In Simple Terms, What Is Discipleship?

Simple?  Is “discipleship” simple?

How simple are relationships?

Christian discipleship is essentially about relationships. Jesus made disciples through relationships. The vast majority of pre-disciples become born-again disciples through relationships with Jesus’ disciples. Newly-born disciples become mature disciples and disciplemakers through relationships.

Even Jesus Himself was a disciple, the best Disciple, through relationship!

Really?  Jesus, a Disciple?  Yes, and to best understand discipleship, we actually start with Jesus, the greatest disciple. Why?

No one was ever discipled the way Jesus was discipled. No one ever followed the way Jesus followed. No one ever had a disciple and discipler relationship like Jesus had with His discipler, His Father.

I loved my human father – my dad. I loved him because he first loved me. I loved being with him. His love and logic made it easy for me to trust him. I assumed that whatever he told me was true. I watched him do what he did, and he shaped me. He watched me and coached me in relationships and tasks. I wanted to please him, and unconsciously I wanted to be like him. He spent much time with me, talked with me, walked with me, and little by little I came to think the way he thought, value what he valued, talk the way he talked, even react the way he reacted. His words and actions molded me, and I carry them with me to this day. In many ways, I became who and what he was. He discipled me. I was his little disciple.

However, and this is a very big however, I could never say about my relationship with my dad what Jesus said about His relationship with His Father. For example, I could never say that before I did anything, I knew it was exactly what my dad wanted me to do. Jesus said it.¹ Or, I could never say that everything I ever said was exactly what my dad wanted me to say. I did not say, nor try to say, nor even desire to say only what my dad wanted me to say. Jesus did.²

Like everyone, I had many thoughts and came to many conclusions. I never thought of bringing every thought to my dad before I came to a conclusion. Jesus did!³

No one – ever, ever, ever – that I have heard of, other than Jesus, claimed to be such a carbon copy of His Father – or of anyone. Have you heard of someone who ever claimed to be such a follower, a mimic, a clone of someone else like Jesus claimed?  He literally claimed that absolutely everything He ever did or said or concluded was from His Father.⁴ He was His Father’s perfect disciple, and it happened through relationship!

This same Jesus – this radical follower of His Father, this disciple – turns around and calls us to be His disciples so that just as He related to His Father, we would relate to Him. Just as He was full of, led by, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, so are we to be full of, led by, and empowered by His Spirit. As He was holy, so we are to be

¹ John 5:19
² Jon 8:28-29
³ John 5:30
⁴ For example: John 4:34, 5:17-20, 24, 30-31, 36, 43, 6:38, 57, 7:16-17, 8:16, 19, 26, 28-29, 38, 40, 55, 10:17-18, 25, 30, 32, 37, 12:45, 49-50, 14:7, 9, 10, 24, 28, 31, 15:10, 15, 16:13-15, 17:4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 21, 22, 26, 18:11
holy in *everything* we do. As He lived, we are to live.⁵ What He did, we are to do.⁶ Just as He was sent by His Father, we would be sent by Him.⁷

That is our picture of being a disciple of Jesus – in simple terms. As Jesus was discipled by His Father, so He, by His Word, Spirit, and Body, desires and intends to disciple us, and to help us disciple others. In future articles, we will consider the extent to which this is possible. It is not as impossible as it sounds. Stay tuned!

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⁵ 1 Peter 1:15  
⁶ John 14:12  
⁷ John 17:19, 21