

## A Philosophy of Discipleship

By Marcia Gillis

The word “disciple” appears in the NASB translation of Scripture over 270 times. The Biblical term “disciple” comes from the Greek word (mathetes) which means “a learner, or pupil.” In Biblical times it communicated the concept of one linked as a follower of a recognized leader. “The word infers an intellectual process that directly shapes the lifestyle of the person.” The process of discipleship must be an intentional process. It must be viewed as the most important ministry of the church family. In fact, in the great command given by Christ in Matthew 28, “make disciples” is the only verb given in the imperative mood, the other verbs are particles giving the activities that accompany the main action – “Go,” “baptizing them” (conversion), and “teaching them to obey” (discipleship proper).

*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.” (Matthew 28:19-20)*

### What is a disciple?

- **He wholeheartedly identifies himself with Christ.** He is characterized by identity with (baptism) and obedience to wholeheartedly follow Christ.

*Go therefore and made disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit... (Matt 28:18-20)*

- **He abides in/Continues in/Surrenders to Christ.** A disciple draws his life strength from Christ. He pursues knowing Christ more and walks in obedience.

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you... (Jn 15:7-8)*

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you continue in my word, you are my disciples indeed.”(KJV, Jn 8:31)*

*“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (NASB, Luke 14:27)*

- **The Words of Christ abide in him.** The disciple draws his worldview from the Bible. He knows the Scripture because he studies it and meditates on it. The Word is his authority and delight.

*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you... (Col 3:16)*

*Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (NLT, Jn 8:31-32)*

- **He prays continuously and receives answers.**

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (ESV, I Thess 5:16-18)*

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you... (Jn 15:7-8)*

- **He bears fruit.** The logical result of the other practices is the fruit of Christian character (Gal 5:22 and Mt 3:8) and the fruit of Christian ministry (Ro 1:13, 15:28; Col 1:10).
- **He glorifies God.** When a disciple wholeheartedly abides in Christ and the words of Christ fill his life, his life is characterized by fruit-bearing and he brings glory to God.

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (Jn 15:7-8)*

### **Important for Leaders**

- 1. We leaders will produce what we are.**

The more we know Christ, the better we can make Him known to others.

*We reap what we sow. (2 Tim 2:6)*

- 2. Discipleship is not a onetime event, but an ongoing process.**
- 3. The Bible must be the central curriculum focus, because it is our direct communication from God.** Other books must be clearly secondary.
- 4. We must keep our people's focus on the importance of them taking personal responsibility to study, meditate on, know and walk in obedience to what God says in the Word.**
- 5. The Bible must be the central guide to our method of church growth and discipleship, because it contains God's words and guidelines.** Other materials must be weighed against biblical principles.