

The Purpose of Discipleship
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We are in a sermon series called Forward in Faith. We've seen how God wants us to move forward in every area of life and how that requires vision, faith and action.

In this series we are using the word FORWARD as an acrostic. All these words are verbs: Follow – Obey – Resist – Worship – Abide – Reach - Disciple

We are taking a few weeks to talk about what it means to FOLLOW. Once we are born again, everything in the Christian life is progressive – it requires moving forward. Hebrews 6:1 in the Amplified version says:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings of Christ, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belong to spiritual maturity.

We should all be steadily advancing in spiritual maturity! That life-long process is called discipleship.

The pathway between immaturity and maturity is discipleship!
 The street between sonship and leadership is discipleship!
 The road between rebellion and righteousness is discipleship!
 The highway between hopelessness and holiness is discipleship.

Today I'm preaching on The Purpose of Discipleship. Many people know they should follow Christ and make disciples, but they don't know why. So we're going to look at the why of discipleship – the reasons for discipleship.

Last week – in a sermon called Follow – I talked about the two parts of discipleship. First – a disciple is a student who learns from another. Secondly, a disciple is a follower who follows another so that they may become like them.

Remember there's a difference between being a **believer and a disciple**. Believers are saved and going to heaven, but many believers never become disciples because they never progress beyond infancy. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 14:20

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

Immature believers stay childish in their thinking. But disciples put away childish thinking and put on the mind of Christ. With that in mind, let's look at 7 reasons why discipleship is necessary according to the Bible.

1. The first reason for discipleship is obedience.

Before we talk about results or what we get out of it, discipleship is about obeying the command of Christ. When it comes down to it, we really don't need any other reason!

Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 which says:

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.

This Commission to make disciples is for every Christian for all time! This is not just for pastors or leaders or missionaries. It's for all believers. It is for you! You should be progressively moving forward in that calling.

As the Great Commission says, we must obey the commands of Christ. As I taught you last week, His very first command is in Mark 1:15

Repent and believe the good news!

That is how you become a born-again believer. But it doesn't stop there. The very next command of Christ is found in the very next verses. Mark 1:17 says:

"Come, follow Me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

The first command of Christ is to repent and place your faith in Him. That's how you become a believer – a Christian. The next command is to follow Him. That's how you become a disciple. Discipleship begins with obedience.

2. Discipleship is necessary because Jesus made disciples

Study the Gospels and you will see that while Christ ministered for three years to masses of people, He primarily spent His time with twelve men into whom He poured His whole life. He took them everywhere with Him, taught them, trained them, and invested His life into them. They caught the life of Christ by spending time with Him. Mark 3:14-15 says:

He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.

Notice the first priority of disciples is to be with Him, then to go out and minister in His name. Jesus ushered in a spiritual kingdom that has lasted more than two thousand years because He invested His life in twelve men. If we are going to touch heaven and change earth, Jesus' strategy is probably the best strategy.

The heart of discipleship exists within small groups of believers who are building into each other's lives at a deeper level – holding each other accountable to work out what they're learning.

A discipling relationship is marked by a disciple-maker who listens and seeks to understand the person. They believe in the person. They encourage them. They walk through life with the person – not only in victory, but also through failure. Discipleship is working out the truth of God's word in the context of a loving, gracious relationship. We do that because Jesus our example did that.

3. The purpose of discipleship is to know God

The key purpose of discipleship is to help you understand who Jesus is so that you can become like Him. Without Jesus, you cannot know how to be a disciple, get disciplined, or disciple others.

Jesus modeled discipleship over 2,000 years ago. He had anywhere from 4 to 120 disciples at different points in the Bible. These disciples followed Him everywhere and listened to all of His teachings. While Jesus lived among His disciples, He promised that those who believed and followed Him would be with Him for all of eternity.

After teaching His disciples about His Father and the kingdom He was bringing to earth, Jesus sent out all of His disciples—seventy-two at the time—in pairs and told them to preach the gospel and heal the sick in His name. When the disciples returned, they rejoiced that the demons had to submit to them in the name of Jesus. Jesus immediately took this as a discipling moment. He told them in Luke 10:20

Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

New believers are always excited about their newfound faith and power in Jesus Christ, but they may not have the correct understanding of who Jesus is and what His priorities are. They need to be taught sound doctrine so they can eventually lead others to Christ and disciple them in their walk with God.

So, Jesus taught His disciples that their true focus should be an eternal perspective, not on the temporary experiences of life. Discipleship is needed because we need to know God and His priorities.

4. Discipleship is necessary because other people need to know God

Discipleship is not just about you and your relationship with God. Jesus' purpose in having disciples was so that they could first know Him and then go and make more disciples who wanted to follow Him.

Paul said it like this in 2 Timothy 2:2

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to teach others also.

Because we are Christ-followers, we must also follow Jesus' example and make disciples who make disciples. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I'll make you a fisher of men." If you're not fishing, you're not following. He says to all His followers, go everywhere, because everybody needs to hear the Good News.

Some people think that making disciples only happens at church. When actually, it should be part of our everyday lives. In fact – the word "go" in Matthew 28:19 is a command to intentionally go into the world and make disciples.

Now I know you cannot go to the whole world by yourself. But there is also case to be made that the word "go" means "as you go" or "as you are going." That's the way some Bible versions translate it:

The Wuest Translation says, *having gone on your way...*
I like the way that God's Word translation says it: *wherever you go, make disciples.*

The going that Jesus is talking about is not just about going to church or going on a mission's trip. It's about going to work, going to school, going into your neighborhood, going over to a friend's house, going home... wherever you go, make disciples. There are some places you can go that no one else can go! There are people you can reach that no one else can reach!

Because Jesus was limited in human flesh, He could not appear to every person on the planet and make Himself known. Instead, He chose us to take His message to all the far corners of the earth. We must remain obedient to that calling and find people to disciple in our daily lives. Whether that is within your own family, your close circle of friends, people in the church, or globally, you are called to make disciples who love and follow Jesus.

5- Discipleship is necessary to empower the next generation of leaders

I'm not going to speak a lot on this today because I preached on it recently. I just want to remind you that our current vision is to become a multi-generational church that makes disciples, strengthens families and empowers the next generation of leaders.

Notice that discipleship and empowering the next generation of leaders go together. Without discipleship, young people will drift away from the faith and begin walking in the ways of the world. They need to be grounded in the Word, in faith, in prayer, in worship and in their identity in Christ.

It is also important that they are listened to, encouraged, prayed with, and

discipled through the Bible by people who are Christ-like examples. Without discipleship from someone strong in their faith and identity in Jesus Christ, the new generation coming after us will not be strong leaders of the truth. This seems like another impossible task, but we believe we have heard from God and we are moving forward in Jesus' name!

6. The purpose of discipleship is to grow to spiritual maturity

What does spiritual maturity look like? Jesus. That's why Jesus said in Luke 6:40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

The goal of discipleship is to become like Christ. God had different callings and destinies for each of us, but we all have one thing in common: God wants to make us more and more like Jesus! Romans 8:29 says:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The world tells you to be yourself, but God tells you to be like Christ! The pathway from self-centeredness to Christlikeness is discipleship.

Becoming like Christ does not mean you're going to be God. You will never be God – but you can become godly. What does that look like? It looks like Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:15 in the Message version says:

God wants us to grow up... like Christ in everything.

The purpose of discipleship is to become like Christ in everything. In our faith, our praying, our praise and worship, our dependence on God, our love for the Bible, our love for God and people, our character, our authority over the enemy, our relationships, our work, in everything!!!

Becoming like Christ is a process called "discipleship" and discipleship takes an entire lifetime. Becoming like Christ means that our:

- Character is improving
- Power is increasing
- Love is intensifying
- Lives are influencing others
- Prayers are interceding for others
- Money is investing in the kingdom
- Witness is inviting others to the kingdom
- Goal is making more disciples

One of the things we often leave out when we think of becoming like Christ is making disciples.

Jesus spent His time on earth making disciples who would make disciples and if we are going to be like Him we must also be disciple makers. Every Christian should be actively seeking to get help from others to keep on growing. That is discipleship. And every Christian should be helping unbelievers become believers by showing them Christ. And every Christian should be helping other believers grow to maturity. That is making a disciple.

If you are not following Christ, you are not obeying Christ. But if you are not helping others follow Christ, that's an area where you are not like Christ.

There are many verses that teach us to follow Christ as our example. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul said:

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Jesus Christ is our example of how to live and how to give.
 Jesus Christ is our example of how to pray and how to obey.
 Jesus Christ is our example of how to serve and how to love.
 Jesus Christ is also our example of how to make disciples.

Discipleship requires spending time with God, but it also requires spending time with mature people who can be an example to you. Not everything is taught – some things are caught. You can hear teachings on prayer and read books on prayer – but you'll never really learn to pray until you start praying! And one of the best ways to learn to pray is to pray with mature believers who know how to pray. You follow their example as they follow Christ.

You can read books on praise and worship – but one of the best ways to learn to worship is to be in a worship service with people who worship in spirit and truth. You follow their example as they follow Christ.

But the goal of discipleship is not just that you become like Christ – but that you help others become like Christ!

7- The purpose of discipleship is to help others grow in spiritual maturity

The goal is you becoming a disciple maker. Eventually, the hope is that the people you have been discipling will make disciples who make disciples who also make disciples. This is how the people of God grow and how the church of God grows.

The purpose of church is to glorify God and to multiply God's family. So everything we do should glorify God and make disciples.

Some people have a very limited view of discipleship, like it only happens when 1 person mentors another person.

That is a huge part of discipleship, but not the only part! Discipleship also happens through our:

Preaching and teaching
 Praise and worship
 Children's and youth ministries
 Outreach ministries
 Small groups
 Men's and women's breakfasts and events
 Counseling
 Leadership development
 Everything we do is part of the disciple-making process.

I know this all might seem difficult or even impossible to you. There's truth to that because Jesus said in John 15:5

Without Me you can do nothing.

We cannot do it in our own strength or wisdom. But Philippians 4:13 says:

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

God gives us the power to do everything He calls and commands us to do! The amazing thing about Jesus' ministry is this: In John 5:30, He said:

By Myself I can do nothing.

When Jesus was on earth He laid aside the independent exercise of His power and totally relied on the power of the Holy Spirit. He came to earth to die for our sins, but also to show us how to live. So He ministered in the power and anointing of the Spirit. We can minister like Jesus ministered only if we have the power of the Holy Spirit operating in us and through us. The more like Christ we become, the more dependent upon the Holy Spirit we will become. He lived His entire life in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Remember – our destiny is to become like Christ.

So, since Jesus was born of the Spirit, we need to be born again by the Spirit!

Since Jesus was filled with the Spirit, we need to be filled with the Spirit!

Since Jesus was led by the Spirit, we need to be led by the Spirit!

Since Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit, we need to minister in the power of the Spirit!

Since Jesus had the fruit of the Spirit in His life, we need the fruit of the Spirit in our lives!

Since Jesus depended on the Spirit, we need to depend on the Spirit

Since Jesus made disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can also be disciples who make disciples who make disciples until Jesus returns!

This is the purpose of God for your life! This is your destiny!

Let's embrace it and run with it and make disciples to the glory of God!