

Apprentice to Jesus

A challenge to discipleship

What does it look like to be **formed**?

What are some things in your day-to-day life that you would say form and shape you?

- Example: when you spend time with family, friends, or coworkers, do you often find yourself picking up some of their tendencies, mannerisms, or behaviors?
- How easily or quickly does this happen?

My point is this: we are always being formed by *something*. We are constantly being molded and shaped by the things in our lives with which we surround ourselves. There are no stagnant humans; no one has “reached” the point of never growing or changing again.

Now that we have explored the idea of being formed, and established formation as a lifelong process, a question arises: What might it look like for Jesus to have “first dibs” on the forming of your life? What if Jesus was the one you began to look more like, act more like, speak more like?

- The immediate answer to this question might be “yes, absolutely, I want Jesus to have the biggest influence on my life”- but this is a question I want to dive into a little more deeply.
- Consider the weight, the intention, and the work it takes to truly become like Jesus every day. To deny the temptations of this world, to love others without restraint, to lay down His life for those He loved.
- This takes day in and day out dedication to Jesus and to the Way He taught.

I want to invite you to intentionally form your life around Jesus with me- to lay yourself down for the sake of being formed by Jesus into a person of greater love.

Author John Mark Comer writes a book called “Practicing the Way” from which I have drawn many of these ideas. We will dive into Comer’s definition of “apprenticeship” to Jesus, along with the three main goals of a life of apprenticeship to Jesus, which are:

1. Be with Jesus
2. Become like Him
3. Do as He did

I want to invite you to intentionally form your life around these three goals. To follow Jesus is to become His apprentice- to learn to live our lives in a way that emulates who He is. The heart and soul of apprenticeship is to be with your master for the purpose of becoming like your master. The invitation is to be with Jesus, to become like Him and to do as He did, together.

Jesus’ invitation to “come, follow me” can also be understood as an invitation to “come, apprentice under me”. Jesus invited His disciples to learn alongside Him, to enroll as His students, to undertake the lifelong journey of becoming more like Him.

An excerpt from Practicing the Way follows on the next page(s).

excerpt from Practicing the Way (Comer, pp. 11-13):

Disciple is a noun, not a verb

The problem with the word *disciple* is that we don't use it much outside church circles. The Hebrew word is *talmid*, and it simply means "a student of a teacher or philosopher"-- not just a learner but a practitioner of an embodied way of life, one who is diligently working to be with and become like their master.

I would argue that the best word for translating *talmid* into English is the one I've been using for the last few pages: *apprentice*. This is such a helpful word. It conjures up a mode of education that is intentional, embodied, relational, and practice-based-- a type of learning that is totally different than what I grew up with.

Jesus' model of apprenticeship was a far cry from our Western educational system. As one pair of scholars put it, "learning wasn't so much about retaining data as it was about gaining essential wisdom for living, absorbing it from those around him. This was...the ancient method whereby rabbis trained their *talmidim*, or disciples." to follow Jesus, then, meant to walk alongside him in a posture of listening, learning, observation, obedience, and imitation. For Jesus' first apprentices, the goal wasn't to pass a test, get a degree, or receive a certificate to frame on your office wall; it was to master the art of living in God's good world by learning from Jesus how to make steady progress into the kingdom of God. It was less like learning chemistry and more like learning jujitsu. But whatever translation you adopt-- disciple, apprentice, practitioner, student, follower-- let me state the obvious: *Talmid* is a *noun*, not a verb.

People regularly ask me "who are you discipling?" or "who disciplined you?" But as far as I can tell, not one time in the entire New Testament is *disciple* used as a verb. Not once. Grammatically speaking, then, to use disciple as a verb is bad form.

Case in point: just attempt to use any of its synonyms as a verb...

Christian: "who are you Christian-ing?"

Wait, what? Christian isn't something you *do*, it's someone you *are*.

Believer: "who are you believer-ing?"

Help me out here, I don't get it. Do you believe (trust in Jesus) or not?

Follower: "Who are you follower-ing?"

I'm so confused: You either follow Jesus or you don't.

People have come to me actually *bitter* because their former pastors "did not disciple" them. What they usually mean is that these pastors didn't spend one-on-one time with them. While I'm *all for* pastors giving their time to foster people's growth in Jesus, I would argue that you can't "disciple" somebody any more than you can "Christian" them, "believer-er" them, or "follower-er" them. Please hear me: this is *not* just semantics. Language matters.

Here's why: if *disciple* is something that is done *to* you (a verb), then that puts the onus of responsibility for your spiritual formation on *someone* else, like your pastor, church, or mentor. But if *disciple* is a noun-- if it's someone you *are* or are not-- then no one can "disciple" you but Rabbi Jesus himself.

You must choose to accept Jesus' invitation to a life of apprenticeship.

If you choose to enroll as his student (and I very much hope you do) that means... your entire life is architected to this threefold aim:

To be with Jesus, to become like Him, and to do as He did.

This is *the* animating passion of your existence. "The rest are just details", as Einstein said.

This journey of apprenticeship to Jesus is not just a semester-long, or a year-long, or even a 4-year-long process-- it is a lifelong journey of submitting our lives to Jesus to be formed into people of love who look increasingly like Him.

We are meeting together for "discipleship" for the purpose of becoming and being disciples of Jesus-- the one true Rabbi. We are seeking to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to do the things Jesus did.

I don't want you to seek to become like me. I will fail and disappoint and fall short. Let's meet together with the driving goal of becoming more and more like Jesus every day-- to love Him, to seek Him, and to know Him more.