

Text: Various

Title: Who are Disciples of Jesus?

Truth: The Bible is clear about the character and behavior of disciples.

Date/Location: February 20 and March 6, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Matthew 28:18-20 tells us that we are to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey everything the Lord has commanded. That is our central mission as a church.

In years gone by, we often used this tagline: “If it is Bible you want, come to Fellowship Bible.” In more recent years, I have been fond of using this phrase: “Our desire is to honor God through faithful obedience to His word.” Both thoughts are connected to the Great Commission. We cannot make disciples apart from the Word of God because it is the “rule of faith and practice” for Christians. If we do not know Scripture, then we do not know what Jesus wants us to do, nor what He wants us to be. Also, our sincere desire to honor God by faithfully obeying Him means that we will do what He says, and that includes the Great Commission as well as the Great Commandment and everything else taught us in Scripture (the “all things that I have commanded you” in Matthew 28:20).

But what exactly is our end product? What is a disciple?

What does one look like? Act like? Think like? How are we supposed to make disciples if we are a bit fuzzy on what we are making? In today’s evangelical landscape, this sometimes gets lost in the rush to “get people to

believe” or “make a profession of faith.” Discipleship is reduced to “belief” and “belief” is reduced to head-knowledge, and true Christianity is emptied of reality. We talk a lot about “believers” but not so much about “disciples” and this is not good.

Discipleship roughly equals belief + transformation, and both are produced by God. Transformation refers to the “new person” thing that happens to someone when they trust in Christ. Their life changes—from characterized by sin to characterized by righteousness. The fact-belief part of it refers to accepting that you are a sinner, that Christ is the Son of God who died for your sins and rose again, and that believing in Him you will have eternal life.

If you have **fact-belief only without transformation**, that falls short of true Christianity (even the demons believe, says James 2:19). That half-baked type of “Christianity” is called easy-believism or free grace theology.

On the other hand, if you claim to have a kind of **transformation apart from belief** in Christ then all you have is moral reformation, which rearranges a person’s problems but does not solve the sin issue ultimately.¹

I want to embark with you on a study of what the Scripture says about disciples. These are the end products that we seek.

We ought not to think that we perfectly become such a thing immediately after coming to Jesus. But we also ought not to think that our lives look *entirely different* than this end product. Even a new believer bears an

¹ Apart from Christ true transformation is impossible.

unmistakable resemblance to what we will see in these many verses we will visit.

I. “My Disciple”

There are several verses in Luke 14 in which Jesus speaks of “my disciple.” I group them here. People can be disciples of a lot of things or of people, but the question is, are you the Lord’s “my disciple”?

- A. The disciple of Jesus *loves Jesus supremely* – Luke 14:26.
- B. The disciple of Jesus has *died to the world* – Luke 14:27
- C. The disciple of Jesus *follows Jesus* – Luke 14:27. This is probably what we have been taught to automatically think when we heard the word *disciple*: a follower. He is more than a mere *learner*, but he is a learner. He is associated with a person who leads by teaching with his word and example of character and conduct. He follows that teaching in his own character and conduct.
- D. The disciple of Jesus *counts the cost* and has consigned² his possessions and life to the Lord – Luke 14:33.
- E. Having counted the cost, the disciple of Jesus genuinely *intends to follow through* to the end, whatever that entails – Luke 14:30.

II. Truths About Disciples

There are over 250 verses in Scripture that mention the word *disciple*. In the NAS, all but two are in the NT, and all of those are in Matthew-Acts. Let’s investigate some of them to see if we can learn some important things

² *Consign* means to “assign; commit decisively or permanently.” To “deliver (something) to a person’s custody.”

about how we are to be living for the Lord. Do not think about these as just relating to Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, etc.

1. Disciples listen to Jesus's teaching – Matthew 5:1
2. Disciples desire to be perfect as their Father in Heaven is perfect – Matthew 5:48.
3. "Disciples" are not really disciples unless they follow the Lord – Matthew 8:21-23.
4. Disciples are burdened about the plentiful harvest and the shortage of workers – Matthew 9:37.
5. The disciple is like the Lord Jesus – Matthew 10:24-25.
6. Consequently, the disciple may suffer persecution – Matthew 10:22, Acts 9:1.
7. The disciple has a close relationship with Jesus, like a close-knit family – Matthew 12:49.
8. The disciple is curious to know the meaning of God's word and asks questions about it – Matthew 13:36, 17:10, 24:3. And they do come to an understanding of it – Matthew 17:13.
9. The disciple is instructed concerning the kingdom of Heaven – Matt. 13:52.
10. The disciple does not follow all the old traditions – Matthew 15:2.
11. The disciple serves the Lord and people – Matthew 15:36, 21:2, 6, 26:19.
12. The disciple acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God – Matthew 16:16.

13. The disciple knows that the Lord was killed and raised the third day – Matthew 16:21, 20:17-19, 26:1-2.
14. The disciple must deny himself – Matthew 16:24. Not to a ridiculous extent, but the Christian has to say no to himself.
15. The disciple recognizes the human impossibility of salvation – Matthew 19:25.
16. There are false disciples, and disciples of the wrong religion. The Pharisees had disciples—who were in effect disciples of the devil – Matthew 22:16, 23:15.
17. Disciples partake of the Lord’s Table – Mathew 26:26.
18. Disciples are drawn from all walks of life, including rich and formerly “religious” people – Matthew 27:57 – and fishermen and tax collectors and physicians and all other kinds of people.
19. Disciples have a job to make more disciples – Matthew 28:19-20.
20. In a healthy situation, disciples are increasing in number – Acts 6:1, 7.
21. Disciples select capable servants and leaders from among themselves to attend to specific needs in the church – Acts 6:2-5. Some of those disciples are the ones selected to meet the needs of the church.
22. Disciples are devoted to good works – Acts 9:36
23. Disciples are also known as Christians – Acts 11:26. The first common phrase for Christians was *disciples of Jesus*. Every Christian *is* a disciple of Jesus.

24. Disciples are concerned for other Christians and will support them financially – Acts 11:29.
25. Disciples experience joy when persecuted for the sake of the Lord – Acts 13:52.
26. The purpose of missions is to make disciples – Acts 14:21.
27. Disciples offer hospitality to one another – Acts 14:28.
28. Disciples of Jesus are not placed under the Jewish Law – Acts 15:10.
29. *Disciple* and *brother* are two words for the same people – Acts 18:27. For that matter, *disciple* and *believer* are two words for the same person.
30. Disciples help other disciples to be wise about their behavior - Acts 19:30 (like Acts 21:4).
31. Disciples naturally greet one another when they come and go – Acts 20:1.

III. Shortcomings and Challenges for Disciples

Again, as we think through these truths, do not think of the 12. I want you to think of *yourself*. Our focus here is on application to our lives.

1. The disciple has faith in the Lord, but not perfectly strong faith – Matthew 14:15, 31; 15:33.
2. Sometimes the disciple is a bit slow on the uptake – Matthew 16:5-12.
3. Sometimes a disciple grasps what the Lord teaches but takes it too far – Matthew 19:10, Mark 10:26.

4. Sometimes disciples do wrong things because they do not really understand the ways of God. – Matthew 19:13.
5. Sometimes the disciple's amazement at the work of the Lord demonstrates a bit of a lack of faith – Matthew 21:20. Do we expect the Lord to be weak and not be able to do amazing things?
6. Sometimes disciples are impressed by things that are not that important, like worldly architecture – Matthew 24:1, Mark 13:1.
7. Sometimes disciples weigh an action incorrectly. For example, when they thought that the use of the expensive ointment was wasteful when it was actually an extravagant expression of worship to the Lord – Matthew 26:7-8.
8. Sometimes disciples make enthusiastic claims that they do not have the strength to follow up on – Matthew 26:34-35.
9. Sometimes disciples cannot complete the tasks the Lord gives them – Matthew 26:40.
10. Sometimes disciples temporarily deny the Lord – Matthew 26:56, 70. But this is not the lifelong habit or pattern of a true disciple (Matt. 26:75, 2 Timothy 2:12).
11. Sometimes disciples are slow to believe – Matthew 28:6, which reminded me of Luke 24:11.
12. Disciples must endure lies about themselves – Matthew 27:64.
13. Sometimes disciples have a mix of emotions like fear and joy – Matthew 28:8.

14. The Lord may require some disciples to do hard ministry – Acts 9:10-12.
15. Sometimes disciples must help other disciples to escape persecution – Acts 9:25.
16. Sometimes disciples are fearful – Acts 9:26.
17. Disciples need strength and encouragement – Acts 14:22, 18:23.
18. Disciples face persecution on the way to entering the kingdom of God – Acts 14:22.
19. Sometimes disciples are misinformed – Acts 19:2. In this case, they were not yet true believers in Messiah, but they were following what they knew to be true up to John's baptism. God sent Paul to them to get them straightened out.
20. Sometimes disciples must leave where they are and gather elsewhere, instead of hanging out with stubborn people who refuse to believe – Acts 19:9.
21. Disciples are the target of the evil one, who tries to draw them away from the truth and from Christ – Acts 20:30.

IV. Mark's Gospel

1. Disciples will be criticized for what the Lord decides to do, and for their association with Him, and for what they themselves sometimes do – Mark 2:16, 18, 7:2, 5.
2. Disciples are privileged to have the help of the Lord to understand Scripture – Mark 4:34.
3. Sometimes disciples misunderstand what the Lord means by what He says – Mark 5:31.

4. Disciples sometimes lack understanding—and this should keep us humble – Mark 7:17.
5. Disciples sometimes look in the wrong direction for their needs when they should look to the Lord – Mark 8:4.
6. Disciples sometimes think in ways that are entirely opposite of what the Lord is thinking – Mark 8:32-33.
7. Disciples cannot always do what they are expected to be able to do – Mark 9:18. In this situation, they could not cast out a demon, which until recently they did do other circumstances.
8. Disciples must be ready for some difficult teaching – Mark 9:31, Luke 9:44, 17:1.
9. Disciples do not always get to be involved in all the action. Sometimes the Lord sets them aside and has them just watch – Mark 14:32.

V. Luke's Gospel

1. Disciples sometimes think to treat people in a very ungodly way – Luke 9:54.
2. The disciple is blessed to see and understand the things that God has shown them – Luke 10:23, 19:37.
3. A disciple wants to learn how to pray – Luke 11:1.
4. Disciples are those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – Luke 12:22-31.
5. A disciple follows Jesus even to death – Luke 14:27.
6. Disciples long to see the day of the Lord – Luke 17:22.
7. Disciples need to heed warnings about false teachers – Luke 20:46.

VI. John's Gospel

1. Disciples do believe in the Lord – John 2:11.
2. Disciples connect the Lord Jesus's ministry to what was promised in the Old Testament – John 2:17, including His resurrection – John 2:22.
3. Disciples baptize people – John 4:2.
4. Some disciples are fair-weather disciples, not true followers of Jesus – John 6:66, because true disciples continue in His word – John 8:31.
5. Disciples sometimes ask wrong questions – John 9:2.
6. Disciples of Moses are not the same as disciples of Jesus – John 9:28.
7. Disciples do not always understand things as first, but later they do – John 12:16, 16:17, 29.
8. Disciples are marked by love for one another – John 13:35.
9. Disciples bear spiritual fruit to glorify God – John 15:8.
10. Disciples care for one another and each other's family – John 19:26-27.

Conclusion

What are we to make of the fact that the word *disciple* does not appear in the epistles? Not much. The narrative form of the gospels and Acts lends itself to the use of that noun for Christians. The epistles are written *to* disciples and do not have to say the word for the target audience to be understood. Disciples look like the kind of people described by Jesus in the gospels. MAP