

Teleology

The Biblical Study and
Doctrines of
Discipleship and Maturity

Discipleship and Spiritual Maturity

(Teleology: The Biblical Study and Doctrines of Discipleship and Maturity.)

Teleology is from the Greek *telos and teleios*, meaning “end, goal, purpose or completion” combined with *logos*, which means “word, logic or reason.” So we have teleology, the reason or logic concerning God’s end goal or purpose and, in this case, for us as followers of Jesus.

Some variations of *telos* in scripture are:

telos - 42 times (Romans 10:4) the end, termination, conclusion

teleios 17 times (Matthew 19:21; Philippians 3:13-15) mature (often translated “perfect”)

telesphoreō - 1 time (Luke 8:14) bring fruit to perfection, perfection as in maturity; to bring to maturity

Also *karpophoreō*: 8 times (Luke 8:15; Colossians 1:6) bring forth fruit, bear fruit, be fruitful. (*Karpōs* is fruit (Luke 3:8))

teleiōtēs - 1 time, a completer or a finisher of a goal or task, used exclusively of Jesus as our perfect example and the finisher of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2)

Teleology is not a common theological term but it should be; and as it pertains to the doctrine of **Discipleship unto Maturity**, it’s an important one. The idea for Teleology as a doctrine is that there is evidence of purpose or design in the universe that moves toward an end, and specifically that this provides proof of the existence of a Designer. Godless Evolution based on chance would be a sort of antithesis to teleology. This makes perfect sense in a God centered cosmos. God has designed all that He has made with stunning purpose beyond mere chance towards His own perfect desired end.

“He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Colossians 1:15-18

Philosophy comes at the idea of teleology through the limitations of the observable and its possibilities. The bible comes at the idea through divine

statements of fact. A philosopher may observe a seed sprout, bloom and fade producing more seed in a cycle of life and conclude there is purpose in the process. But philosophy cannot answer where the seed came from and what the purpose is for its existence. God reveals His purpose and intention through His word. The bible claims everything, all creation, finds it's meaning in the creator's purpose. This is especially true for humankind who the bible states was created in God's image with a distinct purpose of fulfilling His directives. (Genesis 1:26-31)

Teleology in a biblical setting, therefore, finds it truest and most complete meaning in the sense that God has always had purpose and intention for mankind and all His creation. In spite of the failure and sinful fall of Adam and Eve in the beginning, and all mankind from that point forward, God's purpose and intention has not changed. However, God's present work is the restoration of fallen mankind by **new birth**, which results in a **new life** (John 3:3). This new life is offered freely to all who put their trust in Jesus, God's faithful, obedient and sinless Son, who is the last and perfect Adam.

The reality of **personal teleology** is realized when we respond to God's offer of new life. It is a call to **discipleship, to surrender** our own twisted sense of destiny to follow His Son Jesus (Matthew 28:19) who leads us to triumphant completion, in fruitfulness and full **maturity**. At the end of this present age God will create a new heaven and a new earth and continue His purpose and intention to full completion.

“until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (fully mature) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” **Ephesians 4:13**

Teleology speaks of God's intended end for us, in the sense of a completion beyond temporal freedom and personal enjoyment (as is guaranteed in the U.S. Bill of Rights). Since God is eternal and gives us eternal life, God's intention is that of fellowship and perfect union with Him without our present struggles with sin, suffering or despair; without our current physical attachments and limitations, in a new creation, forever.

When Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler who asked how to gain eternal life, Jesus said to him,

“If you want to be **perfect** (*teleios*), go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” **Luke 19:21-22**

What Jesus said in essence was this:

First, there must be a willingness to yield to the Master as a disciple.

In reality, the rich young man was not willing.

Second, there must be an accompanying willingness to abandon all things in life that would keep you from following Jesus completely.

Sadly, this man’s wealth was where his heart truly was and it held him back from following completely. (Luke 12:34)

Third, Jesus wants all or nothing, no distractions, no compromise.

Notice, Jesus did not try to cut a deal or lower the bar. He let the rich young man walk away. It was his decision to make and he made it.

When we speak of Discipleship and Maturity, we must speak of the fact that the one leads to the other. God’s Teleology is that you be discipled unto maturity, unto the likeness of Jesus who is our ultimate example of full maturity.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” **Philippians 2:5-8**

God’s teleology as Discipleship that leads to Maturity look like this:

We hear the good news about Jesus proclaimed and put our faith in Him for salvation.

We are born again. Our spirit comes alive and now we have a new desire for our new spiritual life in Jesus.

Prompted by the Holy Spirit, we begin to feed on God’s word and communicate (communion) with Him in prayer. This causes us to grow. More and more as we turn from our life of selfishness and sin to a life of obedience, following Jesus’ example more closely, not just as Savior, but now Lord and Master, transformation takes place. (Romans 12:2)

We naturally want to share what we have found (the good news of Jesus) with family, friends and acquaintances. (Some will also believe.)

We learn the importance of church life and fellowship with God's people.

We begin using our gifts, abilities and resources in God's work and are sharing our faith and insights from God's word with others.

As we grow and love Jesus, the result is that we become more like Him. The more we become like Jesus, the more we manifest His character and nature; continuously moving us towards a life of greater fruitfulness and maturity.

That is what discipleship leading to maturity looks like.

The purpose and end goal is that, beginning at New Birth, we become like Jesus in character and lifestyle, living to please the Father, sharing the good news in word and deed, fruitful and mature, waiting for the Savior's return when He will restore all creation to the Father. **This is God's desire for us.**

All this happens, to some extent, quite naturally (or supernaturally, we should say) if God's good word finds good soil in our heart. (Luke 8:4-15)

That's not to say we do not have a part in this process, because we do, very much so. We must yield to God's process. We must be obedient. We must guard against the cares of life and the attacks of our enemy, the devil. We must take advantage of the tools and resources available for our growth and wellbeing as well as making ourselves available for opportunities that God brings our way.

For the sake of this study, let's look at Discipleship and Maturity in order.

- * **Discipleship** speaks of the person and a process. Discipleship is the learning and growing through obedience of a disciplined or disciplined life.
- * **Maturity** speaks more of the purpose for the disciplines of discipleship. The result or end goal of being a disciple of Jesus is spiritual maturity.

A. Real Discipleship (key text: Acts 2:40-47)

1. Defined

Disciple is from the Greek words “*manthano*” which means to learn or understand and “*mathētēs*” which means a learner or pupil. A Christian disciple, then, is a learner or a student follower of Jesus. The term *disciple* or *disciples* is used some 267 times in the New Testament.

2. Jesus’ Command.

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus told his disciples “go and make disciples.” That is, to make more followers, learners or students of Jesus, the Savior. Their commission was to make followers of Jesus.

This commission is that Jesus’ disciples are to make more, or other, disciples for Jesus. They are not commissioned to become masters who gather disciples to themselves.

3. Paul’s Example

Paul did say, “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1) but this encouragement was to be like Paul and follow Christ, not an invitation to become a follower or disciple of Paul himself.

Paul’s great desire was to point people to Jesus and to encourage them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus too, to be disciplined by the true master. As we become disciples this should be our desire as well, inviting others to be disciples of Jesus the Christ.

B. Disciplines of the Disciples

There are effective disciplines that are characteristic of all true disciples. Like spiritual seeds, they produce wonderful fruit in the lives of those who practice them. On the other hand, if lacking, a disciple will be left unprepared for day-to-day needs and trials and ministry opportunities.

Acts chapter 2 gives us a glimpse of the early disciples’ disciplines.

“And with many other words he (Peter) testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and

in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” **Acts 2:40-47**

There are seven disciplines mentioned in this passage that are **essential** for the maturity of a disciple. They speak of a life of surrender, obedience, and communion with Jesus and his people.

- 1. Willing to witness for Jesus** (*Telling* – the good news about Jesus)
In Acts 2:40 we read, “Peter testified and exhorted them saying be saved.” This is an example of fearless public preaching at its best. This takes boldness that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.

“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

1 Corinthians 1:21

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”

Romans 10:14

Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. (Acts 1:4-5) Then they would receive power to be His witnesses. (Acts 1:8) Perhaps this is part of the reason so many disciples are unable to witness effectively. They have not been willing to wait for God’s power through His Spirit. This was the same promise, by the way, that Peter spoke of in Acts 2:38-39, a promise to as many as would believe.

Paul told the young pastor Timothy, “do the work of an evangelist,” **2 Timothy 4:5**

Anyone who has been saved from a life of sin (that is every Christian) can give testimony of Jesus and His saving grace, and indeed should. It's not a matter of a calling on your part. It's a matter of eternal consequences to would-be hearers. Speak up!

2. Believing unto salvation (*Born Again* to new life)

Acts 2:38 states that Peter told a gathered crowd to repent and be baptized for the remission of sin and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. These were essential first steps for believers.

Perhaps it sounds elementary, but if we are to become disciples of Jesus with God's intent of growing to maturity, we must first be born spiritually. There must be a starting point, New Birth.

“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” **John 3:5-7**

3. Obedient in baptism (*Baptism* – outward display of inside work)

Water baptism is a baptism of repentance. (Matthew 3:11, Acts 13:24, 19:4) Water baptism did not begin with John and did not end with John. Jesus commanded water baptism. (Matthew 28:19) In this we should obey Him. It gives us a good conscience in that we are being obedient to Him. (1 Peter 3:2-21) It becomes a first important step in a life of obedience.

Baptism is a picture of sins being washed away, the death of our flesh and rising back up in resurrection life. (Colossians 2:12) It is a step of obedience and a symbolic witness to the work that has taken place in the life of the disciple.

And Ananias said to Saul (Paul) “now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” **Acts 22:16**

4. Diligent in doctrine (*Bible study* – God's word to us)

God will speak to us primarily through His word, whether through preaching, teaching or personal study. It's His word made alive by

the Holy Spirit that provokes faith and change in us. We are informed and transformed at the entrance of His word.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Romans 10:17**

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” **1 Corinthians 15:1-2**

“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” **1 Peter 2:2-3**

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” **John 8:31**

5. Faithful in fellowship (*Church life* – ministry to one another)

The Greek word for Fellowship is *koinōnia*. It has at its heart the idea of communion. It is the common life of Christian community that we share together as a church family. It is essential to a Christian’s wellbeing that they be an integral part of a specific local church gathering, both receiving and giving encouragement.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” **Hebrews 10:24-25**

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” **Acts 2:46-47**

6. Persistent in prayer (*Speaking* – conversations with God)

The practice of prayer in Jesus' own life shows how essential prayer should be to us as disciples. His prayers were almost always in preparation for what was ahead. We should take notice of this important fact. Often we pray emergency prayers because we failed to pray in preparation for what lies ahead.

“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” **Mark 1:35**

“(Jesus) sent the multitude away. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.” **Mark 6:45-46**

“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” **Luke 5:16**

For us, prayer can take on several forms or facets, but these three are essential practices.

a) Confession – acknowledging my failings and sin when I'm in need of forgiveness.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
1 John 1:9

b) Intercession – praying for my own needs or on behalf of someone else. Often this is done in agreement with others.

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”
1 Timothy 2:1-2

c) Praise and Worship – in the gospel of Luke, a healed leper gives us an example of intercession, praise and worship.

“Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:12-16

Prayer is not so much about us getting what we want, as much as God getting what He wants. Often we begin praying for what we think we need or want, only to find the Spirit moving us to pray for God’s will to be accomplished. This really is learning (as a disciple) to pray as Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:10, “Your will be done.”

7. Generous in giving (*Sharing* – as an act of love)

God designed us to be givers. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” **Acts 20:35**

We see a wonderful example of giving in the earlier believers in Jerusalem.

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” **Acts 2:44-45** (See also Isaiah 58:7-9; 2 Corinthians 8: 12-15, 9:7; Hebrew 13:16)

Finally, if you learn these disciplines and put them into practice, in a short time they will become Godly habits. These Godly disciplines are traits of a true disciple. They will work to produce in you a maturity that pleases God.

C. True Maturity (key text: Luke 8:11-15; Galatians 5:22-25)

1. Maturity is full development.

It is indeed the Teleology of God, the end goal, the desired completeness and expectation of God for all disciples of Jesus. Spiritual Maturity is the Father’s desire and intention. No father’s desire is for a child to be born and not grow and mature into a responsible and productive adult. Yet many Christians have stopped

short of maturity and are content with a kind of arrested development, stunted in their spiritual growth towards maturity.

2. Maturity is a fruitful life.

A fruitful life is indeed an indication of spiritual maturity and, in contrast, a spiritually barren life is an indication of immaturity.

A fruit tree is said to be mature when it begins to bear fruit.

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” **2 Peter 1:5-9**

a) Fruitlessness and Fruitfulness contrasted.

Jesus’ parable of the sower in Luke 8:11-15, describes and details why some believers reach spiritual maturity (fruitfulness) and others do not. In this parable Jesus uses two Greek words that we spoke of already. In verse 14, *telesphoreō*, (*fruit to maturity*) is used in a negative sense “no fruit to maturity.” Then in verse 15, *karpophoreō*, (*to be fruitful*) “bear fruit” is used to contrast the different results in individual lives. The different soils are types of the heart and receptivity to the seed of God’s word.

V 11) “Now the parable is this: **The seed is the word of God.**

V 12 **Those by the wayside** (path) are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

V 13 **The ones on the rocks** (rocky soil) are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

V 14 **The ones that fell among thorns** (weedy soil) are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life and ***bring no fruit to maturity** (*telesphoreō*).

V 15 **The ones that fell on the good ground** (rich fertile soil) are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and ***bear fruit** (*karpophoreō*) with patience.”

Luke 8:11-15

b) Fruitful as the Fruit of the Spirit which is the character of Christ.

Exemplifying the nature and character of Jesus, the imitation of Christ, by being transformed into His likeness, is the maturity God desires for each of us as a disciple.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-25**

c) Fruitful as one who leads the lost to Jesus

God has not called us to a life of production but one of reproduction. Livestock are said to be mature when they are able to bear young; that is, they are able to reproduce.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. **Proverbs 11:31**

“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” **Daniel 12:3**

“Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” **Mark 1:17**

d) Fruitful as one who makes disciples to Jesus

Paul devoted his life to not only winning people to Jesus, but also grounding them into a life of discipleship. He is a great role model.

“Follow me as I follow Christ” **1 Corinthians 11:1**

“You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom

and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.”

I Thessalonians 2:11-14

3. Maturity is the aim of discipleship

Let us then not be content with knowing about Jesus, nor even knowing Jesus, but let us aim to be transformed into his likeness.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and **perfect** (*teleios* – brought to its end, complete, perfect) will of God.” **Romans 12:1-2**

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” **2 Corinthians 3:18**

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough (sufficient) for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” **Matthew 10:24-25**

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” **Luke 6:40**

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, (*teleiotēs* - the state of completeness or maturity) not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.” **Hebrews 6:1-3**