

Discipleship Moves Men Toward Christian Maturity

There is raging in the cosmos and all around us a titanic battle between the forces of good and evil ... a battle for men's souls. This battle is raging out of control in neighborhoods across America—your neighborhood. Sound overstated?

Think for a moment about the casualties taking place on your street, where you work, even your church. Men leave, women weep, a little 12-year-old girl prays, "God, why is my daddy always so angry?"

This is a real battle. These are real men with real families. What is the solution?

The Greatest Speech in History

The final marching orders from Jesus are, "Go and make disciples" (see Matt. 28:18-20). Those orders still stand. They have not been amended, altered or rescinded. The central mission of the church—the overarching goal—is to "make disciples." More millions of people and more billions of dollars have been mobilized by this brief message than any other speech in recorded history.

Discipleship is the process by which we become civilized. There is one, and only one, way any of us can win the battle for our soul. It is simple and concrete. We need to become disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What Is a Disciple?

What does it mean to be a *disciple*? In the Bible, the word for disciple literally means "pupil" or "learner." When applied to the early Christians, it came to mean someone who declared a personal allegiance to the teachings and person of Jesus. The life of a disciple revolves around Jesus.

Here's a working definition you can build around: A disciple is someone *called* to live in Christ, *equipped* to live like Christ, and *sent* to live for Christ.

For example, in describing the man who built his house on the rock (i.e., a disciple), Jesus said, "I will show you what everyone is like who comes to me (*calling*) and hears my words (*equipping*) and obeys (*sending*)" (Luke 6:47, NCV, parenthetical comments added; for same three categories see also 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

1. A disciple is called to live in Christ. A disciple is *called* to profess faith in Jesus Christ (*evangelism*). I grew up in a "Christian home" that didn't know Christ. We didn't reject the gospel; we never heard it. Our church was focused on other things. In my early 20s, though, my soon-to-be wife, Patsy, explained the gospel of Jesus to me, and I soon embraced Christ as my Lord and Savior.

There are 108 million men in America, 15 years of age and older. Regrettably, 66 million of these men have made no profession of faith in Christ. That's sad, because many of them (like me) would gladly receive Christ if engaged in a credible way. What's even sadder, though, is how many men think they have tried Christianity, found it wanting, and rejected it, when in fact they have never properly understood it.

2. A disciple is equipped to live like Christ. A disciple is *equipped* in a process of ongoing spiritual growth and transformation (*teaching*). Picture yourself as the president of a law firm employing 100 attorneys. For years you have recruited lawyers, but then left them on their own. Without guidance and training, they have done more harm than good. Unresolved cases have piled up, other law firms consider your firm an embarrassment, and the public thinks you are incompetent.

Suppose you go to your board of directors and ask to hire another 20 lawyers. They would say, "Are you nuts? You haven't trained the lawyers we have. Why would we let you hire more? We have a terrible reputation. In fact, several young people who interned with us have quit the law. You're fired!"

When we don't disciple (train and equip) a man who professes Christ, he will almost always become lukewarm in faith, worldly in behavior and hypocritical in witness.

3. A disciple is sent to live for Christ. A disciple is sent to live for Christ by loving others, bearing much fruit and doing good deeds (*service*). Why do we equip men to live like Christ? So they can enjoy Christ by knowing Him better, but also so "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17, NKJV). Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

Every man wants to give his life to a cause, to make a difference, to do something with his life. When you become a disciple, you will eventually want to make that difference for the glory of God: to "bear much fruit" and bear "fruit that should remain" (John 15:8,16).

Once you have been with Christ, experienced the joy of His grace, the warmth of His love, the cleansing of His forgiveness and the indwelling of His Spirit, you inevitably come to a point where you can no longer be happy unless you are serving the Lord.

How Do You Become a Disciple?

Everything and anything that moves you toward Christian maturity is discipleship. The most often noted means for making disciples include preaching, teaching, literature, Bible study, private devotions, small groups, mentoring, prayer, seminars, activities, informal discussions, mission trips and leadership training. As you can see, there are many

ways to become a disciple, but here are my top three picks:

- **First and foremost, the best way to become a disciple is to become actively involved in a disciple-making church.** A disciple-making church will have a plan to immerse you in the gospel at your own pace. Listen carefully to the sermons. Watch how the leaders conduct themselves. Don't merely observe, get involved.
- **Second, set aside 10, 20, 30 or 60 minutes a day to read, study and apply God's word for yourself.** Every year since 1988, I have read *The One Year Bible*, although I have used a reading guide and my regular Bible a few times too. I also use this time to memorize meaningful verses, meditate, pray and sometimes even sing! Personally, I have never known a single man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's Word. Pick up *The One Year Bible* online or at any Christian bookstore. There are 365 daily readings. You can read it in about 15 minutes a day. As an alternative, subscribe to *Equipping the Man in the Mirror* and follow the daily Bible reading schedule included with each day's devotion.
- **Third, become part of a small group, preferably men only, and do life together.** A small group is a dynamic way to become a disciple. Most meaningful change takes place in the context of small group relationships. As men tell their "stories," the truth of the gospel gets meaty and fleshy. Simply, I just "get it" (the gospel) better when I see it in your life!

Pat Morley is the Founder and CEO of *Man in the Mirror*. After building one of Florida's 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded *Man in the Mirror*, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of *The Man in the Mirror*, *No Man Left Behind*, *Dad in the Mirror*, and *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*.