

Module 1: The Fundamentals of Discipleship

DEFINING A TRUE DISCIPLE

Much has been written about discipleship, and indeed, many studies are available on this subject, but let it be noted as a matter of concern that it is because the church is not actively practicing true discipleship that we are struggling to see so few believers walking in true authority.

To define a true believer is not so cut and dry, and it extends beyond merely speaking in tongues or moving in the gifts of the Spirit. It is about a believer walking in Spirit and Truth, endeavouring and striving to become more like Jesus, seeking to grow in intimacy with the Lord by dwelling in the spiritual Holy of Holies and ultimately displaying the fruits of the Spirit. It is about a believer *being* the church, practicing and living the ecclesia life and above all, being a son or daughter of the Lord.

A disciple, by definition, is a convinced adherent of a school or individual. In the case of Jesus, His disciples were those who followed Him while He was on earth, as well as those who continue to follow Him and His teachings today. However, so few believers are being properly disciplined and trained to become believers and then taught how to disciple others.

We all know the Great Commission according to Matthew 28. So who is practicing this command? Was this command only given to the 12 Apostles? Was it only given to the leaders and pastors? No, the Lord was talking to His disciples, implying anybody who follows Him and obeys Him as their Lord and Saviour.

Here is a test. Go look into the mirror and ask yourself the question how many people have you baptized in water and Spirit? How many people have you trained and disciplined? How many people have you taught to follow the teachings of Jesus? It is all our duty as disciples of the Lord to baptize, to train and to teach - all within the scope of our unique personalities, gifts and talents.

Here is the problem then – we still harbour the mind-set that discipleship is the work alone of the leaders of the church. This is a fallacy. Do you follow the Lord? Then you are a disciple. And if you are a disciple of the Lord, then you have been called to disciple others, teaching them and baptizing them to become more like Jesus. We are not called to make clones of ourselves, but to lead others to the feet of the Father so that they can grow spiritually from glory to glory in the image of Jesus.

We, however, struggle with the concept of what it means to disciple someone. Is it discipleship for someone to attend church on a Sunday morning and receive word and teaching? No, that is word proclamation. That is not discipleship. Is it discipleship to attend weekly cell and prayer group meetings? In some small part it contributes to discipleship, but it is not true discipleship.

To discover the answer to true discipleship, we have to go back to the source – the one who called disciples - who is Jesus. To understand discipleship, we must understand what being a disciple entailed in Jesus' day. By exploring discipleship as it was

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understood by a first century Jew in Israel we will gain further insight into how Jesus' disciples would have understood His command to make disciples. We need to reach that point of understanding that discipleship is ultimately showing someone the true ancient way of walking and living as a son or daughter of the Most High.

Where did Jesus learn to be the perfect Son, or in our logical thinking, the perfect Christian? Was He trained or taught? Did He attend any services? Jesus learned sonship before the foundation of the earth was laid. He learned about sonship in heaven as taught by the Father. Before mankind, there was perfect fellowship in heaven between Father and the Son and the Spirit. Jesus was the Perfect Son in heaven before Adam was born and when He came to earth He kept on being the perfect Son. He just lived the way He did in heaven!

What did Jesus do on earth? He walked in fellowship and relationship with the Father. He showed others the way to the Father through Him. He showed Himself so that we can see the Father. He was the perfect Son so that we could find the perfect Father.

He died so that we can be sons and daughters of the Father. Jesus did all those miraculous signs and wonders because of His perfect sonship. He never betrayed the King of the Kingdom. He was full of power, as God while human, because He knew what it meant to be a son. Jesus showed his perfect sonship in His relationship with His earthly mother.

He showed His perfect sonship to the world so that we could all become sons and daughters spiritually because He wants us to serve the Father together in the same intimate and loving way.

What is then sonship? It is a living, breathing faith relationship. Sonship, or for the matter daughtership, is not something external, fed by rituals. It is that daily fusion of your spirit and His Spirit. It is His blood running in our veins, mind connecting with mind, heart with heart, soul with soul, fibre with fibre, bone with bone and morality and immorality. Sonship is alive; it is something pulsating, something eternal, and something real. Sonship does not end or begin for it is forever moving and flowing. It cannot be defined, caged or captured. It begins not on a Sunday or with prayer and neither does it end so. It is continuous, it is birth, it is our blood flowing, and it is our hope and dreams. It is love and endless hope. Sonship and fatherhood mingled and intertwined, every second and every moment.

ULTIMATELY, YOU ARE A DISCIPLE BECAUSE OF YOUR SONSHIP OR DAUGHTERSHIP IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

Our discipleship is defined by our relationship with the Lord. It is not external or temporary. It is not institutional or rationalistic or abstract. It is alive. It is divine.

The Word says the Lord has known us in the secret place and has formed us in the secret place before we were born (Psalm 139). Sonship is born in the secret place. Before we had the means to breathe, the Lord made us in the secret place to be His son or daughter. In the days of Israel, sonship and daughtership was forged in the Tent of Meeting, in the

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Holy Place and in His presence. When Moses went up the mountain, he sat 40 days in the presence of the Father - Moses was taught sonship. Such sonship was sealed and rebirthed in his heart. Moses wrote in Psalm 91 how he found refuge under the wing of the Lord - that is the secret place, the meeting place - the place of His presence.

The day we are reborn in spirit, we enter His presence, His secret place where sonship and daughtership is again rebirthed in us and given full bloom. This spiritual condition flourishes and grows and strengthens and gains power like a mighty flood and like a mighty thunder. In the secret spiritual place where divinity and man meets, we find the Father and where we are covered by the Blood of His Son Jesus.

Sonship gains momentum and grows like a tree when we return as a son and a daughter to that secret place - thereby when we return and walk in the presence of the Lord. For this is how it has always been - the Father teaching His son or daughter, one on one, in His presence, in His way, us covered by His wings and us covered by the Blood. That is discipleship.

From the beginning of time, since Adam and Eve, the Lord showed us how to live as a son and daughter and also how to attain it. This is vital for our understanding. The covenant was a way of attainment, but the Lord's will for how we should live as sons or daughters has never changed. His idea of being a Christian has never changed but only the means of attainment. The covenant in the days of Abraham and Moses shone bright with the ways of sonship and daughtership, ultimately preparing all mankind, including Israel, to embrace the perfect covenant of grace.

The Blood of Jesus sealed the perfect covenant of Father with the purpose of birthing spiritual sons and daughters. The Blood allows us to dwell beyond the veil in the Holy of Holies as we can spiritually again walk with the Lord. The Blood of the Lamb seals the Covenant by which we become disciples of the Living Lord.

Throughout the history God has made His intention clear: how to live as a perfect son or daughter. That is what He wants. No rituals. He wants sons and daughters, therefore DISCIPLES, who make Him and His Kingdom proud. He therefore wants followers who are above all spiritual sons or daughters. He wants disciples who spiritually walk in Spirit and Truth as sons and daughters, who therefore walk under the full authority of God.

Sonship and daughtership is a question of being. And this is where the Bride still sadly fails in her understanding. We are called to simply be a son or a daughter. Ultimately, we are called to be sons and daughters of the divine and eternal Kingdom. In that state of knowing and being, lies our strength and security. We ARE disciples when we allow God to BE Lord in our lives.

In the end, we are sons and daughters. We are royalty. By the covenant and by the Blood, His Kingdom is ours. Seeking the Kingdom is seeking to please the King. It is about loyalty, obedience and serving. But we doubt for we walk not as sons and daughters. We are not *being* a son or daughter, for it should be a normal spiritual state as breathing and sleeping is to our physical bodies.

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Being a follower of the Lord is being a son and daughter, every waking second. It is being that son or daughter in the secret place. It is being there where the Spirit resides in us and us in the Throne Room. So it comes down to our character, behaviour, attitude, norms, values, priorities, outlooks, perceptions and mind-sets. Our discipleship should be a reflection of the divine values of the Kingdom.

Only in His presence, in our sonship and daughtership, we know who we are and act so, thereby our fears and insecurities perish at the hand of the One who made us. In that perfect walk of being, we know the Father as being true and just and loyal, and we can rest from our labour. Finally, by being and knowing, we trust and walk in faith. We are His children.

THIS IS THEREFORE TRUE DISCIPLESHIP - DEFINED AS RELATIONSHIP. SUCH RELATIONSHIP IS NOT DEFINED BY RELIGION BUT IT IS DEFINED BY ABIDING AND RESTING IN THE DIVINE EMBRACE OF GRACE THAT COMES FROM A PERSONAL AND LOVING GOD.

Look at the life of Jesus. He was perfectly cared for and loved and strengthened to complete what was started. But He walked with the Father, and His Kingdom is what He cherishes. If we are true sons and daughters – therefore true disciples - then our Father and His Kingdom are our delight and sole desire. Sonship and daughtership - this is what the Lord desires. Our greatest purpose then in life is to become disciples as sons and daughters.

The main purpose of discipleship is to be like Jesus. Yet, what Jesus came to teach us is that to be like Jesus is to be a perfect son or daughter! Yes, Jesus taught us through discipleship that ultimately we must become like Him, therefore the perfect son or daughter, so that we may also sit at the feet of the Father, infilled by the Holy Spirit!

So often we disciple believers for ministry, yet we forget that the greatest purpose of Jesus' ministry was to teach us about sonship and daughtership! So the young believer above all must spiritually grow from glory to glory as a spiritual son or daughter – then he or she is will be a true follower and therefore disciple. Jesus after all grew up and lived the life of the perfect Son. He came to show us how to live as the perfect son or daughter. He lived in pure relationship with the Father just as Adam had done.

A mayor purpose of Christian discipleship is to learn about the Father. In Christ's three-year public ministry on earth, He often stated that His goal was to teach His disciples about His Father. Christ wanted us to know that God is alive, real, sovereign, loving, and is preparing a place for His believers in heaven. So another purpose of discipleship is to grow in our knowledge of God.

In Philippians 1:9, Paul said, *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight."* As we grow to know God, we yearn to know His power and to experience it at work in our lives. We long to feel His presence more closely and fully than we have experienced previously. We yearn to understand and grow in God's grace.

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Bearing fruit for the kingdom of God is another purpose of Christian discipleship. Our character defines who we are as disciples. It says in *John 15:8*, "*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*" It is essential to increase the fruit (or those character virtues we exhibit in our lives) to be productive as well informed disciples of Christ in order to carry out the responsibilities given to believers such as serving others and spreading the gospel.

Christian discipleship might best be described as training or mentoring program designed to develop individuals to become more like their Saviour. When Christ became man and lived on earth, He endured all of the same trials, pains, and persecutions that man suffers in order to prove himself as a perfect example for us. Therefore, one of the primary purposes of Christian discipleship is to emulate the character of Christ. 1 Peter 2:21 says "*to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.*"

So what did Jesus teach us about discipleship? It is simple. He took 12 men and they walked with Him, therefore following Him, for more than three years! Every day they watched Him – they studied what He did, how He did it. They watched as He prayed, they watched Him grow and they watched Him intensely. And what they saw Him do they did! That is discipleship.

True discipleship is when a believer, who is walking in the maturity of the faith, takes a young believer under his or her wing. In today's world no one can be in the company of another 24 hours a day! But, as the true believer, we must allow enough time for this young believer to "follow" us to the cross and the feet of the Father – implying that the young believer should be allowed to watch, and study and learn and practically and theoretically learn for a time from the mentor. However, the young believer should be learning not to become a clone of the mentor, but must grow in the image of Christ. The mentor, like Paul, serves as spiritual father or mother, showing the way to the true Teacher. The mentor, through practical and theoretical impartation, in maturity and in Spirit, takes responsibility for that young believer until he or she grows in spiritual maturity.

Can we comprehend this? We are not talking about teachings a young believer now or then or simple word proclamation. Discipleship is mentoring. As the mature believer you are in essence the spiritual father or mother to the young in spirit.

But can we comprehend the implications? Just as the 12 followers did exactly what Jesus did, those who disciple must with great responsibility and accountability lay the correct foundation so that the young believer, by studying and learning from his mentor, can grow strong in His faith and the character of Jesus. To what purpose? So that the young believer can then disciple other followers of the Lord!

True discipleship implies that we must allow the young believer the full opportunity to learn predominantly from the mentor. But this demands maturity and wisdom from the mentor's part, who should know that all the flock belongs to Jesus. We are only called to

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train and equip until that young believer grows stronger as a disciple so that ultimately he or she may disciple someone else.

Jesus taught us that the correct way is for a young believer to come under the wing of a more mature disciple. This disciple/mentor must through a strong bond of friendship show the young believer the ropes and teach him practically and theoretically. If this mature disciple is a true follower of the Lord, he or she will be walking in the fruits of the Spirit and will be wise enough to lead him ultimately to the feet of the Lord and encourage him to learn from others. But this mentor should remain the spiritual father until the time is ripe for the young believer, now spiritually grown, to go out, minister and make disciples.

This is therefore the true purpose of discipleship and how to define what it means to be a disciple - to lead people to become like Jesus.

Jesus could handle 12 disciples on a very intense and personal level. In our lifetime we will probably be training about six to seven disciples. Yes, that is all. Remember, discipleship entails an intense journey that you walk with someone, and in our case this journey could take many years before that person is ready to disciple another and become a mentor. Even then, for the rest of your life you will remain a spiritual father or mother to that disciple. This entails a lot of work and commitment and effort. It also entails a lot of responsibility and being accountable.

But can you see the picture emerging? If we properly disciple, then we will have a Bride full of mature believers, equipped and trained properly, ready to equip others. This is what Jesus did with the 12 – who then became 11 – yet at the outpouring of the Spirit they were so empowered that the entire Christian movement was set alight! Why? Because Jesus properly discipled and mentored 12. Jesus also did a lot of word proclamation and He was constantly teaching the crowds, but He only had 12 disciples who walked with Him and learned from Him constantly!

To Paul, discipleship is about imitating Christ. This is not a New Testament phenomenon. Discipleship was the common method by which rabbi's trained and taught disciples to imitate them. Those disciples then went on to become rabbis training their own disciples and so on. What distinguishes Jesus' model is that we, as His disciples, are commanded to raise other disciples, not for ourselves, but for Him.

On his second missionary journey, Paul takes the young man Timothy under his wing (Acts 16), and from that time Timothy goes everywhere with him, being taught the doctrines of the faith, being trained in the work of the ministry, being shaped by the daily disciplines of the Christian life. Paul pours his life into Timothy, reproducing himself spiritually into the young man of God. By doing so, Paul rises up another co-labourer in the Gospel; Timothy will ultimately serve as bishop of the Church in Ephesus Paul raised Timothy to be a disciple after the heart of the Lord.

The problem is that we hardly have disciples anymore. We have a lot of Christians going to church and attending weekly meetings, but they are not walking with a mentor to ultimately like the 12 and in faith go out and making other disciples! It is the simply

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procedure of multiplication. We have many students and learners, but far too few sons and daughters walking in the Spirit and Truth under the authority of Jesus.

Is this principal of discipleship only exclusive to the New Testament? No, because God is always the same and has always been the same. Let us look at a couple of example of where mentoring takes place. Look at the prophet Elijah, who technically discipled Elisha. Look at Moses, who technically discipled Joshua.

In both these cases, we find a process of “following”. Elisha walked side by side with Elijah, while Joshua was in the desert with Moses for 40 years. Both these men studied and learned before they took upon themselves the mantle.

In conclusion, what is the definition of a disciple – A disciple is one who follows Jesus and then ultimately discipled others to become a disciple by following Jesus. We will look more in detail regarding the process of how to disciple someone later on in the course. After all, we will all do it in our own unique way.

In conclusion, discipleship is defined by relationship. Discipleship implies we live, walk and breath as sons and daughters of the Lord. We are disciples because of our relationship with the Lord.

Without relationship, there is no real discipleship, only someone who has been shaped into becoming a Christian through religion and tradition.

Want to be a true disciple? Then walk with God in a close, living and real relationship.