

'THE REST OF THE STORY'
(Rightly Dividing the Word of God about Discipleship)
Applying the Life of Christ to Our Lives Today

Tripartite Discipleship

('disciple' - a 3 part process)

Since the Creator is *triune* (3 in one as in *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*), it comes as no surprise that so much of His creation is also *tripartite* – the world is *water, earth and sky*; a plant is *root, stem and branches*; time is the *past, present and future*; *fish, birds and mammals*; *liquid, solid, gas*; *birth, life, death*; even people are born *spirit, soul and body* (**1 Thessalonians 5:23**). Redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ was accomplished on a 3-day weekend holiday – *Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits*. The Gospel message always includes the *death, burial and resurrection of Christ* (**1 Corinthians 15:1-3**).

Sanctification happens to Christians in 3 stages:

- *past/ at salvation* God sees us in *positional holiness* in Christ;
- *progressive/ as we grow up in the Christian life--* we actually do become more and more like Christ in this life; and
- *permanent/* when we are with the Lord in heaven we will be permanently and perfectly glorified.

Get the picture? No wonder the number '3' in Scripture is always associated with completeness and perfection. Let's see if the hypothesis holds true with the biblical discipleship of Jesus following His baptism and 40 days in the wilderness (**John 1:29-51**). Look closely into this passage and note three stages of discipleship of Jesus – '*believe in Me*' (believer stage / vs 29-34), '*follow Me*' (follower stage (vs 35-42) and '*bring others to Me*' (disciple stage (43-51). Please note this all happened to Jesus' first five disciples on three consecutive days after His coming out of the wilderness! This 3-day encounter, following Jesus' 40-day period of wilderness testing (not in the synoptic gospels), explains why these disciples so readily follow Jesus later when in Galilee He called them to leave everything and follow Him. They already had initial discipleship training from Him previously.

One other *tripartite* thing to notice – John the Baptist's disciples, John and Andrew. Andrew then brings his brother, Simon (Peter). Then '*on the next day,*' Jesus calls Philip who brings his friend, Nathanael. Successful discipleship is always a three-generation activity – the mature disciple calls a faithful believer to follow, who is also bringing others to the Savior.

The Holy Spirit blesses a discipleship ministry like this. Note this process endorsed by Apostle Paul as he wrote to Timothy: "... ***be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also***" (**2 Timothy 2:1-2**).

Ideally, all disciples of Jesus are continually mentoring at least one other faithful believer who is also mentoring some other faithful, but newer, believer in the faith. This scenario puts a believer under the mentorship of someone who is a faithful follower of Jesus but also growing under the leadership of another more mature, seasoned disciple. The success of a believer or their church ministry depends on discipleship like this happening on a continual basis.

Discuss your own experience of spiritual growth from 'believer' to 'follower' to 'disciple.'

- What kind of discipleship help, after trusting Christ as Savior and Lord, have you had?
- Are you currently 'discipling' anybody with what you know about the Lord and the faith?
- Do you want to help a 'younger in the faith believer' grow spiritually in Christ? (Why?)
- What are the 'pros' and 'cons' of personal or group discipleship like this?
- Discuss some good principles to remember in discipling a brother or sister in Christ?

'Come and See!'

(Three days of 'tripartite' discipleship with Jesus)

(The next day... John 1:29, 35, 43)

The definition of discipleship: "...Then Jesus appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach..." (Mark 3:13-15)

Belong to Him

(The next day) believing in Jesus = spiritual salvation)

1:29-34

"Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!"

"...this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit"

"...this is the Son of God"

Discuss why it is so important to confirm a clear testimony of sincere belief in the basic essentials about Jesus Christ before even attempting to begin discipleship with someone.

- Notice John's confirmation of belief in Christ – *"I have seen and testify..."* Please talk about why it is vital to help any new believer have a clear, concise 'testimony' of faith?
- *This should happen ASAP after someone has made a profession of faith in Christ as Savior. There is no point in attempting discipleship with someone who doesn't yet truly belong to Him.
- Are you willing to talk with people after church who claim to have trusted Jesus to be sure they are truly saved? *(We are considering asking any who pray to be saved in church to stay afterward for this)*

Be With Him

(The next day) following Jesus Christ = soul conversion)

1:35-42

"...looking at Jesus as He walked, (John) said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (v 36)

"...they followed Jesus ... 'where are You staying?' ... 'Come and see'" (vs 37-39)

"... they came, saw, and abode with Him' ... " (Andrew) brought (Simon) (vs 39-42)

*John the Baptist released his disciples to be closer followers of Jesus, not him anymore. Believers who have had good initial confirmation of their salvation easily move from their dependence on a person who has led them to Christ, to Christ Himself. The first step of discipleship is vital to know about Christ's Person and work; the next step is learning about the 'walk of Christ' and how they need to 'abide' in Christ through faithful prayer, Bible study and fellowship.

- Discuss why learning to 'follow Christ', 'walk like Christ' and 'abiding in Christ' can best be done through a good local church and its leaders' models and its ministries.
- If a 'follower of Christ' is someone who is teaching others to walk and abide in the Lord Jesus, are you a follower? *(What ministries are you involved with doing this?)*

Bring Others to Him

(The following day) disciple of Jesus as Lord = physical obedience)

1:43-51

"(Jesus) found Philipp and said to him, "Follow Me" (vs 43-44)

"Philipp found Nathanael and said 'We have found Him'" (v 45)

"Philipp said to him, "Come and see" ... You will see great things" (vs 46-51)

Although spiritual growth in Christ does entail learning much about Him and teaching it to others, the obvious proof of successful discipleship is one's natural compulsion to bring others to the Lord Jesus Christ. As with Nathanael (*a skeptic by the way*), if we can stimulate interest in Jesus, He is faithful to persuade them and draw them to Himself.

- Is it possible to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and not try to lead other to Jesus?
- Talk about the repeated phrase 'Come and see' as it pertains to each stage of discipleship.