

Disciples And Mentors

Introduction

It is the expectation of the Lord that we all be disciples and mentors. We are discipled first and as we mature we become mentors who disciple others. This is not an optional thing that we can decide to do or not to do. Jesus gave us the command in what we call the Great Commission, but which is really simply the commission of all believers.

Matthew 28:19-20 NASB "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."

Jesus spoke this to His close followers after His resurrection. These are the mentors who are going forth, the ones who will disciple others. They are to go to "all the nations". "Nations" here in the Greek is "ethnos" and basically means "peoples or people groups" and not a political entity that we would call a country or nation.

The mentors' primary job is to make disciples, not converts or followers. This is an active not a passive process. Once disciples are made then begins the secondary jobs for the mentors—baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded. The end result is that the disciple matures and becomes a mentor duplicating the work in others that was done in him.

Definition of Being a Disciple

Our modern institutional church system has corrupted the scriptural concept of discipleship. What is typically presented as a "discipleship program" is lessons in denominational doctrine, how to create habits of prayer and reading the Bible, and attending all functions of the Church. While this may make one a good supporter of the denomination, it does little to address the biblical requirements of discipleship.

Jesus very clearly gave us the process of being a disciple.

John 8:31-32 NASB So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue [NKJV=*abide*] in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth [*revealed truth*] will make you free."
[parenthetical added]

The steps are clear and definitive: 1) believe; 2) continue or abide in His word; 3) know the truth; 4) be made free. One becomes a true disciple of Jesus by continuing in His word. This results in one knowing the truth and becoming free. The goal of being a disciple of Jesus is being free. The

path to get to freedom is continuing in His word.

Revealed Truth

Revealed truth is experiential truth—not just *known* by the mind, but *experienced* in the heart and *applied* to your life. Revealed truth is available to anyone who is willing to walk in the Spirit. It is not available to those who bound by the desires of the world system.

Mark 4:10-12 NASB As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. (11) And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, (12) so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

In its seed format spiritual truth is hidden from those who are not following after Jesus. To those who are outside of the Kingdom, the Kingdom is a mystery; but, to those who are disciples, the mysteries of the Kingdom are revealed.

1 Corinthians 2:10 NASB (10) For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Continuing in His word causes the Holy Spirit to begin to open our understanding bringing forth revealed truth for us to apply to our life. This is what makes us free.

Make You Free

It is possible to be a believer and not be a disciple. Many of our problems are a result of our failure to "continue in His word". As a consequence, we are not set free but remain in bondage of various types, which prevent us from maturing or from accomplishing the work that the Lord has assigned to us.

Bondage must be broken in our lives if we are to do the Father's will. We must be free in order to be obedient to all that the Lord requires of us. There can be no hindrances binding us to the world or to our self desires that prevent us from fulfilling the Lord's purpose for our lives. We have a picture of this in the raising of Lazarus from the grave.

John 11:43-44 NASB When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (44) The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus *said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

This is a physical picture of a spiritual truth. We who are dead in sin are individually called into life by Jesus. However, we come forth from our tombs wrapped in grave clothes—the stinking trappings of our former life. These hinder our walk in our new life. The hands are bound and hinder us from doing the work of the Lord. The feet are bound and hinder us from going where

the Lord calls us to go. The face is covered, hindering us from seeing and speaking clearly. Jesus commanded those with Him to loose Lazarus from his wrappings and bindings. He did not do it Himself! Jesus calls us into life but it is the fellow followers of Jesus that help us rid ourselves of the bindings of the former life. This is the primary objective of discipleship—freedom to do what the Lord requires.

Applied Definition

General definition of discipleship: one who is under the discipline of another for instruction to produce maturity.

A disciple is similar to a "journeyman" or "apprentice" but in spiritual terms, it is more than learning skills or a trade. It is learning a new way of life.

Christian definition of discipleship: one who is living in the way of the Lord, showing someone else how to live in the way of the Lord. (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9,23)

Discipleship is not *information* but *life formation*. Passing information from one mind to another is education not discipleship. I Cor. 8:1 says that knowledge puffs up but love edifies. Love and relationship demand discipline. (Heb. 12:1-11; Prov. 13:24)

Requirements For Discipleship

The institutional church has given us the idea that there really aren't any requirements for discipleship except for the willingness to attend a few instructional classes. Scripturally this is ridiculous. As described in the aforementioned verses, the first two requirements are easy but they are still requirements—1) believe; 2) continue in His word. As we do this the Holy Spirit will begin to reveal to us some of the other requirements.

Luke 14:26 NASB "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.

Luke 14:27 NASB "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:33 NASB "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

These three verses contain clear requirements—if you don't do this, then you cannot be My disciple. First, the love and desire for the Lord must be the primary focus of our hearts even over those who are closest to us, which includes our family and even ourselves. Second, we must carry our own cross. No one else can do it for us. This is where we die daily to self will and do the Lord's will. Third, we are completely free from the pull of worldly possessions. What we have belongs to the Lord.

Goals of Discipleship

Besides the preliminary goal of being free, the process of discipleship has several definite end goals.

Romans 8:29 NASB For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB (18) But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

The true end goal is that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. Jesus was the "Word made flesh" and His goal is to make the Word flesh in us. Jesus was conformed to the image of the Father. He said that if you had seen Him, you had seen the Father. We are to be so conformed to the image of Jesus, that it could be said that if you have seen us then you have seen Jesus.

This process of conforming to the image of Jesus is the *first goal* of discipleship. This could be summed up in one word: **maturity**.

John 17:20-23 NASB "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; (23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

Jesus prayed the Father that we all would be one. The goal then is *unity*. He went on to say "...that the world may know that You sent me...". Our unity is a testimony to the world of the Lordship of Jesus.

Unity is not *uniformity*. There is diversity within the body, yet we all are directed by the head. No one stands alone; but each stands with the other members of the body.

The *second goal* of discipleship is **unity**. The power of God comes with unity. When the disciples were all together in one accord in the one place in Acts 2:1,2, then the Holy Spirit came like a mighty rushing wind. Later in the chapter (v.14) Peter stands with the eleven (unity is evidenced by the leadership) and preaches his great sermon and about three thousand were added to them. Out of unity came **ministry**, which is the *third goal* of discipleship.

Jesus said in John 15:8 "...bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." What type of fruit are we to bear? God made everything that it should reproduce after its own kind (Gen. 1:24,25). You don't plant peas and harvest string beans. Then, the fruit of a disciple would be more disciples. This is the *final goal* of discipleship!

Discipleship produces **maturity**, which produces **unity**, which produces **ministry**, which produces **disciples**. This is the normal order of events as we learn to walk with the Lord. Many times our problem is the fact that we push ourselves or the Institutional Church pushes us into various types of ministry before we have learned maturity and unity. The result is one of confusion, backbiting, paranoia, ineffectiveness and burnout.

Jesus—Our Example of Discipleship

Jesus had three phases to His life. The first phase was from birth to about age 12. Jesus was like any other child during this phase.

Luke 2:40 NASB The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Phase two of Jesus' life began at age 12 when He and His parents went up to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover.

Luke 2:41-52 NASB Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. (42) And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; (43) and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, (44) but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. (45) When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. (46) Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. (47) And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. (48) When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." (49) And He said to them, "**Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?**" (50) But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. (51) And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all *these* things in her heart. (52) And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Notice that "house" is italicized in verse 49, which means that the translators added it, supposedly to help the reader understand. The King James Version translates this as "about My Father's business". The literal rendering of the words is "the things of My Father". Even though it was not yet time for Jesus to enter into the fulfillment of the plans of the Father, He had a sense of His purpose as dictated by the will of the Father.

Jesus was "...*about His Father's business*" or "*the things of His Father*". Yet, He returned to Nazareth with His parents and was subject to them and he increased in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and men. From age twelve until about age thirty, we have no record of Jesus and his doings. Why? I believe that this was the period of discipleship for Jesus. He was discipled

by the Father.

Isaiah 50:4-7 NASB The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens *Me* morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. (5) The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient Nor did I turn back. (6) I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (7) For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

The discipleship process is what teaches us how to speak the right word at the right time to those who need it. We learn this through a repetitive process, morning by morning. This opens our ears to hear what God requires of us.

Jesus entered phase three of His life at age thirty when He was baptized in the Jordan. This phase included his public ministry and the revelation of Who He was. This final phase also completed the Father's business. In John 17 verse 4 Jesus is praying to the Father and says "... *having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.*" What work was finished? This was before the cross; before the "It is finished" statement when Jesus gave up the spirit. I believe that the work that was accomplished was the preparation of His disciples for ministry. Jesus had built leaders that would reproduce His ministry!

Although Jesus was God in the flesh, He did not live His life as God but as a man filled and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:5-11 NASB (5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. (8) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (9) For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He emptied himself and took upon Himself the form of a man and as such was tempted in all ways like us. He said we could be like Him. Not as God, but as man filled with the Holy Spirit and that we could do the works that He did, and even greater works (John 14:12).

As Jesus moved on with the Father's business after His baptism, His ministry was expressed in three ways:

- A public ministry to the multitudes (gift ministry),
- A teacher/disciple ministry to some,

→ A shepherd/sheep ministry to the twelve.

As we mature in Christ, we become more like Him. Our ministry also becomes more like His ministry. The Lord gifts us in our calling, with the Holy Spirit dividing out the Gifts of the Spirit to us as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11).

As we then, full of the Spirit, go about the Lord's business, there will be many that we minister to in various ways. Out of those who receive ministry from us, there will be some who will want to learn from us. We become a teacher or a mentor to them and they become disciples to us. As a mentor, we also become an example of the things that we teach. We take on the responsibility of leadership. Then, we can say with Paul "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*" (1 Cor. 11:1).

If we are to be mentors that disciple others we need to preach and teach the same Christ that the early believers did. These days in evangelical circles, a person can hear many people preaching such things as "receive Jesus," "trust Jesus," or "ask Jesus into your life." These things are true and right and good. However, this is not the whole story.

What seems to be missing from this kind of preaching is that when we receive Jesus, we receive Him for what He is - King and Lord. When the first disciples preached, they preached the Lord Jesus Christ. They proclaimed a Christ who wanted full allegiance, who asked for a total commitment of the rest of their lives and who required a complete separation from what was not in His Kingdom. They did not overemphasize what Christ could do for the people but they announced what the people's responsibility was toward God. As mentors we must do the same.