

SHIFT 2

from learn-ed to learn-er

Disciple makers must shift from being *learn-ed* to being a *learn-er*. People often think that they have to know a lot of information (i.e., to be learned) to be a disciple maker, but what they really need is to become a learner. If you can be a learner, you can be a disciple maker. The pressure to be learned is an expectation for those who practice informational discipleship, but in relational disciple making the need to be a learner is the essential expectation.

I hear a common excuse from people when we stress that each and every follower of Jesus should be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples with Him. This is the excuse I hear, and it's very worrisome: "But I can't do that because I don't know enough to teach others."

This is a red flag that they don't know this essential aspect of disciple making—that it's not about how much you know but about how much you're willing to learn. It's a common excuse (and very heartfelt), but it's worrisome because it demonstrates a misunderstanding of the word "disciple."

The word "disciple" does *not* mean, *I know a whole lot—so much, in fact, that I can teach you all the ways of King Jesus. That means you*

should come and listen to me teach you, and maybe one day, you will grow to know enough to go and teach others, too. This type of thinking is not the kind of thinking we want in a disciple maker, even if they do know a lot!

By no means do I intend to discount the importance of teaching. It is one of the key words in Matthew 28:18-20, “... *to teach* all that I have commanded you.” But, as I suggest in the previous chapter, we need to do more than just teach His ways like we did in the twentieth century: under florescent lights to people in uncomfortable chairs. Instead, we must look back to Jesus and how He taught the ways of the Kingdom: under the light of the sun and the moon to people with whom He walked in daily relationship.

The word “disciple” does *not* mean, *I don’t have to learn anymore because I earned my Jesus Ph.D. and my not-gonna-go-to-hell tenure.*

The meaning of the word “disciple” actually implies something more like this: *I am a learner and will always be a learner. I’m more like an apprentice who learns from a Master and imitates Him, doing what I’ve seen Him do in my everyday life. I’m more like a son or a daughter who lives in the presence of my Daddy and thus lives on purpose to invite others along like He is their Daddy, too.*

We never learn enough to earn our “discipleship degree.” We never quit being a learner either because a disciple *is a learner*. Not knowing enough, then, is not a valid excuse if we understand the word “disciple.”

What if we moved our understanding of a disciple maker from being a “teacher” to being a “learner”? Like I posed in the previous chapter, what if the primary metric of “teaching” is not about

when we teach but about when learning happens? What if we took the priority off becoming a learned teacher and instead prioritized ongoing learning as we invite along those believing and those who have yet to believe to discover His ways along with us?

Relational discipleship makes room for this, creates an environment for this, and initiates the type of relationships where learning *together* is central. That is, I don't have to be *learn-ed* to make disciples, but I do have to always live as a *learn-er* in order to invite along others into disciple-making relationships.

Hopefully, it encourages you to move beyond what you might see as a limitation—*I don't know enough to teach*—toward what is actually an opportunity—*I am learning to live the ways of the King within life-giving community*. That's what a disciple maker is, and that's a significant shift that we need to make so that more people can join the ranks of disciple makers.