

What is a disciple?

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DISCIPLESHIP IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

Sometimes a part can stand in for or symbolize a whole thing.

You've run into this before.

For instance, what if I were to ask you to "give me a hand" moving a box. By that I mean that I would like for you to use your hands (probably both of them) and your arms and legs, and probably the rest of your body. I would mean that I would like for you to lift a box along with me and then help me move it from one place to another.

Our "hand" represents our whole capacity to move something.

Sometimes a part can stand in for the whole. It's more than just a symbol. It *IS* the thing itself.

In that same way, making and multiplying disciples is something that can *SEEM* like it's just a single program or a nice idea, but it's critically important to the Christian life and to the Church.

In his Great Commission to his followers in Matthew 28:19, Jesus told us that as we're going to all the places we will go, our job is to "make disciples of all nations."

There's a lot more wrapped up in that command.

But making disciples is a symbol that stands in for the whole.

Discipleship is critically important.

In his 2006 book "The Great Omission," Dallas Willard wrote: *"The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence."*

Willard was worried that we were missing out on the fullness of the Christian life.

When we aren't being and becoming disciples, we aren't experiencing the new life Jesus came to bring us.

When we aren't making and multiplying disciples, we aren't complete.

But a statement like that leads us to ask, "What is a disciple?"

To answer that question, I want to turn today to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

As Jesus began preaching and working, He started gathering followers.

In Mark 1:16-20 we get to see Jesus call some of His earliest followers. His call and their responses help us to get to the heart of what a disciple actually is:

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he [Jesus] saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

DISCIPLES OF JESUS FOLLOW HIM

What was Jesus calling these four men to do?

Jesus' encounter with these four men may feel a little out of the blue in the book of Mark.

It feels as if Jesus walked up to them, having never met them before, and summoned them without them knowing anything about who Jesus was or what Jesus had done.

But Jesus was already preaching and teaching around Galilee, calling people to repent and believe the Good News about the Kingdom of God. His reputation was spreading.

And the Gospel according to John, Chapter 1, lets us know that Andrew was already considering Jesus' claims.

Andrew was an active follower of John the Baptist. And when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, Andrew began to try to figure out who Jesus was, and Andrew immediately found Jesus to be compelling and important.

And Luke lets us know that there was likely a miraculous catch of fish involved that may have helped to persuade the fishermen that Jesus was someone extraordinary, worth their attention.

But no matter how many experiences any of these men had with Jesus before this day, and no matter how much they may have been thinking about Jesus' message, this call had to surprise them because of its clarity and claim.

Jesus said, "Follow me." Literally, He called them to come along behind Him, to get in line.

And the four men made a decision. They followed.

Disciples of Jesus follow him before we're ready.

Mark emphasized that Andrew, Simon (also known as Peter), James, and John all followed Jesus immediately.

They followed Jesus before they understood Him.

Their knowledge of Jesus was incomplete at best.

In fact, until Jesus died and rose again, they misunderstood Him.

Message for us: When we begin to follow Jesus, we don't know everything about Him. Our knowledge is totally inadequate. But that's no reason to not start following. If you're waiting for more knowledge before you begin to become a disciple of Jesus, that's a mistake. Don't wait! You'll never feel like you know enough if you do. Today is the day to start following Jesus!

Disciples of Jesus follow him by moving.

Andrew and Simon (Peter) left their nets and got moving behind Jesus.

James and John left their father, their fishing business, their family, and their hometown behind. And they started following after Jesus.

They would share life with Him.

They would go where He went and do what He did, learning along the way.

Message for us: The Christian faith is active and moving. It's always taking us somewhere. It's more than a set of ideas we hold to.

Disciples of Jesus follow him because he's in charge.

Andrew, Simon Peter, James, and John weren't just walking along behind Jesus.

Jesus was now in charge. He would tell them things, show them things, and direct them to do things.

Message for us: This is where the rubber really meets the road for us. And it's one of the most important points about disciples. Jesus is in charge of us. He makes the rules, and we follow them. Jesus gives us orders, and we obey them. Not only is that an important thing for us to know, it's a tough thing for us to do. As we follow Jesus ...

DISCIPLES OF JESUS IMITATE HIM

Disciples of Jesus imitate him, which was the point of the journey He took with them.

Jesus was making a very practical offer to his disciples. They would follow Him, and he was promising to transfer some things to them. They would live with Him, listen to Him, travel with Him, and obey Him like the disciples of many rabbis in that day. In return, Jesus would transfer some of His knowledge and help them to develop His character and pick up His skills.

The goal would be that they would become ready to train disciples themselves.¹

Jesus had a process for teaching his disciples.

We can see Jesus' process of teaching His disciples in His approach to casting out demons.

On multiple occasions, Jesus' disciples saw Him casting out demons. They were getting a lesson in how to do it. Then, in Matthew 10:1, as Jesus commissioned His disciples to begin practicing what they had learned, He specifically gave them the authority and power they needed to cast out demons themselves. Matthew 10:1 says, *"And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction."*

Then the disciples were ready to start practicing casting out demons. But it didn't always go well—as is so often the case with skills we're trying to develop.

We find in Matthew 17 that while Jesus was away, His disciples tried to cast out a demon. It didn't go well.

When Jesus returned, a man came out of the crowd and walked up to Jesus. He knelt before Jesus and asked the Lord to cast out the demon Himself.

Jesus was frustrated with His disciples, because they had the example and the power, but they still weren't able to do what He wanted them to be able to do.

Then Jesus cast out the demon.

And He followed up with His disciples. He helped them process their failure and coached them on how to do the right thing the next time.

Jesus had a process to help us imitate him.

As a disciple of Jesus, I want to imitate him!

However, His character and skills don't always come out in me, and that disappoints me every time it happens.

I have seen an ugly side of myself that came out in odd ways during this COVID-19 outbreak.

As we all began to stay at home, I started to feel tons of disquiet internally. All of my routines were disrupted, I was isolated from everyone I knew, and the world was suddenly turned upside down.

I found myself with a load of anxiety, so without knowing quite why, I started looking for comforts and turned to some strange places.

The drive-through at our local Chick-fil-A stayed open throughout the outbreak, so every day for lunch, I would get into my car, drive to Chick-fil-A, and get lunch.

I told myself it was because I love their food so much.

And I do like Chick-fil-A, but I was eating it five days a week!

I was going to Chick-fil-A because it was familiar and comforting, and I could see people.

Deep down inside, I wasn't trusting God. I think somewhere deep down inside I was asking, "Why this? Why now? Why me?"

Going to Chick-fil-A helped me to feel OK, instead of trusting in God to make me feel OK.

I was studying the Psalms at the time in my personal Bible study. And the Psalms I was studying at the time were all about the sovereignty and greatness of God.

Eventually I realized that these are the days that God has given to us and that we must be ready for them, but as a disciple of Jesus, that should have been my first response.

And it was disappointing to me that once again Jesus' character didn't come out in me.

Because I'm a disciple of Jesus, and I want to be like him.

Disciples of Jesus imitate him, so how does Jesus want you to imitate him?

¹ <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/rabbi-and-talmidim> on 2020-06-16.

What character is Jesus trying to pass along to you?
What skills does Jesus want you to develop?
Dads, today is Father's Day. What character and skills does Jesus want you to develop?
Husbands, what character and skills does Jesus want you to develop?
For all of us, what character and skills does Jesus want to shape in us?
Disciples of Jesus imitate him.

DISCIPLES OF JESUS MULTIPLY OURSELVES

Jesus promised that He would teach us how to multiply.

That's the part of this teaching that's so easy to overlook.
As soon as Jesus called Andrew, Simon Peter, James, and John to follow him, He told them that He would turn them into fishers of men.
Literally, He would take their skill at fishing for fish, and He would cause them to use that same kind of skill to become fishers of people.
They would become ones who could make and multiply new disciples of Jesus!

Jesus' disciples began multiplying themselves immediately.

As soon as Andrew began to get to know Jesus, he went to his brother Simon. He told Simon that he thought Jesus was the Messiah.
Then Andrew and Simon seem to have reached out to their business partners, James and John.
These guys weren't done yet! James and John's mother became a follower of Jesus as well.
It seems that their faith immediately started rippling through the families, the fishing business, and the town. And that's exactly what's supposed to happen!²

Jesus expects us to multiply.

That's just what we're supposed to do.
And it's supposed to be intentional.
When we understand that fact, though, it makes us look at people differently.
Our family isn't just the group of people who are related to us and live near us and do life with us; it's people who need what we've found in Jesus.
Our friends aren't just people we like; they're also people who need what we have in Jesus.
And the same is true of our neighbors. Which leads to a question straight out of the pages of the Bible ...

Who are your neighbors?

Our neighbors aren't just the people who live near us.
In fact, in His Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turned that question upside down.
We can ask the question "Who is my neighbor" to get ourselves off the hook, because if we know who our neighbors are, then we know who our neighbors aren't.
In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told us to be neighbors to whoever needs us!
As good neighbors, we love people, serve them, and share our faith with them.
There are resources on our website that will help us think about how we can be good neighbors during these days.
I encourage you to stop by and check them out.

² Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). [Zebedee](#). In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1700). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

WE WANT TO MAKE AND MULTIPLY DISCIPLES

I was in my early 30s when I met my mentor.

We hit it off immediately because we were both passionate about discipleship.

He had been thinking about discipleship and making disciples for decades.

Little did I know that I had gotten more wrong about discipleship than I had gotten right.

He tried gently to point me in some right directions, but I was kind of hard-headed.

At one point in my life, I thought being a disciple was all about what I knew, so I devoured books and knowledge like my life depended on it.

Then I thought it was all about what I didn't do, so I spent years trying to demonstrate my worthiness as a disciple by avoiding things people told me I shouldn't do.

At the point in my life when I met my mentor, I thought discipleship was all about what I did. I was deeply committed to my spiritual disciplines and took my faith very seriously, and that meant that I wanted other people to take their faith seriously.

But working with my mentor and (more importantly) studying the Bible more, I learned that there's far more to being and becoming disciples.

I realized that being and becoming disciples in part means that my heart has been totally captivated by God.

And being and becoming disciples in part means joining a community of other disciples who can encourage me, and serving them selflessly.

But the point my mentor really wanted me to get that I missed for a long time is that to really become disciples of Jesus, we have to multiply. In John 15:8, Jesus makes the astounding statement: *"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."* The real mark of being a disciple of Jesus is what we give away.

Making and multiplying disciples is the key to us personally experiencing the life Jesus offers us.

As Dallas Willard pointed out, what's at stake here for us personally is the fullness of the Christian life. We don't want to live as people who belong to Jesus but don't get the life that Jesus is offering to us.

What Jesus pointed out repeatedly is that what's at stake is us being known as His disciples.

We can't live the full Christian life without multiplying.

Making and multiplying disciples is the key to us as a Church being everything Jesus wants us to be.

Right now we're dreaming of taking the **next steps** in ministry as we begin to reopen after this phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. How are we going to reopen? When? And why? Thinking about how to make and multiply disciples of Jesus has to guide our decision-making.

Reaching the **next 1,000** people is only going to happen when we are passionately dedicated to making and multiplying disciples.

And reaching the **next generation** hinges on discipleship.

Can we commit to being and becoming a disciple of Jesus?

Let's commit to following Him.

Let's commit to imitating Him.

And let's commit to multiplying disciples of Jesus.

That's the pathway to being and becoming disciples of Jesus that Jesus himself laid out, and that's the pathway to experiencing the life Jesus offers to us.