

# Are You a Disciple? ... or Just Part of the Crowd?

*In 2012, Jesus is calling us to re-enroll in the school of discipleship.*

Besides being the Year of the Dragon in China, 2012 is full of global observances. World Peace Day was Jan. 1, World Rabies Day is Sept. 22 and the World Day for Laboratory Animals (huh?) is April 24. There is also Global Hand-washing Day (Oct. 15), Star Wars Day (May 4), International Cat Day (March 1), and—for all Johnny Depp fans—International Talk Like a Pirate Day (Sept. 19).

I don't know who comes up with these odd celebrations, but I'd like to add one more. Can we declare 2012 the Year of Discipleship?

**"When Jesus started talking about repentance and the necessity of the cross, people lost interest. Crowds always thin out when the message gets tough."**

This would be an appropriate time for it, since Jesus had 12 disciples, and that number won't be showing up for a while as far as years go. But I doubt 2012YD would inspire much more than a corporate yawn. Discipleship is just not popular, even though the word figures prominently in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples

of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19, NASB).

Notice that Jesus did not say, "Go therefore and make converts," "Go therefore and gather crowds" or "Go therefore and build churches," even though those things aren't wrong. The mandate is very specific. Jesus wants disciples, or "taught ones"; He wants followers who know Him intimately, who have surrendered fully to His will, and who can impart His life to others. He wants mature sons and daughters who reflect His character.

As I have reread the gospels over the past few months, I've noticed the Scriptures offer a clear contrast between the fickle crowds who followed Jesus to get something from Him, and the small group of disciples who turned the world upside down after He left the planet. It's no different today. Jesus has tons of followers on any given Sunday, and those crowds know how to fill seats, make noise and "have church." Our problem is not quantity. What we lack is quality.

In Jesus' day, the crowds chased miracles while the disciples hung around for private mentoring. The crowds showed up for the free lunches; the disciples fed the crowds after Jesus blessed the loaves and fish, and they learned about faith in the process. The crowds listened to a few sermons, and oohed and aahed over Jesus' amazing authority, but when He started talking about repentance and

the necessity of  
the cross, people lost interest. Crowds thin out when the  
message gets tough.

It was German  
martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, "Salvation is free, but  
discipleship will cost you your life." He was troubled by the  
lack of  
discipleship in the German church in the 1930s, and he blamed  
it on a flimsy  
message coming from pulpits. He wrote: "Cheap grace is the  
preaching of  
forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without  
church discipline,  
Communion without confession, absolution without personal  
confession. Cheap  
grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross,  
grace without  
Jesus Christ."

Here in the United  
States, cheap grace is just one of many methods we use to draw  
crowds. We've  
also twisted Scriptures to promise people prosperity, and  
we've manipulated the  
Holy Ghost to entertain people who need an emotional high to  
get them through  
another week. Since people are not interested in the  
discipline of prayer, or  
in developing personal integrity, or in how to resolve marital  
problems, or in  
crucifying the flesh, we offer a smorgasbord of exotic  
charismatic delights to  
put Band-Aids on wounds. We turned church into an ear-tickling  
show and worked  
everybody up into a frenzy, but in the end nobody's character  
was changed.

In some churches,  
regular prayer and consistent Bible study are viewed as  
“religious” and unhip.

We prefer something sexier in the age of attention deficit  
disorder. We want  
the Word shortened into Tweet-sized sound bites, and we want  
our pastors to  
keep the message under 20 minutes because we have places to  
go. We want the  
gospel spoon-fed to us on our terms. And we don’t want any of  
those politically  
incorrect “hard sayings” about hell or sexual morality.

In 2012, I believe  
Jesus wants us to repent of our selfish, adolescent ways. He  
is calling us to  
grow up. Let’s stop chasing miracles and become miracle-  
workers; let’s stop  
manipulating God to bless us and instead submit our lives to  
His surgery. Let’s  
abandon cheap grace and return to the Cross. Let’s re-enlist  
in His school of  
discipleship, even if it means we have to leave the crowd  
behind.

**J.**

**LEE GRADY** *is the former editor of Charisma  
and the director of The Mordecai Project (). You  
can follow him on Twitter at leegrady.*