

I. THE QUALITATIVE DISTINCTIVES OF A DISCIPLE

What is a Disciple?

The intentional pursuit of making disciples requires understanding what Jesus laid out as the particular distinctives that should mark any who follow him. Today's disciple makers should have in their view the same traits that define a disciple that Jesus had when he modeled and taught disciple making in the first century.

What follows are seven qualitative distinctives that will make the intentionality of our disciple-making more effective due to the fact it brings focus to what we are striving to make.

A. Disciples are Called to Die to Self that They Might Live to God

Luke 9:18-27

18 Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." 20 Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." 21 And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." 23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." ESV

1. The Sum of Discipleship

When a person is transformed by the saving power of the gospel they transported into a whole new world: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13 ESV). Our status in this new kingdom is identical with Christ's status. We live as kingdom citizens solely on merits of Christ's righteousness. Colossians 2:9-15 tells us of this radical change of identity.

- We are completely identified with Christ.
- We have been filled in him.
- Who he is we are.

- What he's done we've done.
- We died with him.
- We were buried with him.
- We were raised with him.
- Our entire debt of sin has been nailed to the cross with Christ.
- Now there is nothing that stands against. We are eternally forgiven.
- The powers that once ruled over us in the kingdom of darkness have been stripped of their authority.

This is not just a change in our status. It is coupled with a radical change of our interior person and the very nature of our being. Paul tells us we are “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). And no wonder. We are indwelt by the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) and as a consequence we become God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). As we saw earlier this is exactly what the prophet Ezekiel predicted would happen at the advent of the new covenant:

25 “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey his rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV)

But this earthly journey for each of God's new creation is not without struggle and turmoil. Though God has given us a radically different nature and the power by his Spirit the “old self” exists which is something we battle with everyday to “put off” (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9).

This challenge to “put off” the “old self” is exactly the point of this first qualitative distinctive of a disciple: die to self. Dying to self is the sum of every qualitative distinctive to follow. What disciples are called to “put on” involves the process of dying to the self of the “old man”. But when the self of the “old man” is dead, the self of the “new man” is alive to God. God becomes full and rich and fully satisfying when we give up the pursuit to find life and sustenance in all the ways of the kingdom of darkness where we once dwelt or sometimes wonder if we missed out by not dwelling there longer.

a. Save Your Life To Lose It

Jesus is very clear where any person is unable find life.

Any human goal that determines to find life by making much of himself or herself and little of God will find the opposite of life.

b. Lose Your Life To Save It

1) Denial

23 ... "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself ..."

To deny oneself is to disregard one's own interests. Why is the disciple called to denial? Because of his or her inclination to make themselves big. John Calvin writes of the propensity of any human being to make themselves bit.

“... there is no one who does not cherish within himself some opinion of his own pre-eminence. Thus each individual, by flattering himself, bears a kind of kingdom in his breast.” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. VII, Par. 4)

2) Death

23... "If anyone would come after me, let him... take up his cross daily..."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” (p. 79)

John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ* is eager that we don't misunderstand what it is that a disciple is called to die:

“To take up our cross...and follow Jesus, is ‘to put oneself into a position of a condemned man on his way to execution’ (H. B. Swete, *St. Mark*, p. 172). For if we are following Jesus with a cross on our shoulder, there is only one place to which we are going; the place of crucifixion ... Our ‘cross, then is not an irritable husband or a cantankerous wife. It is instead the symbol of death to the self. (p. 279)

3) Obedience

23 ... "If anyone would come after me, let him...follow me."

To follow Christ means much more than to be in close proximity to him. To follow him entails obeying him. We walk in his ways, not our own. But such obedience is not meant to call upon our raw will power and self-discipline. It also calls upon our affections. Those who love Christ obey him (John 14:21). John says the same thing in a slightly different manner in his epistle:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3 ESV).

This writing was discovered by a pastor friend of a Precept student of Kay Arthur's who sent it to her. It was found written on an African pastor's mud hut wall. Even though we might take exception with some of the theology in this writing, it is a poignant example of someone who committed to live as a dying-to-self disciple of Christ:

"I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power. My face is set, my gait is fast, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me - my banner will be clear."