

What is a disciple?

By

Grietje Commelin

Living according to God's will › Living with God › New to Christianity?

<https://www.biblword.net/>

What is a disciple?

[Living according to God's will](#) › [Living with God](#) › [New to Christianity?](#)

In the Bible, we read a lot about disciples. And apparently, this is not just a historical phenomenon, for when Jesus leaves His disciples He tells them to “make disciples of all nations , baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). So, what does it mean to be a disciple?

A definition

Basically, a disciple is a learner or pupil, someone who adheres to the teachings of another person and takes up the ways of this teacher. In Biblical times, this was common practice. Especially in religious matters, if you wanted to learn, you didn’t go to college but you became the disciple of someone else.

This is for example what the apostle Paul did when he was young: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel

according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). John the Baptist had disciples as well (John 1:35-37; 3:25; Matthew 11:2; 14:12), and the religious group of the Pharisees had a couple (Matthew 22:16).

Jesus' disciples

Most references to disciples in the Bible are to the disciples of Jesus – which is obvious since Jesus is the most important person in the New Testament. Jesus chose a group of twelve disciples when He began his ministry (John 1:37-41; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16). Although there were more disciples who followed Jesus for some time, these twelve men had a special position.

Disciples follow their teacher

Jesus' disciples followed Him closely for about three years, while He traveled around: they stayed with Him (John 2:12), were invited to a wedding together, as if they were family members – which indeed Jesus actually considers them to be (John 2:2; Matthew 12:49) – and they celebrated religious feasts together (e.g. Mark 14:14).

These disciples were faithful to Jesus, even though Jesus didn't have the political success they were initially hoping for. "So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). When Jesus was actually taken captive, the disciples fled for fear.

But even in these dark moments, they followed Jesus to see what happened (John 18:15), and after His death, they mourned together. This close relationship made the disciples into excellent eyewitnesses of Jesus' words and miracles, and later of His resurrection (e.g. Luke 19:37; John 21:24; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

Disciples get "private education"

One of Jesus' major tasks was to preach the coming of God's Kingdom to the people (Matthew 4:17; 11:1). But His inner circle of disciples often got additional education (see Matthew 20:17; Mark 4:34; Mark 10:10). The most important lessons the disciples received – but didn't fully understand – were about Jesus' coming death and resurrection (e.g. Matthew 16:21). It was of crucial

importance for them to have a proper understanding of Jesus' true identity and His mission since they were to preach the Gospel to all nations.

Disciples become like their teacher

The goal of discipleship is not just to gather knowledge and to see how the teacher lives, but also to copy his behavior and become a follower of this person. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

In Luke 9:1-6, we read how Jesus sends His disciples out to do what He Himself did as well: "to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal". Jesus Himself has equipped them for this task. He "gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases". Jesus' disciples could not do these things in their own power. They tried once but failed (Matthew 17:14-20).

By the power of the Holy Spirit, they were later able to "be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" and perform miracles like Jesus had done (Acts 1:8; 5:12-16). That's what Jesus

had promised them before in John 14:12-13: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son”.

All believers are disciples

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the twelve disciples still had a special position. They had been eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry, and were called “apostles”. People who came to faith later on, didn’t have this special position. But they too are called “disciples”! (Acts 6:7).

In Acts 11:26, we read that disciples are also called “Christians”. This may be a more common term nowadays, but actually, every true Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. And, what is more, Jesus calls His followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Spreading the Gospel implies teaching people how to be a follower of Jesus in all parts of their lives. Did you realize that this is your calling as a Christian?

Characteristics of modern disciples

As the disciples did during Jesus' earthly life, we are to follow Jesus, learn His lessons, and become like Him. In John 8:31, Jesus said: "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples".

Another characteristic of disciples is their love for one another (John 13:35) and their bearing spiritual fruit (John 15:8). This behavior reflects Jesus' own example. Whoever follows Jesus closely, is transformed from within (Romans 12:2).

Being a disciple comes at a cost

If being a disciple means "following Jesus", it is clear that this comes at a cost. If we are to put Jesus first, other things can't take this first place anymore. Our family, even our own life, is less important than the Lord Jesus (Luke 14:26-27; 14:33).

Moreover, other people don't always like us to be a Christian. We might be persecuted, even killed, just like Jesus was. Jesus warned His disciples about that:

“Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

Being a disciple is the best thing ever

And yet, being a disciple of Jesus is great. Not only will a close relationship with Jesus be a huge blessing during your earthly life, it will also lead to eternal life. Jesus Christ Himself promised: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).

Are you a disciple of Jesus? How has following Jesus changed your life?

Source: <https://www.biblword.net/what-is-a-disciple-or-follower-of-jesus/>

Grietje Commelin · <https://www.biblword.net/> · info@biblword.net