

Ordinary Folks Make Great Disciples

Here is a basic job description for disciples from Mark 8:27-38

Some people think a disciple is a Christian put up a notch or two. Other people have the idea that a disciple is somebody who goes through a course where you get up at some unearthly hour in the morning and go talk with somebody over interminable cups of coffee. But it isn't something you worry about if you just want to be a Christian. But if you get serious, you get into a discipleship course and come out discipled. This thinking needs to be re-evaluated.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is somebody who has a relationship with a teacher. That's the simplest definition. Are you sitting at his feet, hearing his Word? Are you discovering his truth? Do you identify with him personally? Are you applying his principles? Are you gladly sharing these things and disseminating them?

Disciples Confront the Issues Jesus Raised

In Mark 8, the Lord Jesus outlines a basic job description of a disciple. First, his disciples were prepared to confront the issues he raised. For instance, in verse 35, Jesus says, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" The issue is: What are you doing with your life? It's hard to imagine a bigger issue than that. Then he identifies two possibilities: You can invest your life or you can waste your life. He is saying, "What determines whether your life is wasted or invested is your attitude toward me. If you want to hang onto your life, you'll waste it. But if you want to hand over your life to me, you'll invest it for eternity."

Disciples Confirm Christ's Claims

Second, disciples of Jesus Christ confirm the claims he made. Christianity does not stand or fall on whether the Spanish Inquisition was right, or the Reformation or the Crusades. It stands or falls on whether Jesus was who he said he was. Disciples of Jesus are ready to carefully evaluate the claims he made and then confirm that they are true. If disciples cannot do that—build their lives on the absolute bedrock certainty that Jesus is Lord—then it's only a matter of time until they'll collapse. Christianity stands or falls on the validity of Jesus Christ.

Talking to his disciples Jesus said, "Who do people say that I am?" They all had their answers ready. They'd been out polling the people at Jerusalem Airport. But what they didn't expect was the next question: "Now who do you say I am?" That's what disciples of Jesus Christ are ready for.

Disciples Conform to Christ's Pattern

There's a third thing about Jesus' disciples: they conform to the pattern he outlined. Listen to these challenging words: "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" There are four things here that will show whether a person is conforming to the pattern of discipleship that Christ outlined: they come after him, they deny themselves, they take up their cross, and they keep on following him.

Some of you are going to go out tomorrow morning and say, "Look out! Here comes another disciple of Jesus Christ skillfully disguised as a stock broker." And somebody else is going to say, "Look out, neighborhood. Here's a busy disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as a homemaker." If you're disciples of Jesus Christ, that will be the predominant thought. So the question is, are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?

—STUART BRISCOE; adapted from the sermon "Ordinary Folks Make Great Disciples" on www.PreachingToday.com, © 2008 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. How does "secular" discipleship occur today? How is that process similar to Christian discipleship?
2. In what ways have I been discipled by Jesus Christ? By other Christians?
3. How can I help others in the church conform to Christ's pattern of life? How can others help me?

What Every Christian Should Know

Christians need to know about their faith, and the members of your small group get to teach them.

1 Timothy 4:15–16

Jo Lewis and Gordon Palmer lament the findings of a Gallup poll that concluded “many professing believers remain woefully ignorant about the basic facts of Christianity.” They set out categories—biblical and otherwise—in which Christians should have a basic knowledge. For each, rate how you believe the members of your small group would score on a scale of 1 (our members are knowledgeable in this area) to 5 (our members have virtually no knowledge in the area).

	Knowledge in this area		No Knowledge in this area		
	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of common biblical sayings. <i>(Example: They could complete the phrase “Am I my brother’s _____?”)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of the books of the Bible. <i>(Example: They could list the books that compromise the Gospels.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of biblical characters. <i>(Example: They could name the first king of Israel.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of famous Christians. <i>(Example: They could tell you what John Wesley is known for.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members are familiar with Christian terms and phrases. <i>(Example: They could tell you what the phrase “I believe in God the Father Almighty” is the beginning of.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of biblical geography. <i>(Example: They could find Bethlehem on a map of ancient Israel.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members are familiar with biblical proverbs and sayings. <i>(Example: They could complete the saying “A good name is better than _____)”</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could recite the Ten Commandments.	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list the Beatitudes.	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list Paul’s “fruits of the Spirit.”	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list the seven last words of Christ.	1	2	3	4	5

—JO LEWIS AND GORDON PALMER; Copyright © 1989 Jo Lewis and Gordon Palmer. Adapted from *What Every Christian Should Know* (Victor Books, 1989). Used with permission.

Discuss

1. Based on the answers above, what is a good starting point when it comes to discipling our members?
2. How can we model the importance of this knowledge to current and potential members of our group?
3. What are some ways we can incorporate this type of education into our discipling efforts?

Reflections on Discipleship

Quotations to stir heart and mind.

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

Comprehend:

Read the following quotations to meditate on the cost, method, and value of becoming disciples of Jesus.

The form that discipleship takes is conditioned by the historic times in which one lives, as well as by the context of an individual’s life. But the underlying principle remains the same: each of us is called by love to love; called out of our narrow individualism and our small private world, to allow ourselves to be “turned around” by the allurements of God, and to live for him, as Jesus did.

—**Thelma Hall**, *Too Deep for Words*

To become a disciple means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbor. What follows from there is a journey which...never ends in this life, a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbor.

—**David J. Bosch**, *Transforming Mission*

All true knowledge of God is born out of obedience.

—**John Calvin**, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

What does it profit you to give God one thing if he asks of you another? Consider what it is God wants and do it. You will as a result better satisfy your heart than with that toward which you yourself are inclined.

—**St. John of the Cross**, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*

It is not our responsibility to make people “Christians” and get them baptized into a particular denomination, but rather to help people decide to follow Jesus and his radical message. Maybe this is why the New Testament writers only use Christian 3 times but disciple on 269 occasions!

—**Tom Getman**, World Vision International, personal correspondence

Evangelism is not selling Jesus, but showing Jesus; evangelism is not mere telling about Christ, but about being Christ.

—**Lee C. Camp**, *Mere Discipleship*

It has become popular to preach a painless Christianity and automatic saintliness. It has become part of our “instant” culture. “Just pour a little water on it, stir mildly, pick up a gospel tract, and you are on your Christian way.”

—**A. W. Tozer**, *Jesus, Author of Our Faith*

Suffering is the true badge of discipleship. The disciple is not above his master.

—**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *The Cost of Discipleship*

—Quotations compiled by RICHARD A. KAUFFMAN for our sister publication CHRISTIANITY TODAY, © 2004 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. Which of the quotations above is the most meaningful to me? Why?
2. Which of the quotations above is the most surprising? Why?
3. Which of the quotations above is the most challenging? Why?

Pray:

Ask God to bless you with a vision of what it means to be his disciple and to help others do the same.