

THE PRIORITY OF DISCIPLESHIP (PART 1)

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, I gave a series of messages about discipleship; the emphasis being that we are all called to be disciples of Jesus and to become increasingly transformed into His image.

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

¹ Follow (imitate) my example, as I follow (imitate) the example of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

This morning, I will be focusing on the other side of the equation - our call to disciple others.

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This passage is often referred to as the Great Commission.

Galatians 4:19 (NLT)

Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.

This verse reflects the heart of one who disciples others.

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Regardless of which side of the equation you are on, one who is being disciplined or one who disciplines, it is about Christ being developed in our lives; it's about who we become.

So, what is discipleship? What does it mean to disciple someone?

Discipleship is a relational dynamic in which someone, or a group of people, who is/are secure in their identity as a son(s)/daughter(s) of God, mentors and equips another person(s) into an intimate, transformative and empowering relationship with Jesus to become more like Him in identity, character, power and authority.

Let's unpack this in a bit more detail.

Discipleship is first and foremost relational. It is born out of sonship and flows into mentoring and equipping. The Great Commandment precedes the Great Commission. Identity precedes mission. Security in our relationship as a beloved son/daughter precedes discipling others.

Matthew 22:35-40 (NIV)

³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

See also Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28

Discipling, in more modern terms, can be described as mentoring and equipping. There are three intentional aspects associated with this relational dynamic:

- Teaching – Education (Knowledge, Understanding)
- Apprenticeship – Hands-on training (Skill, Ability)
- Immersion – Access, Time with the person/group (Intuitive learning of nuances, What's picked up/rubs off being immersed in the culture)

Examples: Learning a language or a trade.

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The interesting thing about these three aspects is how much time Jesus spent doing each of them. He spent most of his time with his disciples, giving them access to Himself. It is estimated that Jesus spent 18 months of His 3 years in ministry with His disciples. Apprenticeship is the next area where He invested His time. Teaching is where He spent the least amount of His time.

How do we conduct discipleship in our day? We have flipped this pyramid. We spend most of our time in teaching, second in apprenticeship and the least in immersion. Could this be a reason why the church is not as empowered as she could/should be? Do we need to shift our priorities?

The whole purpose of discipleship is to bring us into a relationship with Jesus; one that is intimate, transformative, and empowering. Everything about discipleship is relational. Why is that? Because God is a relational being.

The Bible is the story about how God created us to have relationship with Himself, how that was lost through Adam's sin in the Garden and how He is restoring that to us through Jesus's death, resurrection and imminent return.

What is the fruit of discipleship? The fruit of this intimate, transformative and empowering relationship with Jesus is that we become more like Him. God made us in His image, Adam's sin marred that image, Jesus's death and resurrection made it possible for that image to be restored.

We are meant to reflect His glory. We are meant to be like Him in our identity, our character, our power, and our authority. We are meant to rule and reign.

Genesis 1:26-28 (NIV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

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²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

How did Jesus prioritize discipleship?

Jesus prioritized the Gospel of the Kingdom and this was evidenced by His power and authority in teaching, healings, miracles and signs and wonders. But above this He prioritized discipleship.

Why? Because God’s most effective plan for His Kingdom to be realized on earth as it is in Heaven was through the transformed lives of the redeemed; through those who have accepted the free gift of His saving grace.

Read: Capernaum, pp 35-37 from *Building a Discipling Culture* by Mike Breen.

Why does Jesus leave Capernaum? Because He is playing the long game. He knows the Father’s plan to change the world – through His disciples.

God’s Plan A for individual and societal transformation: Discipleship

His Plan B – There is no Plan B

Jesus came to earth as man, stepping out of His divinity. He learned obedience by the things He suffered, was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, was affirmed by the Father as the beloved Son and then was filled with the Holy Spirit. He chose 12 uneducated men who the religious system of the day had already rejected.

He knew that mentoring and equipping those disciples was the means to reaching the entire world; that once they were filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit they would disciple others who would in turn disciple others until the Gospel of Salvation and the Gospel of the Kingdom spread across the globe.

How can our plan to bring the transforming power of His grace to this world be any different from that of Jesus? *We must prioritize discipleship* – both being His disciple and discipling others.

What will you choose to do?