

Faith Communities Project
A Disciple of Jesus – Being one who is alive in Jesus!
Session #6 – How a Disciple Lives



Now that we have explored WHO a Disciple IS, it is time to move to answering the question, 'How is a Disciple to live?' Yes, our IDENTITY IN CHRIST shapes and informs our actions and lifestyle...but what does that lifestyle look like?

There is a verse in the New Testament that is HUGE in answering this question: 1 John 4:17 *"because as He is, so also are we in this world."*

Questions for Discussion - What does that verse mean? What does it mean to you? What are its implications for all people who follow Jesus?

Remember, a Disciple is not an imitator of Jesus but rather the living reality of Jesus as HE LIVES IN AND THROUGH US. There is NOTHING about imitation in the incarnation. Jesus wasn't imitating anyone or anything in the incarnation...it was and continues to be the defining, unique and powerful action of God that is unparalleled in human history. And that is what Jesus is attempting to do in the world today...something defining, unique and powerful IN AND THROUGH YOU! In other words, living as a disciple is about three "I" words – incarnation, implantation and impartation. You see, "incarnation" isn't about imitation but rather the implantation and impartation of the divine nature and character into human life. If you think about it, the incarnation is a truly shocking doctrine.

Question – What was the incarnation all about? How is the "contemporary incarnation" of God's life in our lives "shocking"?

So, how does a disciple live? Jesus said,

*"No longer do I call you slaves, for **the** slave does not know **what** his master **is doing**; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My **Father** I have made known to you."* John 15:15

*"Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it **is** something He sees the **Father doing**; for whatever the **Father** does, these things the Son also does in like manner."* John 5:19

In other words, a disciple listens to the voice of the Spirit...a disciple embodies the very life of Christ in their daily lives and relationships...a disciple has "eyes to see and ears to hear" (see Romans 11:8 and Revelation 2 and 3) what God is up to in the world...a disciple finds out what Jesus is doing, joins him there. In this way, a Disciple is an apprentice and a learner because knowing how to listen and respond to God's leadings in our hearts and lives is something that grows over time.

Remember, we have a tendency to define what a disciple does by what a disciple believes...for many of us, we have been told that a disciple's action is an educational/pedagogical journey **not a lifestyle**. We have actually

tried to educate people into being Christians (another word that has possibly become so "churchy" that its meaning is obscured), and wound up with only "believers" not disciples. What if we focused on incorporating people into our faith communities and immersing them in the life and practices of a disciple of Jesus? What if they came to belief not by learning but by experiencing the life of Christ in and through people and BY belonging to a community that participates in the mission of the Kingdom of God? Would it produce something different than what we are currently getting?

According to Jesus, what a disciple DOES is manifest their identity – in other words, we declare, exhibit, and make plain in our lives who we are. That means we respond to God's will alive within us not just try to do what God wants...we live by His indwelling life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's be specific - a disciple asks, "How will Jesus handle this situation? Will I do it by myself or with him? Will I find a new partner or hold on to Jesus? How will Jesus and I tackle this situation? In tackling the stuff of life together, your relationship with Jesus will deepen (just like it does in any relationship for that matter).

"So why do we preach rules, regulations and laws instead of Christ? And why such an emphasis on works? Good works are simply fruit falling off the tree. If you sink your roots deep in Christ, who is your life, you will not be able to stop the fruit from coming forth...true Christianity is the life that Jesus lived in the past, lived out in you in the present. And it is in Him that we find our true humanity...from the viewpoint of God, your biography is Jesus Christ." The Jesus Manifesto, Sweet and Viola, p. 58

"Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God." 2 Corinthians 3:3

A side-note for reflection – Many people talk about being "like Jesus" or being an imitator of Jesus. Yet, permit me to challenge us on that account - To say, "make me more like Christ" actually cheapens the Gospel because it depresses the Holy Spirit. Christ-likeness is NOT the Gospel because being Christ-like is lived more on our terms than His. To be "Christ-like we really don't need him, just his ideas and teachings. In addition, the more you try to be like Jesus the more you recognize that you will never be like him. It leads to defeatism and frustration! The Good news is that Jesus doesn't want you to be like Him – He wants to share His life with you...He wants to live in and through you.

Being a Disciple – Living Discipleship not just talking Discipleship

"We are not meant to remain as children...but to Grow up in every way into Christ" Ephesians 4:14 "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus" 2 Peter 3:18

So are there ways we can tell whether Christ is alive within us? Are there "measurements" to being a disciple? In other words, should we be able to tell whether someone is alive in Jesus? Well...YES! Can you tell whether a person is married or not? You should! Can you tell whether a person is a parent or not? You should! Can you tell anything about a person's real identity? Of course you should be able to!

A Disciple is passionately alive...they can't help it because the life of God through the Holy Spirit lives in them. A disciple who is alive grows – because it is something that God designed into the Universe - things that are alive grow! As Philippians 1:6 says, God isn't through with you yet!

A Disciple is alive in Jesus and because of that has access to inexplicable power...effortless and spontaneous in action, a disciple is not concerned about what is truly God's business...in other words, a disciple obeys God and trusts God with outcomes. A Disciple exhibits the "fruit" of the Spirit's life within their lives (see Galatians 5:22ff). A Disciple manifests the gifts of God (they are recipients of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" Ephesians 1:3). Disciple is not necessarily a member (except being a member of Christ's body) but on a mission. And Christ demonstrates HIS life within their lives through aspects of His divine nature being made known ("being incarnated") through us (the New Testament calls these aspects of Christ's nature given to His disciples "spiritual gifts"). Disciples build THE Church (the Body of Christ, being involved in the realization of the Lord's Prayer petition, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven") not necessarily A church and especially not THEIR church...Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build MY church" – not yours or someone else's. A disciple is about making disciples. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) isn't just a mission statement for the Church, it is a Disciple's personal mission and lifestyle – they actively live a life where discipleship and disciple-making is the essence of who they are and what they do. You see, we need to

understand the gift of God's grace in eternal life...but we are misinformed about our part in eternal living. We have learned our part in the faith and practice by our group/denomination but not from Jesus himself. If Jesus is hidden in our lives...the power of the universe is shut down from being expressed in and through us by our choice to die rather than really live. And that's what your friends, neighbors, and coworkers need to really see and experience in relationship – a person that is TRULY alive!

Questions for Discussion – When you hear the words of Jesus in the Great Commission, who do you think of? Do you think of yourself? Why or why not?

Implications for us in the Church/the Community of Faith

Here's where this is all coming from...many of us have seen people come alive in Jesus Christ. Without training, extensive study, without commissioning or titles or degrees, many of us have witnessed disciples supernaturally discipling others. We have seen people transformed from being dead bystanders to being active and alive, passionately sharing the life of Jesus with all who come in contact with them. For many of these people, being a disciple is not what they are aspiring to be or trying to pull off in the habits of their life...rather, it is something they know they are because they know the life of Jesus. In this instance, the Holy Spirit is producing fruit...they are not trying to be better people, attempting to be moral and upright and loving...they just are because of the power of God residing in their lives. If you were to type their blood, they would bleed Jesus. For a disciple, Jesus is not a cause to be understood and/or represented...Jesus is their life, pure and simple.

Why have many of us missed the boat? Why all the discipleship ministries and programs and studies in the local church and few actual disciples? Why do we have to do hand stands and heroic efforts to convince people to share their life, tell their God-story, live out their faith with Kingdom courage? Could it be that we are a bit confused when it comes to being a disciple? Could it be that we are finding it extremely difficult to paint a compelling picture of the experience of being a disciple? Could it be that we have succumbed to drafting a legalistic, "doing" vision of what a disciple is that has actually not brought life to people who desire to follow Jesus? Could it be that all of our efforts have led people more into sin management and shallow spirituality that remains an addendum to an already busy and culturally defined life (through narrowly defined spiritual exercises like the infamous "10 or 20 minute quiet times) than into the very life of Jesus in and through them?

I think we have gotten discipleship wrong and it is time to regain and then unleash the Disciple that lives within YOU! When some people talk about discipleship, they define it in primarily "privatistic" terms...as if being a disciple of Jesus is epitomized in a person's life as "private territory". Some describe discipleship as something that emerges out of a person's belief system, or that which is seen in an individual's devotional life (prayer, bible reading, quiet times, etc.)...for others it has to do with what a person "learns" about Jesus via doctrinal, apologetic, or theological exploration as if the more knowledge one has about God the more of a disciple they become. There is a problem with that though - cognition, mental assent, and doctrinal sophistication were never meant to be measurements of discipleship. Trust me...there is nothing wrong with knowing more about God and knowing God more. That should be one of the prime passions of every Christ follower.

Rather what did (at least biblically) define discipleship was how the follower of Jesus responded in and through their lifestyle to the invitation to participate in the movement of God's life in the world. Make no mistake about it - there is a difference between being a "believer" and a "disciple"...they are not synonymous. Belief does not necessarily mean action...belief can lead and should lead to action. Discipleship assumes belief but primarily means action. Because of that, discipleship is best clarified in our lives by how much of the life and passions of Jesus are imitated in our daily experience. Jesus defines the disciple's existence as we share in his divine nature and lifestyle. Below are some "ideas" of what discipleship can "live like" in someone who claims Jesus as Lord:

"So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Jesus in Matthew 7) – what are the FRUITS that should mark our lives?

James 1:22 says we should not just be hearers of the Word but "doers". What does that mean? How do we live that?

Jesus said (John 14:15), "If you love me, you will obey me." What does that mean for daily life for a Disciple?

Here are some other realities that shape a Disciple's lifestyle:

- Disciples don't necessarily just have principles that they are willing to die for...they also have a list of practices that mark their lives – what are those practices?
- Disciples see each moment as one with an opportunity to be filled by Jesus - they sacramentalize each moment – who do we do that?
- Disciples receive with a thankful heart and know what it means to worship God by giving things away – how do we apply that?
- Disciples are gripped by the things that are gripped by grace – what does that mean for daily living?
- Disciples live out the significance Jesus placed on the gathering/community of His people, what is called the Body of Christ, as being the hope of the world – how do we do that?
- Disciples know the difference between a "please, God" and "please God" prayer – do you pray that way?
- Disciples approach living for the Kingdom of God not as obligation but as an adventure – are you living the adventure?
- Disciples know the difference between their effort, knowledge, experience, and energy and the potential that fills them when they are able to tap into the ultimate power-source, gift-releaser - the Holy Spirit – how does the Spirit manifest Himself uniquely in your life?
- Disciples are not into volunteerism because they know that Jesus calls them into servant leadership and dedicated, humble service to God – what are ways we can live as a servant?
- Disciples understand the mystery of God and knowing that only by living the mystery will they understand what life is all about – what are some of the "mysteries" of God?
- Disciples know that having "eyes to see and ears to hear" has to do with being on the lookout for the movement of God in every moment of life – how is God moving in and through you?
- Disciples know that Jesus calls them to be the Church more than He does to go to church – how can you BE the Church to others? What does that mean?
- Disciples know that God is not through with them yet and that their life would be best lived with a sign around their neck, "under construction" – what is God doing in you now?
- Disciples know that listening and loving is just as powerful, if not more powerful, than sharing their faith – do you find it hard to "listen and love"? why is that?
- Disciples realize that prayer has more to do with their transformation than it does with getting God to do something – what is God transforming in you?
- Disciples know that when they are in the presence of one or more other disciples that the power of God is waiting in the wings – when does that happen in your life?
- Disciples know that there is a difference between being hearers and doers of the Word – what IS the difference?
- Disciples know that in the midst of every human contact there is the potential of a Divine appointment – when was the last time you experienced a Divine Appointment? Why don't we experience them more often? Is there anything we can do to make them more prevalent in our lives?
- Disciples live out the reality that discipleship for them means discipling others who will in turn disciple others who will in turn... In other words, Disciples understand that every person they come in contact with is "fair game" for discipling – who are you discipling?
- Disciples love expressions of worship but understand that true worship is embodied in the phrase, "living sacrifice" – what does it mean to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2)?
- Disciples know in their heart the cost of discipleship and that discipleship continues to cost – what is the cost of discipleship? Is following Jesus "costing" you? How?
- Disciples know that when they follow Jesus they are not just joining the fellowship of "blessings" (Ephesians 1:3) but also the fellowship of suffering (Philippians 1:9) – what does that mean to you?