

In Spirit and in Truth: Rooted and Established

Freedom Church of Denton

Discipleship

Volume 1, Lesson 13

- **In Devotion** (feel free to highlight, underline, and scribble notes. Take your time, working through the following material over the course of the next week...it would be better for you to get through one sentence with understanding than the whole lesson with no understanding!)

...having favor will all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
Acts 2:47

We saw in the first lesson that discipleship is first and foremost about the child of God learning to follow Jesus in all his ways. As we learn to abide in Him, he will make us fruitful disciples and fruitful disciple-makers. It is more about what he does through us as we *observe all that he has commanded* (Matt. 28:20), than it is what we do in-and-of ourselves. The events recorded in Acts 2:36-47 are signed, sealed, and delivered, with God's stamp of approval and blessing, as testified by the fact that the early saints *continued in a state of favor with all the people as the Lord [himself] added to their number day by day those that were being saved.*

From the earliest days of creation till now, God has called his people to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28, 15:5; Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rev. 7:9). His grace brings life, growth, and reproduction. Barely more than a few months prior to the events recorded here in the book of Acts, Jesus had left his disciples with the Great Commission, commanding them to *go and make disciples of all the nations*. As he looked out on the fields that were white for harvest he foresaw his disciples actively cooperating with the grace that he was pouring out on the world and doing even greater works than himself (Lk. 10:2; Jn. 14:12). They were to be God's sowers – and God's promises, the Word of God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ were the seed. There would be no lack of soil, as the nations of the world would become their field! But the power was not as much in the sowers as it was in the seed and in the soil.

In Jesus' parable of how the kingdom of God grows (Mk.4:26-29), we observe the growth in the field that the sower had sown. It occurs not amid his great toil and labor, but as he effortlessly *sleeps and rises*. He doesn't know how, but *the earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come!*

Paul plants and Apollos waters, but it is God who causes the increase! Fruitfulness is part of the promise! But we must be convinced of the fact that it is not our effort, but God's power and promise, that produces the harvest. As *Abraham's offspring, [and] heirs according to the promise* (Gal. 3:29), you and I literally have the spiritual seed of the nations inside us! But the power is

latent (dormant), ready to be unlocked through our obedience and cooperation with the calling that God has placed on our lives. There are people waiting on our beautiful feet to bring glad tidings. There are people that will not hear lest the preacher is sent (Rom. 10:14-15). There is growth in the field that needs the husbandry that only you and I can provide. There are newborn babes that are craving the pure milk of the Word of God dispensed through Christ's nursery of discipleship. There are spiritual adolescents that are deeply desiring the spiritual meat that only those that are further along in the faith can provide. And then there are the emerging Timothy(s) and Titus(s) that need the faithful and intimate nurturing of the elder men and elder women. But in all of it, we can take great confidence in the fact that it is not ours to make happen. It's not ours to keep and sustain. We have not, cannot, and will never be able to cause even a single blade to grow. It is absolutely a work that only heaven can produce! God is merely looking for our cooperation in the obedience of faith that manifests itself in our repentance, baptism, and all the other essentials we have already meditated on in the previous lessons. Then God commands the blessing of growth!

In this truth, and to the discerning and spiritual ear, God has revealed the secret to church growth! It isn't our slick marketing campaigns and promotional services. It isn't in our "relevance" to an unspiritual world. In fact, it is in our ability to offer something that the world could never offer or produce. The quality of our "product" will be directly proportionate to the quality of our sincerity to cultivate the spiritual graces of faith, repentance, baptism, walking in the Spirit, devotion to the Word of God and prayer, testimony, fellowship, worship, and the other essentials of Acts 2:36-47. This is true of the individual and it is true of the church.

You want to grow your church? Take up the hoe of confession! Turn up the soil of your heart with the plow of prayer and meditation. Remove the defilements in the soil with the waters of baptism and the washing of regeneration. Infuse heavenly fertilizer with the implements of intercession and worship. Husband the growth with the clippers of discipleship and training. Maintain and nurture the growth with the sickle of fellowship.

For it was in this manner that the early church grew. She grew from 1 to 12, 12 to 70, 70 to 120, 120 to 3000. From Jerusalem to Asia Minor and throughout the Roman Empire. By the end of Constantine's reign, the church had spread throughout much of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. And she did it largely without the aid of brick and mortar. Instead she spread fervently, from the heart of one firebrand to the next, much like the detonation of a string of firecrackers.

Firebrands that had answered the **call** to make disciples. Firebrands that were willing to pay the full **cost** demanded of such a holy mission, as they became tutors of heaven's Christ-centered **curriculum**. And they enjoyed success and the favor of God as they ministered in the humble **character** of that ultimate disciple and disciple-maker, the servant-hearted Jesus, the Christ. The one who did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for the many. The one that was obedient to the point of death, but not just death, but death on a cross! The one that has been given the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is Lord! Lord teach us how to be a disciple like you. Teach us how to make disciples as you made disciples. For a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone,

when he is fully trained will be like his teacher!

- **In Meditation**

As you consider the following references, first pray and invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you as only the Teacher and Comforter can. Admit to him your complete inability to understand anything spiritual apart from his grace and illumination. Then consider each of these verses, taking notes on anything that the Spirit brings to your attention; perhaps a **Sin** to confess, a **Promise** to claim, an **Example** to follow, a **Command** to obey, or a **Seed** of righteousness to sow. If successful, you are learning to read the Word of God with your **S.P.E.C.S.** on!

What do the following passages say about God’s heart for fruitfulness and multiplication:

Genesis 1:28 _____

Genesis 15:5 _____

Matthew 28:18-20 _____

John 15:1-6 _____

Acts 1:8 _____

Revelation 7:9 _____

What is the significance of the words “favor” and the “Lord added to” in Acts 2:47 _____

Meditate on Mark 4:26-29 and answer the following questions:

What is the relationship between the sower, the seed, and the soil in this passage? _____

How is it that the growth occurs as the sower sleeps and rises? _____

What is the spiritual significance of this as it relates to discipleship? _____

Where does the power for growth reside in this parable? _____

What is the relationship of the promise in Galatians 3:29 and the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15 _____

How should this relate to the disciple-maker's faith, practice, and expectation? _____

Use a bible concordance or topical index to find verses that speak to the following. Search with key words such as disciple(s), equip, train, fruit, witness, multiply, etc.:

The **Call** of discipleship _____

The **Cost of** discipleship _____

The **Curriculum** of discipleship _____

The **Character** in discipleship _____

In Application

Disciples and disciple-makers do not have to be perfect and they certainly don't have to be powerful. They simply need to be F.A.T. Record S.M.A.R.T. ways that you can offer yourself to God and to your disciples as:

Faithful _____

Available _____

Teachable _____

Every believer needs to have several key relationships in their lives. Each one needs a Paul (someone who is pouring into them), a Timothy (someone they are pouring into) and a Barnabas (someone who is a good friend). List the names of those who are currently fulfilling these functions in your life. If there is no one, then write the names of those that you will pursue:

My Paul _____

My Timothy(s) _____

My Barnabas _____

Effective disciple-makers engage their disciples in several different ways. Firstly, they **teach** their disciple by Word (instruction) and in deed (modeling). Secondly, they **assist** their disciple by practice. And thirdly, they activate their disciple through **assignment**. Again, using S.M.A.R.T goals, think of ways that you can begin to do this with one of your disciples or prospective disciples. Record your thoughts here:

I will **teach** my disciple named _____, by _____

I will **assist** them in that which I have taught them in Word and in Deed by _____

I will activate this training in their life by **assign**(ing) them to _____

In Prayer

Thank you Lord that as I make myself available to you to be used by you, my success as a disciple and a disciple-maker has been guaranteed by your Word and promise. Thank you that you have equipped me to cultivate the spiritual graces in my life and that you guarantee that you will multiply the fruit in my life as I continue to yield to you in the obedience of faith. Where there is fruit in my life, prune me that I may bear more fruit. Where there is disease or deadwood, teach me to repent that you would renew those areas of my heart and flow with your teeming life to the desert places around me. Teach me how to teach, assist, and assign Christ-centered discipleship to the people that you have placed in the paths of my life. Train me up, that when I am fully trained I will be like my Master in all my ways. In Jesus' name. Amen!