

Jesus' Full Definition of "Disciple" - What It Means for Your Family and Your Church

Theologically, we know that the Church is supposed to be on mission for God. The church is called to leave what's comfortable and propel itself out into the darkness as light, living the counter-culture life of the Kingdom of God.

But here's a question we all need to consider: **How can a church be missional unless the families are?**

I've spent the better portion of 20 years training pastors on "how to make their churches more missional," but I've come to believe that it's really not about the pastors. Every church would be missional if a good percentage of the families are, if the parents understand their role in discipling their children.

Generally, we understand the word "discipleship" to mean "teaching our children or our friends, or any convert for that matter, the truths of Scripture, the doctrine and theology of God, and establishing the moral codes of the faith." All this is good, but only if we understand the fuller meaning of Jesus' idea of what a disciple is.

When He used the word, He actually meant what we might call an "apprentice." I often use this personal example. As a house painter for 20 years, if I wanted to model evangelical Christian forms of discipleship in my business, I would hire a young man, pay him a small wage and ask him to observe me painting for a summer. If he casually watched me from his seated position on the back of my tailgate for three or four months, he could probably explain some correct concepts about house painting to a friend. But if I want to make an apprentice of this young man, I'd have to call him off the tailgate, give him absolutely every tool I had, and help him learn every aspect of actually painting. He'd have to get dirty, deal with his fears, take responsibility and so on.

Western, non-participatory discipleship, in other words, is satisfied when a person knows concepts about God, but apprenticeship isn't satisfied until the person has learned to live the life of God. This is a simple but profound switch in thinking for several reasons.

First, **God is going to hold us accountable on the level of apprenticeship.** Especially with regard to our children. More specifically, God wants us to form not just doctrine, theology and moral codes in our kids. He wants us to form the very life of Jesus in them.

Second, **apprenticeship puts the onus on the parents, not the pastors or youth pastors.** Pastoral staff can disciple your kids, but the one who is designed to spend the most time and who can actually model the life of Jesus is *you!* So they won't love Jesus, the king, or His kingdom unless they see you selling out for Him.

Third, **apprenticeship creates kingdom citizens.** It's a strange concept, but Jesus actually warned His apprentices to watch out for the "leaven of the Pharisees." The leaven was the

doctrine-focused spiritual fervency that naturally extracted them from truly loving people. Jesus didn't come to belittle them or suggest that scriptural knowledge and moral living was bad, but He came to fulfill, enlarge, and expand what true spiritual formation was. He came to model a holistic life where doctrine, theology, knowledge and morality were coupled with love, mercy, faith and action.

Lastly, and most importantly, **Western non-participatory discipleship tends to shrivel the heart, whereas active apprenticeship actually helps Jesus come alive in the heart**, and that's what causes them to *love* their king. Paul summed up the power of kingdom apprenticeship this way, and it should be the goal of every parent, "That Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). That is the whole life of Jesus:

*The **mind** of Jesus and how He viewed people and His calling to be faithful to the Father;*

*The **heart** of Jesus that broke over the things that broke the Father's heart.*

*The **character** of Jesus that protected Him and gave Him street cred with people;*

*The **mission** of Jesus which gave Him purpose for his life.*

All parents want the character of Christ, the heart of Jesus, or mind of Jesus to be developed in their children, but not the life or mission of Jesus. The character is safe, but to be honest if your children get the heart of Jesus, they may choose to live a life of service that makes you squirm. If they have the mind of Jesus or they live His life, they may not go after the American dream as many of us have. They may instead seek justice, live for the poor, put themselves in harm's way, all because they love Jesus. So the gut check begins with us: **Do you really want all of Jesus to be developed in your children?**

Read more from Hugh [here](#).