

Riverview Baptist Church  
"A Fresh Vision of Discipleship"  
Part One of the Series  
January 4, 2015  
Mark 1:17-18

**Memory Verse:**

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Mark 1:17-18

**Essence of the Lesson in a Sentence:**

Our lives are continually transformed as we live as disciples of Jesus Christ!

- *Review last week's lesson. Reflect on how you have witnessed God's ongoing work in your life or world this week?"*
- *This week will discover how our lives are to be continually transformed as we live as disciples of Jesus Christ.*
- *"What does the word disciple mean to you?"*
- *Who are some examples of believers that you know who seem like true disciples and what character traits in that person lead you to have this opinion about them?*

A dictionary definition of discipleship is . . .

1. a personal follower of Jesus during his life, especially one of the twelve Apostles.
2. a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher.

*But what does discipleship look like in the Bible? If we were going to write a biblical description of a disciple, what should it include?*

**Read the following verses and relate them back to this aspect of discipleship.**

1. A disciple is in a loving relationship with Jesus Christ that is exclusive and takes priority over all other relationships. In short, we worship Jesus! John 4:23-24, Philippians 2:10, Revelations 5:12, Luke 14:26

Johnathan Parnell, "Most fundamentally, to follow Jesus means to worship him exclusively. This is at the heart of Jesus's ministry on earth. As he told the woman at the well, the Father is seeking true worshipers — not faux worshipers, but true worshipers — those who worship him in spirit and truth ([John 4:23-24](#)). Which means, as it did in her case, we shouldn't be so quick to change the subject. If we will follow Jesus, we must worship God — *through* Jesus, because he is our Mediator ([John 14:6](#); [1 Timothy 2:5](#)), and Jesus *himself*, because he is God ([John 10:30](#); [20:28-29](#)).

**Read the following verses and relate them back to this aspect of discipleship.**

2. A Disciple is an eager learner who listens and obeys Jesus' will. Luke 14:27, 9:23

Selfishness and our own will oftentimes prevent us from being willing to desire Jesus' will for our lives.

*"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27).*

Samuel Rutherford said, "The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that I ever bore. It is a burden to me such as wings are to a bird or sails are to a ship to carry me forward to my harbor."

*"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)*

"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Man's soul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility" (A.W. Tozer).

**Assign learners the following verses to read. After letting each one be read, relate them back to this aspect of discipleship.**

3. A Disciple is a humble follower of Jesus who leads others through service and ministry according to Jesus' own example. John 13:35, 13:14-15, Galatians 6:10

A disciple is someone growing in adoration of and love for God, and subsequently in love for other people. Such a person is other-centered because his or her focus is on God. Succinctly put, a disciple loves. (*John 13:35*)

And as a servant, Jesus says of his disciples, to his disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (*John 13:14-15*). In one sense, the posture of servant should characterize Jesus's disciples on all fronts. But in another sense, being a servant like Jesus has a particular focus on disciples serving disciples. It's a family thing. "Let us do good to everyone," Paul said, "and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (*Galatians 6:10*).

4. All Christians are called to be disciples and to make disciples. Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8.

Parnell writes, “John gives us another helpful picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This time it comes in the commission of Jesus, when he says of his disciples, to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21; John 17:18). This means that Jesus’s disciples are on a mission. It means, in the broadest sense, that they are missionaries, that they are envisioned and empowered to step into this world (not of it, but sent into it) as his witnesses (Acts 1:8).”

#### SO WHAT?

- Pray to God and ask Him to show you what are of discipleship you need to grow in.
- Ask God to show you someone who can help you become a better disciple.
- Ask God to show you someone who you can help become a better disciple this year.
- Commit to meet regularly with that person this year with a goal of strengthening one another as disciples of Jesus.

The following three articles are for your study and are the basis for the lesson plan for this and the upcoming series of lessons on discipleship.

# What Is a Disciple?

by Jonathan Parnell

When Jesus speaks we listen.

That makes sense, right? Jesus is the one to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given ([Matthew 28:18](#)). Jesus is the one of whom it will be said, forever, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” ([Revelation 5:12](#)). He’s the one to whom every knee will bow ([Philippians 2:10](#)) — the one by whom all the tribes of the earth will wail ([Revelation 1:7](#)), and from whom the fury of God’s wrath will be executed ([Revelation 19:15](#)).

Jesus has *that* kind of supremacy — so what he says matters.

And beyond that, we’ve been united to Jesus by faith ([Romans 6:5](#)), made alive in him by grace ([Ephesians 2:4–5](#)), counted righteous in him because of his work ([Galatians 2:16](#)). Jesus, in all of his supremacy, is also our shepherd — so we know his voice ([John 10:27](#)).

Therefore, by virtue of his power and grace, because he is *the* Sovereign and *our* Savior, when he tells his church to make disciples of all nations, *we really want to do that*.

## Toward a Definition

Jesus commissions us to “go” — because of his authority — “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” ([Matthew 28:19–20](#)).

This raises a fundamental question, though — one that even takes priority over the *how-to*’s of discipleship. What does it actually mean to be a “disciple” of Jesus? If we are going to make disciples, we need to know what that is.

The standard definition of “disciple” (noun) is someone who adheres to the teachings of another. It is a follower or a learner. It refers to someone who takes up the ways of someone else. Applied to Jesus, a disciple is someone who learns from him to live like him — someone who, because of God’s awakening grace, conforms his or her words and ways to the words and ways of Jesus. Or, you might say, as others have put it in the past, disciples of Jesus are themselves “little Christs” ([Acts 26:28](#); [2 Corinthians 1:21](#)).

The four Gospels give us the definitive portrait of Jesus in his life on earth, and if we really want to know what it means to be his disciple, the Gospels are likely where we start. In particular,

John's Gospel shows us three complementary perspectives on what it means to follow Jesus, each patterned after Jesus himself. Building off of John's profile, we could say that a disciple of Jesus is a *worshiper*, a *servant*, and a *witness*.

## Disciple Means Worshiper

Most fundamentally, to follow Jesus means to worship him exclusively. This is at the heart of Jesus's ministry on earth. As he told the woman at the well, the Father is seeking true worshipers — not faux worshipers, but true worshipers — those who worship him in spirit and truth (**John 4:23–24**). Which means, as it did in her case, we shouldn't be so quick to change the subject. If we will follow Jesus, we must worship God — *through* Jesus, because he is our Mediator (**John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5**), and Jesus *himself*, because he is God (**John 10:30; 20:28–29**).

This is the fundamental perspective of a disciple because it is more ultimate than anything else we are or do, and most distinctive in our context. As far as **ultimate**, worshiping Jesus — gladly reflecting back to him the radiance of his worth — is the greatest act for any creature. As far as context, nothing will irritate our pluralistic society more than being an exclusive worshiper of Jesus. Lots of people are cool with Jesus (at least their notion of him), and even following the “ways” of Jesus, when it leaves out the exclusivity part. Jesus the Moral Teacher, the Nice Guy, the Judge-Not-Lest-You-Be-Judged Motivational Speaker — *that* Jesus is everybody's homeboy. But that is not the real Jesus. That's a manmade figure — a far cry from the portrait Jesus gives of himself.

To follow Jesus, to be his disciple, doesn't mean community involvement and the veneer of tolerance. It means, mainly, first and central, to worship him — with **joy at the heart**. Making disciples of Jesus means gathering his worshipers.

## Disciple Means Servant

John shows another picture of the Jesus we're to worship, and this time *he* is kneeling before his disciples to wash their feet (**John 13:5**). I know, it doesn't sound right, especially when we think of him as the object of our exclusive praise. It didn't sound right to Peter either, until Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (**John 13:8**). But Jesus is a servant. He came to earth not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as the rescue for sinners (**Mark 10:45**).

And as a servant, Jesus says of his disciples, to his disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (**John 13:14–15**). In one sense, the posture of servant should characterize Jesus's disciples on all fronts. But in another sense, being a servant like Jesus has a particular focus on disciples serving disciples. It's a family thing. “Let us do good to everyone,” Paul said, “and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (**Galatians 6:10**).

This one-another angle is where Jesus takes us in giving “a new commandment,” just after he washed the Twelve's feet: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just

as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34; 1 John 3:23). In fact, it is this love that disciples have for one another that identifies us as disciples of Jesus to a watching world (John 13:35), and even assures us of saving faith (1 John 3:14).

To be a disciple of Jesus means to serve like him. It means to serve, primarily, by looking at your brothers and sisters and **going low** in acts of love, even when it’s an inconvenience to yourself, even when it flip-flops the world’s social order and expectations. Making disciples of Jesus means making servants who love one another.

## Disciple Means Witness

John gives us another helpful picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This time it comes in the commission of Jesus, when he says of his disciples, to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21; John 17:18). This means that Jesus’s disciples are on a mission. It means, in the broadest sense, that they are missionaries, that they are envisioned and empowered to step into this world (not of it, but **sent into it**) as his witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Jesus was sent for a purpose — to reveal God and redeem sinners (John 1:14, 12) — and he set his face like flint to see it accomplished (Luke 9:51; Isaiah 50:7). We too, as his disciples, filled by his Spirit, are sent for a purpose — to tell his good news (Romans 10:14–17).

To be a disciple of Jesus means to point people to him. It means to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love so that others would know him and worship him. It means, in other words, that we **gladly** seek more worshipers-servants-missionaries. Which is to say, a disciple of Jesus makes disciples of Jesus, as Jesus tells us to (Matthew 28:18–20).

And, of course, when Jesus speaks we listen.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/what-is-a-disciple>

What is a Discipleship? By Greg Laurie, <http://www.harvest.org/knowgod/new-believer/foundations-for-living/what-is-discipleship.html>

## • Introduction

Many may think that the term disciple refers only to the early followers of Christ. We know that they were a praying, worshipping, loving, giving, and evangelizing group of men and women who refused to keep the truth of the gospel to themselves. Yet, God still desires disciples today! Ordinary people like you and me whom God can use to do extraordinary things.

The Christian experience of the believers in the first-century church may seem radical to many in the church today, but to those early believers, it was normal Christianity. And these men and women empowered and motivated by the Holy Spirit turned their world upside down for the sake of Christ. In short, they were true disciples of Jesus Christ.

## • Are We True Disciples?

If you are a true disciple, your Christian walk will be challenging and exciting, and you will have a sense of purpose and direction. But if your Christian experience can be described as dull, unfulfilling, and even boring at times, you need to seriously examine the statements Jesus made concerning what it means to be a disciple. After all, how can we expect to fulfill the Great Commission (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19) to go into all the world and make disciples if we don't even really know what one is? It literally takes one to make one.

A disciple is defined as a learner, a pupil, one who comes to be taught.

The relationship between the disciple and his teacher is not merely that of a student listening to a lecturer, or a passively interested listener. A disciple listens with attention and intention. He drinks in every word of his teacher, marking every inflection of voice with an intense desire to apply what has been learned.

## • The Requirements of Discipleship

In Luke 14:25-35, Jesus laid out the tests and requirements of discipleship. Jesus saw a large crowd gathering. He knew that these people believed and accepted His message in principle. Prior to this point, Jesus had shown how the message of the gospel was for everyone. He had exposed the Pharisees as the religious hypocrites that they were. As a result, He had become enormously popular. Now He wanted to weed out those who were following Him for the wrong reasons.

Some wanted to be dazzled by Jesus' miracles, while others came looking for a free meal. A few even hoped that He would overthrow Rome and establish God's kingdom. So Jesus turned to the multitude and preached a sermon that deliberately thinned out the ranks.

Jesus seeks quality over quantity

Jesus makes it clear that when it comes to personal discipleship, He is more interested in quality than quantity. The words He spoke that day are perhaps the most solemn and searching words that ever fell from His lips.

Why would Jesus say such things to all those people who followed Him? It seems that He is intentionally trying to get rid of them. In a sense, He is trying to get rid of at least some of them.

A similar account is found in Judges 7:1-22. There God wanted to give His servant Gideon a victory in battle against the Midianites. But the Lord wanted the glory for the victory. So, through a series of tests, God whittled down Gideon's original army of 32,000 to 300. God knew that He could do more with 300 alert, committed men than He could with 32,000 half-hearted ones.

Three times in the course of this message in Luke 14, Jesus used the phrase, "cannot be my disciple." In other words, Jesus was laying out some absolute requirements for discipleship.

## • Requirement #1: Love God More Than Anyone Else

Jesus begins with some very strong words: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Jesus was not advocating that in order to be disciples, we must actually hate family, friends, and ourselves. In this verse, Jesus was using sharp contrasts to make a point. Here He uses the word hate as the opposite of love. He did not choose something easily hated, like sin. Instead, He chose the most noble love we could have in this world the love of family. He uses this analogy to show that our love for God must take pre-eminence over all others.

Your love for God should be so strong that your love for others is like hatred by comparison.

We see how personal relationships can conflict with the call of discipleship in Luke 9. There, Jesus asked someone to follow Him, but the man responds with this excuse: "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." (Luke 9:59)

Right there, a conflict arises. If He is truly Lord, then He is first, not us. This man was essentially saying, "Lord, let me wait until my parents grow old and die. I don't want to create any conflict. I'll follow You at a more convenient time."

Jesus answered: "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:60)

In this life, you either will have harmony with people and friction with God, or harmony with God and friction with people. You cannot have it both ways.



"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matthew 10:34-35).

You must decide which way it will go. If you choose harmony with God, the conflict you experience with others may ultimately lead to the awareness of their own need to find harmony with God.

## • A Test of Devotion

Jesus wants to test our hearts. He wants to be sure that we love Him more than anyone or anything else.

Abraham of the Old Testament seemed to struggle with this. God gave him a son, Isaac, in his old age. The boy was precious to Abraham's life, the joy of his heart. This young man was a physical representation of everything sacred to Abraham's heart: the covenants God had made and the physical link to the coming Messiah.

As Abraham watched Isaac grow from a little baby to a strong, young man, perhaps this child began to fill the spot that Abraham had previously reserved for his friend, God. Perhaps, at this point in his life, had he been asked whom he loved more—Isaac or God—it would have been difficult to answer.

A.W. Tozer writes, "It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love." So God said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

### ○ Abraham passed the test.

When Abraham so wonderfully passed this test, God blessed him and spared his son (Genesis 22:31-18). In essence, God told him, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you actually kill Isaac. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might remain unchallenged there."

After this test in Abraham's life, there was nothing in his life that was not committed to the Lord. He still had great wealth, flocks, and possessions. He still had his son Isaac. He had everything, but he possessed nothing! His grip was very light on these things, and tighter on the eternal. Again, to quote Tozer: "Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed."

God is still looking for men and women who will shake their world, men and women who will be His disciples. I urge you to make that step. If you do, our world will never be the same again. English evangelist John Wesley once said, "Give me a hundred men who love God with all of their hearts and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world."

### ○ A personal thought

Will you dedicate your Isaac to the Lord today? It could be a family member or friend you love more than God. It may be a relationship you are in at the moment. It may be some sort of pursuit you are afraid to give up.

Will you step out from the fickle multitudes and fair-weather followers today and be a true disciple of Jesus, loving Him more than anyone or anything else?

## • The Cost of Discipleship

If ever there comes a time when the call of the highest earthly love and the cross of Christ are in conflict, the call of Christ must prevail. According to Jesus, a disciple is someone who loves God more than anyone else, even family and friends.

## • Requirement #2: Deny Yourself and Take up the Cross

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27).

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

The greatest barrier to discovering all that God has for us is our preoccupation with self. We have become a self-obsessed society. Jesus' mandate goes against the grain of popular culture. In fact, many in the church today have been advocating that the answer to most of the problems in our society is to build up our self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

### ○ Our self-love versus our sinful nature

The Bible plainly teaches that we have an inherently sinful nature (Proverbs 20:9; Romans 3:23; 5:12-13; 1 John 1:8). The apostle Paul seemed to have pretty low self-esteem when he cried, "O wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:24).

The Bible makes it clear that it is not a lack of love for oneself that causes problems in society; it is the obsession with self. In fact, this love of self will be one of the earmarks of the last days, leading to a host of other problems (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Scripture acknowledges the fact that we already love ourselves. Ephesians 5:29 says, "After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it" No, Jesus did not say that we need to love ourselves (we already do that). He told us to deny ourselves. To better understand the significance of this, we must first understand what that means.

### ○ The word denial means to repudiate; to disdain; to disown; to forfeit; to totally disregard.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or you see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether."

What is the positive outcome of denying yourself? Jesus goes on to say,

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). The word for "life" in the original Greek was *psuche*, meaning "soul life" literally your will, ambition, goals and desires. When you give that up to allow yourself to be conformed into the image of Jesus, you will discover His plan and purpose for you.

- **Bearing your cross means dying to oneself.**

Why did Jesus use this particular illustration? He used a radical symbol to get people's attention. He was not simply speaking of an individual's personal problem or obstacle. In that day and age, a person who was bearing a cross was walking to his death. Bearing your cross means dying to self, laying aside your personal goals, desires and ambitions so that God can reveal His desires, ambitions and goals for your life. In essence, it is living life as it was meant to be lived: in the will of God.

Samuel Rutherford said, "The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that I ever bore. It is a burden to me such as wings are to a bird or sails are to a ship to carry me forward to my harbor."

"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Man's soul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility" (A.W. Tozer).

- **Requirement #3: Forsake All That You Have**

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

To forsake means to surrender your claim to; to say goodbye to.

Until I recognize that everything I have belongs to Jesus Christ, I am not His disciple. Consider Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler who asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17).

"Jesus answered, 'You know the commandments: Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely. Do not cheat. Honor your father and mother.' 'Teacher,' the man replied, 'I've obeyed all these commandments since I was a child.'"

"Jesus felt genuine love for this man as He looked at him. 'You lack only one thing,' He told him. 'Go and sell all you have and give money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this, the man's face fell, and he went sadly away because he had many possessions" (Mark 10:19-22 NLT).

Jesus was not implying that to follow Him, we need to take a vow of poverty. He asked this man to "sell all he had" because He could see that possessions were the god of this man's life. If something else had been on the "throne of his life," Jesus would have asked him for that.

- **Requirement #4: Count the Cost**

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it" (Luke 14:28).

Jesus underlines the importance of counting the cost of discipleship. Many people make impulse purchases without even considering the cost, or they rush into marriage or a career. Sadly, some do the same in their commitment to follow Christ.

This point is illustrated in Luke 9:57-58: "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'"

The man in this story did not even wait to be called. He hastily volunteered. He seemed to have a good heart, but he was impulsive. No doubt he had been watching Jesus with great admiration, and now wanted to walk with Him. But he had not counted the cost!

This man did not know what lay in his future, but Jesus did. By the nature of Jesus' statement to him, it would appear that this man, in contrast to the one who wanted to avoid friction with family and friends, was too concerned with material things in general. In essence, Jesus was saying to this man (and to all who would be His disciples), "Whatever would dull your desire to serve, quench your hunger for the Word and thirst for prayer, or make the world more attractive must go."

Jesus is not asking if you will commit 20%, 30%, or 50% to Him. He is asking you to commit everything. Billy Graham has said, "Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have."

## • What Is the Cost of Discipleship?

- I must pay the price for the sins that I may now cherish.

As a disciple of Christ, I cannot cling to a single sin and pretend that I am following Him. In the place of those sins, I can enjoy walking in fellowship and friendship with God, living a holy and happy life.

- I must pay the price of this world's fellowship.

In other words, I must no longer allow secular and worldly philosophy to color my thinking and living. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (Romans 12:2 Phillips).

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I must pay the price of this world's friendship. I will be laughed at for my convictions, mocked for my beliefs, and scorned for trying to live by what the Bible teaches. At the same time, in place of the world's friendship, I will have God's.

- I must pay the price for the plans of my life.

We all have ideas of what we want to do and who we want to be. These are not evil or wrong. Still, I must be willing to give them up if asked to do so by the Lord. And in the place of those flawed plans, I will have God's perfect plan for my life.

## • What Are the Benefits of Being a Disciple?

Yes, there is a cost to discipleship, but what we gain in the place of the things we give up is infinitely better.

- The disciple is the one to whom God reveals more as that individual drinks in His every Word, marking the inflection of His voice with the desire to obey.
- The disciple is the one who lives the Christian life in all its fullness, receiving all God has for him.
- To the disciple, each new day is a fresh opportunity to walk with God.
- To the disciple, life has definite purpose and direction. It is life abundant.

It costs to follow Jesus Christ, but it costs more not to. If you are settling for anything short of discipleship, you are missing out.

## • You have a choice to make.

You love God, and you want to follow Him. Now you have to choose:

- To live for yourself or to deny yourself.
- To ignore the cross or to take it up.
- To seek to save your life and ultimately lose it, or to lose (or invest) your life and ultimately find it.
- To gain the world or to forsake the world.
- To lose your soul or to keep it.

Though our numbers as disciples are small, we must press on and stand together. God may purge our ranks, but it is only to make us stronger as we pursue His plan and purpose to make an impact upon our world.

# What is a Disciple?,

[www.intervarsity.org/handbooks/chapter-leader/whatisadisciple](http://www.intervarsity.org/handbooks/chapter-leader/whatisadisciple)

Before we explore what it means to develop disciples, it is important to first define the concept of a disciple. What exactly are we trying to produce? What does a disciple look like? Your answers to these questions are crucial – they will determine the development strategy that you pursue.

I thought of two traditional descriptions that accurately reflect what a disciple is, but they do not fully define the profound quality of life made possible by reconnection with God. By looking at these definitions, however, perhaps we can see what lies beyond them.

1. A disciple is someone who *does* certain things.
2. A disciple is someone who *understands* certain things.

**A disciple is someone who does certain things.** This view of a disciple emphasizes discipline and obedience. You demonstrate that you are a follower of Christ by trying to live as He lived and by carrying out His commands. A disciple does “good things,” such as quiet times, evangelism, involvement with other believers, and social justice work. We feel deep concern for righteousness, whether personal or cultural. Moral choices and behavior matter deeply and are of more ultimate importance than emotional hardship. For example, I should remain moral even if friends reject me for not participating in their kind of behavior.

**A disciple is someone who understands certain things.** This view of a disciple emphasizes accurate thinking and insight concerning God, people, salvation, and so on. The theory is that if you think correctly about the important things, then the rest of your life will assume the proper perspective. A disciple must understand that God is both holy and loving; that people, though sinners, are made in the image of God; that Christ’s death was the substitute payment for our sin; and that because of Jesus’ payment, we are granted access to the heart of God.

This view holds that we can acquire a substantial understanding of God’s redemptive work, which enables us to correctly see Him and our position in Him. An extension of this view is that we can also gain a substantial understanding of our own lives, our personal history and family background. This understanding enables us to make progress in our relationship with Christ. For instance, understanding that your father’s past ridicule has hobbled your self-image helps you begin to confidently give yourself to others.

## ***The Dilemma of Defining Relationship***

The dilemma with defining a disciple is that you are not defining a static object that stands alone and possesses such and such properties. Rather, you are defining a person who is in relationship with another person. A disciple is defined by his or her *relationship* with God.

The two traditional descriptions discussed above do reflect some of the work and fruit of a disciple, but they are incomplete. A disciple should never be described in terms of things, even if those things are behaviors and ideas. It is possible, after all, to do right things and have accurate answers, and yet be very far away from God. A disciple is best described not in terms of relationship with things, but in terms of relationship with God Himself.

If this is still too static a definition for you, consider the dilemma of defining anyone who is in relationship. For example, try to define a husband. You could say that a husband does certain things (acts kindly toward and cares for his wife) and understands certain things (the commitment of marriage, the psyche of his wife).

If you are the wife, however, I think you would want something better and deeper than that. A wife wants her husband to define himself not just in terms of what he does or thinks, but in terms of his relationship with her. It is one thing to have a dutiful, sensible, and even-tempered husband; it is quite a different

marriage to be passionately pursued by a man who wants to be intimately involved with and committed to you.

And so it is with God. God desires our passionate love – this is the great appeal and command of the whole of Scripture, and the endpoint of the Gospel. As a result, our definition of a disciple should be no less.

Yes, a disciple does and understands certain things. Yet far more fundamentally and profoundly, **a disciple is someone who loves a certain Someone**. A disciple is someone growing in adoration of and love for God, and subsequently in love for other people. Such a person is other-centered because his or her focus is on God.

Succinctly put, a disciple loves. (*John 13:35*)

If love for God is the definition of a disciple, then how do we develop love for God and others? All the implications of our strategy for “developing disciples” stem from the answer to that question. The better we can answer it, the better we will be in helping others to mature in Christ.