

Dynamics of Church Life

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God's Word	The Gospel	Spiritual Renewal	Holistic Worship	Dependent Prayer	Loving Community	United Mission
The Bible is our life and authority.	By his death & resurrection, Jesus gives us his Spirit and makes us God's children.	God's Spirit frees us to live more and more like Jesus in every area of our lives.	All of life is for worshipping our Triune God.	We thank our Father for his love and present our needs to him.	We follow Jesus in vital connection with other believers.	We invite everyone to trust and follow Jesus with us.

United Mission: Making Disciples

Many Christians are familiar with "The Great Commission," in which Jesus tells his followers to make disciples of all nations. The Great Commission, however, cannot be properly understood apart from the Great Commissioner, Jesus himself. Before giving this commission, he declared himself to have universal authority: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

This is a radical and astonishing statement. It pulls together many strands of Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament foretells a King upon whom God would bestow ultimate authority to rescue his people and render judgment on their enemies (see Psalm 2). Jesus' death and resurrection demonstrates how he used that authority: he suffered torture and death to free people from sin and death.

In view of Jesus' world-encompassing authority, Jesus calls us to invite others to follow him as their Savior-King as well. This is what it means to make disciples.

This raises the question, "*How* are we to make disciples?" Matthew 28:19-20 provides a three-fold answer.

- I. We make disciples by **invitation**: "Make disciples of all the nations."

How do religions grow? Religions are usually bound up within a culture, language, and region, so they grow by *procreation*, as people have babies. Sometimes, however, religions grow by *coercion*. This is what happened in the name—though not the essence—of Christianity in medieval Europe when, for example, crusaders forced Jewish people to be baptized. This was also the method of Muslims, who required that people they conquered to confess Allah to be God, and Mohammed his prophet.

Christianity spreads in a completely different way because it is more than a religion: it is a relationship centered on Jesus, the governing head of the universe. He invites people, not to an allegiance of politics, region, language, or custom, but to a whole-person allegiance to himself as Lord of heaven and earth. Becoming a citizen of his kingdom requires an entirely *new* birth (John 3:3). One cannot be coerced into it or born into it. One can only respond willingly to an invitation, drawn by the unseen power of his Spirit (John 6:44; Acts 16:14).

Jesus' uniquely all-encompassing love and authority is also what makes Christianity uniquely transcultural. When Jesus said, "Make disciples of *all* the nations," he was calling his followers to cross ethnic boundaries they had assumed were uncrossable. Now, however, Jews *and* non-Jews could be God's people, without adopting certain cultural customs.

You can see for yourself how Christianity, unlike any other faith, is rigidly narrow but wondrously adaptable, and it is the narrowness that makes it so. Other religions are most at home in limited regions—animism fares best in Africa, Buddhism in the East, and Islam struggles to break the boundaries of Arabian language and culture. Christianity, on the other hand, is at home in every human culture because it is the only faith that truly humanizes people.

- II. We make disciples by **initiation**: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The sign by which a person declares his allegiance to King Jesus is *baptism*. Baptism is aptly the initiatory rite of Christianity because of how perfectly it pictures our salvation. When a person is submerged into water and then comes back up, they show that they are ending an old life and beginning a new one. They are now children of the Father, redeemed by the Son, and indwelt by the Spirit. This is why Jesus told his followers to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- III. We make disciples by **instruction**: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

If baptism marks the beginning of a believer's life, *instruction* marks the continuation of it. Following Jesus is more than just undergoing a religious ritual, but learning throughout one's life what it means to obey Jesus' teachings.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the seven dynamics of church life from this series (see list above). If you had to choose, which one do you think our church needs to understand and embrace the most?
2. In what ways does *coercion* contrast with the *invitation* in making disciples?
3. How does baptism symbolize the believer's new life in Christ and their allegiance to the triune God?
4. How does Jesus' love and authority make Christianity transcultural and adaptable across different societies?
5. Why is *obedience* an essential part of following Jesus? How does this differ from other approaches to discipleship you may have experienced?
6. How can prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit transform our approach to making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission?