

by ***Michael d'Offay***

The word 'Christian' is the name most of us followers of Jesus would use to describe ourselves. But in the book of Acts the believers were called by a different name. In fact, followers of Jesus were only called Christians twice in Acts, and that by unbelievers! So what name or description did they use?

Mostly, these brave Jesus followers were described by the word 'disciple' and Luke uses the word 31 times in Acts to describe them (for three examples see Acts 9:10, 16:1, 21:16). Why did God cause this word to be so prevalent? It is because it describes the kind of Christians Jesus wants us to be. Let me explain why.

The word 'disciple' is not used in our culture today, yet in Jesus' day within Jewish and Greek culture, it was a common word. It was used to describe someone who devotedly followed a teacher, master or rabbi, did life with them, and learned from them. Therefore a disciple is a person who is a pupil or a student.

When I think about that word pupil or student, I have flashbacks to my inglorious days of being at school. Attending school as an under-achieving student (to my shame today), my aim was to get out enough information to pass and my relationship with many of my teachers was distant at best. Being a teacher myself in a government high school, I've experienced that the schooling system is not designed for students to do life with the teacher. It is to learn some information from a dedicated professional whose goal is not to be pastorally involved in the lives of their students. But in Jesus' day a student/teacher relationship was a very different thing. Here are some lessons from what an ancient disciple could have looked like, and some lessons for us.

### **A disciple of the Lord knows they are called.**

For all Greek religions and Judaism, the student would voluntarily choose their master. The student would initiate and decide on the best teacher who would further their knowledge. But with Jesus, we see that He chose his disciples (Mark 1:6) and called them to leave everything and follow him (Mark 10:28). They simply decided if they would respond to his call or not.

What makes Christian discipleship so humbling is that it begins as God's initiative. I can only choose him because he has first drawn me to himself (John 6:44) and the humbling bible truth is that he chooses and ordains me prior to my choosing of him. Do you have a sense that God has called you? This is one of the most important marks of being a disciple of Jesus.

### **A disciple of the Lord is devoted to the master**

A disciple of a rabbi would not only learn information from the teacher but would follow the teacher. Many would literally follow wherever he would travel in small dedicated groups. They were devoted

not only to the words of their teacher but also to the teacher himself. As many would live with their teachers, it made their relationship personal and intense; marked by loyalty and deep commitment.

Being a disciple of Jesus is an invitation to know Him personally, intensely and intimately (John 17:3). You cannot follow God from a distance. Even as we read and study our Bibles (His teaching), it is with the aim to to know the author of the Bible and not just the content in it. It is a devoted relationship with the Teacher himself that transforms our lives.

### **A disciple of the Lord is forever a student**

In other religions the student might one day rise to become a master or teacher himself, but Jesus tells us that he will always be our master and rabbi. We are called to a lifetime of discipleship; a lifetime of learning and growing up to follow our Lord (Matthew 23:8). Knowing and becoming like the master is a lifelong pursuit.

### **A disciple of the Lord brings others into relationship with the master**

When Jesus calls us to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), he is calling us to make discipleship the main goal of our lives. We don’t allow career or family or comfort to define our lives. Jesus’ mandate to us defines our reason for being. Go and make disciples. Prioritize your life in such a way that all you do will point people towards the words and works of the true master teacher, the Lord Jesus.

So we see that being a disciple is an intensely relational activity. We do life together with Jesus and with each other, as his church. Remember that a disciple of Jesus is someone who is called, who is devoted to following the Lord, who is forever learning, and who is passionately prioritizing life around making other disciples.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Michael serves in [Joshua Generation Church](#)'s Wellington congregation and is also the Dean of [TMT](#). He loves to teach, write, train up future leaders and play golf. You can follow him on [Facebook](#) or

check out his [personal blog](#).

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