

## Discipleship

*Discipleship: a loving, spiritual, selfless,  
growing commitment to God and all  
others by God's power.*

**W**e need to pay close attention to terms as we study the Bible; context always determines the meaning of a word (a term). For an illustration, if one were to say the word “trunk” and ask you to define and describe it, what would you say? You most likely would ask a follow-up question: “What kind of trunk are we talking about, a car trunk, a tree trunk, a moving trunk, or something else?” Many words do not have much meaning outside of a phrase or context. “Disciple” is no different when used in the Bible. The word was used for the 12 men who walked with Jesus 3+ years, of course. It was used to describe students of other teachers also (e.g., John the Baptist). It is used to describe larger groups of people and people of faith in general as well (cf., Acts 6:7). Here, I will use the terms “disciple” to mean a committed follower of Jesus.

Similarly, “discipleship” may mean different things to people. Here, I will use this definition, discipleship: a loving, spiritual, selfless, growing commitment to God and all others by God’s power.

**Discipleship is loving.** The two greatest commands are summed up most concisely with “Love God and people—completely.” Humankind was created

## THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

by a loving God. Jesus died for us because of love. Christians have the ability to love in selfless, sacrificial ways due to God's work in us. Love is the supreme Christian virtue. Importantly, love is also the "glue" that binds *all other* Christian virtues together (cf., 1 Corinthians 13). Therefore, love cannot be overstated; without it we have nothing.

Finally, we should admit here: one cannot stay in neutral with God. Either we are growing in our relationship with Him, or we are becoming more distant from Him. The focus of our lives should be—and must be—growing intense desires to love God and others, and to grow in the applications of those desires. Remember, "Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength'" (Mark 12:30, emphasis mine). Desiring to love God with every part of our being has always been the mark for people of faith. Acting on those desires is another mark often missed.

**Discipleship is spiritual**, because it cannot purely intellectual information. Remember Colossians 2:2-3, "My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the *knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (emphasis mine). Wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ (*inside of Him*), so a spiritual relationship is both necessary and central to learning and applying the Bible to life. Therefore, the gaining of true knowledge and wisdom that translates into measurable Christian living—the doing—is found in committed, growing, serious spiritual dependency on God and deepening our relationship to Him.

**Discipleship is selfless**. Matthew 16:25 reads, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." To be a disciple of Jesus, we must get our minds off of ourselves and place our focus on others. Selflessness is a must to discipleship. Our lives must be lost.

**Discipleship is a growing commitment to God**. Believers readily confess that we don't act like Jesus much of the time (Perhaps many would say most of the time!). We should always be growing through our relationship with Jesus, but we regularly fall short. God will do His work in our lives if we are willing, if we become staunchly committed to discipleship. Make no mistake,

## DISCIPLESHIP

*discipleship goes against everything in our fallen natures.* Therefore, discipleship is the most challenging process that we will be a part of. There will be setbacks for sure, but the more we are committed, the more we will experience God.

**Discipleship is a growing commitment to others.** Mark 10:43b-45 reads, “Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Disciples give up their rights to their lives and instead turn toward living as a servant to others (or even daring to live as a slave to them).

**Discipleship is by the power of God.** God is the first cause of all things. He caused us to have life by creating us. And He caused us to have eternal life through His Son Jesus. Furthermore, when we look like God it is because He lives through us and is doing His work in us. Remember Galatians 5:22-23, “But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control [...]” (emphasis mine). These loving attributes have their source in the Spirit’s work, not in human effort. We have a part in the process (as we will discuss later), but we do not transform ourselves; God does.

Finally, we should take heed here: one cannot stay in neutral with God. Either we are growing in our relationship with Him, or we are becoming more distant from Him. The focus of our lives should be—and must be—an intense desire to love. Remember, “Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength’” (Mark 12:30, emphasis mine). Love God with every part of your being; this has always been the mark for people of faith.