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Section: My Walk

Theme: Discipleship

Title Suggestions:

1. The Theology of Discipleship (current working title)
2. Discipleship Defined
3. Discovering Discipleship
4. Understanding Biblical Discipleship
5. Discipleship: The Theology of Transformation

Word Count: @775-825 Words

Article/Copy:

People sometimes think theology is only for pastors and professors, but nothing could be farther from the truth. We do “theology” every time we think about God or the things of God. When we think biblically about the Christian life, we are formulating a *Theology of Discipleship*.

What Discipleship Is

Discipleship is *being and making Christ-followers who, in turn, make other Christ-followers* (Matt 28:19; 2 Tim 2:2). Anything less than this minimizes the impact of our discipleship efforts. In other words, while *being* a disciple is foundational, we must also *make* disciples—lest our discipleship become self-serving. Yet even then, those disciples must *make other disciples* before the biblical ideal is realized.

The Goal of Discipleship

Discipleship begins by receiving salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:5). The Bible calls this justification (Rom 5:1) or being born-again (Jn 3:3). Once saved, the goal of discipleship becomes possible: “*Transformation*” (1 Thess 4:3; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 12:2). *Transformation’s* corresponding theological terms are *sanctification* and *holiness* (1 Thess 5:23).

Transformation is derived from “metamorphosis,” originally a compound Greek word meaning to “change form.” Like a caterpillar that undergoes a mysterious internal change resulting in the external formation of a beautiful butterfly, discipleship supernaturally produces a changed life through the mystery of godliness (Gal 4:19; 1 Tim 3:16).

It’s important to understand that transformation is the work of God and not a direct result of our own works of righteousness (Tit 2:14). Even so, God’s role of sanctifying us doesn’t remove our personal responsibility to cooperate with Him through personal obedience and devotional practices (Matt 28:20; Phil 2:12-13). As we do, God changes us from the inside-out, resulting in godliness (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:6). As this happens, we become spiritual change agents capable of advancing the Kingdom of God for the Glory of God, which is the ultimate purpose of discipleship (Luke 4:43; Mk 1:13-14).

Understanding Discipleship

What does the Bible *mean* by transformation? Transformation is when God makes us like Himself by sanctifying our soul. The soul has been described as our mind, emotions, and will. These are what the Bible means when it speaks of the “heart” (Prov 3:5-6; Mark 7:21-23).

Surrendered Minds. Transformation begins with the mind’s renewal (Rom 12:2). This is the executive center of the soul where cognition occurs. When occupied with the things of God, the mind has the ability to comprehend truth and override unruly emotions and sinful choices (Phil 4:8). It is the home of *reflection, imagination, thoughts, ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and discernment*. A disciple with a transformed mind has devoted himself to pursue sacred imagination, pure thoughts, godly ideas, theological knowledge, biblical beliefs, and spiritual discernment.

Surrendered Emotions. Biblical discipleship also involves divinely changed emotions. Our hearts are intrinsically conflicted and duplicitous in ways we cannot fully comprehend (Jer 17:9). God wants to change all that and give us new hearts of integrity (Ps 51:10; Ez 36:26). Human emotions are the home of *feelings, desires, passions, affections, attitudes, values, and convictions*. A transformed disciple has surrendered his heart to God. This produces godly affections where feelings, passions, and desires are restrained under God’s control. Transformed emotions result in godly attitudes, strong values, and biblical convictions.

Surrendered Wills. Discipleship also concerns our actions. Volition is the deep well within our innermost being where our choices are made. The will is a person’s decision headquarters. This is where we choose what we will or won’t do (Phil 2:13). The will is the home of *moral choices, ethical decisions, bodily actions, behavioral choices, and personal lifestyles*. A disciple with a transformed heart makes biblically-informed decisions that produce internal peace within himself and relational harmony with others (Rom 8:1ff; Eph 2:10).

Transformed Relationships. As important as *intrapersonal* spiritual development is, discipleship must extend beyond our own lives and impact our relationships with others (1 Jn 3:15; 1 Jn 4:20; Eph 5:28-29). Our love for people, particularly believers, is part of what legitimizes our faith (Heb 12:14; Jn 13:35). Discipleship requires genuine expressions of love for those inside and outside the church (Gal 6:10). Moreover, mature believers are marked by relationships of respect that are both solid and secure.

Biblical Discipleship Simplified

Discipleship is the centerpiece of the Christian life. It should be explored in depth and complexity. But it should also be easily understood. Jesus summarized discipleship at its irreducible level when he said “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-40 HCSB).

Discipleship is the essence of the Great Commandment. The theological principles of transformed minds, emotions, wills, and relationships are echoed and reinforced by the words of Jesus. At its most granular level, Christian discipleship is simply this: *Knowing Christ, Loving Christ, Living for Christ, and Loving Others*.

Side Bar Suggestions:

- **Disciple (mathetes):** The word *disciple* is derived from a Greek word *mathetes* (pronounced *math-ay-tes'*). *Mathetes* can be defined as a learner, pupil, or apprentice. It occurs some 250 times in the Bible, with all of those being in the four Gospel accounts and Acts (e.g., Mt 16:24; Jn 8:31; Acts 11:26).
- **Discipleship (mathéteuó):** The word *discipleship* is derived from a Greek word *mathéteuó* (pronounced *math-ayt-yoo'-o*). *Mathéteuó* is a verb that means to “be a disciple” or “to make a disciple.” It occurs four times in scripture—all of them in the Gospels and Acts. The most well-known usage is in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

Call Out Suggestions:

- The means of discipleship are teaching and learning; The ends of discipleship are knowing, being, and doing
- Discipleship requires learning, but it is not merely about “knowing;” It’s also about “being” and “doing”
- *The original Greek New Testament word for Discipleship* means “to be” or “to make” Christ-followers
- Deacons are disciplers: Our service always has disciple making as its goal
- Discipleship is best when it is *intentional*, not incidental

Bio: Dr. Freddy Cardoza is a lifelong Southern Baptist who serves as a professor and Chair of the Christian Education Department at Biola University’s Talbot School of Theology and as the Executive Director for the Society of Professors in Christian Education. Freddy has a Ph.D. in Leadership from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has served 20 years in full-time local church ministry. He and his wife Kristy have been married over 20 years and have two sons. Freddy teaches discipleship classes and leads a small group at Saddleback Church in greater Los Angeles.

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