

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?



WHAT WERE THE COMMON QUALITIES OF JESUS' DISCIPLES? THE GOSPELS NARRATE THE INDIVIDUAL CALLS OF SIX OF JESUS' DISCIPLES. EACH ONE OF THEM RESPONDED IN THE SAME MANNER: ANDREW, PETER, JAMES, JOHN, MATTHEW, AND PHILIP DROPPED WHATEVER THEY WERE DOING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED JESUS. IT IS APPARENT THAT THEY RECOGNIZED SOMETHING IN JESUS WHEN HE CALLED THEM, AND THEY CAME TO HIM, BELIEVING IN HIM. THEY RECOGNIZED JESUS AS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD – THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO HIS PEOPLE. FROM THEIR REACTION, IT IS CLEAR THAT THESE SIX MEN ALL HUNGERED AND THIRSTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS – AT LEAST ENOUGH TO INSTANTLY LEAVE EVERYTHING AND FOLLOW JESUS.

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #1: THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

WHAT DID JESUS LOOK FOR?

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED. *_MATTHEW 5:6 (NIV)*

THEN JESUS DECLARED, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. HE WHO COMES TO ME WILL NEVER GO HUNGRY, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY."
_JOHN 6:35 (NIV)

WHAT DOES HUNGER AND THIRST LOOK LIKE?

1. A craving or urgent need for food or a specific nutrient.
2. A strong desire; an intense, urgent longing.¹
Desire stresses the strength of feeling and often implies strong intention or aim (Webster's Dictionary).²

In light of growing into a fully devoted follower of Jesus, describe what the following words practically look like when applied to discipleship. In other words, if you saw a person who was living out these specific words in relationship to their desire to follow Jesus, what would you observe in his or her life?

- *What does hunger look like?*
- *What does it look like to practically crave Jesus?*
- *What does the word urgent look like when applied to being discipled?*
- *What does it mean to have a strong intention when applied to being discipled?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: The hunger must come from inside of you. You have to want to grow and become more like Jesus. In fact, you will not grow unless you desire to urgently grow with great strength of conviction.

Explain the aforementioned principle in your own words:

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

THIS WAS TO FULFILL WHAT WAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHET ISAIAH: "HE TOOK UP OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED OUR DISEASES." WHEN JESUS SAW THE CROWD AROUND HIM, HE GAVE ORDERS TO CROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE. THEN A TEACHER OF THE LAW CAME TO HIM AND SAID, "TEACHER, I WILL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO." JESUS REPLIED, "FOXES HAVE HOLES AND BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NO PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD." ANOTHER DISCIPLE SAID TO HIM, "LORD, FIRST LET ME GO AND BURY MY FATHER." BUT JESUS TOLD HIM, "FOLLOW ME, AND LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR OWN DEAD." *_MATTHEW 8:17-22 (NIV)*

Following Jesus means that we leave our old lives behind and completely surrender all that we are to him. We must sever our old lives and begin new lives with Jesus as our Lord and King.

For example, you can examine the religious leaders who surrounded Jesus in the Gospels. They wanted to follow Jesus but keep their old lives intact. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer described it this way: "The religious teacher had conditions that had to be met before he would follow. He put himself at Jesus' disposal but at the same time retains the right to dictate his own terms. This is not discipleship but merely a program of our own to be arranged to suit ourselves."³

We cannot follow Jesus on our own terms. We need to repent of any entitlements or rights we hold that stand in the way of fuller surrender to Jesus Christ. By follow-

ing Jesus, we are declaring that we want to emulate him with our very lives—words and deeds. Jesus became a bondservant with no rights; he chose to have no entitlements.

HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOURSELVES WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT REGARD EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED, BUT EMP-TIED HIMSELF, TAKING THE FORM OF A BOND-SERVANT, AND BEING MADE IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. BEING FOUND IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN, HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS. *_PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (NASB)*

Do you have rights or entitlements that shape your life? Start by examining the following statements. Have you ever spoken out loud or just had any of these thoughts?

1. *I have the right to comfort.*
2. *I have the right to make excuses and justify myself.*
3. *I have the right to be offended.*
4. *I have the right to serve only when I feel like it.*

Take time in your group and deal with entitlements in prayer:

Lord, I ask your forgiveness for making conditions for my relationship with you. I surrender these rights at the foot of the cross right now. Forgive me for clinging to the right to _____. I receive your complete forgiveness in Jesus' name.

I rebuke all confusion and rebellion from my life. Enemy, I joyfully give up these rights—you are defeated and must go now in Jesus' name. I replace these rights with the biblical hunger and thirst Jesus desires me to have. I do not want a program but a relationship that will change the world around me.

WHAT DID JESUS LOOK FOR IN A DISCIPLE?

Jesus looked for disciples who were **FAT: Faithful, Available and Teachable.**

FAITHFUL

AND THE THINGS YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES ENTRUST TO RELIABLE MEN WHO WILL ALSO BE QUALIFIED TO TEACH OTHERS. *_2 TIMOTHY 2:2 (NIV)*

Read the statements below describing what it means to be faithful to Jesus. It's not perfection, but a heart condition.

- A person worthy of trust.
- A person who can be relied on.
- One who is convinced that what Jesus says is true.
- A person who does what they say.

To be faithful means you do not need to be dragged to discipleship, but rather you are the one who is hungering for true life change. Each lesson that is being learned is joyfully applied to your life. That is what it means to be faithful.

AVAILABLE

What does it mean to be available?

- To be available means a person's pursuit of Christ has practically become the center of their life. The priorities in that individual's life center around continued learning and pursuing Jesus Christ. There is no greater priority than his or her relationship with Christ.
- To be available also means to move contrary to our feelings. In other words, the person has the ability to say yes to a godly prompting when they feel like saying no. Truth drives their decisions, not their feelings.

The twelve disciples were totally available to Jesus. Are you available to him? Has he practically become the center of your life?

TEACHABLE

TEACH ME YOUR WAY, O LORD, AND I WILL WALK IN YOUR TRUTH; GIVE ME AN UNDIVIDED HEART, THAT I MAY FEAR YOUR NAME. I WILL PRAISE YOU, O LORD MY GOD, WITH ALL MY HEART; I WILL GLORIFY YOUR NAME FOREVER.

_PSALM 86:11-12 (NIV)

Teachability grows out of

- ☑ a life of brokenness and humility.
- ☑ an active examination of one's own heart.
- ☑ an immediate application of revelation, including true repentance; a life of hearing and obeying with all of one's heart is in place.
- ☑ interdependent and vulnerable relationships, and a willingness to initiate with others to help him or her grow in the Lord.
- ☑ the absence of rebellion, resistance, or passivity, which are all polar opposites of teachability.

Take some time to understand teachability. Are you excited to press into everything God wants to show you? Are you willing to pay any cost for this? Have the class pray silently, asking God to examine their hearts. Then have them confess any area of their lives they are still withholding from the Lord. Declare, as a class, that God is fully in charge and that you trust him in all things.

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #2: FOUR QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF DISCIPLESHIP / EVANGELISM

The following four questions will help you keep your priorities set as you press forward in the Big 10. They serve as a means of accountability and should be asked each and every meeting until they become a part of your life.

1. Who are you praying for to accept Jesus as Lord, and what are you actively doing to build relationships with these individuals?

2. Who are you currently discipling, and what are you actively doing to take them through the Big 10? (Note: as you are just beginning the Big 10, you will not have someone to disciple yet. However, if you lead someone to Christ this week, then you will want to be ready to at least teach him or her what you have already learned. You may end up only one week ahead of them, but you always grow more if you are giving away what you are currently learning.)

3. Who are you prayerfully considering as other future prospects for potential discipleship?

4. Who is currently discipling you?

Regarding question number 1:

1. At all times you need to be praying for at least two people to come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

2. Consider the following ways of building relationships with others:

- a. Meet with people. Have fun with others.*
- b. Spend time together in a casual and unassuming way.*
- c. Be visible so people are able to easily talk with you.*
- d. Call people or communicate through technology.*
- e. Ask the Lord how to grow in relationship with each individual so they trust you when it is time to share the gospel.*
- f. In long-distance relationships, find creative ways to keep the relationship strong and trustworthy.*

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #3: THE BASICS

God's heart for evangelism and discipleship is made clear throughout Scripture. Here are just a few examples:

THIS IS GOOD, AND PLEASES GOD OUR SAVIOR, WHO WANTS ALL MEN TO BE SAVED AND TO COME TO A KNOWLEDGE

OF THE TRUTH. *_1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4 (NIV)*

THE LORD IS NOT SLOW IN KEEPING HIS PROMISE, AS SOME UNDERSTAND SLOWNESS. HE IS PATIENT WITH YOU, NOT WANTING ANYONE TO PERISH, BUT EVERYONE TO COME TO REPENTANCE.

_2 PETER 3:9 (NIV)

AND THE THINGS YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES ENTRUST TO RELIABLE MEN WHO WILL ALSO BE QUALIFIED TO TEACH OTHERS. *_2 TIMOTHY 2:2 (NIV)*

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, AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.

_MATTHEW 28:19-20 (NIV)

Why are discipleship and evangelism important to our growth in Christ?

1. EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP ARE MATTERS OF OBEDIENCE TO JESUS.

When we understand God's heart for all people and his desire to see everyone come to know him, it is easy to see that evangelism and discipleship are closely aligned with his heart. Jesus plainly gave us the two most important commandments:

"TEACHER, WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?" JESUS REPLIED: "'LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT. AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT: 'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS HANG ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS."

_MATTHEW 22:36-40 (NIV)

Right after loving God, we are commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. What better way to love someone than to introduce them to Love himself—Jesus Christ? As love from our Savior pours into us and over us, we naturally want to share it with others. Anything less is disobedience to the Lord's command.

As believers we are given gifts of the Spirit, which can include the gift of evangelism. However, we do not need to have the gift of evangelism to share the gospel with others. All believers are called to love their neighbor and are commanded to go and make disciples, not just the evangelists. We cannot wait for an evangelist to come along to present the gospel to someone. Evangelism, and the discipleship that follows, is for every believer. When we walk in a healthy relationship with Christ, evangelism and discipleship will become natural for us. It is the design of every believer—it is God's will for us to be involved in sharing the gospel, leading others to Christ, and growing in our ability to disciple others.

2. EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP ARE INDIVISIBLE. We cannot separate them just as we cannot separate a birth from a life, or a wedding from a marriage.

When there is evangelism that is taking place, people are being birthed into the kingdom of God, and a growth process must follow. Leaving a new believer to grow by themselves is not healthy, wise, or godly. It is like leaving a newborn baby out in the cold to fend for him- or herself. If new believers are left without anyone to care for them and teach them, the chances of their spiritual survival are minimal.

In our culture we celebrate wedding anniversaries and birthdays. A wedding marks the beginning of a marriage. However, if a marriage ends in divorce, we do not look back at the wedding day with great celebration. There is no reason to celebrate an anniversary unless there is a healthy marriage that exists. Similarly, it would be difficult to celebrate the birthday of a loved one who died tragically, or who brought pain and heartache instead of joy.

There can be a wedding without a healthy marriage, and there can be a birth without a positive life that follows. In the same way, there can be evangelism without discipleship. We do not celebrate the spiritual "birthday" of a person if their spiritual life never progresses. Any new

beginning without proper care will not glorify God or be celebrated. Evangelism and discipleship must work together for a believer to be a healthy, contributing citizen to God's kingdom. Both are necessary.

3. EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP ARE NORMAL EXPECTATIONS FOR THE BELIEVER.

In fact, evangelism and discipleship affect our lives every day. They are not just for "professional" Christians, but for every single believer.

The four questions are emphasized because they force us to think deeply about the critical nature of evangelism and discipleship. Without this constant reminder, we tend to be lulled to sleep and stop pressing forward in these areas. It is easy to become comfortable and forget how important these components are to advancing the kingdom of God. As we disciple others, it is crucial to pass on this passion—it is a matter of life and death (spiritually, and sometimes even physically).

As disciplers we must model the great need for prayer in conjunction with evangelism and discipleship. We need to have a life-changing impact on our disciples so that they will not end up lukewarm and rebellious. Make no mistake about it: only we will be held responsible if we do not teach them about God's heart for the hurting and the lost.

4. WHAT DOES SHARING OUR FAITH AND EVANGELIZING DO FOR US?

Sharing our faith with others empowers the Spirit within us. We cannot evangelize without authentically being submitted to Jesus in our own lives. Discipleship and evangelization suppress and crush our flesh, thus forcing us to live dependent upon God's Spirit.

Our own faith grows as our dependence on Jesus grows. Each time we cannot do something ourselves, God has to come through on our behalf, and in the process we build our faith muscles. Discipleship and evangelism are at the core of God's heart. We will grow in intimacy with him as we join him in evangelism and discipleship. We get to participate with God in his work, providing opportunities for others to know Jesus, and we fulfill the purpose for which we are created too.

5. WHAT ARE THE COMMON CONSEQUENCES OF NOT SHARING OUR FAITH AND DISCIPLING OTHERS?

Disobedience has consequences. Whenever we disobey the Lord, we create a crack in our spiritual armor. When we do not share our faith, or disciple others, we function in the following sins:

1. *Fear*
2. *Withdrawal*
3. *Avoidance*
4. *Unbelief*
5. *Selfishness*

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #4: DISCIPLESHIP BASICS

DISCIPLESHIP BASIC 1: PRAYER AND ACTION GO TOGETHER

Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, said that in his early years of discipling others at UCLA he encouraged people to pray for "one," meaning one other person with whom to share their faith and disciple. Dawson's disciples worked hard in their pursuit. They took action to disciple people, and they actively tried to help them grow in their faith. But these relationships seemed to bear no fruit. As a result, they became frustrated in the process. The problem was that they had forgotten to pray. Dawson then encouraged his disciples to begin to pray for these relationships. Once the prayer started, these disciples began to bear fruit.

While Dawson's disciples worked hard at discipleship and evangelism, they had neglected the fruitful work of prayer. Of course, the opposite can be a temptation as well: to only pray and not work. We may think we are growing in evangelism and discipleship simply because we pray for others. Prayer, however, is not meant to replace action; they must happen simultaneously. We need to pray for God's power to be unleashed in evangelism and discipleship while at the same time taking action to build meaningful relationships with those around us.

Look up James 2:14–26 and read it together as a class. How do faith and deeds go together? Examine the life of Abraham. How was he declared justified? To make our faith legitimate, we must pray and act on our beliefs.

DISCIPLESHIP BASIC 2: IT BEGINS WITH MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Generally speaking, most people are led to Jesus by someone they already know, which means there is a level of trust that has been built between the two individuals. In the same way, the deeper the relationship a discipler has with his or her disciple, the deeper the influence the discipler will have. Evangelism and discipleship spring from relationships.

Biblical examples:

- **The disciples:** When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, they brought others they knew to come and meet him as well. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and some of the others brought other men who became Jesus' disciples too (John 1:35–51).
- **The woman at the well:** After Jesus built a relationship with the Samaritan woman, she went back to her village and told people to come and see Jesus. This is an example of the growth potential of evangelism. Jesus built one relationship, and out of that one relationship many others were affected (John 4:1–42).

DISCIPLESHIP BASIC 3: ALWAYS HAVE NEW PROSPECTS

While we disciple and evangelize, we should also be praying for other disciples and evangelistic opportunities too. It is important to keep our eyes open for every opportunity that presents itself. A relationship can take time to develop before someone is ready to enter into the discipleship process. The Lord gives us wisdom as we remain in prayer. We will know the right time.

As you begin to pray for evangelistic opportunities, ask yourself the following questions:

- *Am I surrounded only by Christians?*
- *Do I spend any time with those who do not know Christ?*
- *Are any of my relationships intentional?*
- *Do I go out of my way to meet people when I am in a large group meeting? (Church services and evangelistic outreaches are like fishing ponds where you can cast your nets to find those who are interested in pursuing a relationship with Jesus.)*

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #5: THE PUSH-PULL PRINCIPLE

We are going to grow the fastest when someone else pulls us forward. A discipler can pull us forward with their maturity and obedience to Christ. Their pull expands our vision and draws us to follow Jesus much more aggressively. Classes or books can help pull us as well. If our growth comes only from someone pulling us, however, we will eventually become stagnant in our relationship with the Lord. A “push” needs to be introduced to continue our growth. When we invest ourselves in discipling others, we get pushed forward, and then others will look for a pull from us.

As we begin to give our lives away to others, our selfishness is quickly exposed. In addition to that, we become much more reliant on Jesus in a fresh and new way. When we have people expecting to be pulled by us, it forces us to grow in our own faith. If we do not learn and grow ourselves, then we will not have something to give away to others.

The push-pull principle also occurs in family life. A married couple pulls one another forward in their Christian life. They can spend time confronting each other's selfishness and entitlements in theory, but when the first baby is born, a significant “push” is introduced. A baby requires the couple to give their lives away all of the time, forcing them into greater maturity. They soon discover that prior to the baby's arrival their lives were relatively easy. The “push” will only grow as more children come and each child is disciplined into his or her destiny.

If we only receive from others, and never give back, we will only be immature, selfish Christians. Do you have a “push” in your life?

COACHING POINTS:

The discipler should be slow to commit to disciple a person for the following reasons:

- *Discipleship requires tremendous commitment where much is asked of both the discipler and the disciple.*
- *Once you commit in a discipleship relationship, it is vital to keep your word. This means you must go slow in order to make a solid decision.*

- It is wise to commit to a shorter period of discipleship so that either person can extend or discontinue the discipleship depending on need or want.
- Remember to look for FAT people.

- 1. Faithful:** people who do what they say they will do.
- 2. Available:** they have time for the discipleship process.
- 3. Teachable:** they are humble and understand that their role is to learn and receive from you.

If any of these qualities are not in place, the person is probably not the best fit for discipleship. Each characteristic is important for the health of the discipleship relationship. Without any one of these, the disciple will most likely not reproduce in a healthy way through your discipleship relationship. It will produce diminished disciples. In addition, there is limited time in which to disciple. The FAT principles will help you not waste time when it comes to discipleship, equipping you to prioritize through discernment.

Jesus took time with the twelve, spending all night in prayer before choosing them. If this is what he did, then we can see the importance of patience and prayer in this matter. Jesus needed to select men who would carry on a world conquest in his name. Similarly, our goal is a highway of discipleship, not a dead-end street. Carefully choose disciples who can turn and disciple others.

DISCIPLESHIP FUNDAMENTAL #6: WALK WITH GOD, BE WITH PEOPLE, AND HAVE A PLAN

Our own walk with God is always the starting place; we cannot give away what we ourselves do not possess. If we are not in relationship with Jesus, then we cannot help others with their relationship with him. Being always precedes doing. It has to be who we are, not just what we do. Everything springs from our relationship with God—the intimacy and vulnerability.

Be with people. If we walk with God but do not spend time with people, then evangelism and discipleship will not occur. Meaningful relationships are the key to effective evangelism and discipleship. The degree to which we are with people is the degree to which we will influence them.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my plan for evangelism and discipleship? And how am I going to do it?
- What is my plan to meet people and have meaningful relationships with them? (People who understand the what and the why of evangelism and discipleship need to understand the how.)

ENDNOTES:

1. "Hunger." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2006. <http://www.merriam-websterministries.org> (July 12, 2006).
2. "Desire." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2006. <http://www.merriam-websterministries.org> (July 12, 2006).
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan, 1979).

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