

MAKING DISCIPLES THAT MULTIPLY

By Russ Akins

"No one can be My disciple unless he gives up everything, bears his cross daily, and follows Me." Jesus Christ (Luke 14:26,27,33)

Becoming a disciple of Christ, is something that is “caught” as well as “taught”. Jesus said, that a disciple will become like his teacher (Luke 6:40). Discipleship is not merely the accumulation of Biblical knowledge. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day were loaded with Biblical knowledge, and yet Jesus consistently cursed them for their pride and blindness to the truth. Healthy discipleship involves Biblical knowledge that is energized and illuminated by the Holy Spirit; then that Divine input must be applied by faith through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. So a genuine disciple is a learner who **hears, understands, and then applies** his learning as a **doer**. This is part of the transformational process described in Romans 12:1-2 and IICor. 10:5.

Additionally, all potential disciples need someone else who is further down the road of spiritual maturity to help them in the discipling process. The “discipler” then needs to consistently help the “disciplee” catch the **life-style of trusting Christ** by faith, how to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to be out in the harvest / battlefield contending for the souls of men and women. **He must get into the action**, and see God give him/her victory after victory.

Jesus, reached out to the multitudes and had many brief evangelistic encounters, but chose to spend most of His time and effort on 12 men. They were His closest friends, but also His disciples on whom He would risk everything. It seems that His goal in discipling the 12 was to build their faith in Him, so that they in turn could reach and “disciple the world.” Their motivation had to be internal rather than simply external.

After three short years, Jesus died for the sins of the world, was resurrected by His Father after being in the grave for three days, and then after 9 physical post-resurrection appearances, He ascended bodily into Heaven, and left the young Christian “enterprise” in the hands of the immature twelve. **The risk as well as the challenge was unbelievable!!!**

They were just ordinary, unschooled men endowed with the common weaknesses of the flesh and the prejudices of their culture. But their discipleship training with Jesus, and the advent of the indwelling and filling ministries of the Holy Spirit empowered these simple men to literally change their world. This revolutionary change came about through both the proclamation of the Gospel and an effective way to spiritually multiply. The new Christian movement was to be lead by committed, proven disciples.

To aspire to become a disciple is to desire to be like Jesus. So instead of the One, there would be thousands upon thousands living and ministering like Jesus through the enabling work of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Scriptures. The early Christians even through intense persecution and martyrdom, reached and discipled their world. They were even described as “those who have turned the world upside down.” (I Thess.1:1-10; Acts 17:6)

But since the first century, Christianity for the most part has become a spectator event. Large cathedrals, more sophisticated ceremonies and services, ritualistic prayers, holidays, and other forms of tradition have become the norm. And yet, from time to time, through out the centuries, God has raised up totally “sold out” disciples that took the Great Commission seriously to various parts of the world. Remember, that it was Columbus, who first planted a cross on the beach of America, and openly claimed America for Christ.

But today in the United States, where God has unmistakably blessed our great country because of the faith and obedience of our forefathers, the Christians now have lost their ability to influence the American culture as they once did. For the most part, American Christians have become too busy, too comfortable, and undisciplined to qualify themselves as a true disciple of Christ. Instead of applying Biblical truth through the power of the Holy Spirit, most have filled their lives with the things of the “flesh” and how to please themselves. Many “other things” have entered into the Church, and have diluted or misplaced the great plan of spiritual multiplication that Jesus, the Apostles, and the early Christians so well understood and did.

To be a disciple or learner, the necessary attitude requires that Jesus Christ and His concerns are foremost. Jesus clearly communicated that, no one could qualify to be His disciple who would not give up everything, and would not pick up and bear his cross daily, and then follow Him.

The goal of every authentic disciple is to be conformed to Christ in every way all of the time. So this is a process that requires total personal desire, the truth of the Scriptures, and the power of the Holy Spirit. An individual must have an undivided mind and heart, focused energy, and available time. Distractions will divide and potentially disqualify a disciple from continuing. Basic attitudes of **having a heart for God, teachability, availability, faithful-dependable, flexibility, and a willingness to communicate** are indispensable to any “would be” disciple. To become a disciple is to really know Christ intimately, to obey Him, and become like Him in every way possible.

Do you desire to follow Christ at a distance, or to become a humble servant of His? Are you attached more to the lure of this world and the desire to satisfy fleshly desires, rather than to be like Jesus? Do you really desire the futility of racing after cash, cars, cuties, careers, personal comfort, entertainment, pleasure, recreational activities, and whatever else money can buy? Your honest answers to these kinds of issues will ultimately decide whether you, as a Christian, will live a life of futility, or a fruitful life as a disciple in close pursuit of the Master.

MY CHALLENGE is to seriously look at the futility all around you. Look at the “ripple effect” of Christians going their own self-centered way? What happens to their relationships? What gives them meaning, significance, and fulfillment in life? Look at the priority of their Christian lives. Look at their “fruit.”

MY ENCOURAGEMENT is conscientiously and intentionally choose every day to be a disciple of Christ regardless of the cost. Choose to live everyday filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, so that God can shine through you to reach and disciple others the Biblical way. As you follow Christ closely, you will see God meeting your needs, building your faith, becoming your closest friend, and using you to expand His kingdom.

BUT YOU MUST CHOOSE!!! A Christian cannot be passive about discipleship. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters...”(Matt.6:24). To be divided is to be double minded according to James 1. To be uncommitted leaves a Christian without the will, determination, purpose, and focused attention to be Christ’s disciple.

If you have clearly and carefully chosen to be a disciple of Christ, and have met the requirements that Jesus Christ has laid out, then you have begun the most exciting adventure of your life. You will experience the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, and self control - Gal.5:21-22) as a way of life. You will encounter many difficulties and challenges to your faith, and probably to your life. But you will also see incredible victories that only God could have accomplished. God's great Holy Spirit and sovereignty will guide you day by day molding and shaping you for His purpose and Glory. A genuine disciple lives a life of remarkable blessing and supernatural fulfillment!

There is something incredibly magnetic to watch a genuine disciple at work on his knees, trusting God to "open the eyes" of someone with whom he is sharing the Gospel. The greatest stories you will ever hear will come from the lives of effective, humble disciples. So discipleship is a life-style, not a religion nor an obligation, but instead the greatest opportunity for any Christian to know Christ in a deeper stronger way.

Everything that is "taught" must also be "caught" by the younger disciple. It is a great responsibility for the disciple-maker to say as Paul said, "The things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil.4:9) So each disciple-maker must be careful how he builds the younger disciple. It is easily possible to build into the young disciple things like negative attitudes, unsound Biblical doctrine, personal prejudices, opinions and a lot of good Biblical knowledge without enough application. Make sure that the new disciple is being disciplined to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to you, a particular group, or to anyone else. Remember, the disciple-maker is not looking for an "ego trip." Instead, his motivation through the enablement of the Holy Spirit is to help, teach, guide, model, love, and pray for the new disciple so that he/she will mature, bear fruit and multiply.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

- Matt.28:18-20 – His command to MAKE DISCIPLES
- Acts 1:8 – His Power and strategy to accomplish the Great Commission
- Eph. 5:18 - The necessity of be filled with His Spirit to live the Christian life, and to be effective in discipling others
- II Tim. 2:2 - The plan of multiplying disciples that could reach every person in the world.

As you are “discipling” another person, please take to heart Jesus Christ’s investment in that person. He created them; He gave His blood for them; He loves them unconditionally; He knows them as His sheep; He has given them eternal life; He thinks about them hundreds of times each day; He is seeking their best interests; and He wants them to “bear eternal fruit.” And you have been given a very special opportunity to be a discipleship “tool” in His hands to develop and encourage the young disciple that stands before you. What an incredible privilege!

It is no mistake that God has also chosen you to disciple others, As you train the new disciple, you will grow stronger and understand much more as the Holy Spirit will instruct and use you.

It seems that the majority of new disciples are also new Christians. There are also those who have been self-centered Christians for years, that are finally “broken” and now are willing to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

The Bible (I Peter 2:1-3) refers to new Christians as “babes in Christ.” As with any newborn, critical sensitivity to the needs of the baby are the over-riding concern. The main issue is the good health of the young child, because good health leads to normal growth, which eventually leads to maturity, responsibility, and to reproduction (fruit).

Jesus said it another way to Peter, when He said three times to Peter, “do you love me? Then tend My lambs; then shepherd my sheep; tend My sheep(John 21:15-17). Remember, disciple making has to be developed within you, which also takes time. So be patient with yourself and your expectations. God is also using the young disciple to help continue your own training towards your maturity.

In the last 35 years that I have been discipling others, I have seen some great disciples raised up that are today “making waves” for Christ in various parts of the world. But I also have spent untold hours with the brightest potential, only to see them fall away into sin, the world, or into an unhealthy relationship. Disciple building really focuses the spiritual battle. The enemy, Satan, does not want any more Christ-centered disciples coming forth, so he will do everything possible to discourage, divide, distract, tempt, burnout, and kill any kind of genuine disciple building efforts. Although the battle can get quite rough at times, the victory is always ours in the Lord (John 16:33). Don’t let Satan, other inactive Christians, your feelings, or negative circumstances talk you out of obeying and following Christ closely.

PLEASE BE SENSATIVE TO THESE DISCIPLE MAKER GUIDELINES:

1. Start each day with your own **QUIET TIME**. You need to be walking with the Lord with fresh input for your own life if you expect to disciple others.
2. Be **SENSATIVE** to the **NEEDS** of the **PERSON** to who you are speaking.
3. Be primarily concerned with answering the young disciple's questions; then proceed to share the material that you have planned for your time together.
4. If you do not have time to finish all the material, simply continue it next time.
5. Be sure that you do not "preach" at the person, but rather ask him/her questions to learn things from the Bible themselves.
6. As you are talking and sharing, write down key verses, illustrations, and diagrams on a piece of paper, and let the new disciple take it with him.
7. **PRAY** daily for the people that you are discipling, and **RELY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT** to work in their lives.
8. Do not be discouraged someone becomes a Christian, and then does not want to be discipled, or if someone begins, but then does not want to continue. **REMEMBER**, you are responsible only to be available to let God work through you in the power of the Holy Spirit.
9. Building a relationship based on unconditional love and personal acceptance is most important. The new disciple has to know that you believe in him, and can see that you are trusting the Holy spirit in his life.
10. The person's willingness to be discipled, and the acceptance of content depends to a large degree on how the new disciple views the disciple maker. What you are to a person determines a lot of what he takes in of what you say. Be **AUTHENTIC!!!**

11. Be personable, relatable, and genuinely interested in the new disciple from a motivation of love. This should be demonstrated by taking the initiative to **build good lines of communication and relatability**. Good relationships take time and consistency.
12. Be sure to let the new disciple see you as a person that is also growing in Christ. From time to time share appropriate problems, challenges, and difficulties that you are presently trusting God to solve in your own life.