

Going Deeper: Foundations for Growing as a Disciple

There is an ancient proverb that says, “The tree that would grow taller must send its roots down deeper.” How does a disciple of Jesus grow taller by sending his/her roots deeper? How does one grow as a disciple? It boils down to four essential elements. These are foundational emphases you must have for your life as a disciple of Jesus; without these, you will hardly grow or excel as a disciple of Jesus. The four to focus on, which will be your passion to do as a converted, regenerated disciple of Jesus involve: deepening relationship with God; involvement with spiritual community/fellowship with His people—church participation; learning, studying, memorizing the Word/Scripture; and serving others, especially through the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has given you. All of this is evidence of your salvation.¹ Let me briefly break this down for you.

Relationship with God

You are a relational being—this is the most fundamental reality to your existence. As a relational being, you were made for relationship with the Creator—the greatest Relational Being. You will never quite feel right or be right apart from a connection with Him. You are inextricably linked to God. As Paul put it: “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28, New American Standard Bible, 1995). In a connection with the Father: you are privy to His wisdom (Pr. 2:6); filled with His love (Rom. 5:5); and encouraged and strengthened (Ps. 138:3). This is the greatest connection/relationship you could ever have as a human being—it determines the quality of your life (Jn. 10:10, and alters your destiny (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 860-895, 896-912; Christopher Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples: A Practical Theology of Church* (Franklin, Tennessee: Carpenter’s Son Publishing, 2021), 85-97, 99-113.

Spiritual Community with God's People/Church

You are greatly affected by who you have relationship with (Pr. 13:20).² As someone has observed: “Show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.” You are essentially who you hang out with. It boils down to this sociological reality: you either do life with a spiritual community or the world. The contrast is stark when you look at those who live in the Kingdom versus those who live in the world (Gal. 5:19-23), and “you will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God, and those who don’t” (Malachi 3:18, New Living Translation, 2004).

A disciple of Jesus has been called out of the world to live in the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). You are to come out from the influences of the world (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18), and situate yourself in the most nourishing environment that has ever existed in human history—the church. Given this reality, you must never disconnect from the body (Heb. 10:25; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Eventually, you discover that life is done better in spiritual community.

The Word—Reading and Studying Scripture

Where do you get your ideas from? You either get your ideas about life from God (and thought leaders connected to Him) or you will inculcate the ideas promoted by the god of this world, the ruler of darkness (Jn. 8:44; 12:31; 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4) (and thought leaders connected to him). Ideas have consequences upon your personal life and the masses of humanity.³ Jesus said, you must *not* live by the intellectual “sustenance” of this world—there’s no nourishment to be found there; but you must live by the ideas of God, for “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by

² Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012); Richard M. Lerner, *Concepts and Theories of Human Development*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

³ Please refer to the following works for a sobering assessment of this statement: Arlie J. Hoover, *Ideas and their Consequences* (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1976); R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2000); Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988); Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4, New American Standard Bible, 1995). God brings you His ideas, thoughts, perspectives, commands, and your part involves:

- Studying and learning (Ps. 119:7; 2 Tim. 2:15)
- Meditating on the ideas of God from Scripture (Ps. 1:2; 119:97)
- Obeying and practicing the Word (Ps. 119:2; Mt. 7:24; Jn. 14:15)

Serving

Your significance as a disciple of Jesus involves pouring your life out for others—serving. It is an amazing path we are put on in being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus spoke of this and gave His life as an example of how to live in this great way (Mk. 10:43-45).

Significance comes in being a servant to others. You must find the *best of you* (passions, experiences, abilities, and giftedness) and pour yourself out for others. It is in this appropriate use of your life that you grow tremendously. Self-centeredness, selfishness, self-pity, etc. will minimize your life; but in serving, the full magnitude and potential of your life is realized (Mt. 16:25).

God’s very core is serving—He didn’t have to create, but it was his joy to serve humanity through the creation. Jesus modeled serving in every respect for His disciples. The church cultivates servants, and it has produced some of the most remarkable, astounding and selfless human beings in all of history. The Holy Spirit gifts you to serve in the fellowship (1 Pet. 4:10). It is apparent—the ethos of life in the Kingdom is serving.

Initially, when I first became a Christian, I had an aversion to this idea of being a servant, because I had the wrong idea of what it really meant—I thought it was being someone’s doormat. However, I soon learned that Jesus’ idea of serving involves taking the best of yourself and pouring it out to others. It is an experience of joy to impact and touch the lives of others;

and when you serve, you are nourished, and the experience has a transformational effect upon you.

Conclusion

There are four essential mandates for your life as a disciple of Jesus. *First*, you must build a wonderful relationship with your Father through prayer and the influence of the Holy Spirit. *Second*, you must find meaningful and active community with God's people in the church. *Third*, you must feed on Scripture through study, meditating, memorizing, and practicing the ideas of God. *Fourth*, you must discover what is the *best in you* (giftedness, talents, experiences) and pour yourself out in some meaningful way in the Kingdom. If you are fulfilling all these four mandates for your life as a disciple of Jesus, you will surely experience spiritual growth in the process, impact others, and bring glory to your Creator.

Resources

- Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
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