



## *The Tap Root*

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### *The Ultimate Aim of Discipleship*

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The word discipleship is a big word, and it carries a host of connotations. Some people think of discipleship in terms of adopting key behaviors, or memorizing selected Bible verses, or being able to quote important thinkers within their religious tradition. Some might think of painful accountability groups where people struggle with issues over and over and over. At first glance, neither of these options are particularly compelling. In fact, they can make me tired--especially when they are pursued in order to fit in or be accepted in a context where appearance is more important than transformation. I've actually engaged facets of the above, and while there has been value in those efforts, at some level they have been found wanting.

But there's still the reality of the Great Commission, where, as most of you likely know, Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Because of what Jesus said, and because of the wisdom and goodness we have to assume was behind what he said, somehow discipleship has to be central to whatever we are doing as Christian leaders. If it's not happening, then something is seriously missing. (I would say this is even true for leaders of Christian businesses, where if some sort of discipleship is not taking place, then something significant is missing there as well.) Therefore, in light of the command of Jesus, I believe we are mandated to

#### *Compelling Quotes*

"The glory of God is man fully alive."

St. Irenaeus

"The church will never mature beyond the leadership. "

Peter Scazzero

"Growth toward God *never* ends."

Joseph Allen

"We must make religion (discipleship) attractive, so that men of goodwill will wish it were true; and then demonstrate that it *is* true."

Blaise Pascal

"...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Eph. 3:19

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Jesus, John 10:10

win through to a deeper, richer understanding of discipleship, and to how it might be carried out in ways that would bring great joy to the heart of Jesus, bring more life to our souls, and to the souls of those we serve.

Before that, let me quickly look at one reason why discipleship can seem flat or forced, where I have to reference two of my all-time favorite authors, C.S. Lewis, and Josef Pieper. Both of these brilliant Christian authors discuss how any word that is a good word will be quickly dulled or debased in culture in order to make something that is truly wonderful and life-giving appear boring, or be given a dark, scandalous connotation. It appears to me that Satan has successfully worked to make the word discipleship appear as boring or as superficial as possible, in order that we would be tempted to settle for a shallow understanding of it. One he's accomplished that, we are much more vulnerable to missing out on its deeper, more compelling essence.

So what is discipleship really about? I believe at its core discipleship is truly about transformation (another big word). Well, then what is transformation about? And transforming to what end? To me that means, in genuine, undeniable, and consistent ways, we are becoming more and more like Jesus, the most loving, alive and mature person who ever walked on this planet. It means thinking about the person you respect most, and admire the most, and then imagining them being 100 times better than they really are, which only begins to approximate Christ-likeness, *and then* somehow learning how to be honestly like them, in glorious ways, in how you live and play and relate and work.

Discipleship ideally should have awe-inspiring connotations. It should stir in us a deep hope to become the most glorious person we can be in Christ. And then somehow when we are discipling others, we are helping them truly become the man or woman they are called to be, which will by definition help them experience the richest life they could know in this world. I believe the word discipleship should engender a deep kind of passion and longing in us, which is a far cry from rote memorization, fitting in, or repeatedly confessing our sins when we feel like we're continually disappointing God.

Let me go a bit further in, from a biblical perspective, at the aim of discipleship. I believe the concepts of fullness and maturity are great ideals for framing the goals of discipleship. As we know, Jesus came that we might have life to the full (John 10:10). We know that God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus (Colossians 1:19), and that in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and [somehow] we as believers have been given fullness in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10). These are huge ideas, gigantic ideas. My understanding of fullness includes ideas like abundance, (Psalm 36:8), overflowing joy (Psalm 4: 7), beauty, happiness, energy, and gratitude (insert your own verses too!). It is about feeling truly alive, somehow overflowing with the amazing fullness of God, where all is well and all shall be well. I believe it is like feeling full after a wonderful meal, where you've had fantastic food, rich fellowship, and as you lean back and look ahead, the future is bright. It would be nice to live there more and more often, wouldn't it?

The maturity component is about being fully mature, where as a person, you're mature emotionally and spiritually, possessing a great deal of wisdom and insight, naturally

exuding humility and generosity, and navigate the whole range of emotions with grace and ease. (This stuff can happen!) Being mature means being able to live a life that bears more and more glorious, lasting fruit, where the people and systems and cultures you have influence in gradually become healthier and healthier through your wonderful cooperation with the Lord. (We'll look more closely at maturity in later issues.)

Paul does an amazing job underscoring the aim of discipleship in the stellar flow of Ephesians 4: 11-13. He says the ultimate aim of all Christian endeavors is for the body of Christ to be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become *mature* attaining to the whole measure of the *fullness* of Christ lead to (italics mine). Somehow in God's economy Christian leaders are to view their effectiveness in light of how well they helped their people experience a deep unity, and a rich experiential knowledge of Jesus that culminates in an undeniable level of maturity and fullness. That is something to think about.

When it comes right down to it, our ultimate dream at Cypress River is to support a discipleship revolution. Where to be a disciple of Jesus in a real sense means that person is making undeniable progress in becoming a truly mature, compelling, life-giving person to be around. Where to be a mature disciple of Jesus means that your life is overflowing with fullness, where people feel more alive and happy when they're around you, where they know you'll shoot straight with them because you love them and you're not afraid of the truth. Where they will ultimately want to be more like Jesus because in some ways they hope to be more like you and can't even really imagine yet how amazing it would be to be like Jesus. Wouldn't that be amazing?

I don't believe a Christian leader can truly bring great glory to God unless they are genuinely becoming a more mature disciple, and helping others become more mature disciples along the way. In these upcoming issues we will be looking further at how we as Christian leaders can mature in substantial ways and how we can help others mature in substantial ways so that the body of Christ is truly built up and we have a chance to know in deeper and greater ways the wonders of fullness in Christ. May these thoughts encourage and challenge you to become more of who you are called to be, that you might know the glory of fullness in deeper ways.