

"What Does the Bible Say About ... Discipleship?"
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16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit **20** and **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.** And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."^[a]

Toward the beginning of the gospel of Mark, Jesus is walking beside the sea, and he sees a guy named Levi, a tax collector, and Jesus says to him simply, "Follow me." And Levi gets up and follows him. (Mark 2:13-14)
Levi is reborn in that moment, and he starts a new life in Jesus Christ. He is called to be a disciple. He is called to be a follower of Jesus Christ by the Anointed One himself. Levi doesn't know what this call or being a disciple of Jesus means yet, but he knows he must follow Jesus. He must obey this man who has called him. He knows he must be a disciple of this man, even though he doesn't know what that means exactly at the time.

What Levi does right away is obey the command of this guy, Jesus, who is walking by. Also, in the gospel of Mark, there is Simon and Andrew who are called to be disciples of Jesus while they are fishing with their father, Zebedee. They drop everything and leave their boats and they follow Jesus right away. They obey his command.

In Matthew Ch. 14:28-31, where Jesus is walking on the water, and Peter calls out and asks Jesus that if it's him to command him to come to you on the water, and Jesus commands him, and Peter obeys. Jesus makes the command and Peter starts walking on water. But then it says he started to get scared because the wind was blowing up, and then he started to sink. Then Jesus asked him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" But the first thing Peter did was obey. It was only later where his head got him into trouble and he felt fear instead of the complete trust and obedience to the Lord.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German minister and theologian who was executed by the Nazis in World War II, writes in his classic book "The Cost of Discipleship," that "Peter has to get out of the ship before he can believe"¹

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Collier Books, 1963; First published 1937), 76.

Jesus calls Peter and he obeys. Bonhoeffer writes, "Only those who obey can believe."²

What is discipleship? According to Bonhoeffer, "Discipleship is obedience to the son of God."³

In the Scripture lesson today, Jesus commands his apostles to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, son and holy spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything that he commanded**. Those commands apply to us as well. We are called to make disciples and teach them to obey everything that Jesus commanded.

Thomas Tarrants, president emeritus of the CS Lewis Institute, highlights a definition of discipleship that comes from scholar Michael Wilkins, who writes that discipleship is the "ongoing process of growth as a disciple." So, according to Wilkins, we need to do more and more things like denial of self, wholehearted love for God, love of neighbor, forgiveness of enemies and praying for them, and being servants for the Lord. And obedience to the commands of Jesus.⁴

Tarrants points to Wilkins who writes that "a disciple of Jesus is someone who has come to him for eternal life, claimed him as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following him." A disciple isn't just someone who has made a profession of faith, but has "come to repentance and faith and is seeking to follow his teaching and example."⁵

Being a disciple of Jesus means a process of becoming more and more like Jesus himself. What are some of the teachings of Jesus? How do we become more and more like Jesus? Well, Tarrants points out, "Things like denial of self, wholehearted love for God, sacrificial love for neighbors, forgiveness of enemies, humility, servanthood ... and obedience; these are some of the major themes."⁶

To get a small list of what Jesus' teachings are, all we have to do is go through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. "Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works" (Matt. 5:16). Jesus commanded us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

² Bonhoeffer, 77.

³ Bonhoeffer, 84

⁴ Thomas Tarrants, [Learning to Make Disciples of Jesus: The Calling of Every Believer - C.S. Lewis Institute \(cslewisinstitute.org\) 2013.](http://cslewisinstitute.org)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

As disciples of Jesus, we are also called to the job of creating disciples. That is what Jesus called his disciples to do, and us as well. We are called to make disciples. Today is Evangelism Sunday in the Presbyterian Church (USA) calendar. We are called to make disciples. It is simple. It is inviting neighbors, friends, people you meet to enjoy the experience you have here at Faith Presbyterian. If you'd like to join us on Sunday, come on down. We're a friendly bunch, and you can be sure to enjoy a good cup of free coffee after worship. Or invite them to read the Bible on Sundays before worship in a casual atmosphere. We're reading the gospel of Mark currently. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1).

That's what worked for me. My friend Dave made a disciple of me a few years ago. Dave invited me to Bible study, on Friday mornings at 7 am, and I attended those sessions faithfully with several other men. It was that group, and another that followed, that helped push me on to the path that led me here to you. Dave's work in discipleship was critical to that happening.

I hope, and I pray, I can make disciples of people I meet and get to know. We are a friendly group here and that is one of our strengths. Sharing the good news of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and new life in Christ, is all part of our job as disciples. Not doing it has consequences.

According to Tarrant of the CS Lewis Institute, "Making disciples has been neglected for so long that there is now a crisis of discipleship in the American church. Few professing Christians are living as disciples of Jesus, and fewer still are making disciples. This failure to be salt and light in our decaying society has contributed greatly to the undermining of the church, robbing us of credibility in the eyes of the world and accelerating the spiritual and moral decline in society."

We are called to be disciples, through baptism, and then confirmation, or as adults in the church, all who profess to be Christians. We here are all called by God to be disciples of Jesus, to be lights in the world. To be a good example of what it means to be a Christian.

What I love most about discipleship is how Bonhoeffer describes it, "Discipleship means joy," he writes.⁷ May we all find that joy in the forgetting of ourselves and focusing on being disciples of Christ. Amen.

⁷ Bonhoeffer, 41.