a great many excellent teachers whose faithful and diligent labors have enlarged and nurtured the Church, helping her to realize more of her potential as a sign and outpost of the Kingdom of God. The names come easily: Paul, Polycarp, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Columbanus, Alcuin, Hildegard, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Edwards, Kuyper, Newman, Machen, Lewis, Schaeffer— we could go on and on.

Certainly, every disciple of Jesus should thank and praise the Lord for so many excellent teachers, whose works continue to instruct and equip the saints and make disciples unto our own day. We should also give thanks for all those, called to make disciples, who have helped us grow in our walk with and work for the Lord.

Disciples making disciples: That’s the divine pattern and the Kingdom agenda God has prepared for all who believe in Jesus. We don’t need advanced degrees. Our calling does not require a classroom. Jesus said that we are to make disciples “as you are going,” in all the daily activities and contexts of our lives. We who are disciples of Jesus are called to make disciples of the people God brings into our sphere of influence and will. We all ought to be teachers.

A calling to witness and teach

Preachers, teachers, theologians, writers, and others like them are not the *only*, and in many ways, not even the *primary* source of the Church’s witness and instruction in the world. Each disciple of Jesus has a [Personal Mission Field](#) to which He sends us daily as citizens and ambassadors of His Kingdom. And no small part of that calling is the work of teaching Jesus to others, both believers and non-believers.

Which, in fact, every believer is *already doing*. You and I are making disciples in the “as-you-are-goings” of our lives, even when we don’t think we are. But what *kind* of disciples are we encouraging others to be? The light of Jesus shines in and through us at all times, sometimes more brightly than others. And the truth of Jesus should come to light in all our words and deeds. The challenge is to make sure that what and how we are teaching Jesus should be like the Lord’s own teaching, and that we are making the most of every opportunity to be and make disciples.

We cannot rely only on those who are called to the office of teacher to do the work of advancing the Kingdom by witness and instruction. Indeed, all those cited above would agree in a moment that their primary desire was to equip *other believers* to take up the calling to teach and make disciples, for only in that way can the message of the Gospel and the Christian worldview continue to grow like leaven and glow like light through the sinful loaf of this dark and fallen world.

Consider: Jesus promised His followers that, once they had received the Holy Spirit, they would know power to be His witnesses (Acts 1.8). A significant part of that witness, as we see in the Book of Acts, involved talking to others about the Lord, explaining to them the significance of the coming of His Kingdom, and teaching them how they, too, might enter with us into this glorious life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the

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Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). Because all the disciples took up the work of making disciples at some level, the Gospel spread rapidly, much more rapidly than if only Paul, Peter, and the other apostles and teachers had been the only witnesses and disciple-makers.

We long to see that book of Acts spiritual contagion in our day! But if we as disciples of Christ do not take up this disciple-making mandate and make it a central part of our daily walk with and work for the Lord, then the progress of the Gospel will slow, stall, and even be set back.

The apostle Paul commands *all believers* to let the Word of Jesus Christ dwell in them richly, so that we might teach and admonish one another accordingly (Col. 3.16). Christians have abundant opportunities for contact and conversation with other Christians, but, so often, we waste these opportunities on frivolous, trivial, and mostly mundane things. How much stronger, more energetic, and more effective would the Church be in the world if every believer was equipped, alert, and capable of teaching the things of Christ to other believers with real power and effects?

There simply is no way around it: If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called, and you have been empowered to fulfill your calling, to teach the Gospel and the things of Christ's Kingdom to the people to whom God sends you each day. Disciples making disciples: That's the essence of our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12).

Make the most of the opportunities

Paul wrote that we must not miss such opportunities to bear witness and teach one another. The world is a spiritual wasteland; the powers of wickedness and deceit are always active. Every opportunity lost for advancing the Kingdom will be capitalized on by the devil and our secular, materialistic age.

We must be always alert to these opportunities, always ready with a word of instruction or encouragement or witness, and always earnest in pressing the things of Christ and His Kingdom on anyone and everyone who will listen.

To this end let us embrace the fact that, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all called to make disciples in the daily settings and opportunities of our lives; and let us prepare ourselves accordingly.

For reflection

1. Do you think of yourself as a teacher? A witness? What part do teaching others and giving a witness for Christ play in your walk with the Lord?
2. When most Christians think about *teaching*, what comes to mind? Why?
3. What does it mean to be a witness to Christ? How does teaching factor into this calling? Whose job is this?

Next steps – Preparation: Make a list of the people you see each week, in all the places you go. Which are believers? Which are not? Begin thinking and praying about ways you might daily share with these people concerning what God is doing in your own life.

2 The Great Discipleship Imperative

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." Matthew 28.18-20

The Great Commission

This is perhaps the most mistranslated verse in all of Scripture.

Frequently, when I have taught the Great Commission, I will say, "Now there is only one imperative, one command, in this passage. What is it?", to which people almost invariably reply, "Go!" Because, of course, there it is in the translation of verse 19.

However, that translation is not quite accurate, and therefore that response to my question is not correct. The only *command* in the Great Commission is "make disciples."

Making disciples, as Jesus continued to say, involves teaching the things of Christ to other people. This has been a consistent theme in this series on disciples and disciple-making. But whose job is this?

Certainly those who are called to the teaching office in the Church must preach and teach so that true disciples of the Lord are equipped for ministry and living for His glory. But, as I am arguing in this study, that duty of teaching the things of Christ to one another and the world also falls on every disciple of Jesus Christ. In the Kingdom of God, we are *all* called to be teachers. As we grow in the Lord Jesus we *ought* to be teachers. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples, and to teach those disciples to do the same. Thus, we must make sure we understand *where* and *how* we are to carry out this duty appointed us by the Lord.

So let's examine the Great Commission of our Lord a little more closely, and see if we can't gain more clarity and glean some additional insights into how He expects us to carry out this witnessing and teaching mandate.

Ready as we go

The word "Go" in verse 19 is, as I mentioned, consistently mistranslated in our English Bibles. Rather than being a verb in the imperative mood, as it seems so often to be, the word is a participle, and is meant to describe the subject of the imperative verb, that is, *you* – as in *you all*. As a participle, it should be translated temporally: "as you (all) are going." Jesus thus instructed His disciples to "make disciples" "as you are going."

So what Jesus actually commands is that, *as we are going* about the everyday situations of our lives, in order to make the most of those situations, we must be ready with a life well-lived and a word of witness or instruction, so that we might teach others to be followers of Jesus Christ, or at least to consider Him.

Let's face it, we talk about what excites us most. Seen a good movie lately? You'll share it with your friends, often with much enthusiasm, urging them to go see it. Get a new car? You'll want to show it off to all your friends. Got a new tech-gadget? You'll parade it out with joy for everyone to gawk at and covet. New child or grandchild? Out come the pictures.

It's the way we are: We talk about the things that excite us most. And when our relationship with the Lord Jesus and our experience of the Gospel of the Kingdom affect us like movies, cars, gadgets, and kids, we'll talk about these with anyone and everyone who will listen. As we are going.

Our audience

So whom should we expect to be our audience for such teaching?

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Well, ask yourself, “Where do I go each week?” What makes up the *as-you-are-goings* of your life? We pretty much have these in common, at least as categories: Our homes, neighborhoods, places of work, stores and restaurants, service organizations, churches, circle of friends, clubs, professional associations, and so forth are the places we regularly go. As Jesus was sent to a particular place and time to do His disciple-making work, so He has sent each one of us to our own Judea and Samaria, with the same mandate (Jn. 20.21).

When we begin to see our everyday places as our *mission field* as well as our *classroom*, and all the people we routinely see there as our *students*, we’ll be in a position to start lining-up the curriculum of truth that we’ll want to present to them as we are going about our everyday tasks.

Assuming, of course, that we are growing in our excitement about the things of the Lord.

Begin here

As we’ve seen, we need to prepare carefully to go out into our Personal Mission Field each day ready to talk with others, show the love of Jesus, and work for transformation of various kinds. Daily preparation in reading, study, prayer, and planning is indispensable for making the most of the as-you-are-going opportunities the Lord brings us each day.

How’s your daily time in God’s Word? Rich? Full? Yielding regular encounters with the glory of God? What about your prayers? Do you really experience being in the presence of Jesus as you open your soul to Him in prayer? Do you find that your times with the Lord are increasing the hope of glory in your soul and the experience of righteousness, peace, and joy in every area of your life?

In your time with the Lord, do you look ahead at your day, to anticipate work, meetings, appointments, and other opportunities for showing and teaching Jesus? The more we set our minds to *be* disciples, the greater will be the likelihood both that we’ll make progress in that part of our calling, and that we’ll be ready with a word to make disciples of others.

Work hard at your spiritual disciplines, and be sure that you go with Jesus into all the as-you-are-goings of your life. Soon enough you’ll find that you can’t *not* think about the Lord and His goodness. You will always have something to say about the One Who always fills your life with meaning, purpose, wonder, glory, and love.

Jesus does not command us to “go.” He knows that we’re always going somewhere. He commands us, *as we are going*, to make disciples. Be a disciple who makes disciples, and you’ll be right where Jesus wants you to be.

For reflection

1. How would you explain the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20) to a new Christian? What does this require of us? How can we make the most of the time given to us for this high calling?
2. What would you describe as the *as-you-are-goings* of your life? Have you mapped out your [Personal Mission Field](#)? What opportunities for teaching or bearing witness are present there?
3. How would you evaluate your spiritual life at this time? Are you growing in the Lord? Seeking to be more consistent in serving Him? In sharing Him with others?

Next steps – Conversation: Is your current practice of spiritual disciplines producing in you genuine excitement about the Lord? Do you need to improve your prayers and Bible reading? Take some time in prayer to seek the Lord for ways to improve your time with Him in His Word and prayer.

3 The Spirit Who Teaches

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Luke 12.11, 12

Teaching in the everyday

Every Christian is called to a ministry of teaching. We all need to grow in the Lord because we all ought to be teachers. We must be prepared to bear witness to our unsaved friends and neighbors, and we must make the most of every opportunity to encourage other disciples in their walk with and work for the Lord.

We ought to be teachers because the Good News of Jesus is what everyone needs to hear more of, as often as possible. Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to make disciples as they are going, looking for and responding to every opportunity to use our time for pointing others to the Lord.

So we don't need a formal classroom to carry out this work. We don't need the permission of pastors or church leaders. We don't need elaborate outlines, PowerPoint slides, or a ready raft of authoritative sources to back-up what we teach. We have a calling to make disciples as we are going about in our everyday lives. In everyday situations – all the as-you-are-goings of our lives – we have abundant opportunities to turn a conversation or situation to matters of the Kingdom or to help others consider Christ's promises for their lives.

But how do we do this? Do we have to memorize all kinds of persuasive facts? Store up an abundance of complex answers to objections? What must we do in our everyday situations, with believers and unbelievers, to fulfill our calling to make disciples as we are going?

In a nutshell, we must listen to the Spirit of God.

Listen to the Spirit

Now the Spirit does not speak in audible tones – at least, not typically. The Spirit speaks through the Word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Jn. 6.63). Thus, if we are going to be able to *hear* the Spirit, it will be important to make sure, every day of our lives, that we are spending significant time in the Word of God, letting the Scriptures dwell within us richly (Col. 3.16), hiding the Word in the depths of our soul (Ps. 119.9-11), building up a reservoir of understanding and experience for those times when the Spirit is prompting us to teach someone something about Christ and His Kingdom.

If it seems like we keep circling back to this basic starting-point for discipleship and disciple-making, it's because we do. And that's because feeding on the Word of God is the foundation for and key to growth as a disciple and readiness for making disciples.

As we listen for the Spirit during our times in the Word, He will bring us into the Presence of the Lord Jesus and His glory. There, we can see ourselves as we truly are, repent of any sins that come to light, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ more completely (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Eph. 4.17-24). The Spirit will grow us into Christlikeness as we wait on Him in the Scriptures. He will bring forth in us fruit and power for being a witness to the Lord (Gal. 5.22, 23; Acts 1.8; 1 Cor. 4.20), so that, being made more like Jesus, we will be more ready to talk about Him as opportunities arise.

As we grow in the Spirit and increase in the Lord Jesus, we will be more sensitive to the Spirit's *leading* in everyday situations. How does the Spirit prompt or otherwise influence us, leading us to teach the things of Jesus? In a variety of ways: He may put someone on our heart, so that we can't seem to get that person off our mind. By so doing the Spirit may be preparing us for some encounter with that person or summoning us to pray for and contact a particular individual (Phil. 1.3). Make this person a matter of prayer, and the Spirit

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will guide you to a word of instruction, encouragement, or advice you can share.

In other situations, the Spirit may pick up on a word, phrase, or expression someone makes, striking it in our souls like a gong or cymbal, so that we focus on that word with anticipation until the Spirit leads us to some way to connect that word with spiritual truth. Words like fearful, anxious, uncertain, seeking, and many others can point to an openness in a person's soul, where we might be able to plant a good Kingdom seed. Or some situation or difficulty in a person's life may cue us to recall a relevant Word from the Lord that can serve as a conversation-starter.

The Spirit may also use conviction of sin – in others or in us – to get us moving in the direction of a conversation about spiritual things. Other believers, burdened by a sin, can be taught the value of confession, repentance, and seeking the Lord. Unbelievers, weighed down with guilt or shame (Ps. 83.16), can hear from us the Good News of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Situations that are on everybody's minds – a sudden disaster, an election, a public scandal, a drop in the economy – can also be effective means for the Spirit to lead us to engage others about eternal matters. The better informed we are on such matters, the readier we will be to talk about them, and to use them as pivot points toward spiritual matters (1 Chron. 12.32). Or the Spirit may prompt someone else, who sees something in us, to open the conversation by asking a question that can lead to talking about spiritual things (1 Pet. 3.15).

Be prepared!

However the Spirit prompts us to engage a teaching moment, we need to make sure of a few things before we open our mouths.

First, the words we use in conversing with others must be seasoned with grace (Col. 4.6). You can't teach people by condemning or belittling them. You must reach out to them with grace, as a servant, eager to minister to whatever the expressed need may be. Grace flows through our words when in our conversations we show genuine interest in others, patience to explain matters, gentleness whenever we are challenged, and love in our tone of voice.

Also, as Jesus showed, asking questions can help prepare the minds of others for whatever the Spirit may give us to share and them to hear. By getting their thinking in gear and allowing them to put their own thoughts forward, we can create a level ground for sincere conversational give-and-take. Asking questions not only helps to put others into a learning mode, it allows us to demonstrate the love of Christ and helps us improve our listening skills.

Finally, keep in mind that you don't have to do everything at one time. Teaching is an ongoing calling. We're not driving Gospel dump trucks around the town, looking for unsuspecting lost persons or immature disciples to dump our whole load on all at once. Rather, we are more like physicians, listening carefully to diagnose the need, offering a little help here and a bit of medicine there, and realizing that sometimes cures for what ails us can take a long time.

Listen for the Spirit in the teaching moments of your everyday life. He can lead you in how to proceed.

For reflection

1. In the hymn, "More about Jesus," we sing the line, "Spirit of God, my Teacher be/showing the things of Christ to me." How do you know when the Spirit is teaching you the things of Christ?
2. What are some ways you might expect the Spirit to prod, push, or point you toward a teaching opportunity today?

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3. Give some examples of questions you might ask to begin a conversation with one of your “students.”

Next steps – Transformation: In the light of today’s ReVision, reflect on the week gone by thus far. Can you see any times when the Spirit may have been prompting you to speak to someone? Today, try to be more alert to Him. Whenever you sense the Spirit leading, simply open your mouth and begin a conversation: ask a question, make an observation, solicit an opinion. Go with the Spirit wherever He leads from there.

4 Begin Where They Are

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." John 4.7

Get your mind in gear!

The apostle Peter wrote his second letter to the followers of Jesus in Asia Minor to encourage them to get their minds in gear for serving the Lord (2 Pet. 1.12-14). His instruction to them is good advice for us. Disciple-making opportunities pop up in front of us all day long. But we need to be paying attention.

If we can set our minds to focus on our primary calling throughout the day – the calling of being and making disciples – then we might be more alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as He calls class to order and opens the book of truth with the people around us.

In the Church today we have become so accustomed to teaching and learning taking place in classrooms, at scheduled times, and at the feet of those appointed as teachers, that we just don't have the mindset for making the most of every teaching opportunity that presents itself all day long. We need such teaching, to be sure. But we must not limit the calling to teach and make disciples only to such contexts. All disciples ought to be teachers; all disciples should make disciples; and that means all disciples must be ready for the Spirit to use them in teaching others.

Here we need to cut some new grooves for our walk with the Lord. Paul calls us to pay attention to what's going on in the as-you-are-goings of our lives, so that we can make the most of every opportunity the Lord brings our way (Eph. 5.15-17). Begin your day in prayer, asking the Lord to make you aware of disciple-making opportunities during the day ahead. Think about the people you will see, and get ready in your mind for how you might talk with them about the things of the Lord. Keep that attitude of prayer going throughout the day, so that you are in constant conversation with the Spirit whenever He wants to prompt or guide you in some way or another. Then, listen carefully for His cues or prompts. They will surely come.

This is a discipline that takes time to develop, but it's one we can all learn. It won't just happen; you'll have to *devote your mind and heart* to the task of seeking the Lord daily, and throughout the day, for just the right situations in which you can bear witness or help another believer grow as a disciple of the Lord.

Take the initiative

You'll also need to be prepared to take the initiative at such times, just as Jesus did with the woman at the well.

Sad to say, those who are the focus of our disciple-making won't normally be as ready for class to be in session as we are. So we'll need to get the conversation started, and Jesus shows us how we can do just that.

With the woman at the well, Jesus started where He found her. He could have sat at the well and said nothing to this woman. Or He could have prayed earnestly that the Lord would lead her to bring something up that might allow Him to engage a teaching moment with her. Or He could have just talked about the weather. But He didn't do any of these things, and neither should we.

Realizing that this woman had come to the well with water on her mind, Jesus started where He found her and asked her for a drink.

Now, don't miss the extraordinary strangeness of this. The woman certainly didn't. She knew who she was, and she could tell that Jesus was a Jew and perhaps a teacher of some sort. Jews and Samaritans in those days had no dealings with one another. They were separated by ethnic and religious differences, and each looked on the other with condescension and even scorn.

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Not unlike the differences that are rending the social fabric in our nation, and that cause those who have embraced a secular worldview to look upon believers with indifference or contempt. These divisions have led many believers to conclude that the world is no longer open to considering the call to follow Jesus. In many cases, the fear of man has clamped believers in a kind of spiritual lockjaw so that our witness for the Lord has lapsed into a spiral of silence.

What are we afraid of when it comes to initiating a teaching opportunity with others? Will we appear forward? Will some think we're being nosy? Do we fear how they might respond as we start to turn the conversation toward spiritual matters? If we can overcome these caveats and look for a starting-point for conversation that is on the mind of the one we're seeking to engage, we won't have much trouble going on from there.

Such starting-points are everywhere: work, family, current events, and yes, even the weather. By picking up on any one of these – with the intention of getting around to Jesus – we can initiate conversations that can, as the Spirit leads, bear fruit for making disciples.

The starting-point

This is what we see Jesus doing here. He initiated His conversation by starting where the Samaritan woman was – not in religion, but in water: “Woman, give me to drink.” The woman had water on the mind. She had come out in the middle of the day, perhaps when she suspected no one else would be at the well, to fill her jug with water. Water was what she was thinking, and water is where Jesus started His conversation with her.

His teaching opportunity began in well water, but it quickly flowed toward living water.

When we launch into a teaching moment, we need to listen for an opening that will engage the other person with us. Here it would be appropriate to ask a question, or perhaps to solicit an opinion on whatever the person we wish to engage may be thinking about or doing. Keep the focus on the other person and what they're presently engaged in doing. Ask them to explain something. Make an affirming or complementary comment. Listen and try to understand.

And then, get ready to listen as the Spirit leads, because the work of teaching will have just begun.

For reflection

1. What would you say are the skills of a truly excellent listener? Why is it important to acquire these skills?
2. Think about the day ahead of you. What can you begin doing now to help you prepare to make the most of the teaching opportunities you will surely have?
3. How can believers encourage and help one another to overcome the fears that hinder our witness?

Next steps – Preparation: Where will you be going, and whom will you be seeing there today? Can you envision something you might ask, say, or do that could launch a conversation about spiritual things? What could keep you from doing this? How will you overcome it? Take some initiative today, then share with a Christian friend how the Lord led you in this effort.

5 Make a Connection

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." John 4.10

Teaching moments

A teaching moment begins when we – who are called to be witnesses and make disciples – discern an opportunity, under the prompting of God's Spirit, to engage a conversation with someone around us. Teaching moments can arise with other disciples, providing us opportunities to encourage and edify our fellow believers. Or they can crop up with an unbelieving friend, neighbor, or co-worker, as an open door for bringing Jesus to their attention.

Not all such opportunities will result in a teaching moment. But they will be more likely to if we are prepared, alert, and ready to step forward in faith and obedience. We shouldn't simply wait around for such opportunities, but take the initiative as we are able. We don't need to worry about everything we'll need to say; Jesus promised His Spirit would give us the words we need, as well as the power (Lk. 12.12; Acts 1.8). Make up your mind each morning, in prayer before the Lord, that you will be available as He leads to launch into every opportunity to bear witness and make disciples for Jesus.

Many of the conversations we will initiate won't last very long. That's OK, too. Even though we don't get beyond the step of initiation, our doing so will be an act of obedience and will equip and encourage us for the next such opportunity. Additionally, our effort may serve to affirm or encourage the person to whom we're talking. He or she will come away knowing that we paid attention to them, are interested in what interests them, and can talk to them courteously and in a friendly manner. That kind of opening may lead to further teaching moments.

Plus, each time you exercise this conversation muscle, you grow a little stronger in it, and a little more confident in your ability to be the teacher and disciple-maker every disciple ought to be.

Good listeners

If we succeed at starting a conversation, we'll want to let it go its natural course for a while. Don't be too quick, especially with unbelievers, to rush into the Gospel. Pay careful attention to what your conversation partner is saying (Jms. 1.19). Ask some questions. Share an opinion. Good listeners encourage others to be active talkers, and the more a person is willing to talk with us, the more opportunities we will have for finding something to connect with, to take our conversation to the next level.

And that next level is finding some smooth way to launch the conversation into a new theater by injecting the reality of the spiritual world into the conversation.

You see how Jesus did it here. His conversation with the Samaritan woman began with water. But it didn't settle there. After her initial response, Jesus simply mentioned that there is a "gift of God" available for any who may be interested in it. Don't miss the strategic way that Jesus made this connection between the seen and unseen realms. First, He mentioned a "gift." Who isn't interested in getting something for free, something of value that might do them some good? This is as true in our day as it has ever been.

But, second, Jesus connected the idea of a *gift* with the mention of *God*. Most surveys indicate that well over 90% of Americans still believe in God, to some extent, at least. Mentioning God in a conversation, while it might momentarily startle, will not be a deal-breaker. And mentioning God in the context of a gift might be doubly piquing, especially since many people don't think of God in terms of what *He gives*, but of what they suppose *He demands* of us.

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So, the conversation is developing around, let's say, some current political scandal (there's usually plenty such fodder). We might say, "We are truly blessed to live in a free country – a gift of God to us through our forebears. But do you ever wonder how God looks at our nation's politicians?" Or maybe the person is discussing some aspect of his job, which you have asked him to explain. It's easy enough to say, "I'm grateful for my work; God is certainly good to give us so many kinds of work to do."

Again, it's not necessary to know where such conversations might lead. The Spirit will act in response to your obedient initiative and take it where He will. Listen for His leading, and He'll give you the words you need.

Any and every aspect of our lives can be connected to God's giving grace. As Paul asked, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4.7) As we learn to see every facet and aspect of our lives as a good gift from God, we will be better prepared to help others see His goodness as well, and to use any particular gift of God's goodness as a launching pad into a teaching moment.

Alert to "launchers"

Since God is sovereign over all of life, it shouldn't be too hard for us to find a way of connecting our conversations with some aspect of God's relationship to the world.

William Wilberforce, the great 19th century social and religious reformer, was a master at this. He used to think up and write down what he called "launchers," phrases he might use in imaginary conversations to connect a mundane moment to eternal truths. The more of these he wrote, the more prepared he was when a teaching moment arose. He would take whatever the conversation was, bring it into the light of God's grace, and use it as a launcher for elevating the conversation into the spiritual realm.

It's not a bad idea to practice this, if only in your head, as you watch the evening news, listen in on the conversations of others, talk with members of your family, prepare for your day in prayer, or read the daily paper or a website. Start a journal in which you write down phrases or questions that can connect the here and now with the realities of the then and there.

And don't think you need to do this in every conversation. It must be smooth, natural, and in flow with the drift and mood of the conversation.

For example, in the middle of a conversation about favorite foods, you don't want to say, "Well, enjoy them while you can, because God is going to judge you one day." How much better to say something like, "Thank God for all this wonderful food!" By doing this you introduce a new perspective into the conversation and launch it up to a new plane, a plane where, as the Spirit continues to lead, you will be able to unfold more spiritual truths clearly as the teaching moment continues.

For reflection

1. Explain the idea of a "launcher." Give some examples that you have used or seen others use:
2. "Since God is sovereign over all of life, it shouldn't be too hard for us to find a way of connecting our conversations with some aspect of God's relationship to the world." How can we become more aware of and alert to the ways God is revealing Himself in everyday situations?
3. A certain measure of fear comes in whenever we think about "launching" a conversation to the spiritual level. Why is that? Is this justified? What do we have to fear in doing this?

Next steps – Preparation: Take five minutes right now and jot down two or three "launchers" you might use in conversation with someone today. Try one out and follow the conversation as the Spirit leads. Share with a Christian friend the results of this activity, and so launch into another teaching moment with a fellow disciple.

6 Focus on Christ

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." John 4.26

Command the conversation

The late Paul Little, in his excellent book, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, provided a detailed analysis of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well. I'm merely summarizing the main points of his study, which can be most helpful in learning to fulfill your calling as a disciple-maker.

One important dynamic of that situation is that Jesus commanded the teaching moment and took the conversation where He wanted to go.

We can learn to do this as well, whether we're trying to bear witness to an unsaved friend or colleague, or helping some fellow disciple go a little deeper with the Lord. Having started the conversation, Jesus quickly proceeded to introduce the unseen realm and to direct the conversation toward a more serious consideration of spiritual matters.

And all the while, Jesus knew exactly where He was going with this conversation. Sooner or later, He would bring this teaching moment around to Himself.

The most important topic

Jesus is the most important topic, the central thread of every teaching moment. We who are learning Jesus are called to teach Jesus to others. We want unbelievers to consider Him, and we want our Christian friends to go deeper with Him. As disciples we are being transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As disciple-makers we bear witness to Him and encourage other disciples to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3.18).

Only Jesus can bring real meaning, purpose, direction, and life to the people we meet each day in the as-you-are-goings of our lives. So, from the beginning of our teaching moment, we need to think about ways of guiding the conversation toward the center of all things, toward Jesus.

Now, this doesn't mean that every conversation needs to be a *complete* Gospel presentation, or a full-blown lesson in discipleship. Not at all. Just getting someone to *think* about Jesus lays down a plank on the bridge we're building that we can return to at some later time to resume our conversational journey. But it is the most loving thing that we can do to point others – saved or unsaved – to the One Who is making all things new in our lives.

Again, you won't find many people who have no respect at all for Jesus. Even the most rabid unbeliever will probably admit that, if Jesus really lived, He was a remarkable person. Adjust your point of contact with the person in your teaching moment to meet them where you find them. There are plenty of things about Jesus that can begin to make that essential connection to the center.

We don't always have to start with His death on the cross or second coming to inject the Name and Presence of Jesus into our conversations. Jesus' life, teaching, and works, as well as the various responses to Him by His contemporaries, provide many angles for bringing up some aspect of the Lord in a conversation. Look for a realistic connecting point, and then begin to build your conversation toward the center from there.

Your experience of Jesus

You should of course make sure to have your personal testimony ready – and ready to adjust as needed – to every situation. Even when you're talking with believers, it's important to keep Jesus in the focus; and you can do this by sharing something that Jesus has taught you or done in your life of late. Your unbelieving friends

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may not believe that Jesus has meant so much to you, or done so much for you, but no one can deny your experience when you are convinced of it. Your believing friends will be encouraged by your experience and perhaps challenged to seek more of Jesus for themselves.

Even pointing to a Scripture that clearly talks about Jesus can help to focus others on Him and what He has done in your life, and may want to do in theirs.

With unbelievers you can use your own testimony to bring Jesus into the teaching moment, provided you use a part of your testimony that will connect with the unbeliever. This might require you to spend more time in prayer each day, rehearsing your testimony with the Lord, surveying the vast scope of His goodness and providential care for you, until you see more clearly all the many good things He has done and is doing in your life.

Paul used his own personal testimony freely and often in the Book of Acts and in his epistles. He knew that only Jesus Christ can change lives, only Jesus Christ is the altogether lovely and majestic One, only Jesus Christ can command the necessary wonder and adoration that lead men to forsake their old ways of living and take up their crosses as His disciples.

So the better we become at injecting Jesus into a conversation, at precisely the relevant point, the better we will be in fulfilling our callings to be witnesses and teachers for the Lord.

For reflection

1. Christians believe that Christ is the center of everything. Really? Explain.
2. Can we expect to move our conversations and other *teaching moments* toward Christ if our relationship with Him is not what it ought to be? Explain.
3. What would you say ought to be the important parts of a *testimony* about what Christ has done for us? Summarize your testimony in no more than three sentences.

Next steps – Preparation: Briefly outline your own testimony. How did you become a Christian? What difference has that made in your life? Today, ask a Christian friend to share his or her own testimony with you. If there's time, share yours. This will help you begin gaining confidence in your ability to talk about the Lord in your life.

7 A Living Classroom

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... 1 Peter 3.15

Get our classroom right

By far and away, the most important teaching aid that you bring into any teaching moment is the example of your own life. Only disciples can make disciples, so we need always to concentrate on growing in the Lord and His grace, setting Jesus before us as Lord over all things, and walking the Kingdom path He has marked out for us in His Word (2 Pet. 3.18; Ps. 16.8; Ps. 119.105).

The more we apply ourselves to *being* disciples, the more we will realize the hope of glory in which we stand (Rom. 5.1, 2), and be always ready to bear witness and make disciples as the Lord leads.

Peter believed that, when Christians are living out their hope, they will stand out so starkly in this shallow, fearful, and materialistic world, that others will be drawn to them to find out what makes them tick. Our hope is focused on our unchanging Lord and Savior, that we might know Him, grow in Him, and live for Him unto ever increasing glory (Jn. 17.3; 1 Cor. 10.31). Such a way of life cannot help but stand out as different from what most people experience, most of the time.

School teachers spend a lot of time getting their classrooms just right – just the right pictures on the wall, books on the shelves, order of desks and chairs, and all the rest. They know how important a pleasant, stimulating, and reinforcing classroom can be. We must learn the same as well, and prepare the living classroom of our lives for every disciple-making opportunity the Lord provides.

The starting point

Have you set Jesus Christ aside as Lord in your life? This is the starting-point both for growing in the hope of glory, and for becoming a welcoming classroom for potential students we will encounter in the as-you-are-goings of our lives.

What does this entail?

It means that you acknowledge that Jesus is not just your Savior; He is your King. All that we have is a gift from Him, and He intends us to use everything to further His rule and saving grace. We have acknowledged Jesus as Lord when, every day of our lives, we offer up to Him, for His use and approval, all we have, all we are, all we will do or say, and all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, every moment and opportunity of every day (Col. 3.23).

That's a pretty tall order, I know. But this is the life of discipleship to which Jesus calls us, and which He sends us to nurture in others. We're not likely to make that kind of commitment apart from the hope of gaining something positive and lasting. Ours is the hope of glory. But what does that mean?

In a day when people stake their hopes on good jobs, sufficient wealth and material possessions, reliable relationships, and a suitable amount of fun, it's no wonder hope is such an elusive commodity. Christians must not look to such things for the fullness of life, peace, joy, purpose, and meaning. Instead, we must look to the glory of God. This is our great and unchanging hope.

That is, the Christian believes, and increasingly experiences, the reality of God's awesome and powerful Presence with him, drawing him close, granting him joy and pleasure, and filling him with the sense of eternal truths and unmerited, holy pleasure (Ps. 16.11). The true disciple of Jesus Christ says with the apostle Paul,

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“For me to live is Christ!” (Phil. 1.21), and longs to be transformed, from glory to glory, into the very image of the Lord (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The Christian hopes to *encounter* this glory every day in his times with the Lord, and as the Lord makes Himself known through the glories of the creation (Ps. 19.1-4).

But beyond that, disciples of Jesus Christ hope to *express* the glory of God in their words and deeds (1 Cor. 10.31), so that others are exposed to the reality of a transcendent realm and an all-loving God. So great is our peace and joy in knowing the glory of God, that we want others to know it as well. So we commit to the work not only of being disciples, but of making disciples as well.

Disciples of Jesus Christ long to have Him increasing in them and making Himself known through every aspect of our lives, so that when people experience us, by word or deed, they get a little taste, a sweet fragrance, of Jesus Christ. They come into contact, that is, with His glory.

A commanding hope

When this hope commands our lives – the hope of *meeting God* in His glory and then *servicing God* by expressing that glory to others – our lives will be fully furnished and warmly attractive classrooms for everyday teaching.

Grow as a disciple; grow in your commitment to making disciples for the glory of the Lord. Don't be surprised if people begin commenting on the grace they experience in your life, or on how much they enjoy talking with you. This is what Jesus did, and when Jesus is set aside as Lord in your heart, it's what He'll do through you as well.

We are called to be witnesses for Christ and to make disciples as we are going about the normal, everyday situations of our lives. But we must be constantly preparing for these opportunities, always in communication with and submission to our gracious and powerful Lord, and ever ready to respond to the promptings of His Spirit as He leads us to initiate a teaching moment with someone else.

This is where the most important teaching of the Church goes forth. Make sure you're ready to go forth and fulfill this high and holy calling in the living classroom of your daily life.

For reflection

1. “Have you set Jesus Christ aside as Lord in your life?” How would you counsel a new believer to do this?
2. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. How can we know when we are encountering the glory of the Lord? Is it possible to know this experience in our times of prayer and Bible reading or study? Explain.
3. What does it mean for you to be constantly preparing for the teaching and witnessing opportunities the Lord brings to you each day?

Next steps – Preparation: Spend some time in prayer reflecting on the “classroom” which is your life. Are there things in your life that keep others from wanting to be around you? Or from being interested in talking with you? What can you do, in all the places you go throughout the week, to make the “classroom” of your life more appealing and ready for teaching moments?

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For reflection or discussion

1. Every believer is a disciple, and every disciple is called to make disciples. What does this entail?
2. What do we mean by the “as-you-are-goings” of your life? Why do we refer to these as a “living classroom”?
3. How can we prepare for the daily “teaching moments” the Lord might bring to us?
4. What do we mean by “launchers”? Can you give an example of two?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about making disciples as you are going?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.

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