

## ***Growing Together in Christ***

2/19/06 I Cor. 3:1-3 7 Matthew 28:18-20

**1 Corinthians 3:1-3** *1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?*

**Matthew 28:19-20** *18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"*

This week I was thinking about all the time that a family spends on caring for a new child. There are lots of books that tell us what to do & what to expect of a child and when to expect it. The church has magazines for parents – there is the *Baby Life* and *Parent Life*.

Parents have to learn about bathing, feeding, changing diapers, sleeping (and at times surviving without adequate sleep). There are often issues about when is the best time to get the child out. How do I protect my child from people that are sick. There are immunizations and a variety of doctor check ups.

The baby life book tells us what to expect at various stages in the first 3 years of life. The parent life goes further in telling what to expect in different stages of the first 12 years of life.

As a parent of a 6 year old daughter and 13 & 14 year old sons, I realize several things: children are all different, there is a difference in parenting boys & girls and there are different challenges and blessings at each stage of life. We are constantly to be teaching our children and helping them as they grow.

Also I realize that in some ways, my parents still try to parent me & teach me. A parent continues to parent through out their life.

You are probably wondering – OK what's the point. Well today we continue on our overall theme of: *Love God. Love others. Make disciples.*

Actually today is the last of this series. In this we have looked at how the 1<sup>st</sup> step is to realize God's love for us. Realize that it is greater than we could ever imagine and accept that love. Then we are to love God – with all our hearts, strength & mind. Because of our love for God we are also to love other Christians and to love all people, even those that are hard to love. We are to love and care for people enough to help them with their needs realizing their greatest need is a relationship with God.

Finally today's focus is on how we are also to help people grow in their relationship and walk with God. That is where the illustration about a child comes in.

**Great commandment** *Love God with all your heart soul & mind. Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*

**Great commission.** – *Go ye therefore & make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the father, and of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey all things I have commanded you & lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

When we think of the Great Commission, we often think of evangelism. Sometimes we think of missionaries – making disciples of all nations. We need to realize a couple of things. 1) This passage is for all Christians & 2) it is not only about evangelism. It is also about growth as a Christian, just like being a parent involves all the stages of a child's life.

When I was preparing this I thought about a couple of examples that tell us something about the need for discipleship. The first is a statement that I have shared here before. It was made by a young lady that was serving as a summer youth minister at my last church. Her name is – Elena Vishnevskaya. Elena was raised in Moscow & became a Christian as a teenager after the fall of communism. She was excited about coming to America, but was disappointed when she got here. America is not near as Christian as she had expected. She said, “In America Christianity is a mile wide and an inch deep.” That is something that we need to think about. We can even personalize it by asking ourselves – how deep is my Christianity. The depth of Christianity comes through discipleship.

Another thing that I thought about was Belize. Several years ago the Baptist missionaries left Belize because the country was pretty well evangelized. Some NC Baptist and others have worked to continue to support the people of Belize primarily in discipleship. It is important to help

others not only become Christians but also to learn more about God & grow deeper.

This morning I want us to have 2 basic points – 1) You have to be a disciple before you can make a disciple. 2) Some things involved in discipling others.

**1) You have to be a disciple before you can make a disciple.**

Where are you in your walk with God?

**Seeker** – are you considering accepting Christ? If so what is holding you back. I would love to talk to you. It is the most important thing that you can do.

**New Christian?** Have you recently accepted Christ & you know you need to grow

**Baby Christian?** - maybe you have been a Christian for a while & you are not growing. – Get around someone that is a more mature Christian & that will help you.

**Growing** – but still taking little steps

**Rather mature Christian**

Sometimes I feel more mature than other times. It can be like other areas of our life. Sometimes we are more mature than other times. Sometimes we may act like really mature Christians & some times we may act like really immature Christians. Wherever you are, my goal for you is to be a mature Christian. It may begin by taking that first step to accept Christ. It may mean taking some steps of faith to move closer to God. To grow in our Christian maturity takes discipline over time.

Discipleship is growing to be more like Christ. In our discipleship we are to take a holistic approach. The word discipleship may bring different images to your mind. I want us to examine different areas in which we are to grow & I want to begin this with the image of our body.

**1) Head** – Generally when I think about discipleship I think about learning the Bible. I may think of a discipleship class or Sunday School or some other small group. If we are to be disciples of Christ we are to grow in our

knowledge of God, the Bible and other aspects of Christianity. This is not all there is to discipleship, but the head or knowledge aspect is vitally important. If all we have is knowledge then we are really missing out.

**2) Heart** – When I think of the heart of discipleship I think of prayer & our personal connection to God. Discipleship includes our growth in our spiritual life. We are to pray & focus on God. We are to seek God with all our heart. Yesterday, we hosted an associational prayer conference here at Hope Valley. It was really good. Chris Scofield of the NC Baptist State Convention spoke. He shared a lot about prayer. One statement he made, was that Prayer is to be foundational to our life. If God has to call us back to prayer than we are in a bad way. But we are watching mercy drops of God fall upon us.” God does call us to pray, to commune with him, to know him. If we desire to have a good relationship with another person, we will talk to them. Similarly we are to talk to God. We are to spend time with God and we are to pray for others. Pray for our church. Pray for me. Pray for your family. Pray for people in your neighborhood & just be in God’s presence. It is not always saying something. It can also include being silent before God. If we are to be disciples of God we must have our heart right, but prayer, without knowledge or other actions is also missing something. So what else should a disciple of Christ have.

**3) Hands** – We need to know about Christianity & we need to be connected to God, but we are also to practice Christianity. Our hands are used to serve others. It is with our hands that we reach out to those in need

**4) Feet** similarly we need our feet. We are not just to serve those that are right around us. There are also times that we are to intentionally go to others and care for their needs. The needs can vary – physical, financial, friendship, spiritual. We are to go to people. Now if all we are doing is reaching out to people’s needs, but we are not connected to God & don’t have the knowledge about God then we are just doing social service. That is good, but it is not near enough.

**5) Eye** – The last body part that I would like to share is our eyes. We are to grow to be more like Christ in how we see the world. We are to see people as people that God loves. We are to see situations that we face from God’s perspective – not just we our more natural responses. Our eyes are to grow to be more like Jesus’.

6) Our discipleship also includes **Growing through difficulties**. When we go through painful experiences we grow as Christians if we turn to God.

7) Our discipleship is to include **Growing in community** Christianity is always meant to be in a community of believers never alone.

8) Our discipleship is also to include **Growing through a Christian leader** – As I think about this I think about Paul & Timothy. Paul was a great Christian leader & he connected with a young Christian man, Timothy. He nurtured him & helped him grow & then instructed him to disciple others.

**2 Timothy 2:1-2** *1 You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; 2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*

Wherever you are in your Christian journey, I hope you will work to grow & be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Well we are not only to be disciples. We are to make disciples. How do we do that?

## **2) Make Disciples**

Making disciples obviously begins by caring about someone enough to lead them into a relationship with God. We are starting a study this week on relationship evangelism. You can sign up for a group.

In making disciples we generally struggle at two points: leading someone to be a Christian, and helping them grow. How do you help someone grow. Well we can think about the areas they need to grow: Head (knowledge), heart (spirituality), hands & feet (service), eyes (seeing the world differently), growing in community and growing through a Christian leader.

We can invest ourselves in someone else's life. We are to focus on another person to help them grow. I have heard it said that we should always have a Paul in our life and a Timothy. A Paul is someone that helps us grow and a Timothy represents someone that we are helping to Grow.

I thought about in my life who are the people that have discipled me. There have been quite a few that have been involved in that process. Some have done it more intentionally than others, but many have helped me grow. I want to share some people that have discipled me & in sharing this I want you to think of how you can similarly help others.

- **Parents** – in both intentional and some unintentional ways my parents helped me learn about Christ, become a Christian & grow in my relationship with God. They still do.

- **Sunday School teachers** – I especially think about Jr. Hinson (4 – 6 grade boys)

- **Youth Leaders** – There were two couples that volunteered to work with the youth at my home church Larry & Carrie Bell, Butch & Sheila O’Quinn

- **a College friend** – Rodney Navy. For me it was just spending time with Rodney and seeing his commitment to God. He didn’t intentionally disciple me, but I did see how he did intentionally disciple others at times asking questions like – What is God doing in your life? What have you been reading in the Bible lately?

- While I was in college & seminary I served on several church staffs as a youth minister & I was disciplined by **various pastors** that I worked with.

- I have also been disciplined by **some retired pastors**. Early in my ministry by Boyce Brooks & more recently Jack Causey

There are different ways to disciple another person. We must first be disciples of Christ ourselves and as we live the Christian life, our life and focus of our life can help disciple another person. We, however, must also at times be strategic in reaching out to others – sharing with them about how to first become a Christian & also in how to grow.

Last week I asked you to make a list of people that you know that are either not a Christian or that you are not sure if they are a Christian. I hope you made a list & have been praying for them & seeking opportunities to share with them about God.

Today I would like to ask you to make another list. Make a list of people that are already Christians, but that you are going to reach out to in some ways to help grow in their walk with God.

## **Conclusion**

When a child is born, that is not the end, that is just the beginning they have so much to learn, and so much growing to do. Similarly when a person becomes a Christian that is not the end, but the beginning they have so much to learn & so much growing to do.

Where are you in your relationship with God? If you are not a Christian I invite you to accept Christ. . . If you are not a mature Christian I invite you to rededicate your life to grow as a disciple. If you are not intentionally helping another person grow I invite you to commit to be a discipler.

We are to LOVE GOD with all our heart, soul & mind. That is to lead us to love others & make disciples.