

2025-01-02: Discipleship

Sources:

- [HE Metropolitan Youssef: Effective Discipleship](#)
- [HE Metropolitan Youssef: Discipleship Requirements](#)
- HH Pope Shenouda III: Discipleship

Different Ways of Learning

1. Pupil

- The word "pupil" comes from the pupil of the eye)
- Pupils learn passively (e.g. by seeing, hearing)
- Children in Elementary School are pupils

2. Student

- The word "student" comes from the same root as "study"
- Students learn by studying (e.g. experiments in a lab, research in the library, writing papers, etc.). There is more effort than just sitting in a classroom and learning by feeding.
- Those in MS, HS, College, etc. are students

3. Disciple

- From the root word "discipline"
- Disciples learn through discipline. Followers of a teacher imitate him and he disciplines them.
- Followers of a Teacher (e.g. followers of Christ, followers of desert fathers) are disciples
- The Lord disciplined His disciples:
 - He started by teaching them as pupils
 - Then He sent them out to do some ministry and then come back with a report (Luke 9: "And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done")
 - When the disciples told Him they could not cast out a demon, He told them "because of your unbelief"
 - When James and John argued about who would sit on the left or right, and the disciples were jealous He told them "no, to be the first, you must be last. To be the greatest, you need to be servant of all."
 - Through discipline, He formed their personalities so that they became His disciples

Christian means Disciple

Acts 11:19-26 When Barnabas and Paul went to Antioch they found there followers of Christ, and they added more to the Lord, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26)

The word Christian and the word Disciple are **synonymous**

The day I stop being a disciple, I have stopped being a Christian

Christianity is a religion of discipleship: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20)

A servant who simply gives a lesson is making pupils. A servant who assigns homework or activities or research on top of that, is making students. But a servant who disciplines to transform others into the Image of Christ, is the one who makes disciples. Part of making disciples is to teach them as pupils and letting them do research as students; but the discipline which aims toward transforming others into the image of Christ is an essential part of the ministry.

Into the Same Image

The Copy Machine Analogy

- A disciple of Jesus Christ should look like Jesus Christ - "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18).
- The original image is the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The copy machine is the servant. The paper is the disciple.
- The goal is to make an identical copy of the original - the Lord Jesus Christ. When you are seen looking like Christ, they will say "he is Christian" - "he is a disciple of Christ."
- Challenges:
 - The original image is PERFECT
 - You can never make an IDENTICAL copy to the original in this analogy (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ)
 - You don't have a perfect copy machine.
 - If a copy machine has a scratch, all the copies will have the same scratch
 - If there is a weakness in the life of the servant, you may see this weakness in all of the copies.
 - A servant who doesn't attend vespers, his class will be a copy of him
 - A servant who doesn't pay attention to prayer, his class will be a copy of him
 - A servant who doesn't pay attention to fasting, his class will be a copy of him
 - If parents don't care about fasting, their children will be the same
 - If parents don't care about confession, their children will be the same
 - If parents are smoking and drinking, their children may be the same
 - You don't have perfect paper.
- In order to have an image as similar as possible to the original, I need a copy machine and paper that are as perfect as possible. Even with the best copy machine and the best paper, the first challenge still exists - you will never have a PERFECT copy. But you can

have something that reflects the original.

- The factory that produces the copy machine is the Church. So the Church needs to prepare the servants very well
- A very good copy machine like St Paul, with very good paper like Timothy, Titus or Philemon, results in very good copies.

Principles of Discipleship

How do I become a learner?

"The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.
The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away." (Isaiah 50:4-5)

We will take these two verses as our guide. These two verses are about the Lord Jesus Christ. "I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6)

The Lord Jesus made Himself a Disciple before making disciples

1. Developing the Heart of the Disciple

"The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,

The Lord Jesus had the Tongue of the Learned

- When Jesus was 12 years old, He sat in the Temple among the teachers, asking questions and listening to them.
- "Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." (Luke 2:46-47)
- The Lord Jesus was **submissive to His Parents - St Mary and St Joseph the Carpenter**. Even though St Joseph was not His father biologically. He submitted them and obeyed them.

One problem in this generation is that I know everything.

- If someone gives me advice, I don't take it well.
- If my parents give me advice, I say:
 - "I'm in college"

- "I'm in grad school."
- "Why are you treating me like a kid?"
- "I know what I'm doing!"
- We think that we know and understand more than our parents, more than our Abouna, more than our servants.
- If this is how you think, then you lost the spirit of discipleship.

Pope Theophilus went to the desert to listen to a word of wisdom from the elder St Arsenius. He went as a disciple (despite being the POPE!)

Some people go to confession not to listen to advice, but to challenge and convince Abouna to approve their agenda.

- If you're here for approval, if you think what you're doing is right, go do it.
- But if you're here for advice, here is the guidance according to the Scripture and the Church Teaching.

If I have the Tongue of the Learned, I will go to seek advice without intention of showing off, or of convincing someone, or starting a debate, make an argument, but with the intention of learning.

The Tongue of the Learned is...

- When we open the Scripture, we have to have the heart and tongue of a learner. Be a disciple to the Scripture.
- Be a disciple to the Early Church Fathers and their writings.
- When we go to our Father of Confession, we have to have the heart and tongue of a learner. Be a disciple to your Father of Confession.
- "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6-8) If you have the heart of the disciple, you will learn even from nature.
 - Look at the ant
 - Look at the birds
 - Look at the lilies of the field

A true disciple, at every moment of his life, is learning something

St Antony is said to be like a bee going from one flower to another flower in order to learn spirituality and how to live the true monastic life.

Parents can discipline, Abouna can discipline. But if you do not have the heart of a learner, all of this discipline will be in vain and produce nothing.

2. The Purpose of Becoming a Disciple

"That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is weary."

Selflessness

In college to be a doctor, lawyer, engineer. Maybe I am learning to have a good career, good money, comfortable life. But how many are learning in order to serve others and to help them? The heart of the disciple, is the selfless heart. A person who denies himself.

In season

- If you are in a difficult time and no one asked about you and then one month later, someone came and gave you a word of comfort, you might say in your mind "it's too late. I needed this one month ago."
- When the Lord spoke about the faithful and wise steward, He said: "to give them their food in due season."

The Purpose of Becoming of Disciple is to Serve Others

- "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)
- To be truly in the likeness of Christ, I must serve others

3. The Discipline of the Disciple

He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.

It is not "I will attend seminary, graduate, and now I've finished my discipleship" - "I will go through preservatives and when I'm finished, I'm done with discipleship"

Discipleship is a continuous life-long process

"Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:23) - even in the last moments of his life, St Paul asked for the books and parchments so he could read, learn and continue his discipleship. St Paul who preached in three continents, saw the third heaven, wrote more than half of the New Testament, who was disciplined at the hand of Gamaliel and learned by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ directly - and in the last breaths of his life, asked for the books and parchments to read and to study and to learn.

The Lord gives us an opportunity to learn every morning - and not just every morning, but every moment of every day

4. The Attitude of the Disciple

The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away."

A true disciple is the one who is not rebellious and does not turn away.

Does not pick and choose "I like this, I will take it. I don't like this, I will leave it." Sometimes even with the Scripture or Early Church Fathers - I like this verse, I will use it. I don't like this verse, I ignore it "It's not fit for the 21st Century." Open Buffet style.

The Lord Jesus did not turn away

- The Father told the Son "You will go and be High Priest. And as High Priest, You will have something to offer. I am not pleased with the blood of animal sacrifices. You will take flesh and offer Your Body." And the Son's response: "The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:5-6)
- ⁵ Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin
You had no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.' " (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Life of Discipleship

So far, we have been talking about discipleship in a vague sense. One should be a disciple of:

From HH Pope Shenouda III Book Discipleship

- Learn from the Scripture
- Learn from the Lives of the Saints
- Learn from the Writings of the Early Church Fathers
- Learn from the Faults of Others
- Learn from silence
- Learn from books
- Learn from nature
- Learn from the rites of the Church
- Learn from the events and happenings of our life
- Learn from a Spiritual Father

HH Pope Shenouda goes into far greater detail and many examples in his book, and I recommend for you to read those chapters.

Now let's shift our focus to the discipleship of a spiritual father. Learn from a Spiritual Father.

Discipleship of a Spiritual Father

Firstly, our discipleship is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are called Christians meaning "Disciples of Christ." So how can I be discipled to another person as a spiritual father?

The answer to this is in 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." - How many generations of discipleship do we see here?

1. The Lord Jesus
2. St Paul
3. St Timothy
4. "faithful men"
5. "others also"

St Paul writes: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."

We are talking here about how you can be a disciple to your father of confession, or another spiritual father, or your father the bishop, or your parents, or your servants

How did Christ Disciple the Twelve?

The Lord Jesus used five methods to teach the disciples and prepare them for their ministry:

1. Active learning
 - He would take them on the side and teach them in private, or he would give a sermon publicly and they would be present to hear it.
2. Passive learning
 - They lived with Him and watched Him
 - When He forgave
 - When He prayed
 - From His faith
 - From His care for others
3. Direct Supervision
 - He let them participate with Him in the service (e.g. shadowing)
 - Feeding the multitude, He took their opinion, then had them split the people, then had them distribute, collect the fragments, etc.
4. Indirect Supervision
 - He sent them to serve by themselves, gave them all that they needed, and when they came back, they told Him all that they had done; He corrected the part that they missed
5. Retreat
 - He took time with them to be away from the crowd
 - He had time for prayer and reflection and meditation with them

Why am I mentioning these points?

To see the seriousness of the Twelve in their discipleship.

- Imagine if the Lord wanted to take them to give them a sermon or a lesson and someone said "I don't feel like it right now." This happens today when our spiritual father is giving a sermon and I am sleeping, or I am on my phone. Or my Youth Meeting servant is giving a

topic and I'm coming late, after the topic.

- Imagine if a disciple only showed up when there was a sermon; or he skipped all the meetings and got the "notes" from someone else, but he didn't have any relationship with the Lord. He didn't spend time with the Lord, He didn't see the miracles, He didn't see how the Lord interacted with people, etc. He would be missing an integral part of the discipleship.
- Imagine if every time the Lord told them "I need your help with a service" one said "sorry, I can't today" or just didn't respond
- Imagine if one disciple went on his missionary trip and when he came back and the Lord asked him "give me a report" he said "oh sorry it's confidential"
- Or if a disciple attended all of those events, but when the Lord did a spiritual retreat or a time for prayer, the disciple skipped it. He would be missing a big part of his discipleship... but how many times do we skip prayer in Youth Meeting or Servants Meeting, or miss Matins, or during the Agpeya prayers of the Liturgy, we don't even recite a single psalm?

When being a disciple to a spiritual father, all of those aspects are necessary. The Life of Discipleship requires all of those things

Characteristics of Spiritual Fatherhood

1. Secure in his faith, experienced; reflects the Lord Jesus
 - "If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14)
 - Remember the copy machine - you can expect to become like the spiritual father you are following
 - You want a spiritual father who has experience - personal experience, in that he has gone through the spiritual life, and also experience from other people he has mentored over many years. Many people when a new priest is ordained flock to him to be their father of confession, but it's better to wait and to give him time in his service first. And NEVER change spiritual fathers or father of confession without first asking your original father of confession for his guidance and blessing in doing so.
2. Gives sound guidance and advice supported and reinforced by the Scripture and the lives and sayings of the saints
 - You want to have a spiritual father who gives you sound guidance and advice
 - A good spiritual father will give you good advice, and this advice will be backed by the Scripture and the lives of the saints
3. Accessible
 - You want a spiritual father that you have access to on a regular basis. You see him weekly, you have several opportunities during the week to meet with him or to ask him for 5min of his time. You don't want a priest who lives in a different state or Timezone than you. You don't want a priest or a bishop who is responsible for a thousand other things and may take a few days to get back to you. Of course, you can have more than one spiritual father, but the main father of confession should be someone who is accessible
 - There is a story about Fr Mikhail Ibrahim when his wife departed and that evening he was taking confessions and meetings and consoling a man whose wife had departed six months prior

4. Open to questions and asking for explanation
 - A good spiritual father will always be open to questions and asking for explanations
 - This is different from one who entertains debates and arguments and controversy
5. Gives principles to apply according to the character of the disciple, knowing that (s)he will not be the exact copy
 - A good spiritual father knows your strengths and weaknesses, your character, your personality. He does not want to erase your personality. He knows you are your own person.
 - He also knows that he is his own person with his own personality, psychology, etc.
 - He knows you will never be an exact copy of him or of some ideal
6. A person can have more than one spiritual guide
 - Take the example of St Antony who was said about him that he was like a bee going from flower to flower

What do I need Guidance In?

- Spiritual Life
 - Confession and spiritual guidance
 - Do not use the spiritual father as a means of implementing spiritual desires (i.e. with your mind made up). Some people use the time of confession to “inform” the Father Confessor about their plan – “during the fast I am going to eat this and this, I’m going to pray this and that” - “I have started to pray seven times a day and it’s working out good for me”
 - Maybe these things all seem like the right thing to do. But it is for your Father of Confession to try and assess your motivation, your intentions, your spiritual level, your readiness. The Scripture says: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12)
 - Cultivating virtue
 - It is not good to travel rapidly along the spiritual road. A virtue acquired easily can be lost just as easily... and then it is harder to reacquire.
 - Books to Read
 - You should take the guidance of your Spiritual Father before starting to read a new book. Maybe he gives you general guidance like “read any Pope Shenouda book” or maybe he tells you “for now stay away from books written by Eastern Orthodox or Catholics” – this kind of advice is for your own good! He may tell you not to read a Book of Scripture like Song of Songs, or Revelation because you are not well equipped for them; obey him.
 - Prayers to Pray
 - Service Opportunities
 - Not everyone is ready for every service
 - Or maybe accepting a new service would interfere with your current service; and maybe you don't see how
- Education and Career Choices
 - Imagine someone who goes to Abouna and says “By the way, I’m moving to such and such state for school starting next week” – and it’s the first time Abouna is hearing of it. Did you seek his advice? Maybe you are not ready to move out from your parents house. Maybe you are not ready to live in a place that does not have a

church. Maybe you are not ready to leave the life of service that you are just starting. Everyone is different. Or someone all of a sudden says “I can’t serve anymore because I’m gonna start working overnight” – maybe you are not yet at the spiritual level to work overnight...

- Events to Attend; Places to Go
- Friends, Courtship, Relationships
- Mental Health

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