

## What is Discipleship?

Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16: 15-18

“As believers, we have the wonderful comfort of the instruction of the Word of God. To those who depart from it, there is little hope.”

It is reassuring that we have received the direct instruction from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Himself, to go and make disciples. While some prophecy might be obscure and difficult to interpret, the direction we are given in Scripture regarding the making of disciples is unmistakably clear.

### The Great Commission

Immediately before Jesus ascended into heaven, we read the following account:

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Mark 16:15-18

Some scholars reject this portion of Scripture. They say it was not in the original writings but added later. Others argue that the book of Mark was written before the other Gospel accounts and form the basis for them.

Even considering this controversy, we have these instructions again in the book of Matthew:

“And Jesus came 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

In this passage, Jesus specifically gave us the following information:

- He has all the authority there is.
- He is giving it to us.
- We are to use it to make disciples.
- We are to baptize disciples from every nation (tribe, tongue and people group).
- Baptism is in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- We are to teach our disciples everything He has taught us, including how to teach others.
- He is in, with and working through us.
- This activity will continue until the end of the age.

### Imago Dei (The Image of God)

The passage we have just examined is somewhat like God's original command to people, specifically the first man and woman, in Genesis 1:26-28.

"Then God said, "Let Us make man (adam/humankind) in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man (adam/humankind) in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Here we have the following divine instruction:

- God is giving us authority to rule over (have dominion over) the earth.
- We are to use it to be fruitful and multiply, each after our own kind.
- We are to tend and cultivate, bring out the best in all of God's creation.
- We are to continue doing this until God tells us to stop.
- God blesses this activity and adds His nature and character (image) to it.

Jesus often chided His disciples, telling them that His instructions are so simple, even a child can understand them.

If it is so easy, why isn't everyone doing it?

In a series I am writing called "Omega, Discipleship for the End Times", we take a deeper dive into what it really means to "make disciples." We examine the methodology of Jesus Christ Himself, look at the testimony of the early Church fathers, the examples of Paul, Peter, and others, to really understand what Jesus meant when He commanded us to 'make disciples of all nations.'" Some of that material is covered in this article.

### **Discipleship is like parenting**

"We have all been kids. Some of us are parents. It is the circle of life...."

As children, we have a responsibility to learn from our parents. During childhood, we are watching, modeling after our parents and other adults, preparing for adulthood. We 'play house.' We act out what we see our parents do, and even often say what we hear them say. It's how we grow, and how we 'grow up.'

Some of us had great parent role-models. Many of us did not. So, do some of the bad habits we observe in our parents follow us into adulthood? Of course, they do. We say, "I'm just like my father," or, "my mother always did it that way."

### **Being a parent**

As parents, we understand that our children are watching us, and that they are picking up more from what we don't say than from what we do say. We realize that 'more is caught than taught.' We try to teach our children right from wrong. Often, however, our behavior betrays the truth... we are not

perfect. At some point in our lives, we realize our parents weren't perfect either. In fact, as we observe our own bad habits showing up in our children, we have clarity about how our own parents felt when we 'acted up' in our youth.

Perhaps our children exhibit behavior that we never taught them. We realize, however, that they learned it somewhere. Some lessons we cannot teach them. All we can do is try to be good role-models and pray for the best outcome for them. As believers, we rely on the hope that if we 'train them up in the way they should go, when they are old, they will not depart from it.

### **Spiritual parenting**

Because reproduction is written into the code of our DNA, we will reproduce 'after our own kind.' If we are rebellious, there is a good likelihood that we will produce at least some rebellion in our children. If we are healthy, we will reproduce a healthy lifestyle in our kids. Not everything we experience is learned, and some outcomes depend on our personality. Overall, though, we are a product of our upbringing. You get the point.

This same principal is also true in the spiritual realm. When Creator God designed humans, He built into us a portion of His DNA. The same way He reproduces after Himself, we reproduce after ourselves. Consider the magnitude of this reality.

To a large extent, discipleship can be understood as influence. Ask yourself, "Who do I have influence over?" Chances are, these are the people you are discipling. Whether we know it or not, we are influencing other people's destiny, and their eternal future, by our own behavior and the extent that we allow God permission to 'be God' in our lives.

To the extent that we incorporate and model Christ in our own lives, we will impart Him to others. In as much as we allow Him to transform us, we will be used in the transformation of others. Therefore, it is so important that we understand who we are. We are created in the image of God.

We, as His people, have all kinds of control over how this shows up in our lives. God created us with free will. We can reject His free offer of grace, to our own peril, but also to the peril of those we are influencing. God will not violate our will, even in the matter of our eternal salvation. If this is true, how much more has He given us free-will choices in how we behave in this life? We really do have pretty much complete control over whether we believe Him or not, how much influence we allow Him to have, and how much faith in Him we will exert in any given situation. These things are not random, beloved. It matters what we believe.

If we are parents, our first disciples are probably our children. In any case, as believers, we are discipling the people who look up to us. Therefore, understand. We become like Who we look at. What we do is what we believe. People are either growing in Christlikeness because of our example, or not. We are either modeling Christ, or we are not. The weight of the outcome of all of this is eternal. Like it or not, that is the truth. God, and I, love you too much to keep this information from you. You're welcome. We are discipling people whether we know it or not. Let us be intentional about it.

## **What did Jesus do?**

Whenever I am confronted with a question about what to do next in a given situation, I look to see what Jesus did. It's not that I am so 'holy,' it's just that I understand that, given the choice between 'leaning on my own understanding,' and 'acknowledging God in all of my ways,' I am bound by wisdom to choose the latter.

When we seek the Lord regarding how to proceed with obeying His command to make disciples, we are immediately confronted with the comforting truth that He, in His earthly ministry, left us an example of how to do this. We have only to look to the Gospels to see the pattern for heavenly success!

In the Gospel of Luke, the sixth chapter, we see Jesus going up to a mountain to pray. Jesus often went "up" to pray. He could have spent all of His time with people, and, He understood that His ability to minister to them was sourced through His relationship with His Father. He even went so far as to say that He could do nothing apart from the Father! This should give us a clue as to His plan for us.... We can do nothing apart from Him.

Interestingly, as soon as Jesus came down from the mountain, we see Him choosing His twelve.

### **Synoptic Gospels**

In the Gospels, we can see the process Jesus followed as He disciplined His twelve. We call these the Synoptic Gospels, because they show how the steps He took were reflected across the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The book of John contains some of these examples, and many others.

### **Practical Application**

Without much difficulty, we can see that Jesus Christ took His disciples through a variety of opportunities for learning that included direct teaching (didactic) as well as application (practicum) sessions. Discipleship and mentorship are most successful when the mentor first explains the principal, then demonstrates the principal, then gives the disciple the opportunity to practice, offering feedback as they go. This is the method we use in discipleship as well. "I do, you watch," then "You do, I watch," then "You do." This is the basic methodology for effective discipleship.

We see the outworking of this in the early Church in the book of Acts:42-47:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This portion of Scripture make it clear that His disciples were obeying Jesus' command to continuing to teach those they were discipling everything Jesus taught them. They modeled what they saw Jesus do

when they walked with Him on the earth. Look at the fruit! The Lord was adding to their numbers daily. Let us go and do likewise.

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