

Discipleship #1- Apprentice to Jesus

Imagine this. Your name is Simon. You are a first-century Hebrew, likely in your late teens or early twenties. You run a fishing business in Gailee, a string of villages in the North of Israel. Your life is pretty much mapped out for you. You do what your father did and his father before him. Living under Roman occupation there aren’t a lot of options. Keep your head down, be quiet and pay your taxes.

One day you are waist deep in water, casting your net alongside your brother Andrew, when you notice a man walking toward you on the beach. You instantly recognize his face. It’s him, Jesus from Nazareth just a few miles away. Everyone is talking about this man - he is saying and doing things no Rabbi has ever said or done before.

Here he is, walking straight toward you. You make eye contact. He has a kind of presence about him, but he has no time for small talk. ¹⁶ **As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.** ¹⁷ **“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” Mark 1: 16-17.** You are stunned. He can’t mean me. Surely not.

You immediately drop your nets, drag Andrew out of the boat (though he doesn’t need any coaxing), leave everything behind and fall in step behind Jesus, elated to be in his company. Or as Mark in his Gospel records, ¹⁸ **At once they left their nets and followed him. Mark 1: 18.**

To Simon, Jesus was a Rabbi or teacher. The title Rabbi literally means master. Rabbis were the spiritual masters of Israel. They were expert teachers of the Torah (the scriptures of their day); they were also magnetic examples of a life lived with and for God. Most trained under another Rabbi for many years then began to teach and call their own disciples around the age of thirty.

They walked from town to town to teach in whatever synagogue would have them. They were unpaid and relied on the hospitality of others. They often spoke in parables. Normally they travelled with a small band of disciples. They didn’t teach in classrooms but in the open air and along the road, not from a textbook or curriculum but from the Torah and the school of life. There was a saying that true disciples were covered in their Rabbi’s dust as they walked behind him and sat at his feet.

Over and over in the four Gospels, Jesus is addressed as Rabbi. However, Jesus was no ordinary Rabbi. Everywhere he went the crowds were astonished and overwhelmed with wonder.

³³ **When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. Matthew 22: 33.**

¹⁵ **As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. Mark 9:15.**

²² **All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. Luke 4:22.**

²² **The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Mark 1:22.**

⁵⁴ **Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. Matthew 13:54.**

⁴⁶ **“No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied. John 7: 46.**

Jesus was a Rabbi and like most Rabbis of his day, he had disciples. Contrary to popular opinion Jesus did not invent discipleship. Rabbis were often seen walking around Galilee with their disciples. Once you became a disciple your entire life was organised around three driving goals. Firstly, to be *with* your Rabbi. Jesus invited his disciples to be with him. ¹⁴ **He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach. Mark 3:14.** All day, Every day.

Secondly, to become like your Rabbi. ⁴⁰ **The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. Luke 6:40.** This was the heart and soul of apprenticeship. Being with your master for the purpose of becoming like your master. Finally, to do as your Rabbi did. That was what it meant to be a disciple, and it is still what it means to be a disciple. Be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do as he did.

Apprenticeship to Jesus - following Jesus is a life process of being with him for the purpose of becoming like him and carrying on his work in the world. **“It’s a lifelong journey in which we gradually learn to say and do the kinds of things Jesus said and did as we apprentice under him every part of our lives”.**¹

Now, there are a lot of myths about Discipleship. The first is the myth of knowledge. This is the idea that you must know and believe the right things: head knowledge; intellectual assent; embracing Christianity on a philosophical level. However, knowledge alone is meaningless. I can believe in a lot of things, but that doesn’t mean these beliefs impact my life, much less reflects my life. It’s possible to have lots of knowledge, but no intimacy, no relationship with Christ.

Many people claim to believe in Jesus, but true belief is more than just saying that you accept the facts. Believing is giving your life over to what you say you believe. Believing is commitment. Believing is action. ¹⁴ **What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? James 2:14.**

Knowledge alone does not bring transformation. This was a real problem in the church at Corinth. Many Greeks were driven by a passion for knowledge and wisdom. Even those converts at the church were captured by this. Paul is very concerned because many had become arrogant in their knowledge.

¹ **But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. 1 Corinthians 8:1.** He warned them earlier of the dangers of being ‘puffed up’ in arrogance and self-importance. Now he sets forth the contrast between a ‘knowledge’ that is not accompanied by love but leads to a love that

¹ John Marl Comer, Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become Like Him, Do As He Did. Page 10.

edifies a love that is not arrogant. **“Knowledge is not a self-attained possession to be lauded over others but a divine gift into which one continually grows”².**

Please don’t misunderstand me. Learning about the Bible is important, and you need to engage your brain to do that. It’s just that knowledge alone is a trap. When I was at Bible college one of the students had an amazing memory for Scripture. He could almost recall any New Testament Bible verse or verses. We were all in awe of him. However, in my third year at college this same student tried to take his own life. Don’t mistake knowledge for intimacy. I like how James Emery White puts it, **“True Christian spirituality is intimacy with God and an ongoing transformation into the likeness of Christ”.**

The Instantaneous Myth. Discipleship is not like two-minute instant noodles. Just add boiling water and it’s done. The first misunderstanding about the nature of the spiritual life is that full spirituality happens instantly, at the moment you enter into a relationship with God. **⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2: 6-7.**

Did you notice something about that verse? The language is important. You must let your roots grow; you must draw up nourishment; you must keep on growing; you have to become strong and vigorous. Spirituality isn’t something that just happens; it’s something to be nurtured, and you must be intentional about that nurturing. Becoming a Christian is just the beginning of the journey; it’s the start of a life that follows Christ. That life is meant to deepen and grow.

The Time Myth. The second one is that while Christianity is a journey, it is not merely a journey. Let’s just call this the time myth - the myth that true spirituality is simply a byproduct of time. That’s not the way it works. Being a Christian does not automatically translate into becoming Christlike. In the same way, while your spirituality takes time, it is not simply a byproduct of time. The writer of the Book of Hebrews told a group of Christians this: **⁵ Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again.” Hebrews 5:12.**

The Effort Myth. Well, there’s the instantaneous myth and the time myth – now, let’s talk about the effort myth. Another myth is that spiritual growth is attained by trying. The idea is that people must simply decide to be spiritual – like a New Year’s resolution - because spiritual living is essentially an act of the will. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are believed to be matters of raw effort.

The heart of Christian spirituality is to be like Jesus. And to be like Jesus you don’t try either. You train. You do the things Jesus did in order to live like Jesus lived. That’s why Jesus once said, **⁴⁰ “Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” Luke 6:40** or as the apostle Paul wrote, **⁷ “Train yourself to be godly.” 1 Timothy 4:7.**

The Solo Myth. Which leads to a fourth myth: that a personal relationship with God through Christ is synonymous with a private relationship with God through Christ. Let’s call it the “solo”

² Kimlyn J Bender, *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible: 1 Corinthians*, 141.

myth. Covid was a very hard time for churches. Unfortunately, many Christians who got used to watching services online never returned to the actual church, convinced that watching it on a screen would do them just fine.

As one person said to me, “Oh. Grahame it’s so much easier. No travelling, watch services when it’s convenient to me and I don’t have to put up with the weird people in my church anymore”. This was an early church problem as well. ²⁴ **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrew 10: 24-25.**

Being together is how we encourage each other in the Lord. It’s a crucial part of discipleship. Yes, even with people who we might think are weird. The answer to that is the very same people probably think that you’re weird. Plenty of weird people in the Bible. The truth, however, is that becoming a truly spiritual person is a team sport. This insight is taught throughout the Bible. In Proverbs, we read that, ¹⁵ **“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17.**

The Transformation Myth. The final myth is one you will want to remember throughout the course of your entire life. Let’s call it the transformation myth. This is the idea that transformation is an achievement – something you attain. Or it’s like a light switch; once you turn it on, it’s on. The truth is that it will often be a process for the rest of your life of three steps forward, two steps back.

Growing spiritually is something that can be served by other people, but ultimately must be owned personally by us. This is so important to get down. Too many followers of Christ view discipleship as something that is done to them and for them, almost like a personal enrichment program or getting a life coach. No. That’s why in the New Testament book of Hebrews we’re told that people who keep looking to get “fed” that way are like babies who never grow up.

They’re always wanting their bottle. The mark of maturity is not being fed but feeding yourself. ¹¹ **We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:11-14.**

Ultimately, discipleship is the work of God in us. We follow the son of God and invite the Holy Spirit to guide us. ²² **throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. Ephesians 4: 22-24.**

²⁵ **Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Galatians 5: 25.**