

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Making Effective Disciples

by Dan Trygg

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”

Matthew 28:19-20

“...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

There can be no doubt that Matthew 28:19,20 were written to be our “marching orders”. **Jesus called us to “make disciples”, ...literally, “disciplize all nations”.** The strong emphasis placed upon this idea of being a “disciple” of Jesus is clearly reflected in the text. The word for disciple occurs 281 total times in the NT, 265 of those occurrences refer to the “followers” of Jesus. (Interestingly, these all occur in the gospels and the book of Acts. None of the later letters contain any reference to being a disciple. In the gospels and Acts, this word was used to distinguish between those who made a commitment to Jesus versus those who were “outsiders”. The later epistles were written to the Church, the “brothers and sisters”. There was no need to talk of “disciples”, since they *all* were following 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. Volunteering somewhere, or sending money to some religious organization, is *not* the same as being a disciple. You could do all those things for a different reason 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, it 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 must *put off* the old man, before we can *put on* the new person (Eph. 4:22-24). 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, possessions, unhealthy or competing relationships, and self-comfort, if we want to follow Christ effectively. 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 again, 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 again 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.** They aren't content to "rest on their laurels". They want to improve so they can accomplish *more*.

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 also disregard for disregard for those who mock (Gal. 6:6-8). As a righteous Jew, **Jesus would have been a tither.** A "tith" was the first 10% of all one's increase or profits. It was given to honor God as a sign of gratitude, recognizing that all one's increase came from Him. This was given to support those who labor in ministry. As an exemplary Man of God, He would have also gone *beyond* the bare requirements of the Law. He would have been *generous* in His giving. **If we are going to follow Jesus, we will do as He did, and 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). **Thus, it is our responsibility to make sure those who are teaching and spiritually nourishing us, and others, 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.

Next, the effective disciple will be actively involved in serving others. Jesus came among us a servant, and specifically said this was 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.**

Finally, the effective disciple will seek to disciple others. In II Timothy 2:2, Paul described his vision for discipleship. Timothy was part of that process, and *experienced it* for himself. Paul said, "the things you heard from me, entrust these to *faithful people*, who will be able to teach *others* also." Four generations are represented here: Paul, Timothy, faithful-people and "others". We come right back to Jesus' marching orders. **Effective disciples make obedient disciples, who make obedient disciples, who make obedient disciples..., until we disciplize the world.**