

Following Jesus: Discipleship (Unfolding the Vision Bible study: Part 2)

Opening: Leader opens in prayer.

Gathering (choose one or two of the following):

- Tell the group about one of your most heroic moments (it might be in sport, music, work...)
- There are a lot of books about 'leadership' today, and very few about 'followership.' Tell the group of an experience you had as a *follower*. (Perhaps in a sporting team, a lecture course, a bush adventure...)
- Which current (or historical) world leader most inspires you? Why?

Wrestling with God's Word

What is *discipleship*? The words 'disciple/discipleship' are used a lot in Christian circles. But we would rarely hear them outside of church contexts. This can be offputting for those who don't know what they mean. Just as detrimental, it could mean that we don't really understand what they mean, or that we hide behind the word to avoid acting on it.

What does Jesus say characterises 'being a disciple' in the following passages?

NB, the *word* may not be used explicitly but the *concept* is clearly in view. Write down the characteristics of a disciple from each passage to build up a fuller picture of 'discipleship.'

Matthew 7:24-27 (referencing the 'Sermon on the Mount', c.f. all of Matthew 5, 6,7)

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Matthew 5:1-2

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Luke 9:23-26

- Characteristics of a disciple...

John 15:4-12

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Matthew 28:18-20

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Mark 1:14-20

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Mark 10:42-45

- Characteristics of a disciple...

Luke 10:1-4, 16-20

- Characteristics of a disciple...

- As you read these passages, what overall picture emerges of 'discipleship'?
- Of all Jesus' calls to discipleship, which do you find the most difficult, the most costly?
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- What *promise and hope* do you find in Jesus' call to follow him?

Dallas Willard, in his book *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential teachings on Discipleship*, writes the following startling words in a section entitled "The Cost of Nondiscipleship." Willard writes,

"It was right and good of Bonhoeffer [in The Cost of Discipleship] to point out that one cannot be a disciple of Christ without forfeiting things normally sought in human life, and that one who pays little in the world's coinage to bear his name has reason to wonder whether he or she stands with God. But the cost of nondiscipleship is far greater- even when this life alone is considered- than the price paid to walk with Jesus, constantly learning from him.

Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, nondiscipleship costs you exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10). The cross-shaped yoke of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul."

In your small group, discuss this quote.

- What are some of the costs of non-discipleship? How does this quote challenge you?
- How does the call of Jesus bring liberation from the things of this life which seek to bind you and enslave you? How have you experienced this liberation in your life?
- (Personal question, optional: Where would you like to see Jesus' peace, liberation and 'life to the full' more completely at work in your life?)

Wrestling with the World: Visioning for our Community

Following Jesus in daily life (Love one another, Serve the world, Follow Jesus)

All of our other actions (loving one another, serving the world) spring only from our following of Jesus in faith. Jesus says explicitly in John 15:5, 'If people remain in me, and I remain in them, they will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.' Discipleship begins in realising that we cannot 'do' anything apart from the life that Jesus gives to us. He does this in our baptism, when he grants us the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith in him.

Imagine a community centred around Jesus, with his life-giving word flowing through people and producing fruit...

- How can you 'remain in Christ?' How can you let his word 'remain in you?' Be practical and specific.
- How are we to become more like Jesus? There is no way to become more Christlike, more of a disciple, than through habits of mind and heart. Discipleship is not an idea, discipleship is action. A *disciple* is one who is engaged in spiritual *disciplines*. Alan Hirsch says something challenging: 'The only way to grow in Christlikeness that we are aware of is to engage in a healthy diet of spiritual disciplines.'

Read again through your list of 'Characteristics of a disciple' from the section above.

- What specific spiritual *disciplines* (practices, habits, things that define a *disciple*) would open you up to God's grace and the Holy Spirit's work in your life so that you could grow in Christlikeness in each of those areas?
- How could our LSF community encourage and equip you in this discipline? (Please let your leaders know practical suggestions! Leaders, please let Pastor Nathan and the CTM know!)

(Personal question for reflection) Are you willing to place your trust in Jesus, and let him lead you into freedom, through the gracious application of one or more of those disciplines in your daily life? If yes, which one? Spend some time in personal prayer asking Jesus to grant you his Holy Spirit so that you can grow as his disciple in this area, through this discipline. If you are willing, share this request with another person, for prayer, encouragement and accountability.

- What excites you about the vision of continuing to grow as part of a ‘discipleship community’?
- How do you think you might be a part of ‘unfolding the vision’?

Closing

Spend some time in prayer for one another, asking the Holy Spirit to help you continue to become Disciples - people who Follow Jesus in daily life.

Appendix:

For Further reading

(all of these books are available on request from Pastor Nathan)

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential teachings on Discipleship by Dallas Willard

Search and Rescue: Becoming a Disciple who makes a Difference by Neil Cole

Real Faith for Real Life: Living the Six Marks of Discipleship by Mike Foss

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Some basic Spiritual Disciplines:

(if you or your group are interested in learning more about these, please ask Pastor Nathan)

The Gracious Call of Jesus

1. The call to intimacy with God (John 15:5-10)
2. The call to rest and renewal (Hebrews 10:19-25)
3. The call to authentic relationships (Matt 5:1-11,23-24)
4. The call to Christlike living (Luke 22:24-27)
5. The call to generosity, trust, and joy (Matt 6:19-34)

The Spiritual Discipline

Daily prayer, daily bible reading
Weekly worship and Sabbath (rest)
True community
A life of service
Tithing (generous giving)