

The Life of a Disciple

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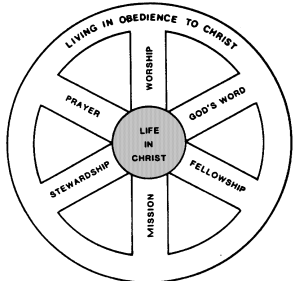
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Discipleship Series

INTRODUCTION

Over 2000 years ago God sent his son Jesus to this earth with the innocence and purity of a newborn baby. The Scriptures tells us that, “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:52) As Jesus came into adulthood he began his public ministry to fulfill the Heavenly Father’s purpose for him – to bring God’s people back into right relationship with their creator through the forgiveness of their sins. How did Jesus go about fulfilling this mission?

It wasn’t how most of us might think. He didn’t strategize a huge evangelistic campaign or implement new programs or outreach plans. He didn’t fill stadiums or even preach a public sermon. No, he began much smaller. The plan of salvation for the whole world began with individuals and the simple words, “Come, follow me.” (Mark 1:17) Jesus began his public ministry by the calling of men who had the faith to follow his lead. One by one he called them out from their jobs, their families, their hometowns and their old lives. He called them into a new life with a new purpose. He called them to be disciples. A disciple is defined as “a follower or adherent.” The biblical meaning is “a learner or imitator” and carries the idea of apprenticeship. Jesus told them to follow his example and become like him. Then he spent the next 3 years living amongst them, pouring himself into them teaching them what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. Then he sent them out to make new disciples. (Matthew 28:18-20) God’s plan of salvation for the world was to win our hearts and lives person by person and that plan has not changed in 2000 years.



Today we are continuing our series on discipleship. We’ve been looking at the Christian life using the illustration of an old time wagon wheel. Each spoke represents a specific discipline of the Christian’s life that needs to be in balance for the wheel to keep turning properly. We started this discipleship series focusing on the hub of the wheel.

Every wheel starts at the hub. The purpose of the wheel is to move something from one place to another. The hub connects the wheel to the object it is supposed to move. The hub of our wheel represents our life in Christ. In looking at this topic, last week we talked about our identity as Christians. In other words, who we become once we come into relationship with Jesus Christ through faith. We talked about how having your sins forgiven is the key to becoming a

Christian yet it is only the beginning of a relationship and new life in Christ. Our identity comes from not so much “who we are” but “whose we are”. Through faith we become adopted children of God. We find our identity, acceptance, value and purpose by belonging to God. As his adopted children we gain the rights and privileges of heirs. As God’s children our inheritance is righteousness, holiness and purity.

Today we are going to continue in the hub and look at our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ called men to follow him and be his disciples all those years ago, he is still calling you and I today. So, what does it mean to be a disciple?

DISCIPLESHIP IS A PROCESS. Following Jesus’ teachings and example as laid out for us in the words of the Bible is not something we can attain or master in the short run. It is not simply a format or program you can follow. There are a lot of “self help” and “how to” manuals in the bookstores today that teach people to do things, but being a disciple is deeper and more intensive than the mastery of information and methods.

The process of discipleship takes a long time. Everyone who chooses to follow Jesus comes to him with their own set of experiences and issues. There is no one step formula or pattern to lay over a person’s life to quickly and simply reshape them into the likeness of Jesus. Discipleship is first about “being” and then secondly about “doing”. It begins first with “being a disciple” which is to learn, to study, to follow, to imitate and to know God and his attributes deeply and internally in our hearts, minds and spirits. To desire, crave and strive to know God intimately and above all else is the first part of discipleship. The apostle Paul wrote of this in Philippians 2:7-8.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

To develop this kind of deep, selfless love, longing and relationship takes time. Becoming like Jesus in his attitudes, character and actions is a life long process of seeking, learning, imitating and transformation.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT To be disciples of Jesus we need to develop the attitudes of Christ. This is an inner being thing. Our attitudes are shaped and formed by our character, the kind of people we are. If we want to become more like Christ, we need to take on the character and attitude of Jesus. So what does this attitude adjustment look like? Galatians 5:23-25 tells us that it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us that allows us to take on the attitudes and character of Christ and is the evidence of God’s inner work in our hearts as his disciples.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such

things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

The character of Christ was shown by the fruit of the Holy Spirit in his life. It was Jesus’ character and attitudes that motivated his actions. So it must be with us as his disciples today. Our attitudes (based on Christ-like character and the fruit of the Spirit in us) will move us to make outward behavioral, relational and lifestyle changes. As we change internally through character and attitude growth it will reflect outwardly through our actions. It will move us forward from “being” disciples to fulfilling our purpose to also go out and “make” disciples.

ACTION PLAN. What’s inside is reflected on the outside. Our actions will reveal what’s going on inside of our hearts and minds. For example, having a submissive attitude will show itself with obedience to God’s will. Humility will evidence itself with care and concern for others. A heart filled with God’s love will reach out in service to others. As this process takes place in our lives it is the plan of God unfolding in and through us.

Being a disciple of Christ means to keep a focus on what we do with our lives day by day. It means to have a burning desire to please God and bring glory to him. This was the priority of Jesus while he was here on earth. Listen to Jesus’ prayer to the Heavenly Father in John 17:4.

“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”

What was it that Jesus did that brought glory to God the Father? It is described in the rest of John 17, but I’ll summarize some of it here: Jesus revealed God to those whom the Father provided, he spoke God’s words, prayed, shared all with God, wanted God’s blessing and protection on those who would follow after him.

To bring glory to God people must see Christ in us. Disciples live in such a way that people see reflected in their actions the character and attitudes of Christ. The most effective way to “make” a disciple for God is to “be” an authentic disciple of God.

CONCLUSION

Yes, God is still in the disciple making business today. He is still calling men, women, boys and girls to “Come, follow me.” The life of a disciple is a costly venture. If we are to be Christ’s disciples we must become learners, followers and apprentices imitating Jesus’ attitudes and doing the actions he did. This is not quick nor easy. Samuel L. Brengle, a Salvation Army officer and Holiness teacher said, “I am a constant student in God’s school, the University of Hard Knocks. I have forgotten much of my Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but I will never forget the lessons I have learned in God’s school. It is here that moral fiber is

developed.” It takes a lifetime of commitment, diligence, perseverance and faithfulness. It requires submission, humility and sacrifice. But is it the life you were created to live and it is the only way to be who you were created to be and find fulfillment. Jesus said in Mark 8:34-37

“...If you want to come after me, you must say no to yourself. You must take your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will lose it. If you lose your life for me and for the good news, you will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world but lose your soul? Or what can you trade for your soul?”

The life of a disciple is the life that glorifies God and satisfies the soul.

How about you this morning? Have you answered the call? Are you following Christ in attitude and action today? Today you can take the first step or another step along the path of discipleship as you put your faith in Jesus and follow his lead.