

Discipleship Notes

A picture of discipleship is just north of San Francisco in the Muir Woods—an ancient cathedral of towering Giant Sequoias that stretch into the sky. These giants reach up to **311 feet**, some with trunk diameters wider than **29 feet**, the largest living things on Earth. Some have stood for **3,200 years**, weathering fierce storms and winds, even earthquakes that many modern buildings couldn't withstand. You'd think their strength comes from deep roots. It doesn't. Their roots reach only **4 feet** into the soil—shockingly shallow for such colossal trees. An interesting fact is they never grow alone.

Sequoias thrive in **groves**, their roots **interlock** underground like clasped hands. This hidden network—spreads wide, not deep—and has anchored them through centuries of challenging conditions and oppressive weather. Their secret isn't in the power or might of any 1 individual, it's from being **connected** and relying on each other.

It is in Matthew we find Jesus announcing His supreme authority over heaven and earth; then Jesus gave His last recorded command in the gospel of MATT to His followers:

In **Acts 1** after Jesus ascended to heaven the disciples returned to Jerusalem from Mount Olivet and went up into the upper room where they were staying and they all continued with one accord, in prayer and supplication.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether about 120),

The strength of the church lies in our obedience to Christ's commands. This obedience helps keep the body of Christ firmly knitted together with the same mission of the 120 disciples in that upper room.

“Go and make disciples.” Don't skim over these words or take them lightly. These words are not an opinion or a suggestion, a choice or an option if you are a Christian this is your personal duty. It was paid for by blood, sealed in the resurrection and given to you in order to equip others.

- a. God never intended for your salvation to be the end; it's a beginning.
- b. After salvation you become a conduit for God's, life changing gospel.
- c. enabling you to help others grow strong interconnected roots so the body of Christ can stand together through life's storms.

God was very intentional about discipleship, that is why it is a command.

How many times does the word Christian appears in the bible... only 3 times. **Acts 11:26, 26:28** and **1 Peter 4:16**. The 2 times it is mentioned in the book of Acts, which present the history of the term, it is used as a derogatory slur. Those who rejected Christ displayed their disgust for His followers by calling them “Little Christs”. It wasn't until years after His ascension that the term was used positively.

- Why is this fact so important?

Because Christ didn't come to make Christians: He came to make disciples.

- We are never commanded to make Christians, it is not suggested anywhere in the bible and there is no example of how to make a Christian that we can follow, because only God can fill someone with the Holy Spirit... only Jesus can save people.

Romans 10:14 underscores the crucial role of evangelism:

We should be compelled to share the good news with unbelieving family, friends, co-workers, and anyone willing to listen. Paul's rhetorical questions in Romans highlights the fact that people won't hear the gospel unless it is preached to them—it's aligned with and the first step of the Great Commission.

God is interested in reproduction. In fact, His first command to mankind was not to be spiritual, or moral citizens, to save the planet or protect the animals. God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply **Gen 1:28**.

- What God commanded Adam & Eve to do physically: Jesus commands each and every believer to do spiritually; To be fruitful and multiply.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

I mentioned the word Christian appears in the New Testament 3 x but the term disciple appears 269 times in the NT.

- We are commanded to make disciples, and It was revealed through Jesus what God's discipleship plan would look like. He gave us written instructions, patterns and examples to follow.

But There is a problem in the church today, we tend to focus on the evangelism and then drop the ball when it comes to discipleship. We want people to hear the word of God, lead them in a prayer and believe we are done.

- I remember When I first received Christ, I was hungry for His word, but for several months I wandered aimlessly in my Christian life uncertain of how to proceed other than going to church attending a bible study and eventually Lisa and I found a home fellowship.

This pattern is repeated all the time. Countless souls accept Christ during altars calls at concerts or Christian events and at church's—they pray the sinner's prayer, raise their hands, step forward for an altar call— and are instructed to go:

- live for Christ,
- deny sin
- and find a good church to faithfully attend.

1 of the problems with a new or immature believer is they will continue to believe what they already believe...

- purgatory,
- people are inherently born good,
- we become angels when we die
- junk from evolution, etc. etc.

It's not until our beliefs are challenged that we start to grow and learn the truth of God's word and how it applies to our lives. That is what changes the way we think and act.

Many Christians enter into the family of God and are abandoned as orphans.

- It takes them years to get off the milk and grow to where they are eating meat because the only discipleship offered is from the pulpit on Sundays.

It is sad when new believers who desire a relationship with Christ are sent out the doors completely clueless about following Jesus and unaware of how to cultivate intimacy with their Lord and savior.

- Especially when we are given complete instructions how to avoid all of these problems.

Sometimes, the right solutions are found later, using the same instructions that were initially ignored. These instructions pertain to discipleship.

Cover what discipleship isn't:

Discipleship isn't an elective separate from the church's main purpose it was never intended to be one of the many programs.

- It's not an event. It isn't a class. Discipleship is a fluid and flexible process; it is not static
- Jesus never intended discipleship to be a ministry option or simply one of the boxes to check off as a Christian.
- Discipleship is not counseling:
 - Biblical wisdom for personal problems is certainly an aspect of discipleship
 - but counseling sessions for personal problems does not define discipleship.

The great commission is designed to be a team effort, it is not the job for a select few like Pastors, Sunday school teachers or elders.

Don't be fooled into thinking only those trained should do the important work of discipleship. That kind of thinking leads to an ineffective church that is not using the gifts given to every believer, it abandons the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

- If you are not currently a disciple or helping to disciple someone, it's time to take responsibility and use the gifts God has given you for His service.
 - Don't think the task of making disciples is for pastors, elders, or other leaders of the church only.
 - If you find yourself saying that discipleship isn't one of your gifts, remember that you're missing an essential part of Jesus' command for all Christians.
 - Discipleship is a priority for everyone, not just a select few.
- Ministry is the pathway to maturity not the other way around, **Eph 4:11-12** tells us that maturity happens through ministry not vice versa.

Eph 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

If you are not growing spiritually, you may be sliding backward or at best are static in your spiritual growth. The work of ministry is designed to keep us from being stagnant.

- Every one of us should be closer to Christ today than we were a year ago, or even a month ago because stagnant is not a term to describe the followers of Jesus Christ.
- Ask yourself, are you growing?
- A Christian without a ministry is a contradiction

So, let's talk about what biblical Discipleship is:

- A Disciple is a learner, one who is set on growing and developing.
- Discipleship is life on life— it is about living life with others.
 - It involves intentionally helping believers understand Jesus' teachings and encouraging them to practice His actions.
 - This process happens through accountable relationships, strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
 - The goal is to create faithful followers of Christ who will continue to make an impact that bears fruit for centuries to come.

It is a true statement that when people don't know what to do, they don't do anything. We need to understand God's plan and work according to His plan if we want to be successful in our walk.

The Great Commission is significant: because it was spoken by Jesus and documented by all the Gospel writers showing its importance in early Christianity, and the book of Acts illustrates how this mission energized the church from its inception.

There is Clarification of Responsibilities: it doesn't create new obligations for Christians; it clarifies the mission's urgency and importance.

- We cannot hold others responsible for our spiritual growth. We are responsible to read our bibles, to ask questions when we run into something we don't understand no matter how long we have been a Christian,

The great commission is a Unique Command: that stands out because it was given after Jesus' resurrection, making it special among His instructions to His disciples.

- We have a shrinking window of time to understand the importance of what God has called each and every one of us to do, and it starts with our obedience to the command given to make disciples.

In nearly every aspect of life we learn specific skills from someone else who has already developed these skills.

- Likewise, when we decide what vocation appeals to us... say if you wanted to become an electrician you go to school to develop a specific skill set, then after an apprenticeship where you are working side by side with a more experienced electrician who is a mentor, in time you test for your electrical certification or license.
- Discipleship works much the same way--- before a person can make a disciple, they must first be a disciple.

1. Let's look at the models we have from the bible.

Of all the options Jesus had to spread the greatest message to the world, the redemption of mankind He chose to entrust it to 12 men, 1 of which failed. As the creator and redeemer, He made us partners in the vital task of transforming new believers into passionate devoted followers of Christ.

The bible does not present any 1 on 1 discipling **relationships** between Jesus and anyone. Jesus met with the woman at the well, Nicodemus and others, but these were isolated meetings not an established pattern of discipleship.

I am not saying 1 on 1 discipleship is wrong or unscriptural, it is not an established pattern of discipleship because it is inefficient.

Think of it this way: what if for 3 years Jesus disciplined only Judas? You get the picture. Jesus didn't invest in just 1 man He invested in a group of 12 men teaching us the importance of the group in discipleship, the **multiplication** model is what Jesus used.

- spending time with just 1 person in discipleship is = **addition**, if you have 1 person mature in a year then they train 1 and you train another at the end of 2 years there will be 3 new mature believers.
- Jesus taught **multiplication** If you equip 3 people in 1 year and they all train 3 people to maturity in 2 years you will have 12 mature believers. A much better use of resources.

Jesus also showed us that there are times when we pour into select individuals for intensive training like Jesus did when He:

- Intentionally selected three disciples—Peter, James, and John—for exclusive, intensive training on five distinct occasions.
 - And all 3 ended up being key leaders in the early years of the church.
 - These training moments were used to uniquely equip them and shape them for leadership.
 - These key situations highlight Jesus' approach to a focused small group discipleship:
1. The Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36**): Jesus revealed His divine glory to Peter, James, and John, deepening their understanding of His identity.
 2. The Raising of Jairus' Daughter (**Mark 5:37-43; Luke 8:51-56**): Jesus allowed only these three to witness this miracle, showing them He has power over death.
 3. The Garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42**): Jesus brought them closer during His moment of anguish, teaching them about prayer and surrender.
 4. The Healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law (**Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39**): They were present, observing Jesus' compassion and authority in a personal setting.
 5. The Mount of Olives Discourse (**Mark 13:3-37**): Jesus shared private teachings about the future, preparing them for leadership.
- ❖ Another model has been passed down through the centuries, and we are the current link in the chain described in **2 Tim 2:2**. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Jesus taught Paul who taught Timothy who committed to faithful men who taught others who have now taught us. If we fail to follow the commands of Christ, we break the chain, eliminating workers that would have disciplined others which directly impacts the resources future believers will have.

That's why **1 Cor 3:9** Paul called us God's fellow workers; we have a job to do.

2nd Timothy gives us a model of discipleship based on 3 relationships:

- They are an older and wiser believer who you learn from = a Paul
- A friend who teaches, encourages and holds you accountable = a Barnabas
- A young believer whom you are investing in = a Timothy
- These relationships allow others to speak into your life while allowing you to speak into the lives of others.

Which is what Proverbs 27:17 tells us: Iron sharpens Iron and 1 man sharpens another.

The concept of learning directly through the expertise and experience of others is the foundation of how Jesus taught when He used the term disciple. He made His disciples fellow workers.

- a. The goal of everyone being disciplined is to become a mentor; to multiply, make other disciples.
- b. Basically, the student is to become the teacher.
- c. It was in Christ's heart to model discipleship and instituted it so that you are not learning only for yourself. You are learning for the person whom you will mentor in following Jesus.

Fortunately for us, Jesus didn't leave discipleship to chance, He was intentional and calculated from the beginning.

- Another model of discipleship that Jesus used many have recognized as a clear, four-step process still used to train people effectively today:

1. **Jesus ministered while the disciples watched.**
 - Jesus taught crowds (**Mark 1:21-22**), healed the sick (**Mark 1:29-34**), and cast out demons (**Mark 1:39**) as the disciples observed.
2. **Jesus allowed the disciples to assist Him in ministry.**
 - Feeding the 5,000—the disciples distributed the loaves and fish under Jesus' direction (**John 6:5-13**).
3. **The disciples ministered with Jesus' assistance.**
 - Jesus sent the 12 out two by two to preach, heal, and cast out demons; He empowered and instructed them first (**Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6**).
 - After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of Him, 2 by 2, into every town and place where He Himself was about to go. (**Luke 10:1**)
4. **Jesus observed the disciples as they ministered to others.**
 - After their mission, the disciples returned and reported to Jesus what they had done (**Luke 9:10; Mark 6:30**).

Jesus showed us how to apply the wisdom of Solomon when he paired His disciples together and sent them out:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two *are* better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. **10** For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls, For *he has* no one to help him up. **11** Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm *alone*? **12** Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken

2. How do we accomplish discipleship is outlined in **Matthew 28:19** Going, baptizing and making disciples.
 - **Go;** is the missional aspect. Every believer is to participate in taking the gospel to others.
 - **Baptize;** is the relational aspect, what makes us family. Every believer should announce their relationship to Christ and His people through the symbolic act of baptism.
 - **Make disciples;** this is the learning aspect. We are all to teach others about Jesus and how to follow Him.

Discipleship creates an atmosphere of fellowship and encouragement through an environment designed for accountability which requires:

- Confidentiality
- Confrontation
- Confession
- Compassion

Which is why men disciple men and women disciple women also why a smaller group is best suited for discipleship.

Discipleship is to help you grow your relationship with Christ helping you to

- Understanding the life changing power of prayer
- Why the memorization of scripture is important
- How to read and apply God's word for personal growth before teaching others
- Leading us to be equipped to Evangelizing others

Discipleship helps you build a solid defense for your faith

- Building strong spiritual roots so you don't become one of the seeds spoken of in the parable receiving the word of God but never growing, never bearing fruit for Him because of a shallow commitment and the love for the things of this world.

Sermons,

- bible studies
- and home fellowships
- exist for the purpose of personal growth and fellowship with the underlying objective of evangelism but cannot offer the intimate relationships that true discipleship can.

When we fulfill the purpose of discipleship, first we are conformed to the image of Christ then help others to do the same.

Paul said in his letter to the Roman church **Romans 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The word transformed is in the present tense, signifying a gradual ongoing change. But what is surprising is that the word is in the passive voice meaning God is the author and finisher of the change.

Jesus didn't hold back; He wasn't trying to spare anyone's feelings; when it came to discipleship. He was blunt and crystal clear.

- Following Him is a choice
- It requires sacrifice

There is a price involved with being a disciple of Christ:

Luke 14:26, NKJV "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Our love for Jesus should be greater than our love for anyone or anything else.

Luk 9:23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

This does not mean you deny yourself a dessert, or a comfortable pair of shoes for the cheaper pair, and taking up your cross is not having to deal with an overbearing wife, husband or boss, it's not some burden that people say I guess this is my cross to bear, deny yourself, in context with take up your cross daily and follow me means to die to yourself, understand it's not all about you humble yourself and live according to Jesus' example.

Luke 14:33 likewise, whoever of you does not forsake, (sacrifice) all that he has cannot be My disciple.

What is most important to you? Or, put differently what do you put before Jesus. If you are knowingly entering into sin: is your mind on asking forgiveness later and diving right in or do you pause and contemplate what you love more—Jesus or that sin?

It's worth asking do you call yourself a Christian and live your life as you always have or do consider yourself a disciple and are committed to your growing relationship with Christ.

Can you imagine standing before God and 1 of the criteria you are being evaluated by for a crown is your disciples... The amount of effort you put into helping mature other believers.

What I want you to take away from today is, we are all commanded to make disciples, there are no courses to take, no tests to pass and no hoops to jump through.

Discipleship isn't a program or event; it's a way of life. It's not for a limited time, but for our whole life. Discipleship isn't for beginners alone; it's for all believers for every day of their life. Discipleship isn't just one of the things the church does; it is what the church does. – Bill Hull

Joh 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.