

## What is a Disciple?

*"I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other." (John 13:34-35, CEB)*

As you may know, I've been making a push for our congregation to increase the amount of time for discipleship activity on Sunday mornings. I'll have more to say about what our new Sunday schedule will look like when we worship this week. This past Sunday, as we dialogued about the possibility of making a change, I was asked an excellent question: **"What is a disciple?"**

A disciple is simply defined as **'a learner.'** When we say that someone is a disciple **of Jesus**, that means the person is **learning from Jesus** - about God, God's kingdom, and how to live life the way Jesus lived it.

One of the best analogies I can think of is an apprenticeship. We don't see this model of learning used as much today as it was in the past. But, let's think about how an apprenticeship works.

There is a master (an expert) and an apprentice (a novice). The expert spends time with the apprentice, showing him or her how to do a particular trade. Over time, the apprentice learns the ways of the master and then begins to do the same things that the master does. The master offers guidance and gentle correction and then gives the apprentice opportunities to do work.

The ultimate goal is for the apprentice to be able to do everything that the master can do. Even more so, there is the hope and expectation that someday the apprentice will become a master to other apprentices. I had an experience sort of like that when I was a student teacher just before I graduated with my bachelor's degree in music education.

If we apply this apprenticeship model to our discipleship journey, then our main goal is **to learn from Jesus**, the master. In order to do that, we need to spend significant time with him and learn from him - to study his ways and put them into practice.

What were the things that Jesus did? What I notice over and over in Jesus' life were prayer, teaching, healings and miracles, and the widening of the circle of people who could be part of God's kingdom. In John's Gospel, we find that, for Jesus, one of the key **marks of discipleship** is our love for each other: "This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

I hope you find this analogy helpful as we think about what it means to be Jesus' disciples. Even as I type this message, I'm reminded that there is always room for growth in this area of my life and that it's very unlikely that I would get to the point where I could tell Jesus, "I'm done learning from you. I've got this discipleship thing all figured out." You see, discipleship is something we should all invest in. It's not just a base of knowledge that our children need. Rather, discipleship is a life-long learning process.

Let's keep learning together!

Grace and Peace,

*Pastor David Rittgers*