

**Forward in Discipleship – Forward Series**  
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I was having a conversation not long ago with my sister. We talked about how different our world is today than when we were growing up. Who would have thought that we would have a pandemic, or see the day when there is such blatant disrespect for the law and authority? Or, what about corruption in politics and violent protests that result in killing people. Racism is rampant and people fear for their lives because of the color of their skin. Then, there's so much fake news you don't know who or what to believe. These are big problems in our country and it's heartbreaking.

But I don't believe that any of these problems are our biggest problem.

- The pandemic isn't our biggest problem.
- Disrespect for authority isn't our biggest problem.
- Politics isn't our biggest problem.
- Racism isn't our biggest problem.

Listen I'm not minimizing any of these things. These are real problems and I grieve over them just like you do. But I believe our greatest problem is spiritual. The greatest problem in our nation is the decline in Christianity, the decline in reaching others for Jesus, the decline in being a true follower of Christ and teaching others to be followers of Christ. Our world needs Jesus.

We are in a series called "Forward." The sad truth is Christianity is moving forward in many nations of the world, but it isn't going forward in the US... in fact, it's declining. In the US, Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050 according to Pew Research.

Maybe some of you may have heard of the Nones? (spell – N-O-N-E-S). The Nones are atheists, agnostics, and people who say their religion is nothing in particular. Basically, they believe nothing.

According to one study in 2007 The Nones made up 17% of the adult population. Now it's 21%. It skyrocketed by 25 percent.

Christianity is declining and the Nones are increasing in America. And one of the main reasons is we are not making disciples. How can Christianity go forward if we aren't sharing Christ with others? Romans 10:14-15 says:

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

My message today is “Forward in Discipleship.”

I believe the solution to the decline of our nation is making true disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Because as Christianity declines so does our morality and so does our nation. I believe the greatest need of our nation is to know God, to be born again, to have a personal relationship with God and make Him Lord of our lives. To live by His word...the Holy Bible. This book right here. (hold up Bible). AND to teach and disciple others to do the same. Not only should we be disciples - which means followers of Christ...the Bible teaches that we must make disciples of others.

I'll always remember a very eye-opening conversation I had with one of our ministers not that long ago. We were talking about how on Mission Sundays I often mention “The Great Commission.” He said that people were approaching him asking “What is the Great Commission?” It was obvious that a lot of people didn't know.

Barna Research confirms this sad truth: More than half of U.S. churchgoers have not heard of the Great Commission. That might be partly due to the fact that the Bible never uses the words “Great Commission.” And only 2% of people even know what the Great Commission is asking them to do. Church, it's time to move forward in discipleship!

So, let's begin by reading the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Although there are numerous commissions given by Christ to His disciples, this is considered by many to be the main one.

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

This verse has great significance because these were some of the last words that Jesus spoke to His disciples. Last words carry great significance.

Pastor Joe lost his brother Paul several years ago. Joe's dad was with Paul when he took his final breath. As that moment was approaching, Paul reached over and took his father's hand and spoke his last words... “Never let go.” Joe's dad can't tell that story without tears in his eyes. Many of you have been with a loved one and you will never forget the last words they spoke.

So, Jesus' last words are important. They are His last instructions, His marching orders for us and yet more than half of Christians don't know what they are, let alone obey them. Jesus told us to go, to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them to obey His commands. You see the Great Commission wasn't just for the disciples. It's for us too.

Jesus gave this commission to His disciples because they were His followers. So, if the great commission was for followers of Christ in His day, then who is the great commission for today? Followers of Christ.

Who are followers of Christ today? Hopefully, it's all of us.  
It's anyone who is saved and unquestionably committed to Christ.  
If that's you - then you have a responsibility to make disciples.  
Like Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:33-11:1

*For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Paul followed the example of Christ in bringing salvation to others. He discipled others and made followers of Christ and this verse says we should do the same.

John Piper said - The Great Commission was given to individuals. Until Christ comes again or until the commission is fulfilled the commission stands. And we have the same responsibility as they did then.

All of us are called to make followers of Christ. But who are the ones that we usually think the great commission is for? How about the pastor, or elders, or church leaders or missionaries? Yes, but it doesn't end here.

**The great commission and making disciples or followers of Jesus Christ is the responsibility of every single follower of Christ.**

Because if we're a follower of Jesus and Jesus made disciples - doesn't it stand to reason that we should do what Jesus did and make disciples?

Jesus spent three years pouring His life into twelve men – making disciples of them, making them committed followers, and commissioning them to go into all the nations and do the same. But that's not the end of the story. He gives the same commission to us. You are called to make committed disciples and if you're not doing it you are missing God's purpose and will for your life.

It's all about reproducing Christ in others. Jesus has called us, commanded us, and commissioned us to reproduce ourselves in others. This is how we move forward in discipleship.

You see we can be growing the church, having great events, building beautiful church buildings, attending church services, watching church on-line, tithing, reading our bible and be completely missing one of the most important commissions Christ gave us...make disciples. It's time to move forward in discipleship.

So, let's define discipleship.  
According to Webster's 1828 dictionary a disciple is:

- A learner; a scholar; one who receives or professes to receive instruction from another...
- A follower; an adherent to the doctrines of another.

Since the original followers of Christ were called His disciples, Christians who follow Christ today are called His disciples, as they profess to learn and receive His doctrines and precepts.

Discipleship means, To teach, to train, or bring up. Discipleship in Christianity is helping people find, follow, and fully become like Jesus.

There are many ways to disciple others, but whether it's through teaching, preaching, writing, counseling, group ministry, or one on one, discipling isn't just about teaching doctrine. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul says:

*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

Part of discipleship is sharing our lives with others. It's loving them and opening our hearts to them...its relationship.

So, let me say this...When we share our lives with others, it can get messy, difficult, exhausting, and frustrating. We could invest our lives into someone for 5,10 or 20 years and they turn away from the faith or betray us or turn on us. If it could happen to Jesus - remember even He had a Judas - it can happen to us. I just wanted to throw that in there.

So, that leads to my three points of How to move forward in Discipleship:

### **1. Before you can make a disciple you must be a disciple.**

Here's the thing - you teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are!  
 We cannot make other believers if we are not believers.  
 We cannot make other disciples if we are not disciples.  
 We cannot teach others to obey if we don't obey the commands of Christ.

The only way you can move forward in making fully devoted followers of Christ is to be a fully devoted follower of Christ.

You might not think you are qualified to make disciples.  
 Well first, you must be a disciple yourself.  
 There's a difference between being a believer and a disciple.  
 If you are a disciple - devoting yourself to God - then you are qualified.

You see, we get our word disciple from the word discipline.  
 A disciple... a true follower of Christ... will be disciplined in reading God's word,

praying, church attendance, worship, and whatever else it takes for a deeper relationship with God.

Which brings us to my second point:

**2. Once you become a disciple you are called to move forward by growing as a disciple.**

We all know the Scripture, “You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.” But do we know what comes before that – what it is contingent upon? Jesus said in John 8:31-32

*If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

Change comes as true disciples continue in the word.  
The Amplified Version says:

*If you abide in My word (hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them), you are truly My disciples.*

Notice Jesus said that those who abide in His word are truly His disciples. Jesus tells us that only Christians who spend time in the Bible on a regular basis are true disciples of Jesus Christ.

In other words, true disciples know the Word AND do the Word.  
Their lives are ordered by God’s word and blessed by the Word.  
Jeremiah 15:16 says:

*Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*

You will not grow in Christ apart from God’s Word.  
You will not make true disciples apart from God’s Word.  
You will not go forward in discipleship apart from God’s word.

Abiding in the word is more than occasionally reading your Bible.  
Abiding in the word is more than hearing a sermon once a week.  
Abiding in the word means to read the word regularly and then to meditate on the word, which means to think about it through the day.  
Joshua 1:8 says:

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

Notice that successful people don’t just read the Bible – they meditate on it – they think about it – they speak it – they do it – they live it.

Immature Christians live on spiritual junk food. And they wonder why they have no strength – no wisdom – no direction – no life – no growth. True disciples live in the Word.

As we do that Jesus said in John 8:32 the truth shall make you free –  
 Truth is the foundation of the Christian life.  
 Truth is the way of deliverance from the power of Satan.  
 Truth shuts the door to the lies of the devil.  
 That's why Satan wants to steal truth from us. In John 10:10 – Jesus said

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

The thief He's speaking of is Satan.  
 Satan is a thief who wants to steal everything we receive from God.  
 He wants to steal healing and keep us sick.  
 He wants to steal freedom and keep us bound up and addicted.  
 He wants to steal joy and keep us depressed.  
 He wants to steal faith and keep us in fear.

He wants to destroy everything good and godly in our lives. How does he do that?  
 The Bible tells us how in Hosea 4:6

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*

Ignorance of God's truth is not a small thing – it's a huge thing!  
 Not knowing the truth will destroy you!  
 Not knowing what truth? Bible truth.  
 Truth about who God is and who you are in Christ.

But also, truth about the practical areas of life:  
 Lack of knowledge about how to handle money can destroy your finances.  
 Lack of knowledge about covenant can destroy your marriage.  
 Lack of knowledge about nutrition can destroy your health.  
 Lack of knowledge about how Satan operates can keep you defeated.

True disciples know and do the word of God and they apply it to every area of life and they teach others to do the same! That's how we go forward in discipleship.

Which brings us to point 3.

### **3. A big part of you moving forward in discipleship is making disciples.**

We are all responsible to go and make disciples. Some people are called to go to other nations to make disciples – like foreign missionaries do. Jesus had all the nations on His heart and therefore so should we.

But that does not excuse us from making disciples as we go through life. Discipleship begins by believing in Jesus – follows by being baptized – and continues through life as we obey everything Jesus taught. That involves witnessing to unbelievers, and teaching them to observe the commands of Christ.

For example, how about the commands given in the Great Commission.

Are you obeying the command to make disciples?

Are you obeying the command to share truth with others?

Are you discipling others and sharing God's word with them?

Acts 6:7 says:

*Then the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.*

This verse tells us that as the word of God is taught the number of disciples will increase. Teaching the word makes disciples. This is how we move forward in discipleship.

So, today I ask you are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?

If not, you can be. You can ask Him into your heart.

You can give your life to Him right now.

I ask you are you moving forward and growing as a disciple?

- Are you in the word, praying, and worshipping?
- Have you been through our Grace Journey classes?
- Are you in a small group?
- Are you making disciples?

Remember if you're a disciple then making disciples isn't optional.

Jesus said, "Go, make disciples and teach them to obey."

Church, we can change the world one disciple at a time.

Will you go forward in discipleship?

It's time to move forward!

We've known we need to study the word on a regular basis – now it's time to move forward in discipleship and do it!

We've known we need pray on a regular basis – now it's time to move forward in discipleship and do it!

We've known we need to make disciples – now it's time to move forward in discipleship and do it!

That's how we touch heaven and change earth together!

That's how we grow as a church and that's how you grow in your faith!