
VISION FORWARD



LEARNING JESUS

There is much written about what or who a disciple of Jesus is and how they should live. Doctrine is our attempt to write and translate into words what we understand the reality of God, Jesus, sin, salvation, etc. to be. The doctrine, for example, of the incarnation is what we believe about the reality of “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) put into words. The words about the incarnation are not the same thing as the incarnation itself. They help us comprehend it, though.

The doctrine of discipleship is putting into words the reality of what Jesus taught and imparted in word and action to men and women while on earth, and now, as in heaven. But the doctrine must be more than a propositional statement and set of beliefs clearly understood and repeated. It must be *fleshed out* in life. What we say is one thing, what we do is another. It is the fruit of our behavior, the *incarnation* of our true beliefs, that matters.

A disciple of Jesus is not a walking doctrine or propositional statement, but a walking, speaking, living, breathing example of Jesus. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

At its simplest, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus, not only to learn *from* Him, but more accurately to learn *Him* (Ephesians 4:20). In other words, as disciples of Jesus, we are encountering and learning a *living person*.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God, “the tradition of God” handed down, come down, to us. He is the only begotten Son of God, the very movement, speech, power, breath of God. There is not something plus Jesus or minus Jesus. There is Jesus. He is the fulness and overflow of God. In Him all things are created and sustained. In Him is contained everything you need to know and understand about God, His kingdom, the world, your life, and your salvation. But we must go further.

Again, a disciple is someone who follows or learns *Jesus*. For the early disciples, to follow someone as your teacher was not simply to learn from the right distance, getting close enough. It was to welcome Him into your very life, to be shaped by Him from the outside in and inside out. You were not welcoming your teacher as a lesson to be learned from, but as an example to be made into. The best teachers were the *living* representation or embodiment of all they taught and all you learned. This is what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus. We are in “the school of Jesus” (F.F. Bruce).

A disciple of Jesus is a Christian, and a Christian is someone who lives “in Christ” and in whom Christ lives. What, then, should a disciple be like? Like Jesus! But even this answer can be (mis)understood in two ways.

Discipleship is more than a destination. It is a direction.

One way is in the form of “*destination*”: a disciple is someone who has passed through and arrived at a new level of maturity. For some they might understand this as reading the Bible 30 minutes a day and/or praying each morning for 30 minutes. Others may understand it as someone who has arrived at sharing their faith everyday with a different person. None of these nor many other “destinations” or “arrivals” are necessarily wrong. But there is a danger in thinking of discipleship as a series of steps you need to take, or tests you need to pass, or benchmarks you need to reach, or classes you need to finish.

Discipleship is more than a destination. It is a *direction*: the direction of Jesus. Disciples walk “a long obedience in the same direction,” to quote Eugene Peterson. Their hearts and feet are towards Christ, their eyes are fixed on Him, and if they keep following, staying in pursuit of Him, they will surely come to know Him and to be made like Him more and more, little by little. Along the way they will arrive at different places of maturity, but those places are not their ultimate destination.

Now, while there are many things we might say we should be doing to *become* disciples of Jesus, one recent large body of research conducted by LifeWay identified three common lifestyle choices or consistent behaviors *belonging* to those claiming to be disciples. These disciples were evidencing a fruit (actions, behavior) consistent with (1) their own confession (doctrine, words) (2) Scripture and an orthodox historical Christian understanding of Scripture, and (3) the description and definition of discipleship given by a unified, broadly recognized and respected group of Christian teachers, authors, and pastors. What were these three things?

1. Reading the Bible every day
2. Attending the same church every Sunday
3. Being a part of a small group

For these disciples, these are “no silver bullets” (the title of the book by Daniel Im presenting this research). Rather, these three primary practices were the fruit *from* their pursuit of Jesus and also what overtime *produced* more fruit in their pursuit of Jesus. (There are other consistent practices as well, including, interestingly enough, confession of sin.)



So let us ask ourselves: as disciples of Jesus, are we in the Scriptures daily, in fellowship weekly, and in community frequently? We won't simply do these things because that's *what we do*; we will do these things because that's *who we are*. (Remember, one of our “First

Goals” this year has been to root small groups in our homes and ourselves in a small group. We believe that this is an essential way we live out our discipleship, not only to grow and to bear fruit individually and corporately, but also to be pruned in order to bear even more fruit together.)

Dr. Robert Coleman says that a disciple is “a learner who's following Christ. You learn by following. And that means, since we are finite and God alone is infinite, there's never a place in the journey where we stop learning...learning is an active process because you never drift to become a disciple...There's a continual sense that as we learn and grow more, we have to do what we've learned; otherwise, we wouldn't make as much progress.”

Pablo Picasso once said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.” We might say this, “Every disciple is a follower. The problem is how to remain a follower

once we grow up.” As disciples of Jesus, we never grow up, we never mature beyond following, we never travel beyond learning *Jesus*.

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him” (Colossians 2:6). Which one of the three practices above is Jesus calling you to follow him in?

WHAT OUR LEADERSHIP IS TALKING ABOUT

Our entire leadership team recently completed an assignment together on “Creating an Empowering Culture”. One of the things that emerged is our desire to build trust with one another, which would translate into building trust within the larger body of Elim Grace.



But our tendency, and a tendency in most all of us, is towards *over*-confidence in ourselves and *under*-confidence in others. To overcome this tendency we must, first, pray and, second, practice. But not just *any* kind of practice.

The difference between a good and a great athlete, musician, artist, etc. is not one of how many hours each practiced. Often the hours are nearly identical. It's the *kind* of

practice: *deliberate* practice. It's finding, identifying, confessing an area of weakness and going after it with everything.

So all of us must not simply practice trust, but *deliberately* practice it everyday. How? Continually through prayer, the Scriptures, confession, honesty, and vulnerability with others.

WHAT'S NEXT? “THE CITY” NETWORK IS GOING AWAY.

As of February of next year, our platform for internal church communication, *The City*, will be discontinued. For the last few weeks I have been thinking through different tools to replace it with. I didn't want to simply swap it out for another tool that would only accomplish the same thing. Rather, I wanted a tool that could serve us both where we are and where we're going. So, over the next two months, we are going to build an App.

An Elim Grace App will give us greater reach and flexibility in communication (individual and mass communication, sign-ups for small groups, baptisms, and events, a blog, etc.); more options for multimedia (audio/video of sermons, a podcast, teaching/training resources, etc.); a more secure and better giving platform; and it will allow us to grow creatively and leverage current and future technology.

These are just a few of the resources an app will give us. Our website is a huge draw for those outside our church. In fact, the majority of our first time guests have found us through our website. But for those of us inside Elim Grace, many, if not most of us, will probably not go to our website to stay current. Rather, we are more likely to access an app on our phone. Clear, concise, timely, helpful, and simple communication is a must, and something we should strive to do with excellence.