

Following the Master

Introduction. George Whitfield conducted outdoor evangelistic campaigns in the 1700's throughout the American colonies, a period of revival called the "Great Awakening." Thousands responded to his message. Once he was asked how many were converted after one of his sermons. He replied, "We'll know in five years."

Whitfield was making the point that there's a big difference between a momentary decision which may be superficial and genuine commitment to Christ. It's one thing to be baptized, but another thing to be discipled.

In the New Testament, several terms are used to identify God's people: "saints," "believers," "Christians," and "disciples." "Disciple" is used the most of the four terms. Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? I've got four terms to show you today to help you develop yourself as His disciple.

I. A Disciple Is One Who Learns

- A. By definition a disciple is "one who is a pupil or learner, the adherent of the doctrines of another." A disciple is a student who's a constant and continual learner (John 6:45).
- B. Training is necessary for a disciple (Luke 6:40). Bill Hull said that discipleship is "the intentional training of disciples, with accountability, on the basis of loving relationships." We're personally accountable for our growth, but this takes time, effort, energy, and study. It's not accidental. It's done with purpose.
- C. After someone learns, and as they are trained, they commit and make the decision to follow.
 - 1. Jesus taught about the level of commitment in Luke 14:23-26. It's total, absolute, and complete. You have to be committed above possessions, family ties, trials, and above your very own life.
 - 2. Additionally, the call of Christ to Philip was "follow me" (John 1:23). This was the same appeal to Peter, Andrew, James, and John. A faithful disciple follows the object of his discipline. Spiritual disciples who live as Christians have no other option but to follow Christ.

II. A Disciple Is One Who Serves

- A. Jesus taught this lesson in John 13 when He washed His own disciples's feet. The scene was the last supper. Other accounts record that the apostles had been arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom.
- B. Following supper and without a word of rebuke, Jesus took a towel, a basin of water, and knelt to wash their feet.
 - 1. When He finished He asked, "Do you know what I have done to you?" Then he told them His purpose in John 13:12-17.
 - 2. Disciples serve and get their hands dirty. And they don't worry about who's the greatest. It's a great encouragement to see the end of letters like Romans (16:1-15) and 1 Corinthians (16:15-20), where Paul commended dozens of people who worked with him and for him. They served!

III. A Disciple Is One Who Loves

- A. Following the foot washing, Jesus preached love to His disciples (John 13:34-35; cp. 15:12-17; 1 John 3:14; 4:7-12).
- B. How did Jesus love? He loved selflessly, sacrificially, and unconditionally. Patrick Morely was right when he wrote, “The height of our love for God will never exceed the depth of our love for one another.”

IV. A Disciple Is One Who Multiplies

- A. Jesus’s discourse, on the way to the cross, about the vine and the branches clearly shows that He expects us to be more than faithful. We must be fruitful. He said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be my disciples” (John 15:8).
- B. New Testament converts took this charge seriously. Philip traveled to Samaria where he taught many (Acts 8:4-8). After Apollos was corrected in his understanding, he went to Achaia to teach (Acts 18:27-28). Epaphras had incredible zeal for the churches in the region of Colossae (Colossians 4:12-13).

Conclusion. We don’t want to be a church that’s only concerned with baptizing as many as possible. We should equally care about discipling them.

When we ask, “What is a disciple of Jesus?” the New Testament answers by showing us a learner, a servant, a lover, and a teacher. A disciple isn’t merely someone who agrees with Jesus in the mind, but someone who submits to Jesus with the whole life. He hears Christ’s words, abides in Christ’s truth, follows Christ’s steps, and seeks to reflect Christ’s character.

And this is where the gospel gives us hope: the same Jesus who calls us to follow Him also gives us the grace to continue with Him. This is why we inspire our members to strive (Philippians 1:27), work (2 Thessalonians 2:17), abound (1 Corinthians 15:58), labor (Hebrews 6:10), and press toward (Philippians 3:14). Let’s not settle for being hearers only. Let’s be true disciples — learning from Him, living for Him, and loving Him with undivided hearts until the day we see Him face to face.

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