

Discipleship Defined

The Greek word for “disciple” is *mathetes*, a learner. Specifically, it is learning by use and *practice*. A disciple doesn’t just follow, or hear; a disciple *learns*, and *applies*.

Discipleship isn’t taught in a classroom; it’s learned in the field. It can’t be imposed; it must be submitted to. It isn’t a matter of the mind, but of the heart. It doesn’t come by hearing, but by imitation. It isn’t passive, but intentional. It isn’t a matter of wanting, but of resolve. It’s not just participation, but commitment. It isn’t an event or a technique; it’s a life-long practice and struggle. It isn’t private and isolated; it’s corporate and public. It isn’t what we acquire, but what we are given. It isn’t something we seek, but what we’re called to. It isn’t what we do for ourselves, but what we do for others. It isn’t learning to become better and greater, but purer and lesser. It isn’t to improve our fruit, but to produce a larger crop. It’s not about conquering ourselves or our fears; it’s about surrendering them. It isn’t temporal and passing, but eternal and lasting. What changes isn’t external adornment, but internal character. It won’t earn us wealth; it will likely cost us everything we have.

We don’t discipline ourselves for show, yet what is produced must be displayed. Its light isn’t meant to be hidden, but to guide and to influence. What it yields isn’t a “better me,” but a clearer image of Christ. Discipleship is about having Christ reproduced in us and in others *interactively*. What we draw from the well in our private devotions will express itself in our service to others. What is tested in our service to others will impact our private devotions. This is how our minds are renewed in Christ. It is a vertical and horizontal interaction that dynamically alters and transforms us. It forces us to be patient with one another as we learn from God, practice what we have been given for ourselves, and then teach one another from personal experience instead of hearsay. We are all striving to imitate and to exemplify. It’s hard, and it’s humbling. We have to be free to fail in the short term if we are to succeed in the long term. And so we need to be willing to forgive and to restore one another. We need to be compassionate and empathetic as we recognize our weaknesses in others. We need to be humble and teachable as we draw upon one another’s strengths. We need to be diligent and persevering to pass on what we have been taught of God.

And what we are passing on isn’t capabilities or skills, but a deeper relationship with God. What we acquire on the journey isn’t just knowledge of ourselves, but a fuller knowledge of God. As we learn more of him, we learn more of who he made us to be. In this way, we begin to partake of the divine nature. We tangibly experience and express the presence, majesty, and love of God in our lives. As we do so in increasing measure, we increasingly glorify the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are one in us, and we in them. Our great hope and desire is to be presented to God holy, blameless, and joyous on That Day. We are a royal priesthood, a holy people, and we are God’s precious possession.

In a way, discipleship is all about ownership. And ownership in the kingdom is a corporate affair. The Church is the temple of God constructed of his people, the living stones which comprise its walls. God’s Spirit lives in us as a group, as a family, and not just individually. Our spirit recognizes God’s Spirit in other believers and it rejoices in them, just as John the Baptist leapt in his mother’s womb when Mary entered. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, co-heirs with him and with one another. We are the Bride of Christ in the whole, and not as individuals. Each of us is a necessary component of this organism called the Church – for though we are organized, we are not an organization. We are a living, breathing representation of the Trinity on Earth. That’s why Discipleship cannot be fully learned, experienced, or expressed apart from the Body of Christ, nor outside the mandate of the Great Commission. We are mutually owned for the glory of God, and for the building up of his people. In Christ we live, and are moved, and... *are* (Ac 17:28).