

Defining Discipleship

Elements of Disciplemaking –

SEEN in Jesus + the Twelve - -The Twelve + Early Church

- Evangelism
- Intimate personal relationship
- Mutual personal commitment
- Personal instruction
 - Teach them to obey
 - Teach them everything I have commanded you
- Personal Accountability – become Doers of the Word
- Commitment to disciplemaking after maturity

What is discipleship?

In one sentence discipleship is what Jesus did with the twelve, and what the twelve did with the early church. Let's look at three simple elements of discipleship.

- Discipleship is what it means to be a follower of Christ.
- Discipleship is God's method for growing the church.
- Discipleship is a non-optional mandate for those who will obey Christ.

1. Discipleship is what it means to be a follower of Christ.

- A. A disciple was *one who would follow after and learn the teaching, disciplines and tradition of its master*. Many of the Jewish rabbi's of Jesus day had followers or disciples as well as John the Baptist and of course Jesus.
- B. **1.** When Jesus called one to follow Him, his calling was one of total abandonment from the former life, completely entrusting oneself to Christ and to His teachings. To follow Him with abandonment of all that we have and all that we are. To be willing to give everything to remain faithful to His teaching.
- Matt 4:18-22** - 8 And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 And **they immediately left the nets**, and followed Him. 21 And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 And **they immediately left the boat and their father**, and followed Him. NAS
- 2. Luke 5:27-28** - 27 And after that He went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi, sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me." 28 And **he left everything behind**, and rose and began to follow Him. NAS
- Luke 14:25-27** - 25 Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 26 "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. 27 **"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple**. NAS
- C. **3.** To be Christian disciple is to emulate Christ. What did the early disciples do? Well, "*they followed Him wherever He went and did whatever He did?*"

And the product of following Christ is what we see recorded in the book of Acts, it is the birth of the Church and the evangelization of the Roman world of the first century. And these men and women of the early church were first called Christians then. And so what does it mean to be a Christian? It simply means to be a disciple, a follower of Christ. Going where He goes and doing what He does and what He has taught us to do. This is summed up in the great commission.

2. Discipleship is God's method for growing the church both spiritually and numerically.

A. **4.** God grows the church *numerically* through discipleship. **5.** What is the most essential element of being a disciple? Its simple, *disciples - make disciples*. The very nature of discipleship is *reproductive*. Jesus called the twelve, and what did He say?

Matt 4:19 - 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." NIV Following Christ for the disciple meant to evangelize and teach the disciplines of Christ to all who would listen and follow. It couldn't be more plain. Is this what being a Christian means to us? It was clear to them, but is it clear to us?

The essential element of discipleship is to make disciples. **6.** This means that as Christians, or disciples, we must by default be disciplemakers. If not, we are falling sadly short of obedience to the Master.

Matt 28:19 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; It was also a very clear element of the early church in Acts.

7. Acts 14:21-24 - 21 And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. NAS

8. Let's face it. When we look at the twelve, and the disciples that were made by them, we see a group of people committed to disciplmaking. It is the very nature of being a Christian. *The contemporary church has almost completely ignored this very essential and fundamental element of the kingdom of God.* Jesus was busy making disciples every single day of His ministry.

Jesus divine method is designed to take an unregenerate person, transform him by the power of the Spirit and the gospel implanted through faith, ground him in the essential principles for abundant living through the Word, and release him into the world to win and make disciples of others. Discipleship by nature reproduces itself again and again.

9. Discipleship is the method then that God has chosen to reach the world with the gospel. **10.** A discipler, a believer who has already been discipled, leads unsaved persons to the experience of the new birth (evangelism), thus becoming a spiritual parent. The discipler then, through the application of Jesus discipling method, trains the new believers, personally guiding them in their walk with Christ. **11.** When the group of disciples has been sufficiently grounded in the Word and equipped to the point of spiritual stability, they are commanded to carry out the same by doing with others what has been done with them. They become disciplmakers themselves.

B. **12.** God grows the church *spiritually* through discipleship. You see, you can't just tell someone the gospel and equip them to Christian perfection in a 20 minute sermon. Those who receive Christ must be personally instructed, for a measured period of time, in the fundamental principles of Christian living. **13.** *They must be nurtured in the Word until they are able to stand on their own feet spiritually, feed themselves, and continue to mature in Christ as a result.* This must occur. If this period of disciple training is missed, a weak and unproductive "church-goer" will result.

2 Peter 1:5-8 - 5 For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith** goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will **keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge** of our Lord Jesus Christ. NIV

Your pastor cannot accomplish this task either. This task is something that is accomplished at a personal level. **14.** *Disciplemaking requires a personal relationship between the disciple and discipler.* It takes much time and a commitment to make a disciple. This ministry belongs to each and every believer. Discipling cannot be accomplished through impersonal means. Jesus didn't choose a throng of men. He selected a few individuals who were willing to follow Him. Jesus knew all about small group dynamics, and so He should He created man in the first place. Jesus knew that a larger number wouldn't allow for the adequate development of interpersonal relationships both between the disciples and their discipler and between the disciples themselves.

15. Teaching such a large number of people that personal relationships cannot be formed is not discipling. The very nature of the word disciple demands intimacy. Discipling requires that the discipler maintain a close personal relationship with those being disciplined, just as Jesus did with the twelve, until the desired objective is reached.

2 Tim 3:16-17 - 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is **useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,** 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. NIV

You cannot have proper accountability for teaching, reproof and correction unless you become a part of one another's life. So then, what is the goal or objective of Discipleship? The objective in disciplemaking is to grow each disciple to a level of spiritual stability, which transforms the disciple into a disciplemaker.

3. 16. Discipleship is a non-optional mandate for those who will obey Christ.

As we have seen, disciplemaking is part of what it means to be a Christian. It cannot be separated from your personal experience as a Christian. As a disciple of Christ, you by nature should be making disciples. Is this not plain from the Great Commission? *What is it contained within this commandment of Christ that allows us to excuse ourselves from it?* There is a very definite problem in the visible American church in carrying out this vital task of discipleship. Hear again the words of our Lord;

17. Matt 28:18-20 - 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 **"Go therefore and make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

If Jesus commanded them to teach us to obey all that I have commanded you, that must also include the Great Commission. **18.** We are therefore to obey what Christ commanded the disciples, including the Great Commission. When Jesus told us to follow

Him, He meant to go where He goes and to do what He does. This first and foremost includes discipling.

The fact that the church is not currently modeling Jesus' example in discipling is no secret. In our fast paced society we want to be able to bring someone into the church, plop them down in a pew, and expect them to mature into Christ's likeness overnight! No wonder the *visible* church is full of every sort of sin and schism and spasm that you can dream up. We have failed at the task of nurturing the "babes" in the kingdom. The church is indeed "the mother of all the living," but she has forgotten the duties of motherhood. This is nothing new, but was a problem even in the first century church.

Heb 5:11-6:3 - 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time **you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.** You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. 6:1 **Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,** not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so. IV

We are comfortable, lazy and complacent in regard to fulfilling the great commission. We have forfeited self denial and cross bearing for a warm comfy pew, where we consume one spiritual meal per week. May God grant us repentance and a desire to truly become followers of Christ and walk after the example He gave us!

Matt 16:24-25 - 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but **whoever loses his life for me will find it.** NIV

Here is a quote from Dr. Collins on this very issue:

The evangelical church has become weak, shallow, and too dependent on artificial means that can only simulate real spiritual power, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. We have proliferated self-indulgent consumer religion, the what-can-the-church-do-for-me syndrome. We are too easily satisfied with conventional success; bodies, bucks, and buildings. The average Christian resides in the comfort zone of "I pay the pastor to preach, administrate, and counsel. I pay him, he ministers to me, . . . I am the consumer, he is the retailer. . . I have the needs, he meets them. . . that's what I pay him for."

We can most clearly see this in our idolatrous worship of the American superchurch. The bigger it is and the more its methods mimic the American entrepreneurial spirit, the better. The seduction is complete when the bigger, the more creative, and the more "successful" churches become the ultimate by which we measure all other churches. The flaw of such a superficial measure is that you have asked the wrong question, "How many people are present?"

The right question is, "What are these people like, What kind of families do they have, are they honest in business, are they trained to witness, do they know the bible, are they penetrating their workplaces, their neighborhoods, and reaching friends and associates for Christ? Are they making a difference in the world for Christ that He expects? These are the right questions and the criteria for greatness."

The evangelical church has lost the will to ask the right questions and the courage to face the answers. The critical decision facing the church is will we commit ourselves to deeper more important issues of Christian virtue and God's glory? Will we repent of our foolish ways and turn to the work that Christ commanded? Will we heed the voice of our Master or flounder in disobedience?

Friends, if these things are true, and the Spirit has born witness to you of such, the question to ask is-"Am I part of the problem, or part of the solution?"

19. The example of Christ is not complex or hard to understand, it is just that He is calling for life of self-denial in order to follow. This is not easy, but it is a mandate for every true Christian.

I pray that God will grant you a willing heart and strength to carry out this vital task! May He bless every step you take in an effort to obey this important commandment!

Matthew 28:19-20 –

- 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,
- baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
- 20 teaching them to observe (OBEY)
- all that I commanded you;
- and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

Matt 7:24-27 - 24 "Therefore **everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man** who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But **everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man** who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." NIV