

QUESTION: Leon, I've been reading the Book of Mark, and I noticed how often the word "Disciple" is used. I'm sure I ought to understand it, but what does it really mean to be a disciple?

ANSWER: Thank you for a great question. During the time Jesus walked on this earth, some 2,000 years ago, among the Jewish people the word "disciple" was very common. When a Jewish boy went to the Synagogue for training and education, if he were a really great student, he would be encouraged to continue to something like graduate school in our thinking to learn the Old Testament well. At 12 a Jewish boy would have been trained to memorize the first five books of the Old Testament. If he continued until around 18, he would have been trained to memorize the entire Old Testament. It was such young men who were typically encouraged to find a rabbi or teacher they loved and admired to ask, if he could be one of that rabbi's disciples, to train under him, learn his life and teaching and eventually go out as a rabbi himself to train other disciples after him. The word we most commonly use for the same concept is to be an apprentice. It isn't just about learning the teaching or going to the classes a rabbi or teacher might share. It was to be with them, watch their life, take on their ministry and become like the rabbi. The concept was like the training of an apprentice in that first the rabbi led them to watch and listen as he taught and did the things he did. Then they would begin to assign the disciple to do parts of work while the rabbi watched and challenged. Then they would work together to accomplish the work until the time came when the rabbi turned it over to the disciple to carry on the mission.

With Jesus he told the ones who came to Him, "Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men." His favorite command was, "Follow me." He called different people than the normal rabbi chose. He didn't look for the graduates, but for those

working on the job. They were ordinary people, fishermen, tax collectors, or servants. They would likely have felt unworthy of such a challenge. But Jesus saw in them far more than they could see in themselves. They walked with him, talked with him, traveled with him, slept where he did and learned his life and purpose. For over three years it was a learning experience where they were given assignments and then corrected and encouraged. Finally, the day came when Jesus died and was raised again to ascend back to the Father. His final challenge to the disciples was, "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. As you go therefore, make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So, a disciple is an apprentice of Jesus, who ultimately not only learns His life, words, and mission, but learns to be a disciple maker as well. As we make disciples, they aren't our disciples but ones we train to be Jesus' disciples. It is intended to be a process that never ends. We apprentice with Jesus to then go out and make apprentices of Jesus who then go out to make more apprentices of Jesus, and the process never ends.

One of the devil's greatest moves has been to convince people that being a Christian just has to do with our believing and perhaps being baptized, but no real change in us. Discipleship is a lifetime effort. His second greatest move has been to convince us that we can't be real disciples unless we are the best and the brightest in life. But Jesus still calls ordinary people to accomplish extra-ordinary things through the power of the Holy Spirit.