

INNOVATE CHURCH -DISCIPLESHIP
Chapter One: *What is God's Will for My Life?*
Disciple!

Jesus had just died. The disciples were dazed and confused. They believed that Jesus would deliver them from the Roman oppression. They believed that they were on their way to something big. But the awful events of the last few days were just too much to comprehend. The arrest in the garden. The trial in Pilate's courtyard. The scourging by the Roman guards. Jesus was just crucified right before their very eyes! What were they going to do now? All of them were nervous. Some were in hiding. They were overwhelmed with doubts and fear. Matthew probably said he was going back to his job of collecting taxes. Most of the rest said they were going back to fishing. The excitement of Jesus and the miracles and the crowds were quickly fading away. The dream was over.

That is... until the third day. First, the women came running to the disciples with an incredible story. Then the disciples went to the tomb and he wasn't there. Then he appeared to them out of nowhere like a ghost, but not a ghost. The disciples believed, but some doubted. His final appearance was full of encouragement and instruction. He told them to go and make disciples of the entire world. They had their marching orders, but they were also told to wait. Wait until the Spirit of Promise had come. Jesus was about to inaugurate a new age with the coming of the Spirit. So they started praying and they prayed for 40 days and then came Pentecost! The disciples were transformed from fearful to fearless. From being passive to being passionate. From having no purpose to having one purpose. They decided to obey their master no matter what the cost. They also decided to follow and accomplish his plan and by the time they came to Ephesus (Acts 17:6) they were regarded as those people who "turned the world upside down."

Innovate Church is about being a passionate follower of Jesus AND being passionately involved in His kingdom. You cannot be a passionate follower of Jesus without being intimately involved in His mission. His mission is carried out in and through the local church. The first chapter in this section is a discussion about what it means to be a disciple (**what is God's will for my life?**) and the second is about the process of discipleship (**what is God's will for my church?**). Let's begin first with an examination of some of the challenges facing an individual who desires to "come after" Christ.

There are many adversities facing a person today who would be like Jesus. Apart from a personal decision and an intentional plan to develop as a believer, the challenges will overwhelm the modern day disciple. Here are a few challenges: moral relativism- evidenced by political correctness and the disappearance of absolutes, the proliferation of internet pornography- evidenced by the epidemic of Christians in bondage, the breakdown of the family through divorce- evidenced by the number of homes without fathers, materialism and greed- evidenced by the paltry giving of church members. These are just a few tests we face today as disciples.

On top of all the obstacles just mentioned, now we face an increasingly hostile and anti-Christian environment. The harsh conditions are like a mighty ocean current pulling the disciple away from the shore of God's will and into deep and powerful under currents of apathy and discouragement. "I don't know and I don't care" could summarize the plight of the modern day disciple inside the church of Jesus Christ.

Many times the modern disciple decides to give up and just go with the current of the world. In the first century Peter, shortly after Jesus had died, boldly declared, "I'm going

fishing” (John 21:3) and several disciples decided to go with him. His confusion and discouragement was too great to go forward so he decided to go back. Resident in the statement is this notion, “I’m not sure about all this religious stuff. I am going back to what I know.” In our day we make a similar pronouncement when we put the things of the world ahead of the things of God with statements like, “I am going to make money” or “I go to church, but I don’t want to become a fanatic.” Tolstoy put it this way, “Everybody thinks of changing the world and no one thinks of changing himself.”¹ In order to reach the world with the gospel, the gospel must permeate and consume the individual disciple.

The way to reach the world with the gospel is for the gospel to fully reach the individual disciple. Abraham Maslow said, “What a man can be, a man must be.”² The church continues to limp along with half hearted Christians with half baked ideas on how to reach the world. The potential for reaching the world is locked up in discovering the potential of the individual disciple. The world is growing at an exponential rate and only exponential strategy that involves the development of the total person will work. The solution to the dilemma of reaching the total world lies in the reaching of the total person and unlocking his or her kingdom potential. When every disciple is fully developed to his or her potential... reaching the world is then a result of obedience to the Great Commission. To make that type of disciple we must first begin with a clear definition of what a disciple looks like.

The starting point for becoming a disciple of Jesus, is to examine the Scriptures and see what the characteristics of a first century disciple looked like and then to draw from those passages bedrock principles regarding being a disciple. Then from the principles you need to create a working definition for the term disciple. It’s been said that, “If you aim at nothing you will hit it every time.” Many times churches are trying to make disciples but they are not clear on what a disciple actually looks like. In seminary my homiletics professor put it this way, “mist in the pulpit is fog in the pew.” If we are not clear on the product then the process is hopelessly shrouded. As a result we are not producing disciples who shake the world, but we are producing disciples who are being shaken by the world’s influence. Which is why, according to all of the statistics and trends, the average person in the church is indistinguishable from the average person in the world. We cannot reach the world when the world is dictating the terms. Let’s take a look at the Scriptures and extract some principles for the term “disciple” and then we will form a definition from the principles.

The word “disciple” or “disciples” is used 266 times in the New Testament with the vast majority of the occurrence recorded in the gospels. To be a disciple requires that a person be disciplined in spiritual habits and disciplined in purpose. The epistles emphasize a relational community where disciples are developed in the context of body of believers. They discover and use their spiritual gifts to love and serve each other and non-believers. Disciples are developed as the body grows in maturity and as each part does its work (Eph. 4:16). However, the clear call of Jesus to come and follow Him in the Gospels cannot be ignored. Jesus clearly identifies the marks of a disciple in the gospels and we need to start there. Here are the main passages related to being a disciple as set forth by Jesus Himself. A disciple is someone:

1. Who seriously considers the cost before following Christ. Luke 14:28, *“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”* This verse makes it clear that before a person decides to follow Jesus, he or she must first sit down and calculate the cost of following Christ. For the true disciple it will only cost you your life, your body, your possessions and your

future. In short it will cost you everything. God's plan and God's will cost Jesus His life; it cannot cost his followers anything less.

2. Who is totally committed to Christ. Jesus is first! He is the first priority. Consider the following verse from Luke 14:26, "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he **cannot** be My disciple.*" Hatred here is a comparative term. Our love for Christ is so great, so consuming that in comparison it feels like hatred (disdain) for others. Jesus said it this way in Matt. 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." "Jesus is first in my life" is evidence by a statement like this, "I will go anywhere and do anything that He asks of me." How about it? Have you come to the place where your first and foremost desire is to follow Him whatever the cost?
3. Who is willing to carry his or her individual burden to sacrifice for Christ and His cause. Consider Luke 14:27, "*Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me **cannot** be My disciple.*" Much has been written and discussed about what it means to "carry your cross." In a nutshell it simply means that the disciple of Jesus will be called upon to lay down his life (his desire for self direction and determination) and to surrender his will to the will of the Master. The kingdom of God is not advanced on a 9 to 5 schedule. You cannot serve someone without eventually surrendering your will to the person you serve. Consider Luke 17:10 when Jesus says, "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" Obedience to the point of sacrifice, if called upon, is part of the commitment.
4. Who is willing to give up all earthly possessions. Luke 14:33, "*So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.*" Again the call to totally abandon any and all ownership to possessions. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 6: 24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other You cannot serve God and wealth." Later on in the same passage Jesus said this, "Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." This doesn't mean that to be a disciple a person must take a vow of poverty, but the disciple must be "poor in spirit" and be willing to surrender all possessions if the Master asks.
5. Who continues in God's Word and experiences the freedom in Christ. John 8:31-32, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*" The Word of God is "living and active." It has the ability "transform our minds" and our lives if we will read it, study it, memorize it and meditate in it on a consistent basis. The Word can set us free from the lies of the enemy and it can empower us to overcome the fiery darts of our adversary. If we don't continue in the Word, then we are wide open to deception, discouragement and defeat. You cannot be a disciple without an aggressive commitment to consume and obey the Scriptures. As we drink in the Word of God it has the power to transform our minds and when our minds are transformed then we can experience the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.
6. Who genuinely loves other believers. John 13:35, "*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" If you don't love other believers, then you don't know the God of love. Year ago Burt Bacharach, wrote the words, "What the

world needs now is love, sweet love. No not just for some, but for everyone.” These lyrics summarize the call and the challenge of Jesus in the upper room discourse, when He called His disciples together and told them to “love one another.” Francis Schaeffer observed that our love for one another should be so strong that it would unite believers and that when believers are living in unity the world “would believe” that Jesus was sent by God. The modern day disciple must be committed to love. Loving God, loving our neighbor and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we love like this, there is no argument that can stand against this force. What’s your love level like right now?

7. Who abides in Christ, prays, bears fruit and glorifies God. John 15: 5, 7-8, *“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”* When we abide in Christ we will know His will and ask for His will and it will be done for the disciple. As a result, fruit will be produced and God will be glorified. John 15 is the clearest explanation of life as a follower of Christ. This passage should be the normative experience for the modern day disciple. It is the clearest explanation of life in the kingdom as a disciple. Pay attention to it. Study it. Obey it.
8. Who is full of the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52, *“And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”* Part of the fruit of abiding in Christ is the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The other part of fruitfulness is fruit that comes from serving and using your spiritual gift(s). John 15 says that a disciple should bear much fruit. Fruit in your character and fruit in your actions. Being should always lead to doing. The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to “be with us” and to guide us in all things.” In order to follow Christ fully we need to full of the Holy Spirit. He will guide us into the path of obedience and fruitfulness and that will ultimately lead to joy.
9. Who obediently follows the desires of the Master. Matthew 26:19, *“The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.”* Immediate and complete obedience is a hallmark of a disciple. Do you realize that it is impossible to ever say, “No, Lord.” Because the moment you say “no” He is no longer the Lord. The gospels portray following God as being a member in His kingdom. As loyal subjects in His kingdom, our job is to follow the King and go wherever and do whatever He says. Many times we approach the kingdom of heaven in a casual “take or it leave it” manner. The Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Minas, make it very clear that one day the Master will return and call His servants into account. In order to hear from Him, “Well done good and faithful servant”, we must understand and assume the role of a servant. You cannot be rewarded by the Master if you have not obeyed the wishes of the Master.
10. Who is intimately involved in the mission of Jesus to make disciples. Matthew 28:16, 18-20, *“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* These were some of the last words spoken by Jesus to his disciples before he ascended back into heaven. They must be carefully studied and diligently observed. A careful study

yields: one command, three participles and one promise from this passage. The command verb (in the imperative) is “make disciples.” Whatever else we are involved in as followers of Christ, we must be involved in His mission. We cannot, as disciples, look at the person of Christ and respond to the person of Christ without responding to the mission of Christ. We will study this passage in detail in the next chapter, but suffice it to say, that this is the most important passage on the mission of the disciple and the church in the New Testament. It must be obeyed on an individual and corporate level.

You’ve just read 10 different passages and principles that clearly identify what a first century disciple looked like. Can you imagine the wonder and amazement of the first disciples as they heard the Master identify the cost of following Him? What is your reaction when you read the words of Jesus as he explains the cost of discipleship? Hopefully as you read the verses and the principles your heart is stirred to accept the simple challenge to “follow Me.” The challenge is clear and simple, but the cost is, at first glance, great. Soon, though, as you examine the cost and understand the nature and love of God, you come to realize that Jesus can and should be trusted. It is really the only way to live. Innovate Church is about empowering disciples to discover God’s plan for their lives and what He wants them to do in His church. Starting from the Scriptures and extracting principles we can begin to see that the way of a disciple is challenging, but rewarding. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I am come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.”

We cannot ignore or gloss over the importance of starting with the Scriptures first. From the Scriptures we can extract guiding principles that will help us create a definition for a modern day disciple. The definition must come from the principles in order to capture the image that God has in mind for a Christ follower. Next let’s take a look at three principles that summarize the passages. A disciple is someone who is:

1. **Sacrificial-** He or she has made a decision to submit to Christ and surrender their will and to follow Christ no matter what the cost. The starting point of this commitment is salvation. After salvation this person has seriously examined the cost and is willing to abandon family and possessions for the Master if need be. This disciple is also willing to take up his or her cross and follow Christ to the ends of the earth. Sacrifice of time, sacrifice of energy, sacrifice of body and sacrifice of future plans are understood to be part of the commitment to come after Christ. “Not I, but Christ” is not a motto, but a way of life. Submission to Christ and His plan is the highest goal for the modern day disciple.
2. **Relational-** He or she understands that love is the hallmark of followers of Christ. If I love God then I want to spend time with Him and His children. Love for God, love for neighbor and love for other disciples is a very important part of the value system of a disciple. He or she will set aside time to be with other Christians for spiritual nourishment and encouragement. They also prioritize serving the body by discovering their spiritual gift and using their gift to serve Christians and non-Christians alike. The local church is the focal point for this relational community and service. A church that is innovative will prioritize the development of believers in community. Loving God and loving people is not only a consistent passion, but a consistent practice.
3. **Transformational-** He or she understands that the purpose of spiritual growth is directed toward becoming like Christ in word, thought, attitude and ACTION. Habits like Bible

study, journaling, memorization, meditation, silence, solitude, prayer, fasting and giving are all means to an end. They connect us to the grace of God and through the grace of God we are transformed into the image of Christ. As we become like Christ in character, we also become committed to the cause of Christ as well. Being leads to doing. The disciple is transformed in their character and calling. The Apostle Paul in Phillipians 3 wanted to know Christ, the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection. He wanted to have an intellectual and experiential knowledge of Christ! But he also wanted to “press on” and accomplish the work that He was called to do! The transformation that we are talking about for the disciple connects them to the person of Christ and connects them to the mission of Christ as well. The individual disciple discovers, develops and uses his or her gift for the kingdom of God. You cannot be a follower of the person of Christ without being a follower of the mission of Christ.

From these three principles, *sacrificial, relational and transformational* we can begin to develop a definition that will help to de-mystify what a disciple looks like and once the fog is lifted only then can we begin to design an organic process for disciple making. Here is my definition for a person, who would follow Jesus,

A disciple is a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission.

Now let's see if the three concepts of sacrificial, relational and transformational are included in this definition:

Sacrificial- the person has not only come to the place where they have accepted the sacrifice of Christ, but he or she has **surrendered** to the rule and reign of Christ as well. In my own life I was 9 years old when I accepted Christ as savior, but it wasn't until I was 19 that I surrendered to him completely. I was saved, but I wasn't “working out my salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). I was not “applying diligence” and adding to my faith and as a result I was not useful or fruitful for the King or the Kingdom (2 Peter 1:1-10). At age 19, I made a statement to Christ to this effect, I said, “Lord I will go anywhere and do anything You tell me.” I completely **surrendered** to him as the ruler in my life. What about you? Have you ever come to the place where you totally surrendered to Christ's rule and reign? The modern day disciple will not only yield to the person of Christ for salvation, he or she will submit to the plan of Christ as well.

Relational- Hebrews 10:24-25 says that we should “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” From this passage we are to be pursuing Christ and serving Christ in the community of other believers. We are saved to serve! The book of Acts records for us the habits and practices of the early church. They met together in the temple and they met “from house to house.” They were committed to carrying out the teachings and mission of Christ in community. In Acts 2:42-47 we have the clearest example of what the early church did. They were committed to the Word, fellowship prayer, meeting needs and praising God. As a result the Bible says that “they had favor with all the people.” All this effort was done in a community of believers.

Transformational- God's goal for our lives is that each of us would bring the maximum amount of glory to God. This is called the sum of all theology. We exist to bring God glory. We bring glory to God by being **developing** into His image and by accomplishing His desires. We develop in community by discovering and using our spiritual gifts to serve the body and our fellow man. The church that equips the saints to do the "works of service"³ will see individuals transformed into the image of Christ. When we reach our full potential in Christ we bear fruit and we bring God glory. John 15:8 says, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." To be an innovative church we must start the process of innovation with the individual disciple.

The early church made disciples, in part because they had the words of Jesus still ringing in their ears. In order for us to make disciples today we must go back to the Scriptures and spend enough time in them, so that the words of Jesus ring in our ears today! Jesus said in John 10:27, "my sheep hear my voice." Can you hear the call of the Master to come and follow Him?

To become a disciple, you must answer the question, "*what is God's will for my life?*" To become an innovative church and pursue the process of discipleship you must answer this question, "*what is God's will for my church?*" That is the subject we will attempt to tackle next.

¹ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Leo_Tolstoy

² <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamas159011.html>

³ Eph. 4:11