

The Path to Discipleship – Part 1 & 2

- Introduction
 - We are going to be in a series discussing the importance of discipleship and how we ourselves can help others become mature disciples who then seek to make disciples out of others.
 - However, before we can make disciples we first need to be one ourselves.
 - Through this series we will talk about how we can grow ourselves to become true disciples of Christ.
 - Today we will start this process by talking about what a disciple is and how it differs from just considering yourself a Christian by name only.
 - We'll see what leads people to be ok with spiritual immaturity who have no desire to grow.
 - Then we will conclude by examining if perhaps we do not put enough emphasis on making disciples after leading someone to Christ.
- The Great Commission | Matthew 28:19-20 & Mark 16:15
 - **If we ask ourselves what is the most important task that Christians are to do with their time on earth, we can find the answer in the great commission.**
 - The Scriptures are filled with how we are to live our lives, the sins we are to avoid the good that we are called to do.
 - **These things ultimately point to same overall goal which is to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples.**
 - Mark 16:15
 - “And he said to them, Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”
 - Matthew 28:19-20
 - **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
 - There are two key directives, one is to proclaim the Gospel and the other is to teach them to observe all that Jesus has command us.
 - To proclaim the Gospel is to be a witness and lead others to Christ.
 - This is the first step, before one can become a disciple they first must be a believer.
 - This is done through proclaiming the Gospel and being a witness for Christ.
 - To make disciples is to teach them to observe what Christ has told us about what it is to be a Christian.
 - This is the second step, after conversion one should grow and learn as much about Christ and what the Scriptures teach.
 - Jesus said to teach them to observe ALL that He commanded, so everything that He has commanded in Scripture is very important.
 - This leads to those who then desire to also share their faith and repeat the process of witnessing and sharing the Gospel.
 - This is our great purpose while we are here, by our obedience to this other will come to know Christ and to become spiritually mature who then also share the Gospel and make disciples.
 - It is a process that leads to the conversions of millions of people, because on our own we cannot reach the world, but together we can.

- In our studies, we are going to break down both of these to understand the importance of sharing and being a witness, then moving on to being and making disciples.
- How much of a priority do Christians put on the great commission? Do you think this is a priority or does it tend to fall to the side?
- We all begin at spiritual infancy
 - Conversion is only the beginning.
 - When one is first saved and has become a Christian, that is not the end but only the beginning.
 - We do not all become spiritually mature disciples the moment we become a Christian.
 - We all begin in a state of spiritual infancy.
 - We know enough to have faith in who He is and what He has done, but do not yet know fully what it means to follow and obey Him.
 - At this time, one has just come to saving faith and knows enough to know who Jesus is and has faith in who He is and what the Scripture's say about him.
 - To become a spiritually mature disciple from infancy is like one who attends school or college to learn a skill/profession.
 - You begin with a desire to learn and to grow so you attend school to grow.
 - Then as you study you grow and eventually you are rewarded with a diploma showing you have learned and can apply what you have been taught.
 - While you don't get a diploma for being a disciple, it is a similar process of intentionally seeking to learn and grow.
 - We should not desire to stay at immaturity, but we should seek to grow.
 - Christians should not stay at this state of infancy, but instead choose to learn and grow to become a disciple
 - How else might you describe spiritual infancy?
- What is a disciple?
 - When you hear the word "disciple" what is the first thing that comes to mind?
 - By definition a disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ.
 - And by follower, I mean one who follows the teachings of Jesus and obeys them.
 - Jesus told us how we would know if we are truly one of His disciples.
 - John 8:31 (ESV)
 - "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, **"If you abide** in my word, you are truly my disciples,"
 - NIV – "hold to my teaching"
 - HCSB – "continue"
 - To "abide" means to remain, stay to continue or persist.
 - This was a sign that one was a true disciple as stated by Jesus Christ.
 - **This differentiates those who might "agree" with what Jesus says and are aware of Him but do not truly follow Him.**
 - This separates those who might associate themselves with being a Christian by name only.
 - Why else do you think Jesus says that to abide shows that one is truly a disciple?
 - It is one who strives to intentionally live out their life for Christ.
 - Christ is not an afterthought, but a priority.
 - A disciple chooses to go through life with a focus on Christ.
 - Their life is intentional to follow the path Christ has laid out for them, with less of an emphasis on what it is they want to do.
 - What are some examples of intentional living?

- **It is one who seeks to learn and to grow, to know as much about Jesus and His teachings as they can.**
 - One is not satisfied with being a simple check box Christian and being familiar with a few passages of Scripture.
 - They truly desire to learn, to grow and know more about Christ.
 - This consists of many things like reading the Scriptures, attending church and small groups.
- **A disciple seeks to make other disciples by sharing the Gospel to lead one to faith, then continues to walk with the new convert to lead them on the path to spiritual maturity.**
 - A disciple understands the importance of not just leading someone to faith and say, “good luck”, but they desire to help grow that new convert in their faith.
- A disciple has moved onto the path of spiritual maturity.
 - They have chosen to move from a state of spiritual infancy to a state of spiritual maturity.
 - Hebrews 6:1a
 - “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,…”
 - **To become spiritually mature is a lifelong process that one never fully reaches until they leave this world and go on to heaven.**
- To become a spiritually mature disciple should be the goal for all Christians.
 - This should be what we shoot for as Christians, not just be OK with the status quo and to know we have our “fire insurance” so life is now good.
 - But we should all seek to become like the original 12 disciples who followed and obeyed Jesus Christ until death.
 - They sought to teach others so that they would grow in spiritual maturity who then would go out and repeat the process.
- **Is this path of being a true disciple something we are all called to or only for a select few?**
- **How important do you think it is that we should strive to become spiritually mature disciples?**
- Traits of one who is a new Christian and/or in a state of spiritual infancy.
 - We have discussed what it is to be a disciple and why Christians are to progress towards this to move onto spiritual maturity.
 - We will now take a look at common traits of a new believer or one who is still in a state of infancy and why it is important that they seek maturity and to become a full-fledged disciple.
 - **A new Christian, or one who is still in spiritual infancy, is not yet able to apply God’s truths to all aspects of their lives.**
 - A disciple who is spiritually mature will seek to apply the truths and wisdom of Christ to all aspects of their life, but a new Christian (or one who is still immature) has not gotten to this point.
 - They know they are saved but are not yet able to apply Christian behavior or traits in all aspects of their life.
 - Examples
 - Response during a time of trial or hardship.
 - Living the Christian life is full of hills and valleys, a mature Christian understands and has learned to keep their faith and trust in God no matter how difficult of a time they are going through.
 - **A new believer however isn’t at this point, when they come to their first trial after conversion they are likely to lean on past behaviors using human reasoning and understanding.**

- This is something that comes with growth and maturity where we put aside our human reasoning and give it Christ.
 - **Can you look at your own life and see a difference in how you handle difficult times from then you were either a new Christian or were in spiritual infancy to how you do that today?**
- The new Christian may not immediately uphold biblical values in the face of opposition and persecution.
 - The Bible more and more goes against the grain of society especially on many social issues.
 - The Christian is called to stand firm on God's truths, but one that is immature in the face of opposition will follow the worldly perspective or popular opinion.
 - Especially if following Christian values and truths would be looked down upon from a worldly perspective.
 - Abortion, sexual immorality and marriage etc.,
 - **This happens in the workplace, with friends and social media.**
 - But a new believer who isn't battle tested with faith and perseverance will have a much greater difficult standing up for their faith.
 - This is why growth and maturity is so important.
 - **Can you relate to this in your life? Have you seen a difference in how you stood up for Christ perhaps in your social circles from being a new Christian (spiritual infancy) to being more mature?**
- **It is vital for Christians to grow and follow the path to discipleship so that they will intentionally lean on Christ in all aspects of their life.**
- The new believer (or spiritually immature Christian), will still retain many worldly traits that make it difficult to distinguish them from the unbelievers in the world.
 - The moment you are saved does not immediately make you a perfect person who never sins.
 - **All Christians no matter how mature will have some aspects of their life that is not pleasing to God. No one will ever come to a state of perfection.**
 - But as time goes on and a Christian grows they begin to look more and more like Jesus.
 - **But one who is in a state of spiritual infancy is still going to keep many of their form traits and look like unbelievers in the world, because they are just now beginning to learn how Jesus wants us to live our lives.**
 - One who has hit rock bottom because of life choices and has just come to Christ will not be able to immediately do a 180 and drop everything that was sinful in their life.
 - However, God does give them a way and a path out.
 - **This is a PROCESS of Christ working in the life of the Christian to move them onto the path of being a disciple and Godly living.**
 - Through the process of becoming more spiritually mature and being a true disciple these things are learned.
 - God helps lead us to living the life He has called us to.
 - **Paul found this trait among the church in Corinth, he expected them to have come to maturity but found them still in a state of infancy as they didn't look any different from the unbelievers.**
 - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

- **“Brothers, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ.** I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, because you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, because you are still fleshly. For since there is envy and strife among you, **are you not fleshly and living like unbelievers?”**
 - **What are some examples of worldly lifestyles or actions that a new Christian will still have?**
 - **Can you relate to this in your own life and describe your actions or lifestyle when you were in a state of spiritual infancy as opposed to how that looks today?**
 - **A new believer will bring a lot of baggage that God will show how to cleans and remove if they peruse maturity and become a full-fledged disciple.**
- Complacency for spiritual immaturity
 - **As we look at the world today we find that many people who come to Christ choose to stay in spiritual infancy.**
 - They are not “new believers” but have been saved for some time who are OK with never growing, they are OK with just being saved and to identify with Jesus but nothing more.
 - **They are essentially “Christian” in name only, not that they actively follow the teachings of Christ and seek to obey Him.**
 - In Scripture, we see examples where Paul was speaking to a congregation and he was disheartened because he knew they should have moved from their state of spiritual infancy from being a new Christian to maturity and becoming a disciple.
 - Hebrews 5:11-14
 - “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the world of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”
 - 1 Corinthians 3:1
 - “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,”
 - The number of Christians in American helps us understand this.
 - According to PEW research in 2014 70.6% of the American population identified themselves as Christians.
 - However, identifying yourself as a Christian and being a disciple can be two different things.
 - As research also shows that at best 1 in 5 attend church on a weekly basis.
 - So It is not likely that 70% are all disciples as we don’t normally think of 70% of American being “on fire” for Jesus.
 - Examples of complacency for spiritual immaturity.
 - Identify as Christian, but rarely (if ever) attend church
 - A person living in this regard might attend church just on Easter or Christmas but not see a real need to attend any more frequently.
 - They do not see church attendance as necessary or important.
 - They may say “I’m a Christian” but see no need for the church.

- Intentionally compartmentalize or separate many aspects of their life from having any Christian influence.
 - While we all can be guilty of doing this, one who is complacent with their immaturity will be very intentional about compartmentalizing their Christianity.
 - Being a Christian has a certain time and place but most aspects of their life they keep separate.
 - God can have “this piece” but everything else is MINE.
 - They are a “Christian” in church but outside those walls they keep Christ out of their lives.
- No desire or urgency to read the Scriptures.
 - This individual might own a Bible but never opens it.
 - They will never read Scripture for themselves, have no desire to open its pages to understand what it is God wants from them.
 - What they have heard and or read only comes their infrequent church attendance.
- Prayer is rare and only for special occasions.
 - Prayer is not used to have a dialogue with God, but is only done on special occasions or circumstances.
- **They choose to be a spectator and not a player.**
 - **They are OK with watching but will never join in.**
 - I’m not refereeing to just service in the church, but in all aspects of their life they do not do anything to further the kingdom of God. They simply watch and identify as Christian.
 - They may attend frequently, but do so to check the box and nothing more.
- **Do you think that most church goers are just believers (spectators) or are they disciples (players)? Why?**
- **Why do you think one might become complacent and choose to never grow or have a closer relationship with God? What is the justification for this?**
- The dangerous line of believing the “things about Jesus” but not enough to follow Him.
 - Those who fall into this may be Christian in so much as they believe the things about Him, but they will never actually follow and obey Him.
 - This is a very dangerous place to be, because that rides very close to the line of just having general awareness of Jesus.
 - General awareness that Jesus is there WILL NOT save you.
 - James 2:19
 - “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-and shudder!”
 - Matthew 7:21
 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
 - **Salvation is not based on knowledge, but belief by having faith, trust and confidence in one’s heart about who Jesus is and what He has done. This comes from the heart.**
 - **Romans 10:9**
 - **“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**
 - **When Jesus says, “the one who does the will of my Father” is one who is truly saved what do you think Jesus meant? Does that mean that if we don’t work hard that we cannot be saved or does it mean something else?**

- We proclaim the gospel, but do we make disciples?
 - There is no question that Christians and the church understand the importance of witnessing and sharing the gospel message.
 - At most churches, there is ample opportunity given to all to hear the word and to make a decision.
 - The Gospel is preached and taught so that those who are lost will hear the word and God then moves in their hearts.
 - There are programs, pamphlets and ministries of all types from VBS, sports and revivals.
 - At your Christian concerts and mass revival events there is always the alter call.
 - God works and moves on the hearts of those who attend and many do come to true faith in Christ.
 - **But perhaps the second most important task which is to make disciples, isn't something the church or Christians in general do as well at.**
 - There are many times where brand new Christians come into the family of God only to be left without any direction.
 - This happens for various reasons, but one is when we put so much focus on leading someone to Christ that once they believe we consider that a "win" and we move on to the next.
 - **We can become so focused on the number of people being saved in a ministry and not put any emphasis on the follow up, to make those new Christians disciples and to help them on the path to spiritual maturity.**
 - Now this is not to say that counting conversions is wrong, it is perfectly OK to praise God for the number of people who have come to Christ during a campaign like a revival or VBS.
 - But there is no question that there is less emphasis on the follow up and helping them to become a disciple.
 - We must not forget the importance of helping those who are new Christians as well as those that are still spiritually immature.
 - **Just because someone has been a Christian their whole life does not mean they are not still in spiritual infancy.**
 - What do you think? Do Christians and the church perhaps at times not put enough emphasis on making disciples? If so why do you think this happens?
 - What can we do to be more intentional about making disciples and to help others grow?