

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 16, 2011

Effective Disciples

by Dan Trygg

“...this we also pray for, that you be made complete...¹¹ Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” II Corinthians 13:9b,11

Recently, I was thinking over the past year and was evaluating the progress of those who are involved in the ministry. I was bringing up the names of those I work with, and thinking over what I know of their lives, making mental notes and observations about where they were a year ago, what they have done in the past year, and where they appear to be now, spiritually. **Some have experienced tremendous growth, while others seem to have progressed very little.** Some have been diverted and distracted by temptations, or poor theology, so that they seem to be in worse shape than they were a year ago. Others seem to be progressing, but it is with fits, starts, and setbacks. Some have made poor or risky choices that have blown up in their faces, and are now picking up the pieces. Some seem to be growing in some areas, but try to keep other parts of their lives closed off from the Lord. It compromises their witness, and shuts down their growth. Others have issues in their lives that they have been unwilling to address, and these keep coming back to bite them. Some of these are past hurts, emotional wounds or scars that continue to affect them. Satan tries to introduce such wounds in our lives to hobble us before we ever get a chance to get out of the gate. Others continue in destructive behaviors or relationships that deplete their ability to grow in and serve Christ. **What is a disciple? What ingredients go into becoming an effective disciple?**

A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who chooses to abandon his or her own self-agenda for life, and commits to following Jesus in order to discover and experience God's purposes for his or her life. Becoming a disciple is not the same as “believing in Jesus”. It is not the same as attending or joining a church. It is not the same as volunteering somewhere, or sending money to a religious organization. You could be doing all those things from a different motive than following Jesus. **Following Jesus is about putting His will before your own. It is not about being religious; it is about being obedient. It is not just learning about Jesus; it is about becoming like Jesus.** A disciple does not just play “head games”. A disciple is not just an *intellectual learner*; he or she is an *experiential learner*. He is determined to *live* the life, not just *think about* it. A disciple puts truth into practice. **A disciple attaches him or herself to a person. A disciple is an apprentice.** Being an apprentice means that a disciple is attempting to *learn skills* from the Master. An effective disciple studies and observes his Master to learn how and why He did things. The Master teaches and demonstrates; the disciple *experiments* and *practices* to do as the Master does. **The end result of a successful discipleship relationship is that the disciple will become like the Master** (Lk. 6:40).

Discipleship begins with repentance and abandonment. Repentance simply means a “change of mind” or a “change of perception”. It means that you recognize *you have been wrong*, or that *your understanding is faulty*. **You cannot learn something new, if you think you know everything already. An effective disciple is teachable.** There is a certain level of honesty, openness and humility required in order to be a good learner and apprentice. If you want to learn *the Master's way*, you have to be willing to abandon *your way*. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23). **You cannot be an effective disciple and continue to think and do things your way. You have to put aside your way to learn His way.** This is not just a starting point, this is a lifelong rule of thumb. We *continually* have to abandon selfishness, if we want to discover and implement Jesus' will, ways and methods. We have to put off the old man, before we can put on the new person. We have to put aside the old practices, if we are going to put on new attitudes and behaviors. **An effective disciple is willing to put aside or abandon anything that gets in the way of following Jesus** (Phil. 3:7-17). We must turn away from idols (anything that competes with God for our devotion) in order to serve the true and living God (I Thess. 1:9). We must be willing to abandon lifestyle choices, our possessions, unhealthy or competing relationships, and self-comfort, if we want to follow Christ effectively. As I think over the past year, I can see that those who are choosing to do this are seeing significant growth. Those who continue as they have, ...well, they *continue* as they have. There is little or no change in those who are not willing to give up these things. **There is no room for growth, if you don't make room.**

The next step in discipleship is following Jesus. Note, this is not the same as “believing in” Jesus. **The word “follow” implies direction and motion.** We are to draw near *to* Jesus. The phrase Jesus used in Matthew 4:19 to call the original disciples was, “Come here *after* Me”. We are to go *where* He goes, and do *what* He does. In order to follow Him, we need to know who He is, hear what He has to say, and we need to observe what He does. In another passage, Jesus said, “Come *to* Me, ...take My yoke upon you and learn *from* Me, ...and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt.11:28,29). The word “yoke” here was not only the word that described the wooden beam used to hitch

together a two-animal team, it was also a commonly used idiom for the teaching methodology and disciplines of a rabbi of that day. **To take up the “yoke” of Jesus, then, would be to recognize Him as your Teacher, and agree to follow His teaching methods and training.** See how this fits the context? **The word for “learn” indicates *an orderly process of gaining knowledge*, whether by instruction, reflection or by practical experience. This word, however, implies learning something *to produce an external outcome*.** **We don’t learn just to know; we learn in order to do with more effectiveness and skill.** So, how can this apply to us? **What is Jesus’ training process? Is it available to us today?** The apostle John records for us, in John 8:31,32, “Jesus was saying to the Jews who had believed in Him, ‘If you abide in (remain in, continue in, live in) My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine, and you will experientially-know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” **If we continue to learn and implement Jesus’ teachings, we will become effective disciples.** The power of His word to develop us and lead us into the will of God is amazing (II Tim. 3:16,17; Acts 20:32; II Pet. 1:3,4). We see in the early church that the apostles immediately broke the large congregation into small groups that dedicated themselves to the same dynamics that they themselves had experienced under Jesus’ training. They devoted themselves to “the doctrine, the sharing, the eating of meals together, and the prayers” (Acts 2:42-47). Paul indicates that the loving, truthful interaction of one another in the Body of Christ was to help one another grow (Eph. 4:15,16; cf. Col. 3:16). As I think over the people I have worked with, **those who regularly apply themselves to draw near to Jesus, ...to learn and implement His teachings, ...and who seek out helpful interaction with others in the Body..., do not fail to continue to grow in a healthy manner.**

The next step for a disciple is to get equipped. In addition to developing their own walk with Christ, **an effective disciple will want to become a more capable, healthy and productive person for the Kingdom of God. Getting equipped, or “fitted-out”, is the process that involves mending and healing from past hurts, as well as gaining new skills and abilities that will enlarge your capacity to help others.** This can include a wide variety of things, from going to school, getting a better job, or obtaining a driver’s license, studying the scriptures to be able to teach them, learning about spiritual warfare, or about prayer. It may involve going to a counselor, or a support group, to work through past hurts or deal with addictions. It may involve going on a mission trip, or learning another language, to develop a heart and capacity for missions. **Those who are purposefully freeing or developing their lives so that they can become more capable of serving others will open new doors of opportunity and usefulness for service to Christ.** Note that it is possible to do any of these same activities purely from self-interest. **A disciple seeks to become further equipped in order to be a more effective, useful servant.** The passage at the top of this study mentions twice the need to become “complete”. In both cases, the word means to “be equipped”. God wants all His people to be equipped for the work of service (Eph. 4:11,12; Heb. 13:21; I Pet. 5:10). **Effective disciples seek to be further equipped.**

Another characteristic of those who are effective followers of Christ is that they invest in the work of the Kingdom financially. There is a special obligation of those who are taught the Word to share all good things with those who teach them. God is not mocked. He will return honor for honor, and disregard for disregard for those who mock (Gal. 6:6-8). As a righteous Jew, **Jesus would have been a tither.** The tithe, or first ten percent of profit, was to go to support the Levites, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. It was God’s plan to set apart one tribe out of the 12 to be fully dedicated to serving Him. They were to serve in the temple, as well as to be spread throughout Israel to serve as teachers of the Law, judges, scribes and musicians for the Lord. The tithe was given to God, but He chose to give it to support the Levites, to keep them free from having to do other things to survive (Num.18). That was under the Old Covenant. While the Levitical system came to an end with the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews, the principle was not lost on NT Christians. They, too, supported Christian workers and leaders to free them up to do the ministry God had called them to. **If we are going to follow Jesus, we will do as He did, or follow His current instructions. It was the Lord’s direction that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel** (I Cor. 9:14). **Therefore, it is our responsibility to make sure those who are teaching and spiritually nourishing us are being supported so that they can continue that work.** When we honor God by supporting the work of the ministry, He will bless us and honor our intent, as well. **In addition, we know Jesus advocated helping the poor** (Matt. 6:3,4; 19:21; Lk. 12:33). This was a strong characteristic of the early church (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-34; Rom. 15:26). **When we give to help the poor, it shows the reality of our faith. We “put our money where our mouth is”, and it strongly reveals Jesus’ heart.** He will also increase our righteous character. We are blessed in every way for liberality in the cause of the gospel (II Cor. 9; cf. Prov. 3:9,10). **Those who have devoted themselves to support the work will be blessed for their choice to honor the things of God.** It frees up those who can teach and disciple, and it makes possible tangible expressions of love that will bring praises to God.

Finally, the effective disciple will be actively involved in serving others. Jesus came among us a servant, and specifically said this was to be an example to us (Jn. 13:13-17; Mk. 10:45; Phil. 2:1-11). Being ready and willing to help others not only breaks our preoccupation with self, it brings glory to God by meeting the pressing needs of others (Tit. 3:1,8,14; Matt. 5:16). **When our heart has truly become like our Master’s, we will find ourselves serving others.**