

Christ's Discipleship DEAL

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Dedicated to the incredible pastoral staff and lay leaders at First Baptist Church of Fair Oaks, California, to whom the Holy Spirit entrusted me to be nurtured, guided, and trained after I first accepted the terms of Christ's discipleship deal in 1976.

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This book comes from a collage comprised of my ministry failures and successes during the past forty years. I am so very appreciative of the patience, prayers, and perseverance of those God has used over the years to guide and guard my path.

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But most of all I want to thank God the Father for sending His cherished Son to save me, and then dispatching the Holy Spirit to equip, empower, and enable me to live, love, and labor as a follower of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

This book is about local church discipleship and leadership—two of my primary passions. In order to illustrate and apply the meaning Christ’s discipleship deal to contemporary followers and churches, I will draw upon several sports and military illustrations from my personal experiences. I believe I am in good company and on firm footing here because the apostle Paul, while writing much of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also utilized these types of analogies.

I was saved at age thirty-one and two years later was prompted by the Holy Spirit to leave my electronics systems management career in order to begin five years of academic training in preparation for vocational Christian ministry. I spent the next thirty years serving local churches as an associate pastor of education & evangelism, church planter, and lead pastor. For the past several years I have been working with denominational and nondenominational churches, providing interim ministry support, pulpit supply, and speaking at men’s ministry events. It has been my observation during this period that local church discipleship training is experiencing a steady and serious decline in emphasis.

This book, which I believe the Holy Spirit has led me to write, is prompted by my concern about the vital importance of local church discipleship training. Books recently written on this subject, such as *Not a Fan* by Kyle Idleman, *Follow Me* and *Radical* by David Platt, *All In* by Mark Batterson, *Choose The Life* by Bill Hull, and *Multiply* by Francis Chan, deal with some of the same concerns I share.

It is my contention that religious education, although commendable and valuable, is not in and of itself adequate to provide the level

of training required to equip Christ's followers to live, love, and labor effectively. During my years of competitive athletics, there were times when I was required to study strategy, learn game plans, and sit in on chalk talks. My most valuable lessons, however, were learned on the practice field under the watchful eye of my coaches. According to the Word of God, learning requires doing and not just hearing.

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

—James 1:22

If I were to ask championship coaches like Bill Belichick, Phil Jackson, or Tony La Russa what their game plan for success was, I'm sure their responses would differ. I believe their common elements, however, would be great players, proper preparation, and "all-in" participation. Championship coaches expect and demand championship attitudes and effort by all team members. They also endorse and enforce the reality that whatever is expected must be inspected. I find that many local churches are not only failing to provide adequate discipleship training, but they have no process in place to measure, evaluate, or improve the results they are currently receiving.

During the numerous men's ministry events I am involved in, I often hear statements like, "We don't understand why more of our men aren't participating in the activities and groups we schedule." Men do what they value most. The truth is most men who attend church don't really understand the necessity or value to themselves, their families, and others of discipleship training. Thus, their involvement is limited to participation as fans, consumers, and spectators. In his book *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, David Murrow does an outstanding job of addressing this problem.

Jesus enlisted twelve followers and proceeded to properly train them. His results speak for themselves. I encourage you to take the time to read this book while carefully and prayerfully reflecting upon your

current discipleship training process and results. I want to emphasize that this is not an attempt to throw stones or be critical. I love local churches and have the upmost respect for local church leaders. My only motive is helping us improve what we have been commission by Christ to do, while there is still time.

Chapter 1

CHRIST RECRUITS TWELVE TRAINEES

The Scriptures teach us that Jesus began His public ministry at around the age of thirty. After being baptized by John the Baptist, He immediately headed into the desert, where He experienced a prolonged period of fasting, and temptation at the hands of the devil. After successfully dealing with the devil's attempts to derail His redemptive mission, Christ returned to His hometown of Nazareth for a time and then relocated to Capernaum, a town near the Sea of Galilee.

The next item on Christ's agenda was to recruit twelve trainees who He spent the next three years personally preparing to provide the leadership required to continue His redemptive mission after He exited earth. It is critical that we understand how Jesus went about recruiting these twelve trainees. Take note of how He clearly, concisely, and candidly explained His reason for their relationship and what was intended for each of their roles and responsibilities.

Christ's first recruits were two brothers who were self-employed as fishermen. "While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, '*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:18-20).

After signing up Peter and Andrew, Jesus went on to immediately recruit two more trainees. "And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat

with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:21-22).

Christ's discipleship deal came with a prerequisite requirement and a promise.

These men were required to leave their families and employment in order to become followers of Christ.

Jesus promised that He would personally provide the training they required to become skilled at fishing for souls.

Notice also what Jesus didn't explain to any of them:

- Where their training would take place
- How long their training would take
- What would be required of them after completing their training

Later, as Christ attracted crowds of people who wanted to follow Him for various reasons, He repeatedly communicated the terms of His discipleship deal to these prospective followers.

“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, *‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple’*” (Luke 14:25-27, emphasis mine).

The three questions that naturally flow from Christ's communication to these crowds of prospective followers are:

Does Christ's discipleship deal still require the same degree of commitment in the twenty-first century that it did in the first century?

Is it possible to be saved and not know about or reject the terms of Christ's discipleship deal, thus functioning as a Jesus fan rather than a Jesus follower?

Is sharing the Gospel and asking for a commitment without explaining the terms of Christ's discipleship deal appropriate or some type of bait-and-switch tactic?

Let's examine Christ's conversation with a young man who came to Him with a sincere spiritual question. Jesus had been teaching near the Jordan River and when it came time for Him to leave, a young man ran up to Him, fell on His knees before Him, and cut to the chase: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). A great question that came from a sincere seeker; how would Jesus respond?

"And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother'" (vv. 18-19).

Jesus here responds by quoting from the Ten Commandments, which was part of the law of the old covenant and would have been well known by most first century Jews. "And [the young man] said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth'" (v. 20).

This young man claims that he had never violated even one of God's commandments; commendable if true, but of course impossible. Notice what Jesus instructs this young man to do. "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, '*You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*'" (v. 21, emphasis mine).

My interpretation of what Jesus said to this guy goes like this: "*If you want to follow Me and obtain eternal life, first go sell everything you own and give the proceeds to the poor.*" Why in the world would Jesus impose such a rigid requirement upon him?

"Disheartened by the saying, [the young man] went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!'" (vv. 22-23).

Sadly, the young man was not willing to meet the terms of Christ discipleship deal. And apparently, at least for this unfortunate fellow, Christ's terms were nonnegotiable. Had Christ been willing to lower the bar and ask him to sacrifice only 50 percent of his net worth, perhaps he would have been willing to sign up.

I believe Christ imposed this requirement because He realized this young man's possessions represented an insurmountable barrier between him and God's purpose and plans for his life. Elsewhere Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

Please take note of the fact that Jesus explained the terms of His discipleship deal before asking him to make his choice about becoming a follower. I find that this requirement still stands in the way of many who express interest in becoming citizens of the Kingdom of God and obtaining eternal life as members of God's family.

"Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple," Jesus said in Luke 14:33. I believe that Christ's discipleship deal requires our relationship with Him and our commitment and responsibility to function as His follower to be our main thing in every endeavor. Followers of Christ are those who have committed to prepare and proceed to fulfill our function as sacrificial servants, and redemptive representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The inspirational leadership author and speaker Stephen Covey expressed the necessity for the radical commitment Christ requires of all His followers when he wrote, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." Jesus said it this way: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

The crowds, drawn primarily by Jesus' teaching and miracles, continued to grow. However, the time came for Him to select a smaller group to train as His disciples. Jesus taught truth to crowds of people, but only personally provided discipleship training for twelve men. Teaching and training are interrelated tasks in a manner similar to lectures and labs that occur in many chemistry and physics courses. Religious education, however, is not an adequate replacement for discipleship training.

Notice how Jesus went about selecting twelve men to train.

“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

“And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach, and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15).

In the next chapter, we will take a look at how Jesus coached the Twelve in order to prepare them to carry out the purpose for which He had recruited them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Christenson has a BA from Grand Canyon University (Phoenix, Arizona) with a dual major in business and religion, as well as an M.Div. with a minor in religious education from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, previously located in Mill Valley, California, but recently relocated to Ontario, California.

During his thirty plus years of vocational Christian ministry, Richard served as a church planter in Elk Grove, California, associate pastor of education and evangelism in Fair Oaks, California, and lead pastor in Fairfield, California. For the past ten years, he has been engaged in itinerant ministry, providing pulpit supply, interim ministry services, and speaking at men's ministry events throughout northern and central California, and northwest Nevada.

Richard and his wife, Sandee, live at Lake Wildwood in Penn Valley, California, and are members of Twin Cities Church in Grass Valley, California.

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