

## Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus' Time - Part II

**Martina Gracin**

Visoko evandeosko teološko učilište, Osijek  
martinagracin@gmail.com

**Ervin Budiselić**

Biblijski institut, Zagreb  
ebudiselic@bizg.hr

UDK: 27-1:27-23:277

Original scientific paper

<https://doi.org/10.32862/k.14.1.2>

### Abstract

*The usage of the terms “disciple” and “discipleship” are very common among Evangelical Christians and the meanings of these terms seem self-evident. However, although these circles adopted such language, it was already present in the Jewish culture of Jesus' time. The purpose and the goal of this article is to analyze the concept of discipleship in its original context and see how much the meaning of this term is removed from the meaning that this term has today. This topic we will address in two parts. In the first part, we studied the Old Testament (OT) roots of discipleship and the Jewish educational system in Jesus' time and analyzed whether Jesus himself, and in what measure, passed through that Jewish educational system and how and in what ways he used this model in the discipleship process of his disciples. In this part of the article, we will address the practice of discipleship in the first Church, and after that offer some guidelines on how to apply Jesus' concept of discipleship in the Church today.*

*The key focus of this article is the problematic of applying principles of discipleship that were present in the context of Jewish culture, on the Church today, since our analysis reveals that understanding of discipleship today does not correspond entirely to the understanding of that concept in Jesus' time. Although discipleship then and now contained passing on information, it was*

*more important to follow the rabbi and learn from him in a close relationship. It is concluded that a possible solution for this challenge must be sought first and foremost in the change of thinking about what discipleship truly is (change of focus), and then in the practice through mentoring or working in small groups purposefully expose both sides (both “teachers” and “students”) to the experience of teaching through example.*

Key words: *discipleship, rabbi, talmid, relationship, teaching by example, mentoring, small groups*

## 1. DISCIPLESHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

After Jesus’ disciples probably went through a three-year period of training with Jesus, he gave them what we call today “the Great Commission” (Mt. 28:19-20). They were the ones who now had to go and make Jesus’ disciples of all nations, so in this part of the article we will observe how and in what way Jesus’ disciples continued that process of discipleship. Inevitably, at this point, the process of discipleship had to experience some change: now Jesus’ disciples had to be *teachers* to other people but Jesus who is no longer with them on earth, remains the ultimate Teacher they all need to follow and model.

On the one hand, after Jesus’ departure, his disciples continued that process of discipleship in but also outside of Israel. In Israel, discipleship was practiced among Jews as well as outside of Israel among Jews in a diaspora and among Gentiles. This is important to emphasize because, based on what we already discussed, we need to assume that Jews have a certain *foundation* which enabled that discipleship among them occurs on a different and probably faster level. On the other hand, when we talk about Gentiles, we have to assume certain lagging or worse starting position because those people probably did not have the same level of Scriptural knowledge that may be assumed among the Jews. Hence, let us look at how the early Church passed on information (knowledge) and practiced formation.

### 1.1. Passing on Information

If we go back one more time on Mt. 28:18-20, it is obvious that Jesus commands his disciples to teach other people “to obey everything I have commanded you.” Notice that Jesus does not leave behind any written record of his teachings nor does he directly command his disciples to make one. The reason for this we can probably find in the fact that the practice of memorization was developed among the Jews. Hence, giving of this command assumes that Jesus’ disciples in those

two or three years had memorized Jesus' teachings. In the first part when we discussed three levels of Jewish education (*Bet Talmud*, *Bet Sefer* and *Bet Midrash*), we demonstrated that to the great extent were based on the practice of memorization, that is, "learning by heart." Children from an early age were trained to memorize significant portions of text. As a reminder, in *Bet Sefer* from the age of five or six children memorized the Torah and in *Bet Talmud* from the age of 10 to 12 (or 15) children memorized the oral Torah as well. Some would even argue that in *Bet Talmud* practice of learning was exclusively done through memorization. Likewise, we saw that first and foremost obligation of disciples in *Bet Midrash* was to memorize the rabbi's words, and in that cultural context, the process of oral tradition was a way of communication among generations. As we previously said, the written works were reserved for the Scriptures, but teachings of a teacher, a learned rabbi, were memorized. This basic method of learning – memorization, Riesner (1992, 810) connects with the stories Jesus taught, pointing out that "As an itinerant preacher, Jesus repeated them many times. They would have quite naturally embedded themselves in the hearers' minds. In addition, as the example of the Lord's Prayer shows (Lk. 11:1–4), one may even assume that Jesus' disciples learned some material from him by heart in rather direct fashion." Furthermore, Gundry (1992, 53) and Riesner (1992, 810), claim that the Jesus tradition was later narrated during the Lord's Supper and in sermons in the form of a school tradition as the collection of information that was taught and learned (1 Cor. 11:23-26; 15:1-8). Ladd (1967, 149–150) reminds us that Paul also encourages the Thessalonians to hold fast to the traditions they had received from the apostles, whether orally or by written word (2 Thess. 2:15). Based on all this we can conclude that the cultural context of learning of that time helps us understand why Jesus' teaching was preserved through memorization and passed on through oral tradition. So, whether it was intentional or expected memorization, or just a usual learning through repetition, for the believers in the early Church memorization of Jesus' words, culturally speaking, was not something foreign.

This period of oral tradition of Jesus' teachings poses before us many questions. However, Ladd (1967, 152–153) rightly claims that in Christian circles this topic is often neglected and reminds us that the expression "the word of God" in the NT does not refer to the written books of the Bible but to oral tradition before it received its written form. The same expression is also used for Jesus' teaching (and not books of the OT or the NT) that was originally preserved in oral form (Lk. 5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28; also "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you" (Heb. 13:7, NIV)). Although Jesus' Great Commission includes memorization and oral tradition, that commission does not exclude learning through written records. Even though each member of the early Church did not have his own copy of "the Bible," sacred texts were written down, read, and memorized.

In the same way, although original Jesus' teachings were transmitted in an oral way, eventually, parts of it were written down (Lk. 1:1), epistles become one way of transmitting of Jesus' teaching, and finally gospel records emerged (Lk. 1:3-4). Notwithstanding all these written records, Paul gives an interesting statement in Col. 3:16, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly" (NIV). For sure, Paul encourages the readers of his epistle to memorize Jesus' teaching.

## 1.2. Passing on Formation

After we briefly analyzed how information was passed down in the early Church, now our focus shifts to formation – that is, in what capacity Jesus' way of discipleship was passed on and spread into the early Church. We know that the first group of Jesus' disciples followed Jesus day and night wherever he went. How did the process of discipleship looked like in the next generation and what happened with three levels of Jewish education? Was Jesus' discipleship mandate connected with these three levels of education or just the last one? Did an average disciple in the early Church had some "rabbi" that he followed, or discipleship occurred according to some other model(s)? If we want to analyze the discipleship model in the early Church, the apostle Paul would be good starting point. Naturally, by using *only* apostle Paul we cannot summarize all discipleship processes in the early Church, but his example can be indicative for us.

We know that Paul studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), so we can conclude that Paul had a third level of Jewish education. Later, when he understood that Jesus is Messiah, Barnabas was his teacher and their relationship can be viewed as one example of that close "teacher-student" relationship in the early Church. According to Goldstein (2010, 68), Barnabas had several common points with Paul: both experienced conversion to the faith in Jesus as Messiah, and both had a strong Jewish background (that assumes that Barnabas also had a complete Jewish education), although Paul was a Pharisee and Barnabas was Sadducee. Pointing out the nature of their joint teaching ministry in Antioch, Hempel (2015, 47– 48) observes that they did not go there to give a onetime speech but rather they stayed in the community, building up the church over time.

Furthermore, we can see how Paul operates on a *Bet Midrash* level, and when he does, we can speak about direct transfer of the model that Jesus used with his disciples. An example of that would be Paul's relationship with Timothy.<sup>1</sup> Paul

1 Perhaps we need to notice that Timothy is described as the one who knows the Scriptures from his youth. Based on this we could say that tentatively Timothy meets the conditions for *Bet Sefer* and *Bet Talmud*, so Paul can enter with him into the *Bet Midrash* type of relationship.

addresses Timothy, his disciple as his son and considers himself to be his father (1 Tim. 1:2) because he was truly Timothy's teacher from which he learned in this close (fulltime) relationship. Hence, Paul could say to Timothy: "But you, you have closely followed my teaching, conduct, purpose in life, trust, steadfastness, love and perseverance" (2 Tim 3:10, CJB). Besides, a significant change in discipleship process was that unlike with Jesus, teachers who serve as models are to the great extent imperfect, and they should be followed as long as they follow Christ. Hence, Willard (2006, 10) writes:

Paul's example instructs us. He could say, in almost one breath, both 'I am not perfect' (Philippians 3:12) and 'Do what I do' (Philippians 4:9). His shortcomings—whatever they were—lay back of him, but he lived forward into the future through his intention to attain to Christ. He was both intent upon being like Christ (Philippians 3:10–14) and confident of upholding grace for his intention. He could thus say to all, 'Follow me. I'm found!' ("Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ"—1 Corinthians 11:1).

Even though in the example of Paul and Timothy we have a discipleship that reflects *Bet Midrash* model, we need to realize that not everyone in the Church had this "Paul-Timothy" experience. All of the members of some local church were not "Timothy" to Paul, nor Paul had an opportunity with everyone to have the same kind of relationship that he had with Timothy. However, even though Paul does not have with everyone *Bet Midrash* type of discipleship that does not mean that this model is not present in Paul's ministry. In 1 Cor. 4:15, we can read that Paul considers himself a "father" to the group of believers. Such language, as we already established, reflects a model of education in which teacher becomes a "father" to his student that is in actuality Jesus' Jewish way of discipleship. Paul would likewise charge different groups of believers to "follow him" (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil 3:17) which again, reflects that same model of learning by following an example of a teacher. It is interesting that Paul in this and other texts speaks about "imitation" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) which demonstrate that even though he does not have with everyone the same relationship like with Timothy, he offers himself as an example to everyone. Hence, Paul must teach by example, but the ultimate model of teacher that needs to be imitated is Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

2 Some biblical texts that speak about the concept of following or imitation are: Jn 13:15; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Eph 5:1-2; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6-7; 2:14; 2 Thess 3:7, 9; 1 Tim 1:16; 4:12; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:10-11; Tit 2:7; Heb 6:12; 13:7; 1 Pet 2:21; Jam 5:10; 1 Pet 5:3.

### 1.3. The Conclusion about the Discipleship in the New Testament Church

With Jesus' ascension, the early Church was faced with two key changes that also presented challenges. The first change was that Jesus as the perfect example or model was no longer *physically* present among his disciples. The goal that Jesus' disciples be like him remains the same, but that task to be a model for someone now falls into the lap of people who are imperfect and limited models. We could say that instead of one perfect model, we have a bunch of imperfect models who have the task to present to the believers a complete image of Christ. The second change was that mission now goes beyond Israel and engages the Gentiles that do not have the same prerequisites or foundation in the Scripture knowledge as Jews have.

Despite all changes, we can say that the *form* and the *content* of discipleship remain the same. Two foundational things that have its root in the ministry of Ezra and relationship between Elijah and Elisha – the knowledge of the Scripture and teaching/learning through example and imitation – are transferred into Judaism of Jesus' time. Jesus continues to use this model and so does the early Church. Regarding the knowledge of the Scripture, Gentile church or better to say Gentile believers needed some additional instruction in this area. Regarding the teaching by example, we establish that such discipleship model continues to be present in the Church. Admittedly, in some modified form. Because Paul was a "father" to Timothy but not all Christians in the early Church had an opportunity to learn in such close relationship with someone and have such a clear example in front of their eyes. However, discipleship continued to be carried out within the context of relationships in the Church, even though given these different circumstances, they were of varying intensity and varying degrees of intimacy.

## 2. APPLICATION OF JESUS' DISCIPLESHIP MODEL TODAY

Before we deal with the application of Jesus' discipleship model, we need to clarify what is at stake if we ignore or neglect Jesus' discipleship model that is in its nature very Jewish. The first thing that we need to emphasize is that the Bible is the single story and not a pile of more or less connected stories. Accordingly, the Bible is: a) Jewish; b) story; c) about the seeds. *Jewish* because it is grounded in Jewish (Eastern) mindset; *story* because the Bible is in its design a narrative;<sup>3</sup>

3 In contemporary language, the Bible is like TV series that has several seasons and in each season 22 or 23 episodes. Regardless of number of seasons and episodes, they are all part of one main storyline.

*seeds* because the thread line of the whole Bible is actually Genesis 3:15 where God announces an enmity between “two seeds.” That story begins with the creation where everything that was created was “good” and “blessed,” and the creation itself was in the state of the “rest.” After the fall, the creation becomes filled with chaos, death, disorder, curse, etc. God did not give up from his creation but desires to bring it back under his rule. Therefore, he chooses Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) as his chosen seed and through him decides to return “blessing” into his creation. When God promises that “all nations”<sup>4</sup> will be blessed somehow through him, at that point, we do not know what that exactly mean and how God will accomplish that. If we continue to follow biblical story, we come to book of Matthew, which begins his record with the following words: Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ, υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” What message Matthew wants to communicate? Matthew claims that Jesus of whom he writes stands in the line of the elected seed and that Jesus is Christ but also son of David and son of Abraham. In other words, he fulfils everything that was promised to David and Abraham. When we come to the end of Matthew where Jesus gives Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20), Jesus commands discipleship of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη “all nations” – which is an echo of the words that God gave to Abraham in Gen 12:3 (also, see: Gen 18:18; 22:18). We said all this to point out the following: in the biblical story, *discipleship* is revealed as a way to return blessings of God’s reign to the creation. If we combine Gen. 12:3 with what was said in Mt. 28:19 to what God announced in Gen. 12:3 in Mt. 28:19 becomes obvious how God plans to accomplish that. Hence, discipleship is not some elective activity or extra requirement for those who want something more, but it is a God-given way of spreading God’s blessing into the world. That purpose extends from Abraham to the Church today.

This leads us to another thing we pointed out at the beginning of the article: it is of utmost importance not to overlook the fact that Jesus taught in the cultural context of Jewish education. This alone can help us to see the complete biblical picture of discipleship and the height of the task assigned to the Church. Assuming that the original Jesus’ disciples went through the initial (first and maybe second) stages of that education (due to the in which they lived), we have concluded earlier that Jesus’ teaching method is irresistibly reminiscent of the third stage that the rabbis practiced with their disciples. After the resurrection, Jesus ascends to heaven leaving his disciples with a Great Commission (Mt. 28:20). Discipleship in the Church enters into the new phase because Jesus is no longer physically with his disciples. Now we have ministers like Paul who in a way, take on the role of teacher. Likewise, we have various ministries in the Church that

4 In Genesis 12:3 as the recipients of that blessing God states “all nations (tribes) of the earth.”

have the task of equipping believers for ministry in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). It is interesting to see that the cultural context is also partly changing, because as Gentiles come to faith, they inevitably lack foundational levels of education that we assumed for Jesus' original (Jewish) disciples. That assumes that for Gentile believers additional (scriptural) education was required, but regardless of the new cultural context, the primacy of Scriptural knowledge and teaching by observing and following someone's example remains a permanent practice of the early Church imitation as we have seen in Paul's example.

If there was a challenge in transferring the quality of discipleship from the way Jesus taught the Twelve to the early Church, the challenge of transferring the same qualities of discipleship to the Church today seems almost impossible. First, as we already pointed out, we have the challenge of the role models we follow. We do have a model that we need to follow (Jesus), but Jesus is no longer among us... our Rabbi is not *physically* present with us. While the disciples of Jesus had one Rabbi who was for them a perfect example in everything, today we cannot choose *one* perfect person who would be our perfect role model in everything. Instead, we have the Body - different limbs that are an imperfect and sinful version of what they should be. This also means that each side (teachers and disciples) must be aware of their limitations and weaknesses.

The second challenge is to find the time that discipleship requires. Namely, Jesus' *talmidim* left everything to be with him for several years. Most of the discipleship in Jesus' time occurred between the ages of 5 and 15, when the "disciples" did not have their own families and responsibility to provide for them. An additional advantage of their time was life in community where several generations lived together, so when one person left family to follow a rabbi, other members of that extended family would compensate his absence. However, today's fast-paced life, which leans more and more toward individuality and privacy, leaves little room for discipleship and all that it entails. Those people who become Christians in adulthood - the age when they have family to care for, puts them in a different situation from, for example, children in Jesus's time. In addition, many of us live in "two-generations families" (parents and children), where if one parent chooses a *Bet Midrash* discipleship model, all the burden falls on another parent or his/hers/their parent(s) (if they are alive and able or near to help).

The third challenge is related to the culture of our time. Specifically, Croatian culture shaped by the Greek philosophical thought. Such a worldview raises an *idea* and *thought* above the *matter* and emphasizes the following: *ideas* must be expressed through *words*, and *words* must offer precise *definitions*. The goal is then to come up with the best definitions where one (or two) words will summarize a complex idea. Furthermore, knowledge is assumed to be a virtue, which means that if a person *knows* that something is good, the assumption is that he or



she will *do* it. Because “to know” ensures “to do.” When we join these two characteristics, we come to the following phenomenon: the ideal of Greek education is to offer knowledge in the form of precise definitions, so when people adopt that knowledge, they will live it. This is the model according to which our higher education is organized: a) an expert (professor) offers to the students b) knowledge in the form of quality information, and then students that acquired knowledge c) apply in their lives. To put it bluntly: lessons occur in a specially selected (isolated) space for this purpose (lecture room, building, etc.); the professor’s job is to provide students with quality information/knowledge and to not teach them something based on his or her example. The other side of such a relationship is that often there is no personal relationship between the professors and the students, but rather everything comes down to interest: “you” (the professor) have “something” (knowledge) that “I” (the student) need. Finally, the student is often left alone to figure out how and in which way he will apply that acquired knowledge.

In light of everything we have said thus far, we have to ask ourselves one question: how can we, in today’s churches, have that what we defined as “discipleship” with all its characteristics and contextual meaning? Speaking of discipleship, Tverberg (2004, 126) points to a very important fact:

Jesus’ Hebraic method of discipleship gives us a new picture of our calling as Christians. We often focus on sharing information, not on living like Jesus in front of others. While it is important to teach truth, Jesus’ method of discipleship is much more than that. He lived with disciples to show them how to be like him. Then they went out and made disciples, teaching and doing their best to show others by their own example. The kingdom is built primarily through these close relationships of learning, living and teaching.

If Tverberg is right, that means that the role of church ministers is not only to equip believers for service in the Church through the Word and teaching, but also to lead them by their own example. That invites us to address the problematic of how to practice discipleship. How can we successfully address these and potentially other challenges and follow Jesus’ model of discipleship? Again, we need to point out that our goal should not be to imitate Jewish culture, not even the culture of the early Church. What we need to emphasize on teaching is through *relationship* and by *example* and less on the transmission of information, which are not irrelevant for discipleship. There is no doubt that the process of discipleship includes passing on information and teaching. That is even more important because, unlike the Jews of Jesus’ time, we did not go through the first two stages of their education. Then again, the key thing happens at the third level of discipleship where instruction is done primarily by example. While in a theological school, the professor primarily gives knowledge to the students, while in the con-

text of Sunday services, the speaker (pastor, prophet, apostle, teacher) primarily acts and serves based on his or her gifts. Theological schools nor church services on Sundays necessarily do not provide that level of discipleship that we can find in Jesus' (*Bet Midrash*) model of discipleship. Jesus' model of discipleship requires from ministers to teach their people by *words* and by *example*; it is time-consuming and requires high level of intimacy by allowing people to come close to us.

While it is impossible to give a definitive and comprehensive solution on how to apply Jesus' model of discipleship today, there are several possible ways how we can do that. These are mentoring and small groups. However, before any thought is given to the question of "how?" we believe that the key need is that church ministers change their mindset about discipleship and the way they teach others about it. Namely, ministers should bear in mind the goal of discipleship and abandon the misconception that preaching or theoretical instruction is the primary, if not the sole, purpose of their ministry. Equally, there is a need for a change in thinking that separates *church life* from the *private life*, which should be of no concern to anyone. In line with the above, we propose two ways of practicing discipleship today: mentoring and small groups. However, our remark is that these two modalities that will be described below do not constitute discipleship in themselves, but can create a *framework* in which discipleship can take place, besides other frameworks within which discipleship might occur (church worship, theological schools, parachurch organizations, etc.).

## 2.1. Mentorship and Discipleship

As the first option for practicing discipleship, we suggest mentoring. Goldstein (2010, 34) defines mentoring as process in which two people establish a personal relationship (for a professional or personal purpose) so that more experienced individual will develop a caring and helping relationship with his protégé in order to enhance their life. The same author observes that mentoring consists of a variety of purposeful and intentional activities designed to help an individual grow, which means that mentor cannot be "a teacher from a distance" but must be a participant in that person's life for the duration of that relationship. Precisely here lies the reason why mentoring is suggested as a possible way of practicing discipleship today: mentoring is relationship-based and without the relationship of the mentor and his protégé, it cannot function. Here again, it should be emphasized that mentoring does not in itself constitute discipleship but creates a pre-condition - a relationship between two persons in which discipleship can take place.

So, what does mentoring entail? Talking about the importance of relationship in mentoring, Johnson and Wilson (2001, 127) argue that a genuine concern and

interest in the protégé should be in the focus of a successful mentoring relationship. Johnson (2015, 73) states that mentoring includes a variety of roles such as coaching, counseling, facilitating, guarding, etc. From this description, it is noticeable that being a mentor presupposes possession of many excellent qualities. Unlike mentoring in secular area, in Christianity there are a number of other qualities that are required for someone to be a “mentor.” Speaking about mentoring, Johnson and Wilson (2001, 124), say: “Most concepts of human virtue refer to the moral or natural virtues of which the human kind is capable, rather than innate theological or supernatural virtues which are qualities or graces infused into the human intellect and will by special grace of God.” That leads us to an additional question regarding the idea of mentoring in the Church. Are there enough people in the Church today with “excellent qualities” that can assume the role of mentors? Is it not necessary, in the context of teaching, that such people have certain degree of spiritual maturity? Therefore, when can someone who is a Christian become “mature enough” to be a mentor to someone? If we return on the Great Commission in which Jesus commands making disciples of all nations, with certainty we can claim that this commission is given to all believers.

Admittedly, a person who is at the very beginning of their walk with God may not be in a position to be a mentor. Johnson (2015, 12) offers us his solution to this problem, designating a mentor as “An adult believer who is a few steps ahead on the journey with Christ than the adult believer being discipled, who provides direction and oversight for spiritual growth and formation.” The usage of mentorship without requiring a serious Christian maturity in an interesting way comments as well Goldstein (2010, 45) when he says, “Whether all Christians are capable or equipped to be spiritual guides to new believers is questionable. However, the idea has biblical precedence since all believers are to be equipped for service (Eph. 4:12).” Tracing this line of argument, we can emphasize what we already know: Jesus’ Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) refers to us all, and we all should be equipped to do the work of service (Eph. 4:12). Accordingly, the task of disciple is to teach other disciples, who will then in return teach new disciples. Although we have nowhere an explicit command to make disciples in the context of mentorship, everything we have said thus far can give us a foundation for reviewing the responsibility of each individual person in the Church for “making disciples.” On that subject Johnson (2015, 180) says:

It is possible, in our modern day and age, with the population growing and church memberships shrinking, that there may not be enough mature Christians in the church today to disciple all of the less-mature Christians. This would be true if discipleship employed a 1 + 1 approach, which fortunately it does not. Even if one mature disciple worked with twelve less mature disciples each year, the total disciples trained after ten years would only be 120 disciples. The Great Commission provides a better understanding: all disciples

make disciples. The only way this can work is if a peer discipler disciplines one or more per year, with each of those disciples discipling one or more a year.

Discipleship in the context of mentorship offers many challenges, whether we are talking about the number of believers or their maturity or the amount of time each individual person has today at his or her disposal. The mentor, in a spiritual sense, refers to a believer who trains another believer by spending a lot of time with him. Goldstein (2010, 147) rightly notices, the difference between lay mentors and those who are in full time ministry. According to him, people in full time ministry often have flexibility to organize their time do what they consider is necessary for mentoring, while lay ministers often are restricted by their work. Regardless of everything, Goldstein reminds us that Jesus taught that the task of disciple making belongs to every believer.

Not losing from the sight stated obstacles, nevertheless we think that it is crucial to make individuals in the churches aware of the need to “make disciples.” In this step, church leaders play a major role, both in encouraging and preparation for discipleship. How can Christian leaders encourage and stir discipleship in their communities? Well, for start, they should lead their congregation in that direction by their own example. *Lausanne Covenant*, a statement of faith of evangelical Christians that emerged from the First Lausanne Congress in 1974, contains one part that is dedicated education and leadership, which begins with a confession:

We confess that we have sometimes pursued church growth at the expense of church depth, and divorced evangelism from Christian nurture. We also acknowledge that some of our missions have been too slow to equip and encourage national leaders to assume their rightful responsibilities. Yet we are committed to indigenous principles, and long that every church will have national leaders who manifest a Christian style of leadership in terms not of domination but of service.

Although discipleship is not mentioned directly, the text clearly emphasizes the need for quality native leaders who through their service and example can direct churches in desired direction.

## 2.2. Small Groups

Time constraint is an obvious technical obstacle for intensive individual mentorship. Hence, the other variant for application of Jewish model of discipleship (that is, Jesus’ model of discipleship in a Jewish culture) in the modern context is discipleship in small groups. Some studies on mentoring and discipleship show

a shift in transition from individual mentoring to a mentoring in a small group. The reason for this is that discipleship in small group enables contact with more people simultaneously, so mentors do not have to be limited any more by number of people with whom they can develop deep and quality relationships. This line of work we also encountered in Jesus' approach to the Twelve. In addition, some studies of this topic show that some individuals that did not have individual mentors, but they spiritually grew in the context of a small church fellowship in which people cared for one another (cf. Goldstein 2010, 102). It is interesting how this (small group) learning framework brings to the surface another important aspect of discipleship – learning in a smaller community environment. Wilkins (2008) makes this environment an integral part of his definition of discipleship when he says: “Discipleship involves living all of human life in this world in communion with Jesus Christ, growing in transformation to his image of how the Spirit changes us from the inside out, receiving community care disciples who are in this lifelong process, and helping others to know and become like Jesus.”

As in the case of mentorship, what this form of learning connects with the idea of discipleship is that it enables learning in close relationships through observing and example. Of course, this model has its own peculiarities but it resembles Jesus' teaching of a smaller group of believers. Naturally, being a part of a small group does not imply the same 24/7 lifestyle as the Twelve, but the focus is important: teaching by example that happens in the context of a relationship.

Due to these settings, Johnson (2015, 49) argues that many church leaders today even decide to completely change the form of church life since they share some of the same ideas about discipleship: “the intentionality, the sense of process, its ongoing nature, and the importance of community.” Concretely, the change of the form of church life refers to the new form of church as the small group community. Hempel (2015, 57) explains this in the following way:

It meant dropping all the attempts at great worship bands, cool media experiences, and big sermons, and having church in living rooms, community parks, or coffee shops. It meant embracing that we cared more about relationships, family, discipleship, and serving our locale than we did about showmanship, attendance figures, and modern buildings. And it meant realizing that truly planting a ministry that builds disciples following Jesus was going to take a lot of time and a whole different mindset and methodology.

Even though this form of church life is indeed radical, it needs to be pointed out that we do not think that it is necessary. Because, as previously stated, mentorship and small groups offer a *framework* that facilitates teaching/learning through relationship and example. These forms necessarily do not have to become a new form of church life, but they can exist within the context of a larger church community, as it is the case in many places. Likewise, we do not think that these two

forms will automatically produce a type of discipleship argued for in this article. However, they can point us back to the focus of Jesus' Great Commission.

## Conclusion

The main question that we raised in the introduction of this article concerns our contemporary understanding of discipleship in the Church, and whether our discipleship today is truly in line with the discipleship commanded in the Bible. Based on our research, the answer to this question is: today's understanding of discipleship is not fully in line with the understanding of discipleship given to us in the Bible. Although it is understandable that there are many differences between discipleship then and discipleship today (since we do not live in the same time, culture, and circumstances), the *form* and *content* of the discipleship of Jesus' time carry for us some important lessons. Exploring the enormous richness of contextual determination that surrounds the term discipleship in the historical context of Judaism in Jesus' time, one inevitably observes that there is a great difference in our Western understanding of discipleship compared to the meaning of discipleship in the first century.

Namely, the term or the concept of *discipleship* is not something new in Jesus' time. It is already present in the Hebrew Bible, but also in the wider context of Jewish culture. In Jesus' time, the term and idea of discipleship were already significantly developed. Jesus was born within that Jewish cultural circle and was a Jewish boy exposed to Jewish education. He invited his disciples to follow him according to the way *talmidim* of that time followed their rabbis.

Besides teachings that Jesus' disciples listened for ca. three years, they could also observe his works, learn how Jesus treated people, and be convinced about the flawlessness of his character. Before he ascended to his Father, he commanded to his disciples to do the same thing he did: make disciples of all nations and teach them to do everything he commanded. Jesus' disciples faithfully observed what he commanded them to do and passed that on new disciples. The final teacher and role model is the same – Jesus, and all the rest who did make new disciples should speak his words and reflect him. We took the apostle Paul as an example and saw how he carried on Jesus teaching and instructed believers to follow him.

This is what is crucial in applying the Jewish model of discipleship. Even today, God gives us ministers whose job it is to follow Christ. We can discuss the technicalities of how to apply this *rabbi – talmid* model of discipleship (where a person is fully committed to follow someone in particular period of time), mentoring relationships, learning in small-groups, or whether even the Churches and church life should be reorganized to resemble the life of Jesus and his twelve

disciples. However, all of these possibilities can only offer us a framework which does not necessarily require drastic changes. The key thing for us to learn from Jesus' model of discipleship is that for a teacher the most important thing is to teach others in a close relationship through example. Precisely this aspect of discipleship is something that the Church needs to put back in its focus regardless of the way in which she chooses to do so or the frame of action.

The Church of Jesus Christ needs to understand that discipleship is not a *list of activities* or some form of a *verbal lecture* that happens in a church building/classroom two hours per week where after the end of lecture each person goes back to his or her life. An increased number of activities is not a discipleship. We might think that increased number of activities will give to the people greater chance to learn something, experience change, and to serve better, so we hope that will produce growth (in maturity and numbers). However, this is a trap. Because "to know something" does not guarantee growth and change for better. Furthermore, the one who teaches should not think that he or she has fulfilled his or her duty by saying to the others *what* and *how* they need to do something, so that the average church members now need to put all of that in practice as best as they know how. That is a false narrative!

There is a power in example and to be an example is based on the fruits in one's life. In other words, we can only be example to others if we have fruits in our lives. That is why Jesus took a selected group of people, spent time with them living his life before their eyes and taught them in this way. Yes, we can *push* and *force* people to be what we are not but that is not the solution. We can also walk together one with another to come jointly to some goal, but it is far better if we have some role model that we can follow and imitate or that we are a role model to someone. Our argument is that the presence or the absence of the teaching/learning through example, will be a decisive factor whether churches will grow or decrease.<sup>5</sup>

Most of us cannot copy Jesus' model of life and ministry and follow the footsteps of apostles, some are not called to do so. The Church needs to find ways how to incorporate the model of teaching by example through relationship as much as possible in the context of its activities. This means that "teachers" should invest time but also allowing people in their vicinity so that others may see someone's life, observe in practice how this person or "teacher" walks with God so that they can copy that, and after a while, be prepared to walk in their own vocation. Being "a model" and to demonstrate in practice to others how to live/apply biblical truths is scary, difficult, and humbling because it forces the "tea-

5 If lions would raise their cubs the same way we often train people in our churches or theological schools, these cubs would surely starve to death.

cher” to be before people what he truly is (meaning, the possibility of pretending is drastically minimized).<sup>6</sup> That is exactly the point of discipleship: purposefully molding yourself into the image of the Other...at any cost!

## Bibliography

- Goldstein, Efraim. 2010. *The Common Characteristics of the Mentors of New Believers in Jesus in Israel*. PhD Diss. Asbury Theological Seminary.
- Gundry, Robert H. 1992. *Pregled Novog zavjeta*. Zagreb. Illyricum.
- Hempel, Brandon. 2015. *Sustainable Church Planting: A Missional Approach*. PhD Diss. George Fox University.
- Johnson, Martin D. 2015. *Key Behaviors and Milestones in Adult Discipleship. Fashioning Intentionality, Personalization, Oversight, and Assessment*. PhD Diss. Winebrenner Theological Seminary.
- Johnson, W. Brad, and Peter Wilson. 2001. Core Virtues for the Practice of Mentoring. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 29/2. 121–130.
- Ladd, George Eldon. 1967. *The New Testament and Criticism*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans.
- Lausanne Movement. *The Lausanne Covenant*. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov> (accessed on September 25, 2019.).
- Riesner, R. 1992. Teacher. In: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel B. Green et al, 807–811. Downers Grove. InterVarsity Press.
- Tverberg, Lois. 2004. *Listening to the Language of the Bible: Hearing It Through Jesus’ Ears*. Holland. En-Gedi Resource Center.
- Wilkins, Michael J. 2008. Disciple Making for Changing Times and Changing Churches. *Enrichment Journal* 1. [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200801/200801\\_040\\_discchangtimes.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200801/200801_040_discchangtimes.cfm) (accessed on April 24, 2019.).
- Willard, Dallas 2006. *The Great Omission: Rediscovering Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York. HarperCollins.

6 Someone can pretend in something sometime, but no one can pretend in everything all the time.



Martina Gracin i Ervin Budiselić

## **Razumijevanje učenja u kontekstu židovstva Isusovog vremena – 2. dio**

Sažetak

Upotreba pojmova učenik i učenje vrlo je uobičajena u evanđeoskom kršćanstvu, a značenje tih pojmova smatra se samo po sebi razumljivim. Međutim, iako je u tim krugovima došlo do svojevrsnog usvajanja ovih pojmova, oni su već ranije postojali i u židovskoj kulturi Isusova vremena. Svrha i cilj ovog je članka proučiti značenje koncepta učenja u njegovu originalnom kontekstu i vidjeti koliko to značenje odudara od značenja koje ovi pojmovi imaju danas. Ovu ćemo temu obraditi u dva dijela. U prvome dijelu članka proučili smo starozavjetni korijen koncepta učenja, sagledali židovski sustav obrazovanja u Isusovu vremenu, razmatrili smo je li i sam Isus, i u kojoj mjeri, prošao židovski sustav obrazovanja te kako i na koji je način primjenjivao taj model u poučavanju svojih učenika. U drugome dijelu članka prvo ćemo razmotriti praksu učenja u prvoj Crkvi, a nakon toga ponuditi smjernice za primjenu Isusova koncepta učenja danas u Crkvi.

Ključan je fokus ovog članka na problematici prenošenja principa učenja shvaćenih unutar konteksta židovske kulture na Crkvu danas budući da istraživanje otkriva kako razumijevanje tog pojma danas ne odgovara sasvim načinu na koji se shvaćalo učenje Isusova doba. Naime, premda je učenje i tada sadržavalo prenošenje informacija, važnije od toga je bilo slijediti učitelja (rabina) i učiti od njega u bliskom odnosu. U članku se zaključuje da moguće rješenje za ovaj izazov treba potražiti prvo u promjeni razmišljanja o tome što učenje uistinu jest (promjena fokusa), a onda u praksi kroz mentorstvo i male grupe ciljano izložiti obje strane (i „učitelja“ i „učenika“) iskustvu poučavanja primjerom.