

Three Marks of a Growing Disciple

Disciple: Following and Learning From Jesus (Part 3)

Matthew 28:16-20; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:28

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Scripture Reading

- *Matthew 28:16-20*
- *2 Corinthians 3:18*
- *Philippians 1:6*
- *Colossians 1:28*

What is a disciple?

- A disciple is a follower/learner of Jesus.
- David Young - "A disciple is someone committed to following Jesus and becoming like Him"¹
- Dallas Willard - "[A] disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is...it is what [Jesus] calls us to by saying, 'Follow me.'"²
 - "I need to be able to lead my life as he would lead it if he were I."³
- The word "Christian" is only used three times in the whole Bible (*Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16*); "disciple" is used 281 times in the New Testament.⁴
- Christians are disciples. We follow and learn from Jesus. If you're a Christian, you're an apprentice of Jesus.
- Discipleship is a process. We never arrive. Discipleship is about transformation, growth, and maturity.
- Jesus called us to make disciples, not just converts. (*Matthew 28:19*)
 - Conversion is not the goal; discipleship is the goal.

The Goal of Maturity

- Paul, in Colossians chapter 1, discusses the goal of his ministry.
 - *Colossians 1:28* - He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.⁵

¹ David M. Young, *New Day: Restoring the Revolutionary Mission of Christ's Church* (Murfreesboro, TN: New Day Press, 2016), 155

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 282-283.

³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 284.

⁴ <https://jdgreear.com/are-you-a-christian-or-a-disciple/>

⁵ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

- Paul's goal is for the people he ministers to is for them to grow in maturity, to be fully mature in Christ.
- The metaphor the Bible uses (and we've been using the past few weeks) when discussing the lack of growth in Christians is spiritual infants or spiritual babies.
 - *1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-14*
 - The goal of parenthood is not to just give birth. The goal of parents is to raise their children to be mature adults.
 - The goal Jesus gave us is not to ONLY make converts to Christianity. The goal is to make disciples of Jesus.
 - How sad would it be if a baby was born, but never grew or matured? How tragic would it be if a person was born but never learned to walk or talk? How sad would it be for someone to eat only baby food and milk for one's whole life?
- It's totally possible to be a Christian who is saved, forgiven, and a child of God, but still be an immature spiritual infant/baby.
- None of us want to be immature forever. No person ever born wants to be an infant forever.
 - Don't be like Peter Pan in Neverland and refuse to grow up.

God Will Transform You.

- Maybe you've been in a place where you're really struggling with your identity and are not satisfied with who you are becoming. Maybe you don't like the person you are.
- If that's where you're at, remember this: God loves you exactly where you are. You don't have to earn your salvation or clean your life up before you come to Him. Just trust in Him. And there's more good news: He will not leave you where you are! He will transform you!
- The good news is God will form you into the image of His Son!
 - *Philippians 1:6* - "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
 - *2 Corinthians 3:18* - "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
- We need to remember this: God is the one who transforms us. We don't do it ourselves.
- However, it is our responsibility to put ourselves in positions to be formed by God.
- It's possible to reject the work of God in your life and quench the work of the Spirit in your life (*1 Thessalonians 5:19*).

- So, here's a logical next question for all of us: what are some ways to position ourselves to be formed by God more fully into the image of Jesus?

Three Practical Ways to Grow in Maturity

- I've never met a mature Christian who does not do these three things, and I've never met an immature Christians who does these three things.
 - Mature Christians...
 - are regularly immersed in the Bible, the Word of God.
 - have a vibrant prayer life.
 - are active members of a Christian community.
- These are not the only marks of mature Christians. This is not an exhaustive list.
- I hope the study of these three marks of mature Christians is very practical, and that you'll be able to apply some of these ideas into your daily life.

Mature Christians read and study their Bibles regularly.

- All mature Christians I know are regularly in the Word of God and immature Christians I don't know aren't.
- *2 Timothy 3:16-17* - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- Why regularly read? We need to hear from God.
- Scripture will help to form us.
- Jesus used Scripture when He was tempted by the devil. (*Matthew 4:1-11*)
- Practical tips for reading your Bible.
 - Have a plan
 - It can be hard to just sit down and read without an intentional plan.
 - Find a Bible reading plan to participate in.
 - YouVersion Bible app
 - Journal through scripture.
 - Read a book or chapter 25 times.
 - Memorize scripture.
 - Ask questions when you read:
 - What's something new I noticed about this passage of Scripture?
 - What does this passage of Scripture teach me about God?
 - What does this passage of Scripture teach me about people?
 - What questions arise from this passage of Scripture?
 - What is a personal takeaway from this passage of Scripture?

Mature Christians have a vibrant prayer life.

- All mature Christians I know have a vibrant prayer life and immature Christians I don't know don't.
- *Luke 18:1* - Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
- We pray to ask God for help, commune with Him, and be formed by Him.
- Practical tips for growing in prayer.
 - Sing your prayers.
 - Many praise and worship songs are prayers to God.
 - Matthew Westerholm quotes John Calvin: "If you love singing to God then you love to pray."⁶ You might say that you're really struggling with your prayer life. If you're struggling to pray, sing to God.
 - Journal your prayers.
 - Praying old prayers greatly benefitted me when I struggled with anxiety.
 - Pray the Psalms.
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "The Psalter [The Psalms] occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God's Word and, with few exceptions, the prayer of men as well. How are we to understand this? How can God's Word be at the same time prayer to God?"⁷ In other words, the prayers of scripture are very interesting and compelling. They are God's Word to us, but they are at the same time, when we pray them, our words back to God.
 - It's also a good idea to focus on the Psalms when you're struggling to pray. The Psalms cover almost every emotion you will have (anger, joy, thankfulness, grief over sin, sadness, loss).
 - Pray traditional prayers.
 - The Jesus Prayer - "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
 - Wesley Covenant Prayer
 - "[Christ In Me](#)" by Saint Patrick
 - Study the prayers of Paul.
 - *2 Thessalonians 1:3-12; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Colossians 1:9-14; Philippians 1:9-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21; Romans 15:14-33*).
 - Memorize the Lord's prayer. (*Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4*)

⁶ Matthew Westerholm, "Your Prayer Life is better than you think," *Desiring God*, January 25, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-prayer-life-is-better-than-you-think>.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 44.

Mature Christians are an active part of a Christian community.

- All mature Christians I know are an active part of a Christian community and many immature Christians I know aren't.
- God created humans to need one another.
 - *Genesis 2:18* - "It is not good for the man to be alone."
- Why are Christian communities important?
 - You need encouragement from others and others need your encouragement. (*Hebrews 10:25*)
 - You have spiritual gifts and abilities others need. And you need spiritual gifts from others. (*Romans 12:3-8*)
 - In community you have accountability.
 - In community you don't always get your way.
 - "Success is doing what I want to do, with people I want to be around" that's not church." - not true in the church
 - You'll be around people who are different from you.
- Are you committed to being a part of a local church?

A Growing Disciple of Jesus

- Do you want to be a growing disciple of Jesus?
- What will be different about you if you commit to reading and studying your Bible regularly, praying consistently, and being immersed in a community of fellow disciples? What would change?
 - You grow in your love of God and people.
 - The Greatest Command (*Mark 12:28-34*)
 - You will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.
 - *Galatians 5:22-23* - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
 - You will be making disciples like Jesus commanded you to do. You will help other followers of Jesus follow Jesus.

Discussion Questions

- Ryan listed 3 marks of mature disciples of Jesus. What are some other marks of growing disciples of Jesus you've seen?
- How does reading and studying your Bible regularly, praying consistently, and being immersed in a community of fellow disciples help you grow? Spend time discussing each one.
- What are some things you plan to do to position yourself to be formed by God more fully into the image of Jesus this week?