

The Cycle of Christian Discipleship
Mark 3:13-19; 6:7-13
February 1, 2015

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.” They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

All of life is a cycle. There are 24 hours in one day, then a new day begins. Seven days in one week, then a new week begins. 52 weeks in one year, then a new year begins. People are born, live, die, and new people are born to take their place.

Our spiritual life flows in a similar cycle. No one begins his or her Christian walk at the top. No one is born a pastor, or a Bible teacher, or a church musician. In the same way, no one becomes a Christian and is instantly ready to be an effective witness for Christ.

Understanding the cycle of Christian discipleship will help you understand where you are and how God wants to use you. Examining the life and ministry of Jesus’ disciples will show us the cycle of Christian discipleship.

The first phase of Christian discipleship is spending time with Jesus. Our reading tells us: *“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons”* (Mk 3:13-15 NIV).

Before the disciples were disciples, they had lives. They had obligations. They had jobs. Matthew was a tax collector. Peter, James, Andrew, and John were fishermen. The specifics may be different, but in many ways these men were just like us. They had places to be, and things to do.

The text says Jesus called these men to himself and they came. The first thing Jesus wanted from them was their time. He wanted them to rearrange their lives so they could spend their time with him.

That’s just what they did. In the case of Peter and Andrew, the Bible says: *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother*

Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him (Mt 4:18-20 NIV).

These two didn't take time to talk it over. When they had the chance to spend time with Jesus, they dropped what they were doing and went to Jesus' side. When Jesus calls you, the first thing he wants from you is your time. He wants you to rearrange your life so you can spend more time with him.

In the beginning, Jesus is more concerned about your walk with him than he is your work for him. He would rather you hang out with him than burn out trying to do ministry when you're unprepared. He is more interested in doing something great in you than you doing something great for him, because once he's done something great in you, you will naturally do something great for him.

Jesus wants your time, and no time spent with Jesus is wasted time. When was the last time you spent private time in the Scriptures, or extended time on your knees in prayer, or sung praises to the Lord while driving down the expressway?

The second phase of Christian discipleship is learning through experience. Mark records Jesus calling his disciples in the third chapter of his Gospel, but Jesus doesn't send them out until the sixth chapter. What happens between chapters three and six is very important. It's during this time that Jesus gives the disciples some much needed on-the-job training.

The disciples watched and learned from Jesus. They listened as Jesus explained that he is not in league with Satan, but he has come to defeat Satan. They learned from the parable of The Sower, the parable of the Lamp on the Stand, the parable of the Growing Seed, and the parable of the Mustard Seed.

They watched in amazement as Jesus calmed the storm, healed a demon-possessed man, healed a woman from a bleeding condition, and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. They also learned how to handle rejection as they witnessed the people of Jesus' hometown reject him.

Without a doubt, many other things happened during this time that Mark didn't record. And, from all these things, the disciples learned valuable lessons that they would need when they were on their own.

They learned as Jesus took them from one experience to another. They learned lessons on how to preach, how to deal with those in need, and how to interact with unbelievers. Most of all, they learned that they could trust Jesus in any situation.

Right now, whatever you are, whatever you are doing, Jesus is teaching you something. Maybe he's teaching you how to trust him. Maybe you're getting a lesson on dealing

with difficult people. Maybe you're learning how to recognize and meet the needs of others.

Whatever the lesson, are you trying to learn? It doesn't matter whether your current experience is extremely difficult or wonderfully pleasant. God can and will use any situation to teach you some incredible truth, if you are willing to learn.

Phase three of Christian discipleship is doing ministry for Jesus. After a sufficient amount of time had passed, when the disciples had learned enough lessons and been taken through enough experiences, Jesus sent them out to do the work of God. He gave them the authority to do all the things that they had seen him do. And he fully expected them to be doing those things. Jesus didn't send those disciples on a vacation. He sent them to work.

Their assignment was never intended to be an easy one. Listen, once again, to their marching orders: *"Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them"* (Mk 6:8-11 NIV).

There are three things we must never do when we are doing the work God has given to us.

1. We must never underestimate the difficulty of our mission.
2. We must never forget the importance of our mission.
3. We must never think that what we do is our own doing.

Jesus told his disciples to go out without things we might consider necessities. He did that so the disciples would understand that whatever they accomplished was God's action not theirs. No matter what we do in the name of the Lord, all the glory belongs to him.

How is your ministry life? Don't think you don't have a ministry, because every Christian has a ministry. What are you doing for Jesus? What does Jesus want you to do? People say, "I don't know what the Lord wants me to do," but that is rarely true. With very little effort, we can see the mission God has placed on our lives. Most often, it's not a matter of knowing what to do, it's just a matter of getting busy and doing it.

It's no accident you where you are, doing what you are doing, and experiencing what you are experiencing. God knows your life condition and it is exactly where he wants you. If it weren't, God would have changed things a long time ago.

Jesus wants you to look at your situation, look at the gifts and talents he has given you, and then get busy using your situation, gifts, and talents for the benefit of others and the glory of God. God wants you to be about your ministry so others and see his grace and mercy in action.

The last phase of Christian discipleship is spending time with Jesus. After we

have spent our initial time with Jesus, we have learned what he wants to teach us, and we have done the ministry he has given us, he wants us to return to him and spend time with him. In other words, the cycle begins again.

Our text ends at Mark 6:13. However, if you advance to verse 30 you'll find these words: *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place* (MK 6:30-32 NIV).

The importance of this step cannot be overstated. You cannot continue ministering for Jesus if you don't take time out to spend with Jesus. This is the classic case of the person who says, "I can be a Christian without going to church." Well, maybe he can, but he won't be an effective Christian. He won't be a Christian who can accomplish the ministry the Lord has for him.

The United States army used to advertize that by enlisting you could "be all you can be." For a Christian disciple, to be all you can be the six disciplines must be a vital part of your life. You must worship, study Scripture, pray, serve, witness, and give. A true disciple of Jesus will submit himself or herself to this cycle, without skipping any step or spending too long on any step.

Where are you in the Christian discipleship cycle? Where do you need to be in this cycle? If you aren't sure of the answers to these two questions, the best place to start is by spending time with Jesus.