

Frank Viola: Discipleship Misconceived

If you ask most evangelical Christians what marks a true disciple of Jesus, their answers will mostly be external.

- They read their Bibles every day.
- They evangelize.
- They go to church.
- They pray daily.
- They are part of an accountability group.

While these things are good, they are mostly surface. They don't touch on what real discipleship is all about.

The deeper things that go straight to our characters are often neglected or not understood.

Look at Jesus' definition of discipleship in Luke 9:

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must *deny himself*, and *take up his cross daily* and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever *loses his life* for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (vv. 23-24, emphasis added).

A disciple of Jesus, therefore, knows how to die. They know how to lose. They know how to lay things down.

To be specific, a person who has learned to be a disciple in the school of Christ:

- Doesn't defend themselves when rightly corrected or unjustly attacked
- Doesn't lose their temper when under pressure
- Never entertains slander against another human being and sure doesn't spread it
- Is profoundly teachable and can be corrected easily

without justifying or rationalizing themselves

- Doesn't find it difficult to say "I am sorry" and "I was wrong"
- When spoken evil against, remains silent and even returns good for evil
- Takes the high road when under the gun
- Will sacrifice themselves and their egos for others
- Treat other people the same way they want to be treated in every situation (Matt. 7:12).

These are the neglected aspects of discipleship and spiritual transformation.

All of these traits have the marks of the brokenness of God and the aroma of Jesus Christ upon them.

True discipleship, then, teaches God's people how to get in touch with their spiritual instincts. And those instincts will lead us to serve, to sacrifice and to lose.

I've met many Christians who had all the "external things" right. Yet they would defend themselves at the drop of a hat, they would believe and spread gossip and slander about others, they could not receive correction from either their peers or those ahead of them in the Lord, and they didn't know how to admit wrongdoing or lose.

Such people were unbroken. They were self-righteous souls, living in their flesh (their "religious flesh," that is), and they knew very little about the deeper work of God in their lives.

True discipleship is all about bearing the cross and carrying the spirit of the Lamb.

Note: The preceding is an excerpt from Frank Viola's new eBook, Discipleship in Crisis: 9 Reasons Why Discipleship Isn't Working Today—Problems and Solutions. From now until March 15, you can download the book for free by clicking here.

Frank Viola has helped thousands of people around the world to deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ and enter into a more vibrant and authentic experience of church. He has written many books on these themes, including *God's Favorite Place on Earth* and *From Eternity to Here*. He blogs regularly at .