

KCF – Discipleship.

Greetings KCF family. It is sad that I cannot see you in person again, but here is the word that I believe God has given me for you. Here are two scripture readings:

Matthew 28:16-20 ESV – Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Hebrews 5:12 – 6:2

(*the only word modified is "baptisms", which in the ESV main text is "washings", but in the Greek the word is literally "baptisms" plural. And this is indicated in an ESV footnote, at least in a study bible version.)

I always find it hard to find some teaching for you all, using my brain anyway (the Spirit always knows what you need to hear, so I just try to hear from Him), since I know full well that you have all been so privileged to have had so much solid in-depth teaching over the years, from so many wonderful brothers and sisters. But I recently did some teaching on discipleship for my own local church, Inverkeithing Baptist, and felt that the same topic would be appropriate for you all.

We see from the end of Matthew's gospel that Jesus commanded the apostles to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that He taught them. The Greek word for disciple literally means student, or learner. And the Eastern way of learning was not in a classroom, like we have in the west, but it was by imitation. In the Jewish context of the Gospels, the disciples of a Rabbi would follow the Rabbi everywhere he went and learn by becoming like him as much as possible. They would share life together. Sure, there were many "formal" teaching times, where they would listen to the Rabbi, but most of their learning was informal and practical. It was by imitation. The Rabbi would do something. They would copy and learn that way. And that is exactly how Jesus taught his disciples. He called them "to be with Him" (Mark 3:16), and they followed him everywhere he went for 3 years, watched him, and then imitated him. Just as Jesus would preach, heal the sick and raise the dead and cast out demons, so too, the disciples were sent out to do the exact same things (see Matthew 10; Luke 10:1-20). They learned on the job as it were, but also, they had a model to imitate. Eventually, Jesus was no longer with the Apostles, and they were now ready to lead and make disciples of others. So, when we see the command to make disciples of all nations, this is what Jesus had in mind.

We too are to be disciples of Jesus. We are to imitate Christ (Eph. 5:1). But the way that we learn how to imitate Christ is the same way that Jesus taught the disciples. The personal sharing of life with another, mature Christian. That is how Paul taught. Remember how he instructs the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ? (1 Cor. 11:1). And the writer to the Hebrews, in the passage above also encourages the imitation of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (6:12). That whole passage actually is about moving from infancy in Christ to maturity. The Christian life is not static. Once you become a Christian you are born again, but now, just like real babies, you have to grow up to adulthood.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us two ways that we grow from spiritual infancy to maturity. One: by teaching, just like this! He writes a letter to them, instructing them in the word. Sunday teaching

is very important, as you all know. And just look at the wealth of teaching you have all had! Praise God! But two: he encourages them to imitate mature Christians. This second form of Growing is the main bulk of what is called “discipleship”. What I believe the Lord wants to say to you all today, is who are the mature Christians in each of your lives which you can imitate? If you have one or two whom you look to for spiritual guidance, amazing! You should be growing in the faith onto maturity, away from the basics of the Christian life, and getting to the point where you too can disciple others: where younger Christians can imitate you as you Imitate Christ. One question you can ask to test how mature you are is, can I honestly ask someone to imitate me as I imitate Christ? If you don’t have someone taking you under their wing, and sharing life with you, then one thing you can do is start praying for someone like that to disciple you. It doesn’t matter how old you are or how long you have been a Christian. It is possible to be a Christian your whole life, but someone has never taken you under their wing to learn from practically through imitation and sharing life. Yes, you can of course learn so much from Sunday teaching and the Holy Spirit guiding you. But learning from the mature through imitation is the best and fastest way to learn and grow in faith, in a way that your growth won’t be stunted as a Christian.

To give a practical example of what discipleship looks like today: think of me and Harry. He has literally shared his entire life with me. I originally stayed with him for 6 months for a period of intense discipleship (though the Lord had other plans, I am still living with him!), and learned from him practically everything he knows, but not just by intellectual “classroom” type learning. But by imitation and watching him. I learned how to pray, to preach, to minister to people through watching and imitating Harry and then practising it myself and learning on the job! The fact that I am able to bring this teaching to you is testament to Harry’s discipling of me! So basically, what I am trying to say is: find a Harry for your life!

House groups are a great place to start and I know you already have one. So, if you feel you haven’t really had any discipleship, start intentionally meeting in order to grow in faith through those of you who are more mature and can set an example! I should add that even the “mature” Christians are still learners of Jesus and are still growing! So, this doesn’t mean that can’t make any mistakes or anything. No, it is simply that they are skilful in the word (Heb. 5:13), have moved beyond the “elementary doctrine” or teachings of Christ, can inherit the promises of God through faith and Patience (Heb. 6:12), are able to teach (Heb. 5:12), and are able to reproduce themselves: i.e. they can bring others to faith, disciple them, and be an example to others (e.g. Paul 1 Cor. 11:1). As I said earlier, you can also pray that God would bring this person into your life. They could be someone outside your congregation (as long as you stay faithful to the congregation; the only good reason to move on is if God tells you too and you go with the blessing of the fellowship) who can input into your life. Harry was that person for me, but I still faithfully went to my local church.

With all that in mind, the purpose of all this is the great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28. You cannot make disciples if you are not made a disciple of. This is God’s challenge to his whole Church, not just you. But by God’s grace I hope you are already being made disciples, “moving onto maturity” that you may “show the same earnestness [and] have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

God bless you all.

In Christ,

Michael.