

Introduction:

When Jesus Christ came into the world, the heart of His teaching was incredibly simple. His main message was good news, the gospel. For Him that meant, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (**Mark 1:15**, ESV). Surely, that will get unpacked in many ways throughout the rest of Jesus's teaching, the rest of the gospel accounts, the rest of the New Testament. But at heart, it is quite simple. God's kingdom is here. Believe that is so, and change. Quit being your own king. Let God be your king. There is a further instruction Jesus proclaimed even more frequently. He repeated it again and again to different people in different contexts, making varying specific applications. At the heart were two simple words: "Follow Me." Like the gospel message, those two words will get unpacked in many ways throughout the rest of Jesus's teaching, the rest of the gospel accounts, the rest of the New Testament. But the heart, it is quite simple. Follow Me. Go where I go. Do what I do. Become like Me. In **Mark 1:17**, Jesus sees Peter, Andrew, James, and John fishing. His instruction? "Follow Me." In **Mark 2:14**, He sees Levi (known as Matthew in parallel accounts) working at his tax booth. His instruction? "Follow Me." In **John 10:27**, Jesus explains He is a Shepherd, His sheep hear His voice and "Follow me." In **John 12:26**, He describes it this way, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also" (ESV). Follow Me; be where I am. People responded in different ways to this Follow Me directive. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Levi (Matthew) left what they were doing and followed. The fellow we call the rich, young ruler went away sad (**Mark 10:21-22**). Do you know what we call the people who follow Jesus? Disciples. Jesus's earthly ministry ended with an amazing instruction to His apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (**Matthew 28:19**). The commission for the apostles was simple: "Go everywhere you can and everywhere you go make people followers of Me. Make disciples." Of course, Jesus goes on to say disciples are made by "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" (**Matthew 28:19b-20**). When the apostles made disciples, they were supposed to teach those disciples to observe all that Jesus had commanded. What about this very command? Of course, they were to pass this command on as well and it has come down to us. Our job is to be disciples who make disciples. I am a disciple. Are you? How would we know? If we are disciples, what is supposed to happen in our lives? If we are making disciples, what do those people look like when we are done? Obviously, we could read the entire New Testament to get the fullest picture of discipleship. But let me share with you some major points and let's see if we can get a simple handle on discipleship.

Discussion:

I. A disciple looks like his/her Teacher.

- A. In **Luke 6:39-40**, Jesus told a parable. "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" The unpleasant answer, of course, is "Absolutely!" Why? Because a student will follow his or her teacher. The teacher can only take the student where the teacher has been, teaching the student what the teacher knows. If the teacher is blind, the student will be as well. If the teacher is walking into a pit, the student will also.
- B. However, though this passage is about the blind leading the blind, Jesus's principle tells us something about discipleship in general and about being one of His disciples. It is absolutely true, if I disciple myself to someone who is blind, I will become blind and fall into the pit. But if I disciple myself to Jesus, what will I become? I will become like Him. When I'm fully trained, I will be like my teacher. Keep this in mind. This is the simplest understanding of discipleship. Discipleship means becoming like Jesus. Plain and simple.

II. A disciple is centered on God.

- A. Discipleship begins with who is at the heart of our lives. For Christians, the answer is simple, coming from the greatest command: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (**Matthew 22:37**, ESV). Every fiber of our being is focused on God. He is at the heart of all.
- B. And there is room for no other master, no other center. As Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (ESV). You cannot serve God and anything else. As we've said before, this isn't advice, instruction, or even a command. It is simply a fact. A disciple is someone who has God at the center and isn't allowing anything or anyone else to try to occupy the center with God.

### III. A disciple honors God.

- A. Remember, a disciple is someone who is becoming like his or her teacher. Let us see Jesus in action and then let us see what He taught about His disciples. We must follow Him. We must be where He is. We must go where He goes. We must become like Him.
- B. In **John 12:28**, Jesus is preparing for the hardest moment of His life. He was tempted, no doubt, to ask the Father to save Him from the hour of crucifixion. But notice what He claims He will do instead? “Father, glorify your name” (ESV). Jesus glorified the Father. He honored the Father. Even if that meant going to a cross.
- C. Is it any surprise then that Jesus explains in **John 15:8**, that we prove ourselves to be disciples by bearing fruit that glorifies and honors God? A disciple isn’t about honoring self, but God. Whatever it takes, we want to bring honor and glory to God above all. I use the word “honor” because we so rarely use “glorify” in our daily lives. But we know what it means to honor God. Put Him first. Lift Him up. Praise Him. Worship Him.

### IV. A disciple learns from God.

- A. At heart a disciple is a student. Though, our view of student doesn’t quite get the idea across. Perhaps “apprentice” fits the bill better. A disciple is someone who follows a master teacher around, watching what he does, listening to what he says, imitating his actions, mirroring his teaching. Of course, for us, we are to learn from God.
- B. Jesus describes Himself this way in **John 8:28**: “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (ESV). Imagine that. Jesus is God incarnate. He is divine. Yet, He learned from God the Father. He was instructed. He watched. He listened. He learned. He followed.
- C. Therefore, it shouldn’t surprise us at all to hear Jesus say about all of His disciples in **John 6:45**: “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught of God’” (ESV). Of course, this doesn’t mean we sit in classrooms with God as the teacher or hear sermons presented by Yahweh Himself. It does mean we open His Word and learn from it. It means unless our teaching comes from God’s Word, we don’t have God at the center.

### V. A disciple loves like God.

- A. We have already learned the greatest command is to love God. He is at the center of our lives. But when He is at the center, our actions are governed by Him and by His love. It is not surprising then that the second greatest commandment is that we love our neighbor (**Matthew 22:39**). Consider Jesus’s standard of love.
- B. In **John 15:9**, Jesus describes His own love. Do you see what He says is His standard for love? “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (ESV). Jesus saw how the Father loved and loved in the same way. Jesus loves us like God loves us.
- C. It is no surprise then that Jesus teaches the disciples a new standard of love. In **John 13:34-35**, Jesus called His disciples to a new commandment. “Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (ESV). Did you catch that? This love is the identifying marker by which all people will know we are really Jesus’s disciples. However, notice, this is not just general love. Certainly, as Christians we are distinct in our love for all people, even loving our enemies. But here, in **John 13:34-35**, the distinguishing marker is our love for one another. We are to love one another as Jesus loves us and this special relationship will declare to the world that we are His disciples.

### VI. A disciple leads others to God.

- A. Surely, as a disciple, we are not satisfied merely having a relationship with God ourselves. Rather, having God at the center of our lives and knowing how fantastic that is, we want others to have God there as well. Therefore, a disciple will lead others to God. After all, we are not merely to be disciples, but to be making them as well.
- B. In what we call Jesus’s high priestly prayer in **John 17:26**, Jesus describes His work for the Father: “I have made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known” (ESV). Jesus, the incarnate God, did not simply lead the apostles to Himself. Rather, He led them to the Father. He made the Father’s name known to them. He led them to God.
- C. In **John 20:31**, we see the apostle who wrote this particular gospel account from which most of our look at discipleship has come had a goal. He was walking in the footsteps of His Master. “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (ESV). What was John doing with this book? He was leading us to God. Do not think we can be private disciples, keeping our faith to ourselves, practicing it only in our houses and our church buildings. Oh no! We shine our light before others, we take our faith to others. We lead them to God that they may also be His disciples. Our growth as disciples is not complete if we are not leading others to God as well.

VII. A disciple does all of this while abiding in God's Word.

- A. For every bit of this discipleship life, there is a standard. We don't just get to do anything that pleases us and call it honoring God. We don't just get to study anything and call it learning from God. We don't just get to treat people any way we want and call it love. And we cannot lead others to God by any means we choose. Rather, we must follow God's way. Why? Because God's way works. And it is the only way that does. There is only one way to know God's way. Be in His Word.
- B. Jesus sets the example for us. In **John 8:55**, He distinguishes Himself from the Jews who were rebuking Him. They did not know God. Though they had the law and searched the law, they didn't know God. Jesus however says this, "I do know him and I keep his word" (ESV). Jesus kept God's Word. Think about that for a moment. Here is deity incarnate. Jesus is fully God. Yet, He doesn't simply do whatever He wants. He keeps the Father's Word. In other words, He honors God according to God's Word. He learns from God by learning from His Word. He loves others according to God's Word. He leads others to God using God's Word.
- C. It should not surprise us to see that Jesus had just described true disciples in this way, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (**John 8:31**, ESV). We aren't Jesus's disciples simply because we show up at a church service on Sundays. We aren't Jesus's disciples simply because like Him a lot, even love Him. We are His disciples when we do what He says. When we abide in His Word and let His Word abide in us, governing us, then and only then can we claim to be His disciples. When we honor Him the way He has prescribed in His Word, we are being His disciples. When we learn from His Word, we are being His disciples. When we love the way His Word directs, we are being His disciples. When we lead others to God by using His Word as the guide map, we are being His disciples.
- D. This is so important. Please, don't miss this. We aren't Jesus's disciples when we do stuff that just kind of makes sense to us. We are Jesus's disciples when we can go to His Word and find the authority and justification for our actions. We aren't His disciples merely because we do "Jesusy" things and say "Jesusy" words. We are His disciples when we are getting into the Word He revealed and letting it sink into our hearts and minds, letting it govern what we say and do.

Conclusion:

I'm a disciple. How about you? Recognize, I have illustrated this using a circle to help us grasp that the journey and growth of discipleship doesn't end. I don't get to say, "Oh, I've honored God, I've learned from God, I've loved like God, I've led others to God, guess I'm done." No, no. Our Master is still leading us. He is still teaching us. We still have so much farther to go until we are fully trained to be like Him. But perhaps now we have a handle on the direction we are to be growing.