

Ball with no air...the ball was designed for a particular purpose. Without the air inside the ball it cannot fulfill the purpose for which it was created. We were created on purpose. We were given a physical body by which to accomplish the purpose of God. However, without the Holy Spirit we will be as useful to God as a flat basketball is to Dirk Nowitzki. When you are full of the “air” of God’s Holy Spirit you are full of purpose. Let’s review the purpose of God this morning.

Mt. 28:18-20 is a familiar passage of scripture. These are the last words of Jesus recorded by Matthew. If you are disciple of Jesus Christ these are your marching orders. Our primary objective is to extend the offer of God’s Good News of His love and forgiveness to “all” people. The word “nations” is unfortunate because when we hear this word we think of countries with geographical borders. The word “ethne” means people groups. Every nation or country consists of many distinct people groups. In his book *Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard translates verse 19, "Go therefore to every ethnic group and help them become my students." Or, as we say around here all the time, “lead them in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

The church consists of multiple ethnic groups, socio-economic groups, denominational groups, political groups working together as one people of God. History shows that most churches are content to fill a building with people who look exactly alike. Even if these people simply transfer from some other church, as long as we fill the place up we are “successful.” But the Great Commission is not to make disciples of people who are just like us. Our calling is to take the Gospel to ALL people. This was a challenge even for the early church. They preferred to stay in Jerusalem as an all-Jewish, one language church. God would not allow that.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus restated the Great Commission just before His departure from the earth emphasizing not the “what” but the “where.” When I read this verse I picture a pebble being dropped into a pond and the ripples emanating outward from the center. When Jesus touched down in Israel His impact upon the world began to reverberate outward. He told His disciples to wait until the coming of the Holy Spirit and then to get busy spreading the message of the kingdom of God, not just in their own neighborhood but even to Samaritans and Romans.

Our purpose is to do everything in our power to make disciples. How can I make sure that I am living a purpose-full life? How can I be used by the Holy Spirit to make disciples?

**1. Follow Christ.** Discipleship begins with a simple assumption: only a disciple can make a disciple. Only a horse can make a horse. Only a tomato can make a tomato. So discipleship begins with you and it begins right where you are. “As you go...” What is going on at home, work, school? Who has God placed in your path? When we talk about fulfilling the Great Commission or evangelizing the world it sounds so big that we can be immobilized by the size of the task. But each one of us, as disciples ourselves, should be in the disciple-making business.

Are you a disciple? Let’s be clear about what a disciple is using Jesus’ definition:

**a. A disciple is completely devoted to Jesus. Luke 14:26-27.** “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” How is it that we are to hate our father, mother, etc. when Jesus also taught us to love one another? Isn’t this a contradiction? No, it is a good example of Hebrew hyperbole or overstatement. In order to make His point Jesus contrasts our devotion to Him with our devotion to everyone else, including ourselves. He is saying that there is to be no competition for our affections. A disciple of Jesus is fully devoted to Him.

**b. A disciple has settled the issue of truth. John 8:30-32.** “As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’” One of the inevitable results of the information age is confusion. We have so much information and so many conflicting opinions that it is hard to know what is true. Jesus said that those who embrace His teaching as true and act upon that truth build their house, their life, upon a rock that will withstand the winds and the waves of conflicting opinion.

**c. A disciple pursues what is in the best interests of another. John 13:35.** “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The willingness to set aside our own self-interest for the sake of someone else is so radical that it is the identifying mark of a disciple.

**d. A disciple is committed to reproducing disciples. John 15:8.** “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples.” We will talk more about this next week but one characteristic of fruit is that it carries within it the promise of the next generation. The seeds within contain an invisible future harvest. Making disciples means I change my behavior in a way that will produce future generations of Christ-followers.

**2. Follow those who follow Christ.** There is a popular version of discipleship that is defined by sitting down with someone one on one for an hour a week and filling in the blanks in a workbook. That may be helpful but it is only part of a healthy discipleship process. When Jesus said, “make disciples,” He was talking about making disciples of Him not you. In order for someone to become a disciple of Jesus Christ they need the body of Christ not just one part of the body. I believe Jesus embodied all the spiritual gifts. To be like Him I must be exposed to all the gifts. I can’t do that if I spend my time with one person who may have one gift.

I think this is why so many young men and women desire to work on a church staff. It is a rewarding experience to be around people using their gifts for the Kingdom. Tommy and Kelly – administration; Carol and Mitzi – helps and mercy; Randy and Gabe – teaching.

**3. Invite others to follow you as you follow Christ.** We are influencing people every single day whether we know it or not. I’ll never forget mowing the lawn one day and seeing Jana waving at me from the porch. I stopped to see what she wanted and she pointed behind me. My 6-year-old

son had slipped in right behind me with his little plastic lawn mower and was doing what I was doing. Later Jana said, “Wasn’t that cute.” I said, “No, that was scary.” I realized that he wanted to do everything I was doing.

If someone followed you around and did everything you did, would their lives be better or worse? Paul said, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” **Philippians 3:17**. He also said, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:9**. Could you say those things? If not, why not?”

One of the most common questions I have been asked over the years is, “How can I know the will of God?” Well, now you know. The will of God, the purpose of God, is for you and me to use whatever resources we have been given, our age, experience, talents, gifts, vocation, to be part of a disciple-making movement. Follow Christ. Follow others who follow Christ. Then you will be able to say to anyone and everyone, “Follow me as I follow Christ.”