
What is Discipleship?

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Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12

What is discipleship and what is Jesus calling us to in Matthew 28:18-20? Is this a command, or a suggestion; does it mean we are just to evangelize and let people find their faith on their own, or does this mean we are to lead others and teach the precepts of the Scriptures and the character of our Lord? Does it require obedience and action on our part, or are we disciples just by being a Christian and being in a church on Sundays?

This passage at the end of Matthew's Gospel is what is called the "Great Commission." This is also the *great failure* of the church! This is the main call to the church from our Lord and Savior, and is the one thing most churches do not do at all! This is the main reason for a church to exist, yet can you name one church that actually teaches people the basics of the faith and then moves them deeper into the precepts of His love and Word through all of the seasons of life? If discipleship is mostly absent from our churches, then most Christians will not understand how to live out their faith. They will not be able to handle problems, witness, share their faith, or grow effectively spiritually, because no one is modeling, or showing them the way! Some churches do a great job with evangelism, but once the people come in, they are *stored* in the pews. Where is discipleship? What is it? Is the back door of the church as big as the front door?

Being a disciple encompasses more than just asking Christ in, and goes far beyond baptism. Our conversion, our acceptance of Christ as Savior, our election, is the beginning, the entrance, into the faith and Christian life. It is not the only act of being a Christian! It would be like joining a club, but never venturing into the club. Baptism is initiation and public dedication. It is to be the door through which we go in our walk of faith, as is also our profession and testimony of our faith publicly. It does not stop there! It **starts** there!

So, what does the average church do about discipleship? In most churches, people are encouraged to accept Christ or make a profession of faith. Then, they are congratulated, put on the membership role, and then quickly forgotten. Sadly, the Church has forsaken discipleship, and has left its members to figure out these spiritual growth things on their own. In doing so, it causes many to give up on Christianity, while others become confused, calloused, or complacent, or they are swept away by false doctrines and cults because they do not know the difference.

The Church Is Called To Make Disciples

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

This is perhaps the chief characteristic that most churches somehow forget. It is also the quintessential aspect and reason the church exists. So, why is it that so few churches actually have disciple making as a primary ministry? For most churches, it is something they think they are already doing when in fact they are not. Saying that going to church on Sunday is discipleship, or providing a couple of token adult Sunday school classes that few attend, is not discipleship. Some churches throw it in as an after thought, or may offer a class or something related to the subject.

Due to our human, fallen thinking, we desire the right to ourselves more than we desire the life that Christ has for us. It is difficult for the non-Christian to except a Savior when they think they have to give up their rights. It is similarly difficult for the Christian to live a life that is truly surrendered and poured out to the sovereignty of God. Yet, true discipleship cannot begin until we learn one key important aspect of life: there is one God and you are not He! We must learn to yield to the Lordship of our God and not to the desires of our will. When we do this, the discipleship process can begin. However, when we refuse, we will be the strife and conflict that gives Christianity a "black eye." We become the problem rather than the solution.

Therefore, discipleship as a priority gets lost. We make up excuses saying, *"Well, people will not come; We are Christians already, so we are Disciples already; The Spirit will guide them; That is not what Jesus was saying; He is saying for us to evangelize only; we do not have anybody to lead it; etc..."* Excuses, excuses, excuses, and no response to Christ! What they do not realize is **we are not responsible for people coming; we are only responsible for obeying our Lord and doing it!** The reason there is no one to lead it is that there is an extreme lack of real disciples in the church; that is, people whose lives are surrendered to Christ and out of gratitude to Him are modeling and teaching Biblical precepts to others. Even the Apostle Paul spent three years being discipled by Barnabas, and he received his call and was empowered directly from Christ Himself!

Humbleness is characterized by the willingness to grow in Christ, and receive learning and experience growth. Peter tells us we ought to be humble toward one other so that we can know the grace of God and not be in opposition to God. Then secondly, he says, we had better be humble, not only toward one another, but toward God. This is so straightforward. This is so essential to be a blessed church, to be a growing church, not in numbers, but in discipleship!

Check out some passages that tell us discipleship and mentoring are not an option, but a command: Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 6:1-10; Mark 1:35 – 2:12. We must follow out of our obedience and mentor in a multigenerational lifestyle, caring for the total person. This will move us from just playing church, to really *being* a church.

The effective church is mentoring, building relationships, and teaching each of the members by other, caring people, who are being discipled themselves, who are being taught, encouraged, and led. The death of a church happens when we follow political trends, not the national politics, but the patriarchal personalities that want to control people. In addition, when we have a controlling attitude, we do not allow God to control us, thus, we become empty shells and hollow logs. Being hollow means there is nothing working within us, there is no Creator of the universe leading and directing our ways, so, we become worthless to the Kingdom of God.

Making disciples takes vision and the understanding of Scripture. It gives the church a purpose to form leaders who grow other leaders in an outgrowth of their growth. The Christian, especially the leader, who discipled and equips others is a person who is living the faith for themselves and setting goals for their personal growth before they set goals for others. Their skills and abilities are growing them to be a better worker because first, they are striving to be a better child of God.

From the character of Christ will come the conduct of Christ, if we chose to follow Him. Then, those values of our daily walk, which drive our behaviors, will, in turn, influence others. You cannot lead where you have not been, or where you do not know the direction to go. This is why discipleship is so essential to the aspect of being a Christian. We are called, not to just visualize discipleship, but to do it; not to just talk about it, but to do it. One cannot just think about dinner and satisfy hunger; the meal has to be prepared, then eaten! The effective church will take Scripture and the call of our Lord seriously, and then implement it into functioning!

Jesus' purpose for His three years of earthly ministry was the discipleship and equipping of the 12 Disciples. This was His drive and where most of His time was spent. He was focused on the teaching of the kingdom of God, teaching men to see beyond their present situation to the life to come. With His teaching, Jesus entrusted His church and people to the care of the people He taught. They were to replicate themselves to others. The objective was that every Believer was an equipper, every member a minister, every Christian involved in the life and gifts of the Body to influence the world.

The Word must touch who we are, and transform the very core of our being. This is the knowledge that leads and transforms. One cannot lead where he does not know the way, and to know the way you must have knowledge.

Knowledge comes from experience, and experience comes from discipleship. The will of God is for us to study His Word, which will change our behaviors. A Christian and especially a leader in the church must have the knowledge and experience to put into practice the work that needs to be done. The disciple will be studious so that the Word nourishes him. He must study and apply the Scriptures, not just read it occasionally like a novel. The Word must touch who we are and transform the very core of our being. This is the knowledge that leads and transforms.

So, what are we to do?

God does not ask us to seek converts, He simply asks us to do Discipleship. Discipleship is modeling and teaching Christians the precepts of the Bible—mainly prayer, doctrine, Christian living, and worship. Yes, we are still to evangelize, but that is not our main mission and call! When we evangelize, we must realize that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring people into an intimate relationship with God. This is an act of divine intervention and grace. He uses us as the tools, but He is the means! We are to care, and share with others His love and character. We obey and reach, but we cannot lead people anywhere. He is the One who leads!

This leads us to our role, which is to model to the convert Christ-like character, encouraging others to surrender themselves to Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20-21). However, this is only the beginning! Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. Surrender is the process in which we grow toward Him and His will and away from our Will. Surrender is making Christ Lord of all of our life. We have to get rid of our perceptions, reckless ideas, faulty thinking, and other such things that are barriers to our growth, so we can make room for Him. Jesus authors our faith, and teaches us how to run the race according to God's will, His glory, His worship, and His purpose. Thus, we gain a deeper intimacy with our Lord as our Commander and Friend, as our God and our King, as our Love, and our reason for being. In His purposes, we find real contentment, joy, and fulfillment.

There are three main areas or principles in discipleship:

- 1. Relationships and Mentoring**
- 2. Teaching**
- 3. Service**

Relationships

We are called to build a network of relationships so we can build one another up in the faith through friendship and mentoring! (fishers of men) Most people are intimidated by discipleship out of ignorance, fear, unawareness, or just not wanting to be bothered out of their "comfort zone." The term, *discipleship*, has been viewed as something only for the spiritually mature, or just for certain people, such as Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders. What we need

to see is Barnabus and Paul, and, later, Paul and Timothy, where the elder, more experienced Christian takes the inexperienced Christian under his wing, and helps him to become a better, deeper, more effective Christian for God's glory. Keep in mind that Paul was highly educated and an experienced leader, and although Barnabus may have not been educated formally as Paul was, or at Paul's level in the world, Barnabus was Paul's superior in the experience and knowledge of the Word. Friendship, knowledge, experience combined into mentoring, and the quality of the relationship are the keys for this spiritual growth to have happened. Discipleship equals friendship with a Christ-centered focus. However, it is very important that we make disciples in His image, not ours!

Teaching

The other main principle in discipleship is teaching. We are all called, as a church, to teach one another--not only the kids in Sunday school, but also all Christians at all ages and levels--how to live the Christian life. The new Christian, (and all Christians for that matter) need sound instructions on how to live the Christian life. We do not learn by magic or osmosis. Although the Spirit will lead, it is still our responsibility to learn and grow, and then to teach others! In most churches, there are some opportunities to be in Bible studies, and even teach. The focus must be to teach the basics first--how to study the Bible, how to pray, how to worship, essential doctrine, etc And, as we grow, how to be a Christian family, how to find God's will, our conduct in the work place, discovering our spiritual gifts, leadership, and so forth. Then, the deeper expressions into the faith can be explored, along with accountability, and so forth.

Service

We are all called to put our faith into practice! We now take the relationships, mentoring, and learning, and carry it out in daily life. This is often expressed in service projects and missions, but that is only a small, although necessary aspect of service. Service is how we live our lives and model His character on a daily basis to those around us! When we are in ministry, we need to realize, *it is not what I do, but whom I can equip*. As we practice by reciprocating what we have learned to others, we will also be built up!

All three of these principles collate and build into each other synergistically. Discipleship can be skewed and people fall away if any of these three principles are let go. We will lose valuable opportunities to share and teach one another if, as Jesus stands at the door and knocks, we are watching TV and ignoring His door. Remember, the focus is never the task in and of itself. Rather, it is the glory and worship of our Lord and the enabling of one another to do and be better at the Christian life. What we learn and do here during our short time on earth will echo throughout the vastness of eternity!

Just as anyone can be a friend, anyone in Christ can disciple. We cannot expect only a select few to take up this call and imperative, and we do not need to be spiritual giants to do the work. We just need to be real in Christ, be willing to learn and grow as one of His disciples, and replicate our knowledge to others. Many people may feel anxious when it comes to reaching out, and it requires a big step of faith that many do not want to make. Therefore, the excuses pile on top and over our responsibility. That is a flaw in our human nature, our sinful nature! If we all just sit in the pew and expect someone else to reach out to others, we are slapping our Lord in the face. When no one reaches out, we are condemning others to feel and be lonely and isolated. We must reach out as a team effort, linking people with introverted personalities and who are reticent at interacting with others, with people who are more extroverted and that do not have this problem.

What is a Disciple?

A Disciple is one who models and teaches Christians the precepts of the Bible, prayer, doctrine, relationship, Christian living, service, and worship, to name the main ones.

Question:

Ask yourself, “How do I, and how can I do these:

- Have made a profession/acceptance of Faith in who Christ is and what He did on your behalf! 1 John 3:23; Acts 16:30-31
- Jesus is Lord of all! 1 Corinthians 3:2; Romans 8:9-17
- A disciple is willing to grow in Christ! 2 Peter 1:5-7
- Discipling is not an option--it is a command!
- A disciple has surrendered himself to His Lordship! Romans 8:28-32, 12; Galatians 2:20-21; Philippians 3:1-10; 1 Peter 4:2
- Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 2:2 all tell us that it is a lifestyle that moves us deeper into prayer and into worshipping Christ!
- A disciple makes good decisions and is focused on God’s will!
- A disciple is honest with God and others! 1 John 1:9
- A disciple walks with the precepts of Psalm 15!

- A disciple knows his abilities, gifts, and talents! Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; 1 Peter 4:10
- A disciple is willing to submit to Authority! 1 Peter 2:13-15
- A disciple is infused with humility! Psalm 149:4; Proverbs 3:34; Matthew 18:4; Ephesians 4:2-3; Colossians 3:12-14; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10
- A disciple will not be critical or have a bad attitude! Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5; Ephesians 4:29-32
- A disciple is not greedy! Luke 12:15; Romans 12:14-15
- A disciple is willing to wait on God's timing! (Saul versus David)
- A disciple is a listener! (James)
- A disciple confesses sin and repents from it! Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 12:9
- A disciple will not have a trace of pride in him! Job 35:12; Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:5; 18; 29:23; Obadiah 3; Galatians 5:26
- A disciple is discerning! Proverbs 20:25; Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7
- A disciple loves people and the lost! Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 10:24-25; 2 Peter 3:9
- God calls us to motivate and teach others to move more in prayer and care for others! Mark 1:35-2:12; Galatians 6:1-10
- John 1:36-52, and Acts 10,16 tell us that discipling grows from a web of relationships!
- A disciple is a person who forgives! Matthew 5:46; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:1-2; 4:32
- A disciple is willing to endure hardships and consider them as growth opportunities! James 1:2-4
- A disciple is faithful! Matthew 25:29; Luke 16:10-12

- One of the themes of the Gospels and Acts 11-16 is that in discipling people, we walk them through the phases and experiences of life. We come along side them and we do not let them go off on their own!
- Mentoring and small groups will be your keys to success!
- Discipleship is a lifestyle. As we get into the lives of others, the purpose for loving them is simply because He first loved us, and, then we become instruments of His grace.
- In John 15, the goal is intimacy with Christ, that of being surrendered to Biblical priorities and not to our own. Then we become tools that Christ uses to equip others. We are to be equipped so that we can enable others to grow in Christ!
- Discipleship is not a one-time act. It is a change of heart, a change of direction for a lifetime.
- In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus said we are to *deny ourselves*. This means we are to surrender ourselves completely to Him. We are to identify with His character and with what He did on our behalf on the cross, and then, out of gratitude, follow Him wherever He leads us!
- Discipleship is dynamic, not static. Jesus desires us to understand that being a Christian is not just about sitting in a pew or saying a prayer. It is about a life committed, a life changed, a heart and will surrendered, and a new direction and worldview with His precepts and character for living as our example.
- A disciple is a server with a servant heart who leads by servant hood!
Ephesians 2:10

Question

Ask yourself, "Where am I?" in these thoughts:

- When we live just for and to ourselves, we miss opportunities, learning experiences, and growth, and we exchange an eternity of rewards for a limited time of fun.
- Remember, Christ loves you and wants the best for you. His way is the best way, and we need to have Him and the perspective of eternity in mind, not our limited feelings and desires!
- Jesus lived and died on our behalf, for He willingly gave up His life by paying the penalty for our sins. He allows us not only to escape the fires of hell, but also to give us eternal life. What is your response?

- Being a true disciple means having a willingness to trust Him completely in all aspects of our lives from the highest highs to the lowest lows. It means we are not only willing to trust Him to provide for our salvation, but we trust Him for the future. We are to trust Him even when we do not know, like, or understand, and when where He is leading is unpopular!
- Being a true disciple allows us to put our hand to the plow and not look back. As we grow in Christ, we become increasingly unsatisfied with anything less than His call and character.

Question:

Ask yourself, “Am I willing to pay the cost?” Luke 9:23; Luke 14:25-35

- Jesus invites you to discipleship. But, He lets you know up front that it is a commitment that will cost you something. It is not going to be easy. You cannot just say you love the Lord. You must show it with your heart and it must transcend to your hands and feet. Then you will be Jesus’ disciple!
- Discipleship is costly because Jesus must have priority over your will, ideas, plans, and presumptions.
- "Follow me," means going His way to His purpose, not our own way. It means following His plans, not our own; obeying His will, not our own.
- Jesus is saying, Look, if you want to be a disciple, you will have to choose to whom you will be loyal. Will it be God the Creator and Savior, or your limited ideas and things?
- The world hates Jesus because it knows that He has priority over all things and all relationships. The world wants to be god even though there already is a God!
- Considering the cost of discipleship means asking the question, "What does Jesus want me to do?"
- Jesus wants us to see that the cost of discipleship involves understanding that there is a higher calling on our lives than doing what we want to do. We cannot say to God that we are only available two hours on Sunday! We must respond with the attitude of Isaiah, *Here I am God, ready to be used by you.*
- How much does discipleship cost? It costs everything! However, the rewards are limitless as we are entrusted to a Savior who loves us deeply and more than we could ever comprehend! He desires the best for us, He has a plan and purpose for us in the kingdom of God, and He wants us to spend eternity

with Him. There is no better way. To whom would you rather entrust yourself and your possessions?

How do I Become a Discipler?

- We all are called to make disciples! There are only two kinds of people who cannot disciple, and that is one who is not a follower of Christ and/or one who disobeys God's command and refuses to disciple.
- Disciple by obeying and doing as Jesus did! Set up a plan; target a small select group of people without ignoring the others around you!
- In Proverbs 27:17 and 1 Corinthians 10:12, we are told to come along side and encourage those who are down, who are new, who are old, who are immature, and who are mature. In other words, **everyone**.
- Teaming up with God and others makes it possible!

Ask yourself these questions:

Q: After doing a personal inventory of myself about my faith, have I truly become His disciple or am I just wearing the uniform?

Q: Do I love Him wholeheartedly? Then what is the obstacle to obeying Him?

Q: Is the Holy Spirit convicting me of a sin or a bad attitude that I need to confess and submit to Christ?

Q: Do I have a good understanding of God's calling, and am I obediently pursuing it?

Q: Who is really in charge of my decisions, me, or the Lord?

Q: After reading 2 Tim. 2:19, does He know me? Do others know that He knows me?

Q: Do I use Jesus or does He use me? Is He a divine bellhop or my Lord?

Q: Do I constantly remind myself what I am living for, a future hope in eternity?

Q: Am I willing to do whatever it takes to become more like Jesus?

Q: Calvin said I must be willing to "regulate my life and manners according to the Scriptures!" Am I?

Q: Where do I need to go and what do I need to do? (Seek God's will by knowing His character and precepts from Scripture, and look in your heart. Find your spiritual gifts and what opportunities are before you. See our channel on *God's Will!*)

Q: Set goals for myself, as it is better to prepare than to repair! St. Francis of Assisi said, "Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

To reach the goal set before you, there are three P's you need to seek and pray about:

1. **Preparation**--never go off and do what you are not led and equipped to do!
2. **Process**--following a strategic plan from His precepts!
3. **People**--encircle yourself with good God fearing Christians to help you see possibilities and directions!)

Q: Do I practice my spiritual disciplines in a consistent manner?

Q: Is my family in good shape?

Q: Have I discovered my spiritual gifts and then prioritized my ministry to complement them?

Q: Do I have prayer partners to provide essential support?

Q: Do I see the seriousness of obedience that my eternal destiny depends on? Do I realize that Jesus required His disciples to distinguish between appearance and reality, that is, between being true Christians and just going through the motions?

Q: What is my attitude toward myself, the people around me, my situation, the precepts of Scripture, and the opportunities and life that Christ offers me?

Q: If He is Lord then He is my boss and conqueror, although in His case, a loving and caring boss with my best interest in mind, and a good and gracious King! Thus, am I willing to turn over the reigns of my will to Him, not somewhat, or half way, but allow Him to be in control entirely? As St. Augustine said, "*If He is not Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all.*"

Q: Am I afraid of failure? (If so, remember that God understands the difficulties, and it is OK to fail as long as you tried and were obedient! Remember, Jeremiah was a big failure in the eyes of his county and world, but a great man of obedience in God's eyes!)

Q: My focus must be on Christ, not on how to disciple. I must not let the process be my doctrine, but rather, Christ!

Q: Do I confess God with my lips and deny Him in my daily life? It is not difficult to belong to a church or recite a creed, but it is hard to live the Christian life. Yet, He gives us the love, grace, and means to do so.

Q: How do I define faith? Remember, faith without action is a contradiction, and love without obedience is impossible!

As we walk the Christian life, we must be careful that in our strategies and struggles, we do not lose sight of God and His purpose. We typically try to come up with some type of short cut for success. However, in Him, there are no shortcuts. Maturity and discipleship are lifelong pursuits, and we are to always be growing and bettering ourselves through the Word, prayer, spiritual disciplines, and our Godly relationships. These are the tools. He is the means.

You may ask, *Why should I be willing to give up riches, comfort, fun and even friends to follow Christ as His disciple?* When we read the gospels, especially Luke, we are given a very compelling motivation--the salvation and blessings that Jesus gives us. These things are eternal, while what we give up are very limited and temporary. Giving up a smaller benefit for a superior one is smart and practical, both in business and in being a disciple of Christ!

If you are a church leader and feel this is just too much and you are feeling overwhelmed, remember it does not happen over night, it takes a lifetime. If you are still unsure, then consider this. One of the main reasons people leave their church is they have no real relationships there! Discipleship is the means for relationship building! We are designed for something more in life than just pursuing pleasures. That is why people who "have it all" still feel empty. God did not create any *Lone Ranger Christians*. He created us to be in community, in relationships with one another, and discipleship is the key to that community. God calls us to lift one other up. There should not be a single person in the church that does not have at least one person they can call a friend and have a relationship with outside the church campus and programs.

Take this to heart: Jesus never asked anyone to do anything without enabling them with the power to do it. Let this be you encouraging motive!

Some passages to consider on discipleship: Proverbs 18:24; Matthew 7:18-24; 19:28-30; 10:1-42; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 9:23-25; 48; Luke 14:26-27; John. 8:31; 12:20-26; John 14; 15; 1 John:5:3; 1 Corinthians 3:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:7; 1 Peter 3:15.

Remember these resources are free for you! Most ministries only sell there materials, we feel we are doing what God has called us too, by going ahead and offering the best materials possible for free and seek support for doing so. There is no obligation but please consider supporting our ministry if you

are able to do so. As these materials have cost us a tremendous amount of time effort and financial resources that have taken us years to develop for you!

Feel free to pass this around to any pastor who is overseas or on the mission field who may need it! We also have several other “Pastors Training Packs” available in various languages on: “How to Study and Teach the Bible,” “How to Lead and Manage the Church” and many more. As a missions and discipleship organization it is our call to train pastors and provide resources to Christians and Church leaders all over the world. They may printout any information we have posted, reproduce it, make the needed cultural changes and translate it. All we ask of you is to keep us in prayer, keep the name of our ministry and any copyright information on the resources, and tell other pastors what we have to offer. If anyone does translate any of our material, please let us know and give us a copy so we can make them available to others in their language and culture!

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