

Topic 5: A Disciple Learns

The Bible Guides Us

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

—2 Timothy 3:16–17



We get our English word “disciple” from the Latin word *discipulus*, which means “pupil.” This corresponds to the New Testament noun *mathētēs* (from a Greek verb that means “to learn”). In short, the most basic and literal meaning of “disciple” is “student.” *A disciple is first and foremost a learner.*

The disciple’s goal is to become Christ-like.

However, learning in the time of Christ was different than it is now. Being a student in the first century required being *physically with* one’s mentor. With no Internet and no online courses available, you couldn’t watch YouTube videos of your rabbi or receive the latest blog posts of your teacher via email. Sages and scholars in that day weren’t tweeting their wisdom or posting pithy sayings on social media. All of which means, if you wanted to know what your

teacher was thinking and saying, you had to tag along behind him. You literally had to follow him. Otherwise you’d surely miss an important lesson or an essential truth.

The gospels show the first disciples following Jesus—to *know* Jesus and his teaching; to *grow* more like Jesus; and to *go* for Jesus, serving others and making new disciples. Two thousand years later, that’s still a good definition of discipleship.

A Definition of *Disciple*

A disciple is a person who follows Jesus—to *know* Jesus and his teaching; to *grow* more like Jesus; and to *go* for Jesus, serving others and making new disciples.

So discipleship involves *knowing*, *growing*, and *going*. We can compare these three areas of discipleship to the head, heart, and

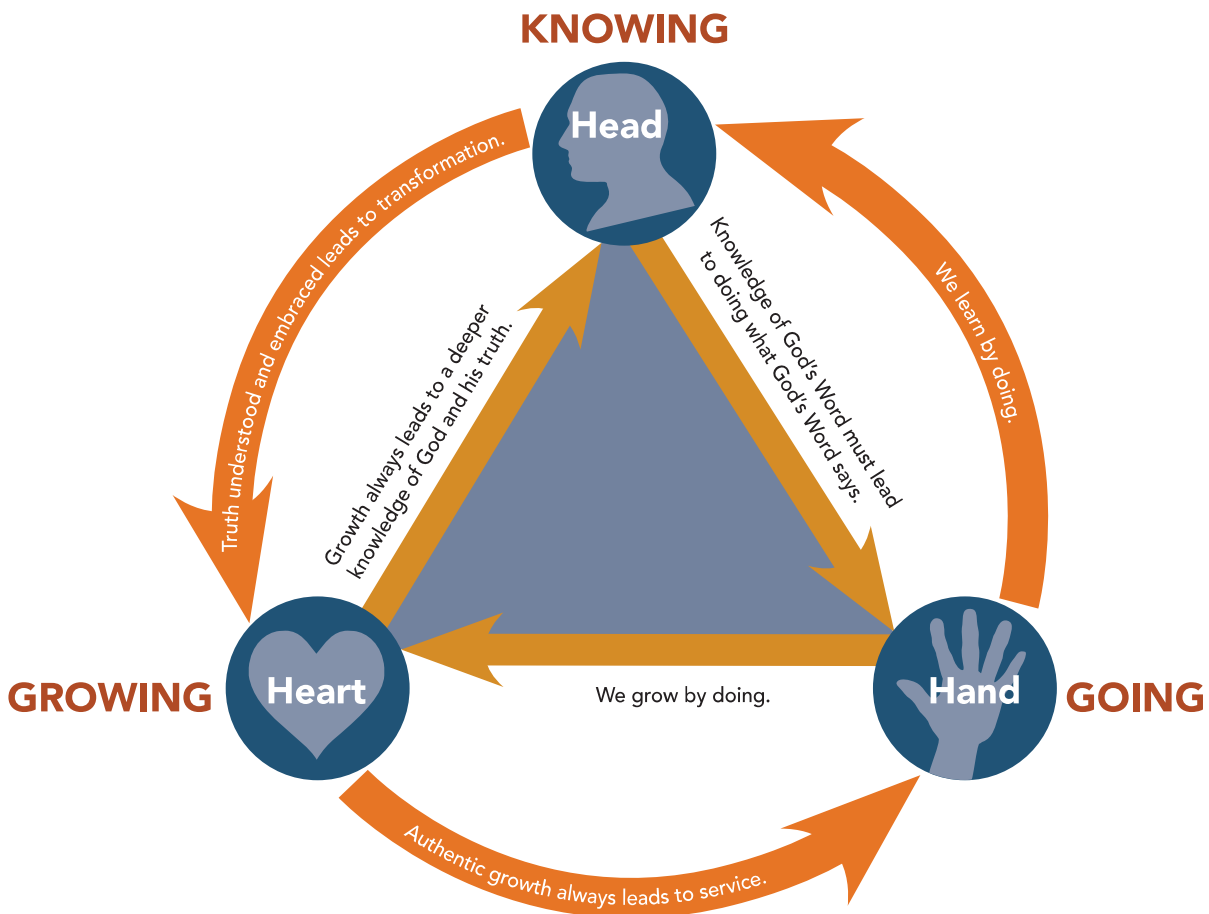


hands of a disciple. The idea of “Knowing” is symbolized by the head, while “growing” is symbolized by the heart, and finally, “going” is symbolized by hands. (Though we don’t walk on our hands, the hands are a better symbol for this concept than feet would be, as the idea of “going on mission” is more tied to serving others than walking somewhere.)

Though broken into three different concepts, we can’t draw sharp boundary lines between the “head, heart, and hands” aspects of following Christ. These categories bleed over into one another and

depend on each other. *Healthy discipleship is always integrated.*

- ▶ Head—Beliefs that don’t penetrate our hearts to help us *grow* or alter our behavior so that we *go* and serve are worthless.
- ▶ Heart—*Growing* in the faith can’t be separated from *knowing* truth and *going* on mission to serve.
- ▶ Hands—Serving the Lord effectively is tied together with *knowing* God’s truth and *growing* to have the right heart attitude.



Though each relies on the other, we will examine these three areas individually in three separate sessions. In this session we want to get an overview of the *knowing*, or head, aspect of discipleship. A follower of Christ is a student of Christ. He or she must learn certain things.



Bible Study

1. Consider these passages from the gospels. They all show Jesus helping his followers grasp God's eternal truths. He did this largely through teaching:
 - ▶ "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them" (Matthew 5:1–2).
 - ▶ "Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me'" (John 7:16).
 - ▶ After an extended time of teaching in the Upper Room the night before his death (see John 13–16), Jesus looked toward heaven and prayed to his Father for his disciples, "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth" (John 17:17, NLT).

What did Jesus want his disciples to know about his teaching? From whom did it come?

Jesus taught his followers God's Word. Why? Because the ancient Scriptures are a revelation of God. They reveal:

- ▶ what God is like (Isaiah 46:8–10)
- ▶ why the world is broken (Genesis 3)
- ▶ how we can know God personally (Acts 17:27, 1 John 4:10)
- ▶ how broken people like us can find wholeness and enjoy lives full of significance and purpose (John 10:10, 2 Corinthians 5:17)

It's easy to forget that the "Bible" Jesus read and taught from was only the Old Testament (the New Testament documents weren't written until after the death of Christ). Consider Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Old Testament. It's a beautiful collection of meditative prayers about the wonder of God's revelation.



Ten Names for God's Word in Psalm 119

Names	Meaning
Law(s)	The Hebrew word is <i>torah</i> , which means instruction, and may refer to the whole Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament
Testimony(ies)	One of God's regulations, a rule, or standard for conduct
Judgment(s)	A divine judicial decision, binding law or ruling
Commandment(s)	A clear, authoritative order from God
Statutes	Literally "things inscribed;" this refers to enacted laws that set limits or boundaries
Precepts	Divine orders
Word	The general term for God's revelation—the utterance of God
Saying	Sometimes translated "promise"
Way(s)	The way of life required by God's good and wise moral law
Path(s)	Used interchangeably with "way"

In this one psalm, we see that God's Word reveals his holy nature and can lead his people into a life that is blessed and protected. It is even more than that. It's a love letter, a lamp, light, and so much more. As the psalm points out, the Scriptures give a follower of Jesus:

- ▶ power against sin (vss. 3, 11, 101, 165)
- ▶ freedom (v. 45)
- ▶ direction and guidance (vss. 105 and 130)
- ▶ stability (v. 89)
- ▶ peace (v. 165)
- ▶ hope (vss. 114 and 147)
- ▶ delight (vss. 16, 24, 35, 47, 77, 92, 174).

2. Take a moment to read what the gospel writer Mark said about Christ's way of teaching his followers:

- ▶ "[Jesus and his disciples] went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach" (Mark 1:21).
- ▶ "Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them" (Mark 2:13).



- ▶ “He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables” (Mark 4:2, NLT).
- ▶ “Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near” (Jesus, speaking in Mark 13:28, NLT).
- ▶ “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jesus, speaking in Matthew 11:29).

What do these passages say about the way Jesus taught?

Reading the gospels, we see Jesus was a master teacher. He understood that people learn in different ways. Some people learn best through hearing, others by seeing, and still others through hands-on experience. For these reasons, Jesus taught in a variety of ways:

- ▶ Publicly (Luke 21:37) and privately (Luke 10:38–39)
- ▶ Through lectures (Matthew 5–7)
- ▶ Telling stories (Luke 15)
- ▶ Turning common, life experiences into teachable moments (Matthew 15:32–38; Luke 21:2–3; John 4)
- ▶ Using object lessons (Matthew 18:2)
- ▶ Using examples from history (Matthew 12:40; Luke 13:4).

Discipleship is the pursuit of whole-life *transformation*, not just biblical or theological *information*.

Underscoring the brilliance of Jesus’ teaching methods, modern educational researchers have discovered that the deepest learning involves a combination of reading, studying, listening, discussing, watching, participating, testing, experimenting, etc.

Disciples grasp this, too. They see their knowledge of Jesus deepen as they study and put into practice God’s Word.



3. What are the primary ways God has helped you gain knowledge of Christ and his truth?

After his crucifixion and resurrection and just before his return to heaven, Jesus, the master teacher, gathered his “students” and told them to go and make disciples of all the nations. “Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 28:20a, NLT). Do you see it? The taught ones were to become teachers themselves.

That’s precisely what they did! This first generation of disciples began to pass on the things they had learned from Jesus. In Acts 2, we read that all the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (v. 42). That’s still the pattern. We learn . . . then we share what we’ve learned with others (2 Timothy 2:2).

4. In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, our memory verses for this lesson, we see how and why knowing God’s Word is so important. Reread this passage. What sticks out to you in these verses?

In summary, a disciple is a student. A disciple follows Jesus in order to learn—to learn *about* him and to learn *from* him.



Take-Home Reflections

Getting into the Word . . . and Getting the Word into Us

Colossians 3:16 urges “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (ESV). How does this happen in our lives? How do we become people who know the truth of God—not merely in a cerebral or academic way, but in a deeply personal way that brings honor to God, blessing to others, and joy to our own souls? Take a few minutes to work through this list and evaluate your own habits when it comes to knowing Christ and his teaching.

Way to learn and internalize God’s Word	My experience—positive or negative	My future plan
<p>1. Hearing God’s Word read Via audio Bible MP3s, at church, through responsive readings, etc.</p>		
<p>2. Listening to communicators teach or preach God’s Word At church, conferences, online, etc.</p>		
<p>3. Reading God’s Word on my own Carefully, regularly, prayerfully; perhaps even reading through the entire Bible</p>		
<p>4. Discussing God’s Word With a community of spiritual friends; small groups, Sunday School settings, etc.</p>		



Way to learn and internalize God's Word	My experience—positive or negative	My future plan
<p>5. Studying God's Word Reading, learning—then practicing—how to accurately unpack, interpret, and apply a Scripture passage</p>		
<p>6. Memorizing God's Word Hiding the truth of God in my heart and mind so that I can recall it at anytime</p>		
<p>7. Trusting God's Word Believing the promises and claims of God when he seems absent or life seems hopeless</p>		
<p>8. Paying close attention to how others live out God's Word in everyday life situations In giving, serving, sacrificing, forgiving, etc.</p>		
<p>9. Teaching God's Word Sharing with others, formally or informally, Scriptural truth that has impacted me</p>		
<p>10. Reflecting on God's Word Meditating, pondering, and praying over the things God has revealed; letting them govern my heart and mind</p>		



What surprises you most about this exercise? What's the biggest takeaway for you?

Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

2. Read Psalm 119 carefully and make a list of all the blessings and benefits that come to the disciple who learns to follow the Word of God.

3. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:

- ▶ Here are two old teaching sayings: "More is caught than taught" and "I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; I do, I understand." What do these statements mean?
- ▶ Jean-Pierre de Caussade said, "God instructs the heart, not by ideas but by pains and contradictions." What does this mean? How does this insight apply to the disciple who seeks to know God and His truth?
- ▶ What would you tell a friend who said, "Help me! I'm realizing my knowledge of Christ is impersonal and academic. It makes no real difference in my life. How can I have a real relationship with Jesus?"

4. Improve your Bible study skills with *How to Study the Bible* resources from Rose Publishing. *How to Study the Bible* has concise steps for personal preparation, descriptive resources and reference information, and a step-by-step approach for inductive Bible study that teaches students to dig deeper into God's Word. These materials are available as an easy-to-use pamphlet, a wall chart, or a PowerPoint®. Go to www.rosepublishing.com for more information.