

Introduction

Today is July 4 or Independence Day in the United States. Our country fought for our freedom. We wanted a country that would be founded on Christian principles, to have the people represented in the government decisions, particularly in the area of taxes. We are in a day where we have another fight before us, a fight to maintain our freedom. Our country has also fought to free other countries. We did it in World War 1, World War 2 and even in the Gulf War in 1991 to free Kuwait. As I considered the Gulf War, it did not last long and very few lives were lost. The ground troops went in to retake possession from Saddam Hussein. The Army and Marines on the ground had tremendous support from above. The Air Force provided cover and used laser guided missiles to destroy enemy positions. We are in a series on the Great Commission, and in many ways it is similar to the Gulf War. We are the ground forces and we are getting tremendous support from above. When God gave us the Great Commission, He said He was with us, even to the end of the age.

We are looking at the Great Commission. In Part 1, we looked at Mark 16:15, where Jesus commanded the apostles to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” The focus of the message was evangelism, which is part of the Great Commission. In Part 2, we looked at Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus commanded us to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” Our focus is on the goal of the Great Commission, which is to make disciples. In Part 3, we looked at 1 John 2:12-14, where John addresses spiritual fathers, young men, and little children. These are stages of discipleship, and when we are making disciples, we must be cognizant of where they are in their spiritual journey, and give them things that are appropriate for them. Today, in Parts 4 and 5, we are going to look at the Plan of Discipleship. In Part 4 we are going to look at the Partnership we have with God and the Activities that are part of this plan. In Part 5 we will be looking at the Organizational Structure in the Discipleship Plan.

Discipleship Plan

1. Partnership (Part 4)
2. Activities (Part 4)
3. Structure (Part 5)

1. Partnership

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He spoke with authority, and so the command that we have been given is not a suggestion; it is an order to be obeyed. When we obey His order, we are acting under His authority. We can fully expect that God will support our efforts because we are acting on His behalf. To make it very clear to us that He intends to support us, in verse twenty, He said, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus was not sending them or us out on our own. Jesus promised to be with us as we carry out the Great Commission.

(Matt 28:18-20) “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”** {19} Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; **and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

When two different parties agree to work together to accomplish something, they are partnering. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a partner as: 1a) one associated with another especially in an action; b) a person with whom one shares an intimate relationship; c) either of two persons who dance together; d) one of two or more persons who play together in a game against an opposing side partners in card games; 2) a member of a partnership especially in a business.

You can see that when we obey the Lord's command to preach the gospel and make disciples, we are working together with the Lord to accomplish His will. By definition, we are partnering with God. The other definitions use another word that is key in partnering: together. Karen and I are a couple and we share an intimate relationship called marriage. We love to be together. We love doing things together. We eat meals together. We pray together. We run errands together. We talk and laugh a lot together. We are a partnership. Merriam-Webster also use the examples of people dancing together and playing a card game together. What Jesus has stated in Matthew 28:18-20 is that we are together in this. He is going to be with us as we work with Him to accomplish the Great Commission. We are His partners.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul was addressing the division in the church at Corinth. Some were saying they were of Paul, who planted the church. Some identified themselves with Apollos. Paul told them that he planted and Apollos watered, but it was God who was causing the growth. You see that they were working and partnering with God in the planting of the church. Then, in verse nine, he said, "for we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." Paul used the Greek word, *sunergos*, which is a compound word, and it is translated as fellow workers. The first word is *sun*, which means to join together, and the second word is *ergos*, which means worker. *Ergos* comes from *ergon*, which means to work. Paul was telling the Corinthians that he and Apollos were joined together with God to accomplish this work in Corinth. Those who have joined together to accomplish a common purpose is what we call a partnership. Paul and Apollos were partnering with God to plant and build the church at Corinth. All of us need to see ourselves as partners with God in carrying out the Great Commission.

(1 Cor 3:5-9) "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. {6} I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. {7} So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. {8} Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. {9} For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

Many times, in evangelism or discipleship, people feel like they are on their own. The truth is that Jesus is with us, and we are working together; we are not on our own. I like to play card games, especially Bridge. When playing bridge, you work together with your partner. You try to establish your strongest suit between the two of you, and the number of points that your team has, which will determine the number of tricks that you bid. Your bid does not depend solely on your own cards, but on the team cards. We may feel from an evangelistic standpoint that we have a weak hand. We may not think we are bold enough. We may feel we are lacking in knowledge. We may feel our personality is not outward enough. We may feel like we have a weak hand for a number of different reasons. However, we need to consider that our partner has a very strong hand. Jesus said He has all authority in heaven and on earth. There is nothing impossible for our partner; He can do whatever He wants, wherever He wants, and anytime He wants. We have a very strong partner. He can use our weak hand, but He is the one with the strong hand that will help us accomplish this work. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, it is God who is causing the

growth. We do our parts, whether it is serving on the media team, praying for people, sharing meals with others, teaching, or sharing the gospel with people, but it is our Partner, Jesus, who causes the growth.

In Mark's account, after commanding the disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation, they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. Notice that they went and preached and the Lord worked with them. They were not on their own as they went out to preach the gospel; the Lord worked with them. The signs that followed were the evidence and confirmation that He was working with them.

(Mark 16:15-20) "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation... {20} And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]"

In Luke 9, the Lord sent out the twelve apostles and they went out preaching and healing people. In Luke 10, Jesus sent out seventy others, and they went out preaching, healing, and casting out demons. In Luke 10:17-18, these seventy disciples returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." Jesus replied, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Jesus was watching everything that was going on in the various cities that they went to. They were not on their own; they were under the watchful eye of Jesus, who had appointed them to go out and preach the gospel.

(Luke 10:1) "Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come."

(Luke 10:17-18) "The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." {18} And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning."

In Acts 23:11, Paul had been arrested and had appeared before the Sanhedrin Council. He was being guarded by Roman soldiers at the barracks, and while he was there, the Lord stood at his side and said, "take courage; for you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also." Jesus was watching everything that was going on, came and stood by Paul's side, and gave him a word of encouragement.

(Acts 23:11) "But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

In Psalm 127:1-2, God tells us that unless He builds the house, we are laboring in vain who build it, and unless He guards the city, the watchmen are keeping awake in vain. Unless we are partnering with God, and He is the Senior Partner, our labor is in vain. We must partner with the Lord, and not be out doing our own work. Partners work together to carry out a common goal.

(Ps 127:1-2) "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. {2} It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved *even in his* sleep."

In this Partnership we have with the Lord, Jesus gave us one of the keys in John 15. He said that we can do nothing on our own, but if we will abide in Him we will bear much fruit. When we partner with the Lord, we will bear much fruit. The key is abiding. Let's take a quick look at that passage.

(John 15:1-5) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.... {4} the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. {5} "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Jesus is the true vine, the Father is the vinedresser, and we are the branches. For the branches to bear fruit, they must abide in the vine. Jesus said that apart from Him, we can do nothing. In this partnership, if we decide to go it on our own, we can do nothing. However, if we abide in Jesus, we will bear much fruit. In verse sixteen Jesus said that He chose us and appointed us that we would go and bear much fruit and that our fruit would remain. The Lord chose you and I to be His partners in accomplishing the Great Commission. If we abide in Him and allow Him to work in and through us, we will bear much fruit. We must work with our Senior Partner.

(John 15:16) "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."

2. Activities

What are the activities that are associated with this partnership? Jesus said to go make disciples, and that command is followed by two verb gerunds which describe out we are to make disciples. The first gerund is baptizing and the second is teaching.

(Matt 28:19-20) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, {20} **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The first activity is baptizing. In the Jewish culture when a non-Jew converted to Judaism, he was baptized and it was a public declaration that he had converted to Judaism. So, when Jesus gives this command to baptize people, they had a framework in mind of people converting to Christianity.

In addition to the public declaration, John had preached a baptism of repentance. Repentance (metanoia, Strong's G3341), which means to do an about-face. It is to turn from sin and turn to the Lord. It is to turn away from our own selfish life and to turn to the Lord. In this sense, baptizing people was to see people turn away from legalism, false religions, and idols to serve the living God. Again, baptism is a picture of people turning to the Lord.

(Mark 1:4) "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

In Romans 6, Paul speaks about baptism. He said that those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death, and have been buried with Him into death. Then, he mentioned that as Christ was raised from the dead, we are raised up to walk in a newness of life.

Baptism is a picture of people receiving Christ, dying to sin, and being raised up to new life. Baptism is a picture of people coming to Christ.

(Rom 6:3-4) “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? {4} Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

When Jesus tells us to go make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He is telling us to go make converts. He is telling us exactly what is recorded in Mark, to go preach the gospel to all creation. Discipleship begins with people receiving Christ. In Romans 10 Paul asked some pertinent questions about people believing in Christ. His first question is, “how then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” His second question is, “And how will they hear without a preacher?” His third question is, “How will they preach unless they are sent?” Then, he quoted from Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” For people to believe in Christ, they must hear the gospel. In order for people to hear the gospel and believe, people have to preach the gospel to them.

(Rom 10:14-15) “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? {15} How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

When Jesus tells people to go make disciples and to baptize them, He is referring to the first step of discipleship: salvation. Discipleship begins with believing and receiving Christ. In Part 1 of this series, which was out of Mark 16, the focus of the message was on preaching the gospel, or evangelism. That is the first part of carrying out the Great Commission.

There is a common teaching that is going around, particularly in Muslim nations, that discipleship begins before conversion. I want to briefly address this out of 2 Corinthians 17. Paul said if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature and that old things passed away and new things have come. The old way of life does not pass away and new things do not come until someone is in Christ. In the Muslim world, conformity is required, and punishable if not followed. They make people act a certain way out of fear and pressure. The hearts have not changed, but behaviors have changed to conform with their requirements. These are external changes without an inward change. Christianity is an internal change that works its way outward into our life, which is very different than forced behavioral changes.

(2 Cor 5:17) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

I love the picture of salvation that we find in Ezekiel 11. When we come there (salvation), we remove all the detestable things and abominations, which is repentance. Repentance is not preached much today, but when we come to Christ, we turn away from sin and turn to God. We must be willing to go sell our possessions and follow Christ. Notice what else Ezekiel prophesied about our salvation experience. God gives us a new heart and puts a new spirit within us. He takes out the heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. When this hard heart has been replaced with a soft, pliable heart, and we have been given a new spirit, then we can walk in God’s

statutes and ordinances. When we become the people of God, the inward changes will reflect in outward changes in our life. True discipleship begins with salvation.

(Ez 11:18-20) “When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. {19} And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, {20} that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.”

The second gerund is teaching. Discipleship requires teaching. It is a crucial activity. People must be taught God’s word and His principles. They must be taught to observe all the things that Jesus commanded.

(Matt 28:19-20) “ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

One day I was in prison and a man named Samuel told me that he did not need to be taught anything. He had read in 1 John 2:26-27 that since he had been anointed by the Holy Spirit that he had no need for anyone to teach him. It is interesting that John is writing and teaching these believers and tells them they don’t need anyone to teach them. John is obviously not telling people that teaching is not necessary in the church. The early church was devoted to four things and one of those was the apostles’ teaching. In the Great Commission Jesus commanded us to teach people to observe all the things that He had commanded them. There is a tremendous need for teaching in the church. I believe that John was encouraging believers to get into the Word of God and learn to study and feed themselves. The Word of God is for all of us. It is not for just an elite group of people with special revelation who need to interpret and explain things to us. The context of John’s letter is to keep people from deceiving them, and these false teachers held a view that they had the special revelation that the church needed. It was a type of control and deception.

(1 John 2:26-27) “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. {27} As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

(Acts 2:42) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The Scripture that is very appropriate is in Acts 17:11. Paul was in Berea and stated that they were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Paul was teaching them, and they were studying the Word of God to make sure that what was being taught was Scriptural or not. I believe every Christian should receive teaching, and they should also examine and study the Scriptures to make sure what they have been taught is correct. We need teachers, and we also need to be good Bereans who study the Word of God on our own.

(Acts 17:11) “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.”

In Acts 11 there had been a dispersion because of persecution, and many believers scattered from Jerusalem. Some went to Antioch and preached the gospel, and the grace of God was there, and many people believed. The church in Jerusalem heard that these people in Antioch had become believers and they sent Barnabas there to check things out. When he arrived, he witnessed the grace of God and encouraged them. Barnabas was a prophet and one of the key things that prophets do is encourage the body. After encouraging them, he left for Tarsus to look for Saul. Why did he go find Paul? He knew that Paul’s primary gifting was teaching, and he knew that these new believers needed lots of teaching. So, he went and brought in a teacher to help disciple all these new believers. Luke wrote in verse twenty-six that for an entire year they met with the church and TAUGHT considerable numbers. He also recorded that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Barnabas and Paul were making disciples that looked like little Christs, and teaching was a very important part of their discipleship plan.

(Acts 11:22-26) “The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. {23} Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord; {24} for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. {25} And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; {26} and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

I want to mention one other activity that Paul mentions in Colossians 1:28-29. Paul said, “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also, I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” Notice that Paul proclaimed Christ; that is the preaching of the gospel, and he taught every man. But, that is not all that Paul did to present every man complete in Christ. Paul also admonished every man. The word admonish is *noutheteo* (Strong’s G3560, 8x), which means to warn or reprove gently. In our churches today we see a lot of teaching, but I do not see a lot of admonishing and warning, so I want to take a few minutes to look at what Paul meant.

(Col 1:28-29) “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. {29} For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

Who do we admonish? In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul told the brethren to admonish the unruly. The Greek word for unruly is *ataktos*, which comes from the negative prefix, “a” and *tasso*, which means orderly arrangement. We are to admonish those who are not in order, and who are not submissive to authority, or under authority. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, Paul told them to admonish those who do not obey his instructions, which is the Word of God. In context, in Paul’s instructions, he has been telling them to work and eat their own bread. We are to admonish those who are not under authority, and do not pay attention to the instructions of those in authority.

(1 Thess 5:14) “We urge you, brethren, admonish (noutheteo) the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

(2 Thess 3:14-15) “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. {15} *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish (noutheteo) him as a brother.”

Paul told Titus to remain in Crete and set things in order. God is a God of order and admonishing those whose lives are not in order is something that the church is called to do. In our culture today, people do not believe it is their place to admonish or warn others, but the scriptures tell all of us to admonish one another. It is clearly the responsibility of church leaders. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Paul told the church to appreciate those who diligently labor among them and have charge over them in the Lord, and who give you warnings. The NASB translates noutheteo as instruction here, but the KJV and ESV correctly translate it as admonish. Paul told the Ephesian elders that he was with them for three years and did not cease to admonish them day and night. Admonishing people was part of his ministry. Paul proclaimed, admonished, and taught every man with all wisdom so that he could present every man complete in Christ.

(1 Thess 5:12) “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction (noutheteo),”

(Acts 20:31) “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish (noutheteo) each one with tears.”

(Col 1:28) “We proclaim Him, admonishing (noutheteo) every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

Admonishing is not just something for leaders to practice; it is also the responsibility of everyone in the church. Paul urged the Thessalonians, that is everyone in the church at Thessalonica, to admonish the unruly. In Romans 15:14, Paul told the church in Rome that he was convinced that they were full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another. In Colossians 3:16, Paul encouraged the church in Colossians to let the word of Christ richly dwell within them and that they were to teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. I believe these letters are God’s word to all of us. I believe that we are all able to admonish one another, and are commanded to admonish one another. We need to align our thoughts and ways with God’s word and admonish one another.

(Rom 15:14) “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish (noutheteo) one another.

(Col 3:16) “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing (noutheteo) one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Conclusion and Applications

God has a plan for reaching everyone with the gospel. He commanded us to preach the gospel and go and make disciples of all the nations. We call this plan the Great Commission. In this plan, God has called us to partner with Him. He has promised to be with us as we go out, even to the end of the age. He promises to support us and confirm our work. He is our Partner, and we are his fellow workers.

In this plan, there are specific activities that He has told us to do in order to make disciples. We are to preach the gospel and baptize people. We are to teach people all that Jesus taught His disciples. We are also to admonish people. We are to work hard to make disciples so that we can present every man complete in Christ.

As we have looked at partnering with God, do you see yourself as a partner with God, or do you feel like you are on your own? In Romans 12:1, Paul urged the church to present themselves as living holy sacrifices, which is their spiritual service of worship. The rest of the chapter is about spiritual gifts. All of us have a unique spiritual gift and we are to present ourselves to God as part of our service to the Lord. If you not sensing that you are partnering with the Lord, I encourage you this morning to present yourself to the Lord. It could be as simple as saying,

“Lord, I want to be Your fellow worker, Your partner. I don’t want to be doing my own thing, but to partner with you in building Your kingdom on earth. I present myself to you this morning. I present my life and the gifts and talents You have given me for You to use however You desire. Use me to bear much fruit for You. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

(Rom 12:1) “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.”

This morning the Lord may have been impressing on you the activities that He has called us to do. Has He called you to share the gospel and see people get baptized? Has He called you to teach people? Has He called you to admonish people? I encourage you to ask the Lord how He wants to use you in the Great Commission. Write down the impressions that He gives you and then continue to speak with the Lord and to ask for more details. Pray for opportunities. Let’s be a church that partners with God and is found doing the things that God has called us to do.

Closing prayer

Q&A

Introduction (Mark 16:15, Matt 28:18-20, 1 John 2:12-14)

1. **Partnership** (Matt 28:18-20, 1 Cor 3:5-9, Mark 16:15-20, Luke 10:1, 10:17-18, Acts 23:11, Ps 127:1-2, John 15:1-5, 16)

2. Activities

(Matt 28:19-20, Mark 1:4, Rom 6:3-4, 10:14-15, 2 Cor 5:17, Ez 11:18-20, 1 John 2:26-27, Ac 2:42, Acts 17:11, 11:22-26, Col 1:28-29, 1 Thess 5:14, 2 Thess 3:14-15, 1 Thess 5:12, Acts 20:31, Col 1:28, Rom 15:14, Col 3:16)

Conclusion and Applications (Rom 12:1)