

Discipleship

Study 1: An Introduction to Biblical Discipleship

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Background

Why did Jesus want disciples and not just believers? Why is it so important for confessing believers to grow as disciples? What does this mean for us as Christians? These are all questions that we need to ask ourselves continually and questions we will be meeting head on in this series of studies in Discipleship.

When we begin to study Discipleship in the New Testament, some points become clear:

- It begins with a call in which Jesus takes the initiative (Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:14, John 1:43)
- It requires recognition and response (John 2:11, Matthew 16:13-20)
- It involves commitment to Jesus (Mark 8:34-38, Luke 14:26-33)
- It involves obedience to Jesus (Matthew 10:37, Matthew 24:45-46)
- It requires us to take up our cross (Matthew 10:38, Luke 9:23-25, Matthew 10:17-18, John 15:18-19)
- It involves a radically different relationship (John 16:29-30)
- It involves becoming like Jesus (Matthew 10:24-25, Luke 6:40)
- It involves growth. This was achieved through Jesus demonstrating a clear pattern for leadership:
 - Taught the disciples (Mark 4:10-12)
 - Corrected them (Matthew 16:5-12)
 - Admonished them (Matthew 17:19-20)
 - Supported them (Luke 22:31-34)
 - Comforted them (John 20:19-22), and
 - Restored them (John 21:15-19)
- It involves a commission (Matthew 28:16-20)
- It involves fellowship (John 13:34-35) and servanthood (Mark 9:33-37, Mark 10:35-45)
- It involves bearing fruit (John 15:8)

Spend a few moments thinking about the above points. It should be readily apparent that discipleship is a process, at the heart of which lies intimacy and openness with God and the enabling of the Holy Spirit in and through Jesus Christ. Some of the above points can be captured in a modified form of the 'Engel Scale'¹, which represents the journey from 'no knowledge of God' through to 'spiritual maturity as a Christian believer', and arguably is a process of growth, change and transition that we as Christians all experience. The transition point when we become a disciple may be termed the 'Cairos Moment'. Cairos is a Greek word meaning the 'right or opportune moment', and is often used to denote a time of transition or opportunity. This modified scale is featured in the following schematic:

¹ See Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engel_Scale) for further information. The schematic included in this study has also been produced with reference to Foundations for Ministry (2005/06) course notes.

Presence

- -8 Awareness of supernatural, but no knowledge of the Gospel
- -7 Initial awareness of Christianity and the Gospel / interest
- -6 Awareness of basic facts / Gospel fundamentals

Telling

- -5 Grasp implications of Christianity / Gospel
- -4 Positive attitude towards Gospel
- -3 Awareness of personal need / problem recognition

Persuading

- -2 Challenge and decision to act
- -1 Repentance and faith in Christ

Cairos Moment

- A new disciple is born

Persuading

- +1 Evaluation of decision

Follow-up & Growth

- +2 Incorporation into church / body of Christ
- +3 Become part of process of making new believers
- +4 Communion with God
- +5 Stewardship

There are several Greek words that relate to discipleship. These include *manthánō* (to learn, find out, discover), *katamanthánō* (to examine, consider), *mathētēs* (pupil, disciple), *symmathētēs* (fellow disciple), *mathētria* (woman disciple), *mathēteúō* (to become a pupil, to make disciples).

The first of these words, *manthánō*, occurs only 25 times in the New Testament. It is interesting that Jesus never sought to teach His disciples in a dry and academic way; His mission was to awaken commitment to Himself.

The word *mathētēs* implies a deep & profound relationship to a teacher and is found only in the Gospels and Acts. It is attested some 250 times, usually for those who follow Jesus. Acts has it in the absolute for a disciple of Jesus.

The true disciple is one who abides in the words of Jesus and keeps in His commands (John 8:31-32, John 13:34-35, John 15:5-11).

The call to discipleship is a call to partnership in service. This comes out in sayings, parables, and specific directions. The sending out of the disciples two by two (Mark 6:7-9) is for doing the work of Jesus on His authority and according to the principle that, as they have freely received, so they should freely give (Matthew 10:8).

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”²

The Message

The call to discipleship

We need to realise that Jesus has called us. It was very common in Rabbinical history for disciples to choose for themselves a teacher and devote themselves entirely to following them in obedience and learning. The fact that Jesus called us individually completely turns the tradition of discipleship on its head. We must never forget that our calling marks Jesus’s authority, it testifies to His Godhead; it never denies us the choice of whether or not to follow God, but if we do decide to follow God the results are His eternal love, support and encouragement for us.

*“The Christian church today suffers from large numbers of people who think that *they* have ‘made a decision for Christ’, or from those who think *they* have chosen to join a certain church. Such man-centred notions spell spiritual death, or at least barren sterility. It is only when we begin to see ourselves as chosen, called and commissioned by Christ that we shall have any real sense of our responsibility to present our bodies to him ‘as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God’.”³*

Read Matthew 4:18-22, John 1:35-51, Matthew 19:16-22. In each of these the invitation is given by Jesus to follow him and a response is demanded either positively or negatively. In the case of the young rich man the cost, and we need to be clear of what the cost entails, was too high.

Questions

1. What are the typical signs of recognition and response to the call to be a disciple from Jesus? Are these signs evident in our lives?
2. Where on the Engel Scale would we place ourselves?

² Matthew 28:18-20

³ Watson, D., (1981), p.21, *Discipleship Chapter 1: The Call to Discipleship*, London, Hodder and Stoughton

3. What is so significant about God calling us individually to be disciples?
4. What do you think commitment to Jesus involves?
5. What do you understand to be meant by the requirement to take up our cross and follow Jesus?
6. Why should a relationship with Jesus be different to any other relationship? What makes this possible?
What insight does this give us into the sort of relationship we should have with each other?
7. Why should the relationship between Christians be different to any other?
8. What steps can we take to encourage our growth in the Lord, and growth of others in the Lord?
9. What are the biggest obstacles to our growth in the Lord, and how might we deal with them?