

STUDENT NOTES

LECTURE 1 - INTRODUCTION

- What images come to mind when we think of the words, ‘disciple’ and ‘discipleship?’
- How do we define a disciple?
- Are all believers’ disciples?
- Is discipleship an option?

1. GOD’S WILL AND HOW IT AFFECTS DISCIPLESHIP

- a. For every person who claims to be a Follower of Jesus, there is one primary will that God has for each and every one of us. It can be found in Romans 8:29.

For God knew his people in advance, *and he chose them to become like his Son*, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:29 NLT)

- b. The “destination” towards which believers have been set in motion, is that we might be “*like his Son.*”¹
- c. Hence the importance of growing in our Christlikeness.
- d. The common biblical term for someone who is a Follower of Jesus is *disciple*.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 534.

2. DISCIPLESHIP MODELS

a. Disciples are learners.

- A learner who follows a great teacher.
- The suggestion here is someone who has put themselves under the authority and teaching of a master, but it has no reference to whether or not the person is a Christian.
- Almost relates to the concept of an apprentice.

b. Disciples are committed believers.

- A committed Christian who obeys the radical commands of Jesus.
- Stressed by the admonition of Jesus to 'count the cost.'
- It can negatively create a 2-tiered system whereby only the real committed believers can be considered disciples.

c. Disciples are ministers.

- One who has been called out from other believers to enter the ministry.
- Discipleship, therefore, is the act of learning from Jesus in order to serve the church.
- It can negatively be associated strictly with the disciples/apostles, once again presenting a two-tiered view of discipleship.

d. Disciples are converts and discipleship comes after.

- One who has been evangelized but who experiences a later process of growth that is called discipleship or perfecting.
- It can distort the concept of the Great Commission by implying the teaching aspect is reserved for later.

- e. Disciples are converts who are in the process of discipleship.
 - A true believer who enters the process of discipleship at conversion.
 - It is not a second step but is synonymous with the Christian life.
 - Conversion is where the identity of a disciple begins and the process of growth from there is discipleship.
 - Most scholars believe this is the model that reflects the biblical text best.

Each of these models represent a part of the biblical teaching but they do not represent the entire picture.

3. DISCIPLE - DEFINITIONS

What is a disciple of Jesus?

- Is someone who has come to Jesus for salvation?
- A follower of Jesus who is in the process of growing and maturing.
- Someone who accepts the message of Jesus as truth and taking that truth and putting it into practice. The truth of Jesus becomes the filter for all of life's decisions, plans, and
- Someone who has counted the cost.

The following is a definition helpful to our understanding of how discipleship and the practice of spiritual disciplines shape our lives:²

The process of being conformed to the image of Christ *for the sake of others*

² M. Robert Mullholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006) 25.

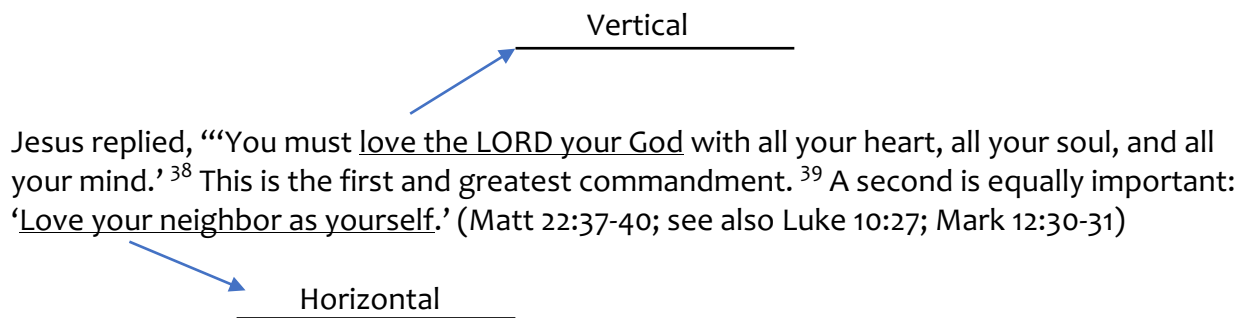
- Discipleship is not a selfish endeavor, though it impacts us personally in every way, it is also for the sake of others, and for the sake of community.
- Spiritual formation, spiritual growth, spiritual disciplines, et al, are all synonymous with the term, discipleship.

4. THE KEY ELEMENTS AND GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP

- To become like Jesus in every area of life (Matt. 10:25; Gal. 4:19; Romans 8:29).
- The 2 main filters are the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:27), and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18).

The Great Commandment

- The vertical and horizontal dimensions of discipleship based on the Great Commandment. The commandment is a summary of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.



⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

According to Jesus, love is the underlying ethic to the entire Old Testament. He merges a passage from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 to summarize the entire foundation of the Old Testament Law and prophetic writings.

- To stay in the vertical dimension results in theologizing without application
- To stay in the horizontal dimension results in moralizing without a foundation

Love as a Key Component of Discipleship

Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person by which I give myself to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose.

Michael Wilkins³

The Great Commission

- The key element of the Great Commission is the 'make disciples.'
- This includes a call to evangelism, but it includes much more.
- The command to 'go' implies a purposeful intentionality in every believer's life.
- The mandate to 'baptize' and 'teach', imply the initiation of a person into faith and the ongoing growth of the individual through discipleship.
- Jesus' empowering presence is what fuels the Great Commission.

The Non-Negotiables of Biblical Discipleship

- Grounded in a personal and costly relationship with Jesus, resulting in a new identity.
- Guided by God's Word.
- Is empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Developed through a whole-life process.
- Is practiced in communities of faith yet carried out in the everyday world.

³ Presented by Dr. Michael Wilkins, during a doctoral class on "Following the Master", 2008.