

Three Pillars Of Growing Disciples



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Three Pillars Of Growing Disciples

Introduction

A. Ask yourself the following questions: What does being a “disciple” of Jesus Christ mean? How much have you grown as a disciple over the past year? Have you plateaued as a disciple to the point you are no longer making significant progress as a disciple? Have you began shrinking as a disciple to the point you are now losing some of the growth you had previously gained?

B. Evaluate your greatest season of spiritual growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. When was it? What was going on during that time in your life to propel the growth? Who were the key people who were influencing you during that time?

C. Evaluate your worst season of spiritual growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. When was it? What was going on during that time in your life to hinder your growth? Who were the key people who were influencing you during that time?

D. True growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ will always be maximized whenever there are three key ingredients. This is the recipe we see throughout the New Testament Scriptures. Unfortunately, some attempt to be disciples without one (or more) of these components.

E. Purpose: To learn what discipleship is and the three pillars that are essential for growing disciples.

1. What Is Discipleship?

A. Two elements of being a disciple

1. The word “disciple” is used to identify people who follow Jesus far more than the word “Christian” (which is only used three times, Acts 11:26).

2. Following Jesus and being a true disciple is not a passive relationship with Christ. It is sad when people are content with a form of

“Christianity” and are never truly made into the image of Jesus. Instead, true discipleship involves two elements.

- True discipleship involves being a student of Jesus. You cannot be a true disciple without learning what Jesus wants from your life (John 8:31-32). Today, you learn from Jesus by the words recorded in the Bible!
- True discipleship involves being an imitator of Jesus. You cannot be a true disciple without being committed to letting Jesus Christ be formed in you (1 Corinthians 11:1). Today, you will become an imitator of Jesus by putting His teachings in the Bible into practice in your life and using them as the perfect pattern for all your conduct!

B. Disciples are made

1. You must consider how someone goes from not being a disciple to being a disciple (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).

- Disciples are made! Being a disciple is not a gift some people are naturally born with and is not something that will happen accidentally.

2. Jesus outlines a four-step process for making disciples.

- Go. Those who follow Jesus must take the initiative to go out and find others who are willing to be Jesus’s disciples.
- Preach. There is a certain message (the gospel) that will work to create new followers of Jesus.
- Baptize. Those who hear the gospel and want to follow Jesus must be fully immersed in water to be saved.
- Continued teaching. Those who have become Jesus’s disciples must continue to grow by learning even more from Jesus and observing what He says.

C. Discipleship is a lifelong process

1. While you became a follower of Jesus upon your baptism, you are not complete as a disciple at that time! Rather, discipleship is a growing process. The catalyst for this growth is the word of God (1 Peter 2:2).

2. Although maturing as a disciple does not happen overnight, there is a point at which Jesus expects His disciples to no longer be spiritual babies (Hebrews 5:12-14) – able to distinguish between good

and evil, teach others, and live more Christ-like (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). So, how have you progressed as a disciple?

2. Pillar #1: Personal Commitment

A. How a personal commitment impacts discipleship

1. The extent to which you are *committed* as a follower of Jesus will impact everything about your spiritual growth. This is likely why Jesus spent so much time teaching about the commitment He expects from His disciples.

2. Luke 9:57-62. Jesus did not accept people who put discipleship in second place. These wanted to first go and do something else. True and growing discipleship is absolutely dependent on putting Jesus first in everything every day. If you are unwilling to make this commitment, Jesus says you are unfit for the kingdom of God!

3. Luke 14:26-27, 33. Jesus wants every person to know the commitment He expects from His followers up front. He did not lower the bar for discipleship to gain more followers. Instead, He bluntly tells us we cannot be His disciples without putting Him before our families, lives, comforts, pleasures, possessions, etc. Unless you are committed to Jesus in this way, something will always tend to get in the way and come first before you do the essential things you must for spiritual growth!

B. Essential disciplines of a personal commitment

1. If you are a personally committed disciple of Jesus, there are some things you must do in your own personal life to grow and mature as a follower of Jesus. Consider the following.

2. Daily Bible study. You cannot separate spiritual growth and studying the Bible. For, the Bible is how you learn Jesus's teachings and will learn to imitate Him. The Bible contains God's words that teach, rebuke, correct, and train you in all the ways of righteousness so you can please God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). You must set aside the appropriate amount of time to read, study, and meditate on the precious words of God in the Bible.

3. Prayer. Prayer is consistently seen in the Scriptures as a discipline strong and committed disciples of Jesus practiced (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You must have a constant prayerful attitude about everything in life. This will help you constantly rely on God, increase your

thankfulness and recognition of God, increase your contentment, and focus on serving God throughout your life.

4. Holiness. Growing discipleship requires you to consistently weed the garden of your life so as to eliminate any evil that has sprouted, while nurturing the good things God is trying to grow in your life. You must cleanse yourself from every impurity (2 Corinthians 7:1). You must be holy in your words, clothing, relationships, what you watch on television, what you look at on the internet, the music you listen to, the company you keep, etc.

5. Service. Just as Jesus came to serve, He expects His disciples to serve others (John 13:1-17). Whether in physical or spiritual needs, you must develop yourself as a servant. Keep your eyes open to watch for needs. Keep enough room in your schedule so you can respond to opportunities. Develop yourself as a servant. Let your service be centered around showing others the love of God and helping them glorify Jesus.

6. Evangelism. Jesus has given His disciples the great work of taking the saving message into the world to help others be disciples (1 Peter 3:15-16). Embrace disciple making as your work. Develop the heart of a disciple maker. Watch for opportunities to spread the gospel every day. Develop the knowledge and abilities you need to do the work. Develop boldness to say and do what you must to help others follow Jesus.

3. Pillar #2: Faithful Congregation

A. How a faithful congregation impacts discipleship

1. The Scriptures demonstrate that you cannot separate being Jesus's disciple and being a member of a faithful local congregation of Jesus's people. Since the church exists by God's design, He believes it is an essential component to growing as a disciple of Christ.

2. The approved example throughout the New Testament shows people who become Jesus's disciples joining themselves to other disciples as a local church (Acts 9:31). Churches were established in such places as Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Antioch, Philadelphia, Smyrna, etc. Disciples in the first century realized the importance of being connected with other faithful disciples in a local church (Acts 9:26-28). Every time you read about a local church in the Bible, the implication is that disciples joined themselves

together in this way. In fact, there is not a single approved example in Scripture of someone becoming a Christian and choosing not to join a local church. God has intended for each local church to be a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual disciple.

3. Disciples must not neglect gathering together with other disciples of Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25). The Bible is clear that one of the expectations God has for a local church is to assemble at designated times (1 Corinthians 14:23, 26). And, when the church assembles, God sees it is important for every member to make it a priority to be present! The implication is that whatever happens during these assemblies is important for the spiritual health and growth of disciples - and that local church membership is a crucial element in spiritual growth.

B. Essential disciplines of a faithful congregation

1. If you are part of a faithful congregation of Jesus's disciples, there are some things you must be involved in with that church to grow and mature as a follower of Jesus. Consider the following.

2. Assembling. God considers assembling a non-negotiable responsibility of the church and the members of the church. Although there may be things that prevent you that are beyond your control, you must never choose to put other things before assembling with the church or choose not to assemble. To do so is to neglect (forsake) gathering together and intentionally skip opportunities to grow and mature in Christ (1 Corinthians 14:23, 26).

3. Worship. The early church was devoted to worshiping together (Acts 2:42) and you should be also. While you can worship privately, there is a God-designed purpose for collectively worshiping God with other Christians and God sees this worship as being crucial to your spiritual development (i.e. in helping you not feel alone and through encouragement and spiritual strength gained through each activity of worship).

4. Bible teaching. This is a key component of a church's work. The sermons and Bible classes provided by the church offer excellent opportunities to learn from spiritually mature teachers who can help equip you for serving God (Ephesians 4:11-16).

5. Accountability. If you are not connected with a local church, who will correct you when you fall, encourage you when you are weak, or challenge you to develop and grow in your faith? In a strong and faithful local church, the leaders of the church (particularly the elders)

will be interested in your spiritual wellbeing and try to shepherd you in a way that is most beneficial for your soul (Hebrews 13:17).

6. Work. God has given each church the work of spreading the gospel to the lost, edifying the saved, and benevolence toward needy Christians. Although you have your own work to accomplish, there is a collective work that requires collective effort and funding (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Being actively involved in this will help you grow because you will be accountable for showing up and doing your part.

4. Pillar #3: Biblical Community

A. How a biblical community impacts discipleship

1. God does not want people to be just a number in a congregation who have few connections outside of when the church meets and are strangers with one another. Instead, the Scriptures show that Christians ought to be closely connected with one another.

2. Consider some pictures of togetherness concerning the early disciples in the book of Acts (2:46; 12:12; 19:9; 20:20). Although the assemblies are important to your spiritual health, notice how early disciples connected beyond those times. Small group Bible studies can be an effective way for Christians to grow together (giving disciples opportunity to ask questions, connect with other disciples in meaningful ways, and make more direct applications of God's teachings than what is often available during larger gatherings or assemblies).

3. There is a consistent picture in the Scriptures concerning Christians doing life together (James 5:16; James 5:19-20; Hebrews 3:12-13). While every member of the congregation should be concerned about every other member, every disciple needs some very close connections. You need people who know your greatest struggles and failures you can confess your shortcoming to and will hold you accountable. You need some who will encourage you every day to live faithfully for the Lord. You need some who can approach you when you fall and try to bring you back to the Lord. And, you need to do these things for others.

B. Essential disciplines of a biblical community

1. If you are part of a biblical community of Jesus's disciples, there are some things you must be involved with those people in to grow and mature as a follower of Jesus. Consider the following.

2. Mentorship. Every person in a congregation can benefit from a spiritual mentor. Both older and younger disciples need to search out for good spiritual mentors and mentees (Titus 2:1-8). Learn from them. Ask them questions. Watch them live for Christ. Invite their feedback concerning your life. This will help you grow and prepare you to be a spiritual mentor.

3. Breaking bread. Although the church's work does not include providing for social and recreational activities, individual disciples routinely spent time together in New Testament times and even shared meals together (Acts 2:46). This kind of hospitality is often a gateway to deeper and richer relationships for the purpose of growing in faith.

4. Accountability. It is easy to fall through the cracks in a congregation and for other members not to know what is going on in your life. As a result, other members may not perceive when something is wrong or you are struggling until it is too late. You need to develop relationships with other disciples that are open and transparent (Galatians 6:1-2), with those who will hold you accountable.

5. Service and evangelism. There is a place for service and evangelism alongside a small number of others. For example, the apostle Paul often had others accompany him on his preaching journeys (Acts 15:39-40). Doing this will provide accountability in your work and spur each other on to greater works, while also helping to push through the discouragements.

6. Encouragement. The devil uses discouragement to hinder those who are trying to serve the Lord. Having people who know you so well that they know how and when to provide the needed encouragement is important to your spiritual survival and growth (Hebrews 3:12-13). If you don't have such people in your life, you are more vulnerable to the roaring lion who is seeking to devour you!

Conclusion

A. Where are you in your spiritual development as a disciple of Christ?

B. How many of these pillars are present and prominent in your life? Challenge yourself in each area. When these are present and you are doing your part regarding each one, you will experience the kind of spiritual growth God desires from you.

Study Questions

What does being a “disciple” of Jesus mean? How much have you grown as a disciple over the past year?

1. What Is Discipleship?

What two elements are necessary to being a disciple?

How are disciples made?

How is discipleship a lifelong process?

2. Pillar #1: Personal Commitment

How does a personal commitment impact discipleship?

List and briefly describe some essential disciplines of a personal commitment.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

3. Pillar #2: Faithful Congregation

How does a faithful congregation impact discipleship?

List and briefly describe some essential disciplines of a faithful congregation.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

4. Pillar #3: Biblical Community

How does a biblical community impact discipleship?

List and briefly describe some essential disciplines of a biblical community.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
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