

TUTORIAL 9.18 Disciples of the Master

This tutorial looks at the first question under the area of *Discipleship*: 'Are they seeing all other ties, loyalties, and commitments being increasingly defined by their primary relationship; disciples of their master, Jesus Christ?'

Colossians 2:6: And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

This verse tells us who we're going to build our faith on, and it's Christ. We're thinking now about the subject of discipleship, and that's ultimately what is at the heart of the Great Commission. In the Greek, the idea here wasn't so much going; it was as we're going. As we're going, we need to be making disciples, not of ourselves, but of Christ.

As our roots grow down into Him and are built on Him, things will flow naturally out of that. Hopefully you see that discipleship includes theoretical truth, if you like, that's presented and we teach, but then it gives its real roots and its reality in everyday life. The verse above says that as you follow Him as His disciples, your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and then you'll overflow with thankfulness.

Last time

We looked at the fifth and last question from the WILD outline in the area of Life. It focused on the area of growing in a commitment to reproduce the life that they have, and prioritizing ministry opportunities. In this tutorial we will discuss the first question in the WILD outline in the area of Discipleship.

Keep in mind that we're talking about allegiances here; our ultimate allegiance needs to be to Jesus Christ alone. In some countries, students put their hands over their chests and pledge allegiance to their countries' flag. But as you think about it, is our ultimate allegiance to the flag or what it represents? It's not God's intent for our ultimate allegiance to be to anything other than Christ Himself.

Discipleship is described and perceived in different ways, and specifically the issue of becoming a disciple and whether that means salvation comes after forsaking every other allegiance. What we see in Scripture is that Jesus' disciples did turn from whatever else they were following. There is a sense in which they put that aside. They left the nets and their families and followed Him. That's part of it. On the other hand, it's an ongoing process of discovering those things that are our allegiances. For unbelievers, they already have loyalties and allegiances. And so discipleship is also an ongoing process.

Are they seeing all other ties, loyalties and commitments being increasingly defined by their primary relationship; disciples of their Master, Jesus Christ?

Kelley talks about how identity as a disciple of Christ begins early on as people hear God's Word and continue to grow through suffering:

Early on, through the Creation to Christ teaching and then up until Ephesians, I think that we have this visual of two bamboo holders up on two posts and so as you're going through Creation to Christ, you're constantly putting the two clans, Esau and Jacob, and they're making that identity. So, even early on, I feel like they realized that as believers they were disciples of Christ and that His road was going to be their road. As you're studying His life and all those things, they understand that that is going to be their life now, and so they're identifying with that. And then, as they grow, I think the most growth is done in the time of suffering. I think suffering is that gift that He gives us. He promises that we'll each suffer, if we even desire godliness. That's the time that we seek growth.

I'll never forget—it was a couple months ago—there was some talk that had come up. In our village context, to have your name called to be accused of something is a tremendous sin, if it's not true. We had one of our believers that had her name called, and it was over something that she hadn't done. The unbelievers were accusing her of certain things and it was quite heavy for her. So I went over to visit with her and I just asked her, "Amelia, how are you doing with all this? How are you dealing with it?" She said, "Well, Joshua [her husband] and I just sat down and prayed. We just sat down and prayed about it because, from what we know about the Bible and the life of Christ, we are going to suffer just like He suffered."

She had a passage in Matthew and a passage in Psalms. She's reading these through and it's like, "This is the road that I have for you." In her mind, it was very clear. He suffered. We will suffer too. Our reward is not going to be in this world. It says that the world will hate us. It says these things so it's going to be true. Our rest is going to be in Heaven. It was just an encouragement to us to see. We didn't go over those passages with her. I don't even know how she

found them, it had to be through her own study, but those were the things that the Lord was showing her and she understood that she was a disciple of Christ, that she would have to follow in those same footsteps.

Are they realizing that the relationship with Jesus is unique from all others in terms of its scope and rightful claims, and because it gives them access to His guidance in handling all other relationships correctly?

Are new believers being given help by other disciples as they face the challenges of reconfiguring their existing personal commitments and obligations in light of the relationship they've entered into with Jesus?

Are the individuals or teams in discipleship roles truly encouraging other believers in their commitments to Jesus as Master, or are they—perhaps unknowingly—fostering unhealthy individual and corporate allegiances?

John shares about seeing the believers begin to follow the model of discipleship that had been passed on to them:

I think there was an emphasis on the fact that we're to grow in Christ. We start off as babes in Christ, but then as God's Word becomes more real to us and we understand more and more of it, we become stronger in our faith, in our dependence on God, in our love for Him, in our adoration of Him. That all impacts our lives and it impacts our relationships with other people, but in order to grow we need to connect with other believers who can help us in that journey. Initially, it was the church planters discipling, but then it was these guys who've been discipled discipling others. I think of an outreach with a young couple, and them taking another young couple with them and discipling them in church planting, that sort of thing happening.

Bill talks about the deepening discipleship relationship the church planting team had with the believers as they reached out, working with them as equals:

It's funny because in that time where the new church starts becoming independent, a lot of workers start thinking about leaving them. Yet, that's the very time that you can start working with them as equals. It's also in that time that you can start having discussions and talk about things that you've never been able to talk about before, just like you can with your teenage kids. It's the same way a teenage kid sometimes just walks away from their parents and is on their own, but yet I've seen a lot of teenagers have really good relationships with their parents during that time. It's during that time that they're open to talk about things that they've never talked about before. Right now, with the elders in the church, and they're basically in charge and I'm their helper, they see me more as an equal. I think

it's this time period that I'm able to talk with them more about things that relate to the spiritual life. I can be vulnerable with them and they can be vulnerable with me. Whereas before they almost thought of us as never sinning. In fact, they even almost said as much; "Well, you never do that. We do this." Yet, now they're starting to see us in a much different light. It opens up a lot of discussions that we've never had before. I don't know how we would've talked about those things early on.

In the case studies in this tutorial, there's a strong sense of humility amongst the church planters. It's not a fake thing for church planters to be somehow portraying equality with the elders and wider body, but rather recognition that they are also disciples of Christ and also have great needs.

We began this tutorial with the question, "Are they seeing all the other ties, loyalties, and commitments being increasingly defined by their primary relationship; disciples of their Master, Jesus Christ?" We saw that this is for both the church planter and the wider church body; we are all disciples of Jesus Christ and we're growing and moving on this journey together.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Disciples of the Master

1. Spend some time reflecting on the verse that was shared in the tutorial (Colossians 2:6). Share any thoughts you have on how it relates to your own personal discipleship relationship with the Lord Jesus, particularly as you consider a future role in cross-cultural ministry.
2. What would you see are some of the implications when a church planter has a strong sense of their own national identity? Do you think patriotism can be an obstacle to modelling a primary loyalty to Jesus in a cross-cultural situation?
3. What kind of relationship are you eventually hoping to have with local believers where you live, specifically in terms of discipleship?