

**FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS  
YOU WERE CREATED TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST  
Matthew 28:16-20 (NLT)**

Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn.

**M.I. WE ARE TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS EVERY DAY.**

**I. THE SOURCE OF GROWTH (Vs. 16-18)**

**JESUS IS THE EXAMPLE WE ARE TO FOLLOW IN FAITH.**

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them still doubted! <sup>18</sup>Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth.

- A. THEY OBEYED JESUS
- B. THEY WORSHIPED JESUS
- C. THEY EXPERIENCED JESUS

**II. THE SCOPE OF GROWTH (Vs. 19-20a)**

**WE ARE COMMANDED TO GROW AND TO HELP OTHERS GROW IN THE FAITH.**

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20a</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.

- A. MAKE DISCIPLES
- B. GOING
- C. BAPTIZING
- D. TEACHING

**III. THE CERTAINTY OF GROWTH (Vs. 20b)**

**JESUS WILL GUARANTEE WE GROW IN THE FAITH.**

<sup>20b</sup>And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- A. GOD’S PROMISE
- B. GOD’S PRESENCE
- C. GOD’S PERMANENCE

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How many of you have heard the expression “born again” as it refers to becoming a Christian? It really is a nice way to describe what happens to us when we receive Jesus into our lives.

Remember what we have been saying: When we were born into this world, we were born physically alive but spiritually dead. When we give our lives to Christ, we receive eternal life. We are made spiritually alive at that moment. We have been born spiritually. We have been born again.

That is a very helpful picture for me. When I was growing up physically, I had to learn to feed myself, go to the bathroom myself, dress myself, and basically learn to care for myself, I had to grow up to maturity. Think about how sad this would be, if I were here this morning as a 41-year-old adult man, and was still unable to tie my shoes, feed or dress myself. You would say that something is very wrong.

Well that carries over into our spiritual lives as well. When we become Christians, we are spiritual babies. We need to grow up and mature in our spiritual walk. The Bible calls this act of learning and growing up spiritually, discipleship. The goal of discipleship is for each of us to become more like Jesus and to help others become more like Him.

But for the most part, Christians remain spiritual babies because they would rather be spoon-fed than learn to dig into the Bible themselves.

Let me give you an example of how reluctant church people are to grow. You remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?)

It was so tough that even the deacons didn't want to grow. I tried to make their discipleship a little more enjoyable so I tried to take them through C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy. In the first book, the hero travels to Mars and encounters life forms there.

The deacons just weren't getting it. So pointing to the hat on my head I said, "Let's use my hat to represent the planet Mars. Are there any questions?"

One of the deacons said, "Yeah is Mars inhabited?"

They all thought it was funny. But I'm wondering about all of us here this morning. Are we committed to growing up and maturing in our faith? Are we becoming more like Jesus each day?

We have been trying to demystify all these religious words in this Purpose Driven Life campaign. Worship means loving God and Fellowship means loving one another. This morning we are talking about discipleship. Here is what that means, and is the main idea of this morning's message: **WE ARE TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS EVERY DAY.** Discipleship describes the way in which we grow up spiritually. It describes how we mature in our faith and relationship with God.

I. THE SOURCE OF GROWTH (Vs. 16-18)  
**JESUS IS THE EXAMPLE WE ARE TO FOLLOW IN FAITH.**

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them still doubted!  
<sup>18</sup>Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth.

Verses 16-18 describe the source of our growth: **JESUS IS THE EXAMPLE WE ARE TO FOLLOW IN FAITH.** We have physical standards to see if we are growing and maturing properly. We have height and weight charts that let us know if we are too fat or too skinny. We are told our blood pressure should be around 120 over 80, and our cholesterol under 200.

But how do we measure ourselves spiritually? The Bible tells us that we are to be in the process of becoming more like Jesus every day. The job will be finished in heaven where we will be like Him.

#### A. THEY OBEYED JESUS

Let us see how the disciples get this idea. First, they obeyed Jesus. Jesus instructed the disciples to go to a specific mountain in Galilee; verse 18 describes the disciples going there. Now for our purposes, there is an interesting twist here. It is now 40 days since Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus has spent 40 days with the disciples in His resurrection body; in this time they gained confidence and courage. Peter was forgiven, healed, and restored; even though he denied knowing Jesus the night Jesus was arrested and later crucified, Jesus forgave him, healed him, and restored him to a position of leadership. Peter ended up dying a hero.

The only way we are going to grow as believers is to spend time with Jesus. We meet Jesus in the pages of the Bible. Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee; they obeyed. Many of us never mature in our faith because we never get to know the Jesus of the Bible. We all make up our own ideas of who God is and what He expects of us. The problem is that most of our ideas are made up, they are not biblical ideas. The bible is not a textbook of rules and regulations, the bible is the book in which God reveals Himself and His will to us. It is impossible to obey God if we don't know what He wants from us. It is impossible to be like Jesus if we don't know who Jesus truly is.

#### B. THEY WORSHIPED JESUS

The disciples knew who Jesus was and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him. If we were to stop reading the Gospels too soon, we would miss the nature and character of Jesus. He wasn't just tortured, killed, and buried. That was not the end of the story. He rose from the dead.

He conquered sin and death on our behalf. But the story doesn't end there either; He ascended to heaven and the Bible says that He sits at the right hand of the Father. But still the story doesn't end there; at the very mention of the word Jesus, "Every knee in heaven, every knee on earth, and every knee under the earth will bend and bow... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We are to submit to Him and worship Him alone. He is our model of humility. He is our model of holiness. He is our model of purity. He is our model of love and obedience. We are commanded to be like Jesus. We worship Him as we allow His Holy Spirit to shape us and mold us into His image.

### C. THEY EXPERIENCED JESUS

And the disciples experienced Jesus. They often did not get it right away, even though they saw Him, some still doubted. Jesus encourages them by saying, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth," yet some still doubted. Aren't we like that? Sometimes we can be so noble and pumped up with faith, yet at other times, God seems so far away, and we again resort to doing things our own way. We let the world squeeze us into its mold. But that doesn't change the reality that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, and with this authority, He commands us to quit being squeezed into this world's mold. Instead we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are to learn to think and act like Jesus: **JESUS IS THE EXAMPLE WE ARE TO FOLLOW IN FAITH.** We do that by learning about Him in the bible, we do that by obeying Him and loving Him and we do that by experiencing Jesus in our everyday lives.

### II. THE SCOPE OF GROWTH (Vs. 19-20a)

#### **WE ARE COMMANDED TO GROW AND TO HELP OTHERS GROW IN THE FAITH.**

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20a</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.

Verse 19 and the first half of verse 20 describe the scope of growth. This is a life-long project. This is a worldwide project. This is a never-ending story: **WE ARE COMMANDED TO GROW AND TO HELP OTHERS GROW IN THE FAITH.** Did you catch that? We have two responsibilities here. First we are commanded to personally grow, and then we are to help others grow.

#### A. MAKE DISCIPLES

In your outlines, it looks like I got the commands out of order. However, there is only one main verb, and the other three are subordinate. The main verb and phrase is, “Make disciples.” Jesus’ last request is that the disciples spend the rest of their lives, teaching and helping people to become more like Him. You want to know God’s will for your life? It’s not mysterious, it’s simple; God wants you to become more like Jesus. Jesus dedicated His life to loving God and loving people. It is God’s will for our lives to make disciples.

That may sound real noble, but what does it all mean? How do we make disciples? First of all, it entails going. Jesus commanded them to make disciples of all nations. I think that includes our families, our friends, our classmates, our co-workers, our neighbors and pretty much everyone we meet. It is God’s desire that every person in the world come to a saving faith in Jesus and it is God’s will that we all grow up to be mature Christians.

#### B. GOING

But there is a major assumption that underlies our going to make disciples. It assumes that we know Jesus personally and that we are growing in our own personal walk. In his book and in his lectures, Rick Warren reminds us that there are three tools God uses to make us more like His Son Jesus.

First, God has given us the Bible. We have already talked about that, but to summarize what we said, the Bible is where God reveals His nature, His character, and His plan for us. We gain an understanding of what a mature believer should look like by reading and studying about Jesus, as well as looking at the success and failure of bible characters as they attempt to grow in their relationship with God.

Second, God has given us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. He encourages us to repent and make restitution. The Holy Spirit guides us, gifts us, comforts us, and prays for us. God's Holy Spirit works in us to make us more like Jesus.

Thirdly, God uses circumstances to make us more like Jesus. Jesus suffered a great deal while He lived on earth. The Bible says that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. Expect to suffer; it is part of the maturing process. God will bring both good and bad times into our lives. Learn to rejoice in both. Look at each situation as an opportunity for God to make us more like Jesus.

So we are called to go into the all the world and make disciples. But this means that we are disciples ourselves. It doesn't mean we are perfect, it means that we have committed ourselves to be more like Jesus every day.

### C. BAPTIZING

The next part of making disciples is baptizing. I think there is a double meaning here because first of all, baptism is descriptive of the salvation experience. Baptism is a public and visible declaration of what has taken place spiritually. When we gave our lives to Christ, we died to our own wills and received new life in Jesus. Going under the water symbolizes death to us and our old way of life. Coming up out of the water symbolizes our new life in Jesus, one that is characterized by holiness. So salvation, receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior is the first step in

discipleship. In order to grow in our faith, we must be alive in our faith. Salvation gives us eternal life.

By the way, let me point out, there is no example of people becoming Christians in the Bible who do not immediately get baptized. The only example is the thief who dies on the cross. Obviously he was a little preoccupied at the time and besides, the guards would not let him get down off the cross to get baptized. If we claim to be Christian, but have not been baptized, we should wonder what salvation means to us. The first act of discipleship when one gets saved is obedience in being baptized. If you are a believer, and you are not baptized, maybe you should give it some real serious thought.

But there is also another side to baptism. Yes, baptism primarily symbolizes what happens when we receive Jesus in salvation; it is a public declaration of our faith but in addition to that, baptism is a ritual in which you are publicly received into the community of faith. It is an initiation rite, which welcomes you into the family of God. There are some people who think they can grow in their faith alone and they don't think they need other believers around. There are people who say they don't need to go to church. Let me set the record straight. God is a social God; when the Hebrews left Egypt and spent 40 years in the wilderness, traveling to the Holy Land, God had His tent set up in the middle of the camp. Jesus said that the church is His body. Christianity is a social religion, which has all sorts of social ramifications; we are to love one another, care for one another, serve one another, encourage one another, spur one another on, correct one another, etc. Christianity is a community, inter-acting with one another in the faith. It is impossible to live out Christianity alone. To be like Jesus is to be involved with other people.

#### D. TEACHING

Which brings us to the teaching aspect of making disciples, first of all we are to be students ourselves. We are to be bringing people the saving message of God, that through faith in Jesus, their sins can be forgiven and they can be in a right relationship with God and then we bring them into the community, the church. Now look at verse 20. From here, we are to teach them everything Jesus has given to us. Jesus spent over 3 ½ years with these men and women. He poured His life into them. Good solid churches teach and train the people to become mature Christians. The preaching should be balanced preaching. There should be small groups in which people learn to worship, evangelize, love one another, find and use their spiritual gifts; we need to grow both in information and experience.

Here is what occurs at most unhealthy churches: one of the components that Jesus mentions in these two verses is emphasized to the point of neglecting the other two. Sometimes churches are so focused on meeting their own needs; they neglect the ministry of evangelism, some people come to church simply to have their needs met. They like the programs. They like the music. They like the preaching. Their focus is on themselves and their families. The problem with this church is twofold. First, they never grow in numbers, and second, since the goal of maturing as a Christian is to become a minister, these Christians never mature.

The next type of unhealthy church is focused on evangelism and everything they do is seeker driven. The messages, week after week, are basic salvation messages. Their goal is to bring as many people as possible into the church to get them saved. The problem is, their numbers grow very quickly, but nobody ever helps these baby Christians mature in their faith.

Third, there are churches that focus on the teaching aspect of discipleship. There is good preaching and teaching, but they never take this information and go out into the world with it. People gain a lot of knowledge, but no experience.

For those of you who have been in church as we have been studying through the book of Proverbs, will have noticed that the definition of wisdom includes a balanced approach to our faith. We need to acquire knowledge through Bible study, coming to church and being taught by more mature believers. Secondly wisdom requires us to put this knowledge into practical everyday experiences. We must take this knowledge and live it out obediently in the course of our everyday, work-a-day lives. It must be practical. And third, we must pass wisdom on to others; we must be willing to help other grow to maturity.

Here is a nice description of a mature believer, “One who is growing in their knowledge of God, living out God’s will in their everyday lives, and is helping others to grow in their walk with God.” All of us should be in three relationships: First, we should be in a relationship with a more mature Christian who is teaching us. Second, we should be in a relationship with Christians who hold us accountable for our daily walk and third, we should be teaching younger Christians about the faith.

Discipleship is a complete package, from bringing unbelievers to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, to a point where they continually mature in their faith, and where they carry on the mission by ministering to others. The nature of Christianity is to continually grow. If we are not growing, then we are dying. The nature of discipleship was stated clearly by Jesus: **WE ARE COMMANDED TO GROW AND TO HELP OTHERS GROW IN THE FAITH.** It’s as simple as that.

### III. THE CERTAINTY OF GROWTH (Vs. 20b) **JESUS WILL GUARANTEE WE GROW IN THE FAITH.**

<sup>20b</sup>And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Again let me emphasize this point. If you are a Christian who is not changing and growing on a daily basis, there is real reason to be concerned. Why? Because Jesus promises us

the certainty of growth according to the second half of verse 20. The point is this: **JESUS WILL GUARANTEE WE GROW IN THE FAITH.** After giving the disciples this incredible task, Jesus gives them this incredible promise. He says, “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Think about this. Before Jesus gave the disciples the assignment of making disciples of all people in the world, He told them that He had all authority in heaven and on earth to give them this command and He ends up by guaranteeing them success. Why will they have success? Because Jesus will be with them.

#### A. GOD’S PROMISE

Jesus gives them God’s promise. I like the way the New Living Translation captures this where it says, “And be sure of this.” The NASB translates it, “Behold,” and the NIV translates it, “Surely.” The meaning is clear. Jesus is saying, “Count on it. It’s a done deal. You can take it to the bank. Or like the White Sox announcer Ken Haroldsen says, ‘You can put it on the board ... Yes!’”

#### B. GOD’S PRESENCE

What is it that Jesus is exactly promising? He is promising God’s presence. Jesus said that He would be with them always. As we read through the rest of the New Testament, we learn how Jesus remains with us. God sent the Holy Spirit to live in each one of us. The Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill all the commands and different aspects of discipleship. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and our need to be right with God. So the Holy Spirit helps unbelievers to understand the message of salvation. The Holy Spirit leads believers into more truth as we read and study our Bibles. The Holy Spirit enables us to live up to the truths we learn in the Bible, the Holy Spirit enables us to minister to others by giving us spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit gives us strength and comfort as we face difficult times in our lives.

### C. GOD'S PERMANENCE

Which brings us to God's permanence: Jesus promised us that He would be with us to the end of the age. Jesus knew that the disciples would have to face difficult times. He knew we would have to face difficult times and He knows it is hard for us to grow. That is why He gave us the Holy Spirit. I think the Apostle Paul describes this the best: If you are having a difficult time in life, just listen to how permanent God's promise and presence is; and we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him, he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory. What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us. <sup>35</sup>Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? ... No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't, the angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above

the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28-39).

We can be certain that we will grow up in our faith. We know that the church will be successful because: **JESUS WILL GUARANTEE WE GROW IN THE FAITH**, as long as we faithfully submit to His authority and hold on to His promises.

Physical life is pretty simple, isn't it? We learn to grow up and take care of ourselves. We try to overcome our physical ailments and move on with life. Our spiritual lives are a lot like that. Our job is pretty simple: **WE ARE TO BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS EVERY DAY**. If we are sincere about growing, we will easily see that it will take us more than a lifetime to achieve this goal. The fact is we must never think we have arrived and we must never stop growing. Things that stop growing are dying. Things that are alive are growing.

I like the way Kent Hughes captures this attitude. He says, “It is said that, before the discovery of America, Spanish coins that bore the imprint of the Pillars of Hercules had a motto: Ne plus ultra, (which means) “Nothing else beyond;” but after the success of Columbus, the motto was changed to Plus ultra, (which means) “More beyond.” So it is with the Christian life; whatever may be the heights which the believer attains, “Still there is more to follow.”

Where do you find yourself this morning in your walk with God? Are you still a baby, crying to get your own way? Are you an adolescent, rebelling and doing your own thing? Or are you becoming a humble adult, growing everyday, and realizing that you still have a long way to go? Keep growing, because the alternative is simply dying. Let us commit ourselves this morning to be more like Christ every day, and help others to be more like Christ also.