

Rediscovering Biblical Discipleship

Some of Jesus' last recorded words of his earthly ministry were recorded for us by Matthew and found in the gospel account that bears his name. We have come to know that particular scripture (Matthew 28:18-20) as the "Great Commission." Jesus' words give purpose to those of all ages since who have chosen to follow him. We have been called to be disciple makers. The church has often given much more emphasis to the evangelization component of that task than the process of nurture. And in that reality is the inherent problem. It has distorted a holistic view of disciple making. While there is an event dimension of making disciples (evangelism), the nurture of those converts (teaching them to observe) is process and process is long-term and often messy. Is it any wonder that we like event better than process? There is a closure (praying the sinner's prayer and baptism) in evangelism while in nurture the process never concludes and the time and energy expended is far greater. Paul wrote to the Christ followers in Philippi and instructed them to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12)

Certainly there can be no nurture in disciple making unless there are first disciples. Evangelism and nurture together are needed for the task of making disciples. When evangelism is stressed apart from the nurture then it will be unbiblical and difficult to rally around. When nurture is focused on one's intimate relationship with Jesus, evangelism will occur. Nurture that is characterized by accumulating cognitive knowledge and fellowship with other believers without the overflow of sharing the good news of relationship with Christ is not biblical nurture. Disciple making is healthy and holistic when evangelism and nurture work interdependently.

Discipleship, the expression of Christ Jesus' presence in a believer's life is a lifelong journey of faith. It does not conclude at Christian baptism, but it is then that it really begins. The journey should be marked by the gradual transformation of Jesus' character into the Christian's life. It has far more to do with how we live than what we believe or in other words, what we truly believe about Christ Jesus will be evidenced in how we live our lives. Believers have not been saved for spiritual birth, but for usefulness to God. Dallas Willard, a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California has defined discipleship in these words. It is "learning to live my life as He would live my life if he were I." What a high and noble calling for all of life!

As disciple makers of students we have an opportunity to reach and nurture collegians who will continue to help shape the spiritual climate for coming generations. If we are to be effective in this task, it is imperative we help them understand what it means to be a Christ-follower-- to faithfully live out their discipleship and disciple making.

Contendings (Jude 1:3)

Can a person really believe he is a Christian and not be one? Why or Why not?

What do you think is the difference between being an immature Christian (I Corinthians 3:1-3) and a person who just cognitively believes that Jesus is divine?

Resources:

Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 2:6-7; Ephesians 4: 11-15

Book: *The Great Omission* by Dallas Willard