

DISCIPLESHIP:

toward a definition & some goals.

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Some of the last words of Christ contain the commission to His followers to go into all the world and make more disciples. To be a disciple of Christ is to be a follower of Him; that is, a learner of His Word and an imitator of His ways.

DISCIPLESHIP is the progressive journey of growing in Christlikeness until every believer is presented completely mature in Christ.

1. CONTINUAL.

Discipleship must be continual; that is, it must be an ongoing pursuit of every believer. The author of Hebrews says that believers must encourage one another day after day. The Christian life is not a momentary phenomenon; it is a relentless ambition. To follow Christ means that one surrenders to Christ and His Lordship and continually, zealously, resolutely, and single-mindedly grows in Christlikeness. To grow does not happen alone; it happens in Christian community, with the Body of Christ. It is impossible for a Christian to grow on his own just as it is impossible for a limb in a body to live and thrive on its own unattached from the rest of the body. It is impossible. So, the journey of Christlikeness is a continuous resolve and a constant pursuit. If a child of God wants to grow into the character of Christ, he must live a life of continuous discipleship following after Christ and growing with Christ's people.

2. INTENTIONAL.

Growth does not happen in neutral. God's people must thrust themselves into an intentional battle of conformity to Christ. Meeting with God's people just does not merely happen. It requires sacrifice, intentionality, focus. The children of God who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ must make it their resolve to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ so that they may serve Him by serving His body, the Church. And in so doing, they will fellowship with other believers, shed old sinful habits and reflect more of the glorious character of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Discipleship requires intentionality. Just as a lump of clay does not become a beautiful vase by happenstance; it requires care, skill, precision, time, and intentionality from the potter. So it is in the life of the believer. To grow, as earthen vessels, into a glorious piece of God's workmanship, believers must devote themselves to every good deed by intentionally focusing on their heart, their mind, their passions, and their lifestyle. Godly growth never happens automatically; but with intentionality and with the power of the Spirit, God's children can grow more into the image of God and reflect more of the character of Christ!

3. BIBLICAL.

The Christian life is shaped by one Book: Scripture. Nothing so owns the man of God like the Word of God. Because the Word of God is the very words of God, the believer gives to Scripture the same reverence that God deserves. Thus, Christian growth cannot happen in isolation from the Truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. Godliness comes with knowledge of, meditation on, and application of the Word of God. Those who have been redeemed must let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly and believers must speak of these things with regularity. This must not only happen in the public setting of corporate worship but even in the home environment with the smaller family units. Every aspect of life must be guided and governed by the authoritative Word of God. To live the godly life, the instruction manual is found in one book, the Bible. It is utterly impossible for a person to grow in Christ who separated himself from the Word of Christ. But when believers come together to study the Word together, to open

the Word and read it together, and to search it and mine out its glorious riches together, and to search the breadth and length and entirety of the Word together, then Christian growth occurs at unprecedented speed. A husband must lead his wife biblically. A father must lead his children biblically. A pastor must lead his flock biblically. Older women must lead younger women biblically. Elder men must lead younger men biblically. Discipleship occurs when the Bible is sought, spoken, savored and submitted to and applied by the power of the Spirit.

4. PRAYERFUL.

To grow in Christ means that a person will pray to Christ. Christ is God and deserves all worship. He is the Lamb who was slain for sinners by bearing their wrath and becoming their Curse. Growth requires communication. To excel at a job, one communicates with someone else in the workplace who helps by providing feedback. Similarly, to excel at the Christian life, one must commune and communicate with God to please Him more and reflect Him better. To pray is to shatter the stronghold of Satan. To pray with others is to provide ample opportunities for growth, for thanksgiving, for petition, for confession, for accountability, and for praise! And when God hears and answers those prayers, and the great things that God has done is testified one to another, thanksgivings abound to the glory of God and resulting in the joy of His people! This is why discipling relationships between Christians should include a time of prayer. Paul often told the churches to pray for him. And often those prayers revolved around the believers petitioning God to grant Paul an open door for the gospel and that Paul would speak truth with boldness. Let believers gather regularly and pray fervently so that God, who is always present, will hear and act!

5. REPRODUCING.

Christians meet to grow in Christ. When others come to faith, an opportunity exists to welcome that new believer in to the discipling relationship. Or, after a few believers meet together for a season looking at the Word of God together, and when they complete their engaged period of study together, they can separate to each find a new person to disciple in the Word thus reproducing themselves and making more disciples. This is intentional, bold, reproducing discipleship. Again, to grow in Christ means that one exert effort, energy, time, and resources to grow in Christ and help others grow in Christ. The biblical admonitions often reflect this very truth. Take what you have heard and pass it on to faithful men who can teach others, is what Paul told Timothy to do. Christ told His disciples to make more disciples. Thus, they must reproduce themselves. Follow me as I follow Christ. In so far as I imitate Christ, you imitate me. Come my children listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord! Parents must teach their children to fear God and to obey God so that the children learn the gospel, embrace the gospel, and love Christ fervently. True discipleship is reproductive and always fresh since there are always new believers in which to invest.

6. VULNERABLE.

Christ made Himself vulnerable with His disciples. He loved them dearly and they saw Him in His weakest moments and in His most sorrowful seasons. Nevertheless, He remained faithful at discipling them. So it is with Christians today. Christianity is authentic, real, and not sugarcoated. There is no true fabricated, easy, effortless Christianity whereby one simply slides into heaven. Everyone must strive to enter the kingdom and make violent war against sin — his own personal sins in his life. To refuse to engage in this war is to remain a nonbeliever. To not fight sin is to become friends with the Devil himself. To love the world is to make war with God. To live like the world is to prove that one has no interest in God, Godliness, or the glory of Christ. So when believers meet together and honestly and openly express their griefs, their struggles, their afflictions, their pursuits, their prayer needs, this vulnerability enhances growth in godliness. Believers walk together on the journey toward the heavenly city. And walking together entails trials, sorrows, joys, and hardships. Being willing to openly share these with another person can take a friendship deeper so that hearts are knit closer together rooted in Christ and established in love. Christ made Himself vulnerable with His disciples. He openly and honestly spoke with them. Believers should do the same with other believers.