

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Discipleship? (Part 2)

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I. Introduction

The main responsibility of the church is not growing the church but making disciples. And making disciples is very much like parenting. A parent's job is to show their children how to live every facet of life successfully so that their children will show their children and so on. Making disciples is similar; we're to show people how to join God's family and then how to live life the way Jesus did, so they can show others how to join and live in God's family.

II. What does Making Disciples Have to do With Parenting?

What's our main responsibility as Christians? You might think that our responsibility as Christians is to grow the church, but it's not. That's Jesus' job, Matthew 16:18. Our responsibility is to make disciples, Matthew 28:19-20. The command is not in the word "go," but in "make disciples." We're to produce people who follow Jesus' footsteps, who think, speak, and do as Jesus did, including making disciples.

Discipleship is Parenting, *God is not about individualism but family,* when you read about Jesus in the Gospels, especially with the American idea of rugged individualism, you might think that Jesus is the ultimate individual, someone who battles the odds and forges ahead no matter the consequences. But this is a caricature of Jesus. Jesus is not about individualism, rugged or otherwise. Jesus came to do one simple thing: invite us into the Family of God, where His Father becomes our Father and He becomes our brother. This is why discipleship happens in the context of family not individualism. After all, what happens when we believe in Jesus? We become God's children, John 1:12. This is why we're called brothers and sisters in Christ. We're a family that's supposed to help each other be more and more like Jesus.

Jesus looks for a family on earth, Jesus first tried to make disciples out of His own family and friends, but things go badly; they actually tried to kill Him, Luke 4:16-30. Since He's rejected by His own family and friends, Jesus begins building a family elsewhere. He goes to Capernaum where fishermen lived who had responded to His call, John 1:35-42. He preaches in their synagogues and the people are amazed not only at the power of His words but in His power to heal, Luke 4:31-37. He makes Simon's house His headquarters and He heals hundreds and preaches all over Galilee, Luke 38-44, thus He becomes part of Simon's family. But He's not here to join our family; He's here to invite us into His. So Jesus proceeds to see just how far Simon and the others will go. Will they hand over their lives and live in His family full-time or are they just interested in part-time ministry work? They forsake everything and follow Jesus, Luke 5:1-11.

Children are supposed to resemble their parents, as children resemble their parents, so it is in Jesus' family. We are to resemble Him, take on His identity, His name (cf. Galatians 2:20). This is why He changes Simon's name to Peter, which means stone, Matthew 16:18. Jesus is the Big Stone and the rest of us are little stones that make up His house/family, Acts 4:8-12; 1 Peter 2:1-10. Thus, Jesus becomes our big brother, Hebrews 2:11, but He's also our spiritual father, which is why He calls His disciples "little children," John 13:33, and why He spends three years discipling them as a parent does children.

Jesus parents His disciples (and the apostles follow His footsteps), Jesus spent three years with His disciples; He did everything with them. They watched how Jesus taught and healed and then Jesus sends them out to do the same. He traveled with them, ate with them, celebrated with them, rested with them, etc. Jesus showed them how to live life properly. That is, He showed His disciples how to have a relationship with their Heavenly Father, with each other, and with the world around them. And when they got it wrong, He corrected them as any loving parent would, Mark 1-6; 8:27-38; 9:33-35.

And when Jesus departed, He left His disciples with His final command to do what He had just done with them, i.e., to make disciples of all the nations, Matthew 28:19-20. And that's exactly what the apostles do. They play the role of spiritual father to those they disciple, 1 Corinthians 4:14-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 John 2:1-6. This is what the New Testament epistles are about. They're about God the Father showing us, instructing us, correcting us, challenging us, encouraging us, comforting us, etc., to be like His Son through the apostles who act as our spiritual fathers.

If we don't know how to pray, how to parent, how to work, what sex is about, how to survive the enemy's attacks, anything and everything related to life, God will show us how to do it all. And when we get it wrong, God steps in and tells us that we're starting to look like the enemy's children instead of His children, 1 John 3. This is God our Father disciplining us as His children so that we can go out and disciple the nations.

III. Conclusion

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.