Matthew 4:18-22 *Disciples who make Disciples: The Job Description*

***D.T.R.***In his book, *Not a Fan*, Kyle Idleman talks about having a D.T.R. conversation with Jesus. Do you know what a D.T.R. conversation is?

If you are a person who is on the dating circuit, you know what a D.T.R. conversation is, even if you aren’t sure what the initials stand for. A D.T.R. conversation is the one every young man dreads, the one where the girl he has been crushing on for months says to him, “I think we should just be friends.” Or, conversely, a D.T.R. conversation is the one that takes place on the second date when the gal says it is time to start picking out curtain patterns.

You know what D.T.R. stand for yet? **Define The Relationship**

This is the talk that takes place at some point in every romantic relationship to determine the level of commitment. Are you Facebook friends and Instagram buddies? Are you in the same group of friends who go to movies together and hang out, but not really exclusive? Do you think maybe it should be exclusive? Is there something more permanent and long-term happening here? Is it moving toward marriage?

There comes a point where you need to have the conversation. It can be awkward and uncomfortable. You might find out you are not both on the same page. But you need to define the relationship. You need to intentionally evaluate what is going on and be clear about your level of commitment to each other.

So Idleman says we have to have a D.T.R. conversation with Jesus. He describes it like this:

In your mind picture yourself walking into a local coffee shop. You grab a snack and get a drink and then walk towards the back where it isn’t crowded and you find a seat at a small table. You take a sip of your drink and enjoy a few quiet minutes. Now, imagine that Jesus comes in and sits down next to you. You know it’s him because of the blue sash. You’re unsure what to say. In an awkward moment you try to break the silence by asking him to turn your drink into wine. He gives you the same look he used to give Peter. Before he has a chance to respond, you suddenly realize you haven’t prayed for your food. You decide to say your prayer out loud, hoping that Jesus will be impressed. You start off okay, but understandably you get nervous and pray “Three things we pray: to love thee more dearly, to see thee more clearly, to follow thee more nearly, day, by day, by day.” You quickly say “Amen” when you realize you’re quoting Ben Stiller’s prayer from *Meet the Parents*.

Before you have a chance to make things more awkward, Jesus skips past the small talk and gets right to the point. He looks you in the eye and says, “It’s time we define this relationship.” He wants to know how you feel about him. Is your relationship with Jesus exclusive? Is it just a casual weekend thing or has it moved past that? How would your relationship with him be defined? What exactly is your level of commitment? (*Not a Fan*, p. 23)

***Disciples who Make Disciples***Jesus is calling us to a high level of commitment. Jesus wants an exclusive relationship. Jesus doesn’t want to be our weekend fling, someone we check in with on Sundays and then sort of put aside for other things the rest of the week. He wants to be our one and only.

Here’s the thing: there is a danger in American Christianity that we can make a relationship with Jesus about superficial things.

Like, for example, I’m a pastor. I’m concerned about having people in church Sunday morning. I want to encourage you to become members of the church. I want to challenge you to volunteer in church programs. But, Jesus is calling us to more than church attendance or church membership or even church volunteering. It’s possible to do all three of those things and still not have a very serious relationship with Jesus; and I have to be careful that I am not fooling you into believing that’s all Jesus wants from you. I believe participation in the life of the church can help you in your relationship with Jesus. But it can’t be a substitute for it.

Or, again, there are certain behaviors that fit in with how Christians act and identify themselves in our culture. Maybe you have a fish sticker on the back of your car. Maybe you only listen to Christian radio. Maybe you made a decision for Jesus at summer camp or a Christian crusade back in the day. Nothing wrong with those things. But if that is the extent of your relationship with Jesus, I don’t really think that is what Jesus is looking for from you either.

In a word, Jesus calls us to **discipleship**. That’s the word that sort of summarizes the Biblical process of following Jesus. The word “disciple” means, essentially, a learner or a follower. At the time of Jesus, disciples were students who attached themselves to a significant master. Jesus’ followers were known as disciples. Adding “ship” to the end of “disciple” means “the state of” being a disciple, or the ongoing process of being a follower of Christ.

And discipleship is more than church attendance or cross necklaces or positive and uplifting radio—it’s a committed relationship with Jesus.

So what we are doing is, today, we are beginning a series of sermons on discipleship. We are going to spend the next 6 weeks talking about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. And I’ll tell you my goal for the series, it’s right there in the title we’re using: I’m calling this series “**Disciples who make Disciples**.” And that’s the goal. That’s the end game. That we will all be disciples of Jesus who help others become disciples of Jesus. That we will be committed followers of Jesus who help others to follow Him. That we will have growing relationships with Jesus while also influencing others for Jesus. Disciples who make disciples.

***The Job Description***So, let’s start by defining what a Disciple is. And to do that, we might as well go to the part of the Bible where Jesus calls His first followers. **Matthew 4:18-22**. It’s here that we get what I am calling the job description of a disciple. Matthew 4:18-22:

**8**As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **19**“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” **20**At once they left their nets and followed him.

**21**Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, **22**and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus did most of His public ministry in the area known as Galilee. This is the northern region of Israel, the area that includes His hometown of Nazareth. The Sea of Galilee isn’t really a sea, more of a lake, the northern source of the Jordan River. But it did have an active fishing industry. And Jesus is at the beginning of His public ministry. Matthew chapter 4 begins with the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan and then talks about the beginning of His preaching ministry.

The way Matthew tells this story, it sounds almost like Jesus cold-called Andrew and Peter. That He was just walking down the shore and saw these guys working the nets and He just said “Follow Me” and they followed like he was the pied piper or something. But I don’t think it happened that way. The fact that Jesus has been preaching in their hometown almost certainly means that they have heard him already, and they were well aware of who He was. The gospel of John even tells us that Andrew had an association with John the Baptist and was there when John called Jesus “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (cf. John 1:40)

So it’s not like Jesus mesmerized them or something. They knew something about Him. But still, it’s remarkable that Jesus doesn’t go into a whole lot of detail about what it will mean to be His disciple. In verse 19, the only verse where Jesus speaks, He only says 11 words in our English translation. And yet, I think from these 11 words we can get a pretty good sense of what it means to be a disciple. Like I said, this is the job description.

There are three parts to **verse 19,** so we’ll look at three important attributes of discipleship.

***A Choice*First, Jesus says “Follow me.”** This is Jesus’ invitation. It’s an invitation to make a decision for Jesus.

Discipleship starts here. It starts with a choice. Are you going to follow Jesus, or not? Do you believe in Jesus, do you believe He’s the Son of God, do you believe He died for your sins, or don’t you? It’s like a decision tree, right? Do you believe in Jesus, yes or no? Do you believe the things we talked about for the last three months in the Apostles’ Creed? If no, then we’re done. I mean, if the answer is “no, you don’t believe in Him” then that’s the end of the decision tree. Nothing more to do. But if the answer is yes, then that means: Follow Him. That means you become His disciple. That means He has a claim on your life.

So this is our head. This is discipleship at the head, or cognitive level. It’s making that choice to believe in and follow Jesus. It’s making the calculated, considered decision that following Jesus is worth it, that it is better than anything else.

You see that in the first disciples. Peter and Andrew, James and John, they made a choice. They chose Jesus, and they left behind their boats, their nets, even their families. Verse 20: “At once they left their nets and followed him.” Verse 22: “immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” They made a decision. They made a value judgment. Jesus was better than what they had. Not that there was anything bad about their boats and nets. Obviously, there was nothing wrong with them being devoted to their father. But they made a decision that following Jesus was better even than those good things.

It’s like a pair of stories Jesus will tell later in the Gospel of Matthew about the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. If you’re walking along a path and you find a piece of treasure in the field—a gold coin or two lying around—and you start digging and scraping and find there is a whole treasure chest buried under there, then it’s not a going to be a big deal to you to go and sell everything you own so you can get together enough money to buy that field. Cause that treasure is far greater than anything else you could have. Same with a pearl merchant who finds the greatest pearl ever, he’ll dump his entire inventory in order to possess that one, priceless jewel. (Matthew 13:44-46)

The decision to follow Jesus is like that. It’s a considered counting of the costs and the unmistakable conclusion that He is worth more than anything else in this world.

This first attribute of a disciple is primarily a mental acceptance of Jesus, understanding that He is now the one in charge of our lives. He is the boss, our leader. He calls, we follow.

There is more to being a disciple, of course. There are actions and emotions and affections involved in following Jesus. But it starts with this simple decision: Do you believe in Jesus? Do you acknowledge His position as Lord and Savior? Are you willing to give your life to Him?

***The Shaping***Then, second, Jesus says: “**and I will make you.”** This is Jesus’ promise. This is Jesus’ commitment to shape us and mold us to become more like Him. It requires an openness on our part.

Discipleship is not about our effort. It’s not about how hard we work or how carefully we keep a detailed list of rules or match superficial behaviors. In fact, as I’ve been saying, those things can actually get in the way of a relationship with Jesus. The offer of discipleship is that Jesus will change us. He will transform us. In His grace, it is Jesus who does the work.

So if making the decision to follow Jesus is about our heads, this openness to His transforming work is about our hearts. It is a spiritual response to the presence of His Spirit in our lives. This is allowing Jesus to move in our lives and cause changes in our hearts that lead to the development of our character. This is absorbing the way of Christ.

Too often, we hear a word like discipleship and assume it is all about what we can learn, the transfer of information. Memorize the books of the Bible and learn to recite the creed. Answer all the Bible category questions correctly on Jeopardy! But discipleship is about more than what we know. It involves our hearts, a transformation at the deepest levels or our understanding, affection and will.

So, are you open to Christ’s transforming work in your life? Are you ready to let Him make you into what He wants you to be?

The Biblical image I think of, from both Isaiah and Jeremiah, is that of the potter and the clay. The clay does not get to tell the potter what to make of it. The clay sits on the potter’s wheel and gets shaped however the potter sees fit. Some gets shaped into a beautiful vessel for pouring water, other into a simple container for holding pencils. It’s all the potter’s choice, and for the potter’s purposes. As Isaiah says: “Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter, we are all the work of your hand.” (Isa. 64:8)

So ask yourself: are you going to Jesus get what you want, or are you going to Him to allow Him to make you into what He wants. There is a real danger that we will treat God like a cosmic lottery ticket. Believing that now that we are following Him He will make everything in our lives conform to our fondest wishes. When it truth, there may be many challenges as God seeks to mold and shape us.

Jesus knows what He wants to make out of us, we need to surrender to Him.

This is good news. Sometimes we assume that we need to clean ourselves up before coming to Jesus; or we start to follow Him and get discouraged when we make a mistake or fall into an old pattern of sin. We think that God’s grace covered us up to the point of salvation, and now somehow we must get it right all the time to continue as a disciple.

But if we pay attention to the lives of Peter and James and John and the other early disciples, “we see that they often acted in ways that were selfish, rude, clueless, and immature. They were not spiritual giants, they were just regular guys with the same selfish, sinful struggles we all have. Jesus didn’t choose them to be his followers because they were anything special. He chose them with an eye to what they could become. Responding to the call to follow Jesus meant allowing Him to unmake them and then remake them into his image—as his disciples.” (*Discipleshift*, p. 48)

Jesus promises to make us into what He wants us to be. We need to be open to His work in our hearts.

***The Mission***Then, third, Jesus calls us to be “**fishers of men**.” This is Jesus’ mission for us. This calls for an availability, a call to action.

Discipleship has a mission. There is a purpose, a goal. Jesus wants us to influence the people in our lives. He wants us to share the good news of His gospel and help people into a relationship with their creator and savior. He wants us to share His love and mercy with those who are hurting and disenfranchised. He wants us to be salt in a starving world, light in the midst of the darkness.

This is a metaphor, of course. A figure of speech. Jesus’ doesn’t want us throwing nets on anybody, or hooking their lips with fishhooks. But the metaphor is easy enough to understand: for their entire lives Peter and Andrew have been fishers of fish. They would throw a net into the water, wait a while, and then haul out fish to sell at the market. That was their life’s purpose, that was their goal. That’s how they got enough food and shelter to make it through another day.

But now Jesus is going to give them a new purpose, a new goal. From now on, they are going to fish for souls. Before, they would have found joy in landing a 20 pound trophy fish. Now, their joy will come from seeing people grow closer to their heavenly father.

So if choosing to follow Jesus is about our heads, and being shaped by Him is about our hearts, this availability to be used in His mission is about our hands. This is the activity disciples are called to engage in.

Now, this doesn’t mean that we all drop everything and move halfway around the world as missionaries. For some of us, that might be God’s specific calling on our lives. But for many more of us, it means staying right where we are, continuing our careers as teachers or accountants or carpenters or homemakers, and being salt and light every day to the people we come into contact with.

Jim Putman, in a book called *Discipleshift* that the consistory is reading together this year, writes;

Being on a mission means that we acknowledge that we’re saved for God’s kingdom purposes. Our mission is not simply to come to church each Sunday, to be nice to other people, or to cram a lot of biblical facts in our heads. It’s not even to give money to the church so that the pastors can carry out the mission of Jesus. It’s for every disciple to join in God’s mission in this world, to participate with God’s purposes in the world. The world is hurting and lost. People are dying and going to hell. We can give no greater gift of love than to share the good news that brings people into a relationship with God through Jesus. Inspired by Jesus (literally) we seek to love people and tell them what we have found in him. (p. 50)

So the third attribute of a disciple is a commissioning, a call to action. Using our abilities in the places where God calls us to serve Jesus.

***Putting it Together***Let’s put it together, this is the job description Jesus gives to those who would be his disciples. This is what it means to be in a committed relationship to Jesus: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Disciples are people who have made a decision to follow Jesus with their heads; are open to being changed by Jesus in their hearts; and are serving on Jesus mission with their hands.

Finally, I was looking for a way to conclude this sermon when something sort of fell into my lap. Many of you will know the name Brian Keepers. Brian grew up in Spencer and was a part of Hope Church as a High School student. He went on to become a pastor, and served a church in Sheldon before moving on to Michigan.

Well, Brian is being installed today as the pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City. There will be a car load of us going over there this afternoon for the service, and if you would be interested in going let me know.

Anyway, last week Sunday was the second or third Sunday he preached at Trinity, and I heard he talked about Hope Church. I went online and watched it, and I thought what he had to say about Hope Church was such a good example of what it means to be a disciple that I called Brian and asked him if I could show it to you. Here’s what Brian had to say:

<<play video>>

Way to go Ray! What a tremendous moment when God used you and the rest of this church in that young man’s life.

But now, think about what we’ve been talking about: Disciples who make Disciples. Doesn’t that describe Ray in that story? He was committed to Jesus. He was open to what Jesus wanted to do in His life. And He was available to be a part of Jesus’ mission.

So what about you? Do you need to define your relationship with Jesus? I have two questions for you, two things for you to think about this week as you think about discipleship:

**Who are you following?**

And:

**What sort of example are you setting?**

Are you following Jesus? And are you following Him in a way that will help others follow too?