

## DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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### ABSTRACT

In the gospel of Mark, we encounter numerous theological emphasis. One of them which is very paramount to Mark's gospel is discipleship. This work discusses and narrates the accounts in which Jesus called the twelve apostles and their responses. It examines Jesus' objective of choosing the twelve; discipleship and experiment/practice; discipleship and empowerment; discipleship and self-denial; and discipleship and service/humility; the failure of the disciples; and the implications of discipleship for our contemporary Christian setting. The findings are that obedience to Christ's calling or vocation and its mandate serve as a determinant for true and resolute discipleship. Moreover, the call to the ecclesia to train her members or followers (of Christ) especially those involved in active ministry according to Christ's standards cannot be overemphasized by the church.

### INTRODUCTION

It is obvious when the four Gospels are juxtaposed, Mark appears to be the shortest and probably the first to be written. With regards to the authorship of Mark, David A. DeSilva, cited Papias' testimony which was preserved as a fragment quoted in Eusebius, thus, the elder also used to say: "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's...Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only – to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it".<sup>2</sup>

The book of Acts recounted that the writer was known as John Mark, living with his mother, Mary in Jerusalem where many people used to meet during the time of the apostles or the early church. Acts similarly stated that, Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 12:25, 13:5) and later left them at Perga a city in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). Peter referred to Mark as his son when he was at Rome (1Pet. 5:13), and scriptures reiterates that later he reconciled with Paul in Rome (Col. 4:10, Philemon. 24).<sup>3</sup>

The Gospel of Mark seems to have gentile Christians in mind, due to the explanation of Jewish words and customs in the book. Mark wrote to an audience unfamiliar with Aramaic and many Jewish customs. Hence Mark found it necessary to translate Aramaic words or proper names (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34) and explain Jewish customs (e.g., purificatory washing at Mk 7:3 – 4).<sup>4</sup> Steve Moyise likewise submitted that "Since Mark is writing in Greek to a Greek-speaking audience, it is to be expected that the quotations would follow the LXX, [Septuagint]<sup>5</sup> which is generally the case. It is

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<sup>2</sup> David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Context, Methods & Ministry Formation* (England, Nottingham: Inter varsity press, 2004), 195.

<sup>3</sup> John Kojo Ntsiful, *A Survey of the New Testament Message* (Kumasi: Christian Service University College, 1997), 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Context*, 196.

<sup>5</sup> Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism fourth edition* (Kentucky, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 192. (Lat: seventy; *siglum*: LXX; sometimes called the Old Greek or Proto-LXX translation) is the name of the earliest Greek TRANSLATION of the Hebrew TORAH; it later came to include the whole HB and the Apocrypha, as well as works not in the Apocrypha, viz., 3 – 4 Macc and Ps 151.

possible that Mark is responsible for this, but most scholars think that the translation of Jesus' sayings from Aramaic to Greek had happened long before Mark wrote his Gospel. The Gospel is usually dated between 65 and 69 CE, largely because Mark 13: 14 – 23 seems to envisage a period just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies (c. 70 CE).<sup>6</sup> Tremper Longman III likewise asserted that “Many scholars place the origin of Mark’s Gospel in Rome in the mid-60s AD, in the context of the emperor Nero’s persecution of Christians”.<sup>7</sup> Now, Mark portrayed Jesus as the mighty Messiah and Son of God, who suffers and dies as the servant of the Lord – a ransom price for sins. Mark’s purpose is to provide an authoritative account of the “good news” about Jesus Christ and to encourage believers to follow Jesus’ example by remaining faithful to their calling through persecution and even martyrdom. A theme verse is Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”.<sup>8</sup>

Mark’s gospel has some discourses of discipleship which the focus for this research article shall be. The main objective of this work is to identify some of the various issues in his gospel which concern discipleship, and critically examine them, but also to find out the implications that can be applied to our contemporary Christian setting. Besides, other scholarly references can also be made to substantiate a point when necessary. The various issues identified from the Gospel of Mark which shall be deliberated upon in this research are; the calling of the Twelve apostles and their response; Jesus’ objective of choosing the twelve; discipleship and experiment/practice; discipleship and empowerment; discipleship and self-denial; discipleship and service/humility; discipleship and service and additionally, the failure of the disciples. The ensuing discussion shall examine the above issues as far as discipleship in Mark’s Gospel is concerned.

## DISCIPLE(SHIP)

A disciple appears to be a name designated for someone who is a learner, or a student who is training under a master for a specific skill of activity. Someone who is *disciplined* in the teachings of his master or trainer. W. E. Vine defines discipleship as, “*mathétēs* (μαθητής) “a learner” (from *manthanō*, [μανθάνω] “to learn,” from a root *math* –, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor), in contrast to *didaskalos*, (διδάσκαλος) “a teacher,” hence it denotes “one who follows one’s teaching,” as the “disciples” of John [the Baptist], Matt. 9:14; of the Pharisee, Matt. 22:16; of Moses, John 9:28. It is used of the “disciples” of Jesus. A “disciple” was not only a pupil but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher; cf. John 8:31;15:8.”<sup>9</sup> In an article by Joel B Green on ‘disciple/discipleship/mentoring’ he opined that “In the ancient world the term *disciple* was used generally to designate a *follower* who was committed to a recognized leader or teacher. When Jesus entered the scene of history in the first century, several other groups of individuals were called disciples. These disciples were similar to, yet quite different from Jesus’ disciples”.<sup>10</sup> This statement suggests that disciples were antedated even before Jesus’ coming. Probably the term became popular at Jesus’ epoch. On diverse types of disciples Green, submitted that,

The followers or disciples of the Pharisees (Matthew 22:15 – 16; Mark 2:18) were followers of the Pharisaic party, possibly belonging to one of the academic institutions...  
The disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18; John 1:35) were courageous men and women

<sup>6</sup> Steve Moyise, *Jesus and Scripture, Studying the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011),13.

<sup>7</sup>Tremper Longman III, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 1103, 1105

<sup>8</sup> Longman III, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*,1105.

<sup>9</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with topical index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 171.

<sup>10</sup> Joel B. Green, *Holy Bible, Everyday Study Edition*, ‘disciple/discipleship/mentoring’ (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 821.

who had left the status quo of institutional Judaism to follow the prophet. They were *members of a movement*. They were attached more to the movement of God through the prophet than to ritualistic practices or traditions... Jesus' disciples were those who heard his invitation to begin a new kind of life, accepted his call to the new life, and became obedient to it. The center of this new life was Jesus himself because his disciples gained new life through him (John 10:7 – 10); they followed him (Mark 1:16 – 20); they were to hear and obey his teachings (Matthew 5:1 – 2 ff.); and they were to go into all of the world offering forgiveness of sins to all people who would also become Jesus' followers (Matthew 28:19 – 20; Luke 24:47).<sup>11</sup>

Green moreover posited that,

Discipleship means the beginning of a new life in intimate fellowship with a living Master and Savior. Jesus recognized that various securities in this life can be a substitute for allegiance to him. The demand to count the cost of discipleship means exchanging the securities of this world for salvation and security in him. The call to be a disciple in Jesus' life time meant to count the cost of full allegiance to him. For some this meant sacrificing riches (Matthew 19:16 – 26); for others, it meant sacrificing attachment to family (Matthew 8:18 – 22; Luke 14:25 – 27); for still others it meant abandoning nationalistic feelings of superiority (Luke 10:25 -37) ...Jesus declares that to be a disciple is to become like the Master (Matthew 10:24 – 25; Luke 6:40).<sup>12</sup>

This discussion points to the fact that discipleship encompasses calling, submissiveness to the call, forfeiting ones will for the sake of the Master, and ready to serve or heed to the agenda of the Master with respect to humanity. Let's look at discipleship, calling and response and its allusions.

### Discipleship, Calling and response

It seems discipleship demands calling by the master and response by the learners (apprentice). Mark accounts the calling of Jesus' disciples and how the disciples responded to the call. Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake... "Come, follow me," ... At once they left their nets and followed him... he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him' (1:14 – 20). He saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him (2:14). Mark narrated Jesus' appointment of the twelve for the purpose for which they have been called, thus,

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that *they might be with him* and that *he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons*. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:13 – 19).

Concerning the passage above on the issue of *mountain experience*, John Painter postulated that "The mountain scenario recalls the place of divine revelation and action (see Exodus 18 – 19) where Israel was constituted as the people of God".<sup>13</sup> Keener succumbed that, "Mountains were often considered places for

<sup>11</sup> Green, *Holy Bible, Everyday Study Edition*, 'disciple/discipleship/mentoring'821.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *Holy Bible, Everyday Study Edition*, 'disciple/discipleship/mentoring'822.

<sup>13</sup> John Painter, *Mark's Gospel* (Minnesota: Taylor and Francis Publishers, Research Log, Amridge University, 1997-04-24), 64.

communion with God (cf., e.g., the experiences of Moses and Elijah; Ex 3:1 – 12; 1 Kings 19:8, 11 – 18)”.<sup>14</sup> Cheryl S. Pero likewise consented that, “Mountains had long been settings, symbolic of theophany, an interstitial place where humans historically encountered God, as the Twelve now encounter Jesus, God’s agent”.<sup>15</sup> Robert H. Stein, however, debunked this notion and stated that “In contrast to Matthew (cf. 4:8; 5:1; 17:1; 28:16), “mountain” does not function in Mark as a technical term for a place of divine revelation. Most times it functions as a purely geographical designation. In only one instance (9:2) does a mountain appear to serve as a place of revelation, and this seems, as here, to have been part of the tradition Mark inherited”.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the perception of the number *Twelve*, and their names of the (Twelve Apostles) and their respective meanings, Keener mentioned that, “Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and if groups chose twelve leaders (as apparently those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls did), they did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel, perhaps a source of renewal for all Israel”.<sup>17</sup> Eugene Boring reiterated that “The number twelve is not arbitrary, but resonant with Biblical associations of the twelve-tribe covenant people”.<sup>18</sup> It seems Jesus gave the inner circle thus, Simon, James, and John names and their meanings. However, Michael Cahill discusses the names of all the Twelve with their respective meanings which appears to be interesting for readers consumption. The following describes the names and their meanings.

- And he [Jesus] conferred the name **Peter** on **Simon** (Mark 3:16). From “obedience” he ascends to “recognition”. *For whoever has, to him will it be given, and he abound.*
- Then **James**, who has overthrown all the *desires of the flesh* and **John** who by grace received what others get through effort. He conferred on them the name “Boanerges” which is “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). The sublime merit of these three made them worthy to hear on the mountain *the thunder* of the father sounding through the cloud about his son, *this is my beloved son*. This happened so that through the cloud of the flesh, they themselves, too, would scatter the *fire* of the word like flashes of lightning that turn into rain upon the earth. Because *God has made lightning turn into rain* so that mercy might extinguish what judgement burns by fire. As the prophet says, *Mercy and judgement I will sing to you, Lord.*
- And **Andrew** (Mark 3:18), whose manly form forced him to his destruction, so that he has the response of death with himself always, and so that he has his life in his hands always.
- And **Philip**, which means “the mouth of the lamp”. He is able to illumine with his mouth what he has conceived in his heart. The Lord has given him the opening of an illuminated mouth.
- And **Bartholomew**, which means “son of the one who holds up the waters”. And who is “the one holding up the waters” if not he who said, *And I will order the clouds not to send rain upon it?* The name *sons of God* is acquired through peace and through love of enemy. *Blessed are the peacemakers because they are sons of God and Love your enemies so that you may be sons of God.*
- And **Matthew**, which means “given”. The Lord granted him the gift not only of remission of sins but of enrolment among the number of apostles, in order that *the lion and the ox* may eat together, and *the wolf* may feed with *the lamb*.

<sup>14</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 136.

<sup>15</sup> Cheryl S. Pero, *Liberation from Empire: Demonic possession and Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., Amridge University Research Log, 2015-05-31), 103.

<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 168.

<sup>17</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Mark* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, Amridge University Research Log, 2006-11-17), 100-101.

- And **Thomas**, which means “abyss”. For many know *the deep things of God* but say little; as Paul says, *I know a man* etc., as far as, *may not be spoken by any human being*.
- And **James, son of Alphaeus**, means “son of the instructed one” or “son of the thousandth”. At his side a *thousand* fall and at his right hand, *ten thousand*. He is another Jacob whose struggle is not *against flesh and blood but against spiritual evils*.
- And **Thaddaeus**, which means “little heart”, that is to say, a cultivator of the heart. He preserves his heart *with every means of protection*. By purity of heart, God is seen, just as in a *clean mirror*, an image is clearly shown.
- And **Simon the Cananean** who was also a zealot. Simon means “dismissing melancholy”. For *blessed are those who mourn now because they will be consoled*”. The person who seeks future consolation has to realize a threefold sorrow; weep copiously for his own sins with David and Mary; weep with those who weep, along with Paul; and weep much with John who said, and *I wept much because there was no one found worthy to open the book and to break its seals*. He is called a Zealot because *Zeal for the Lord’s house consumes*. This is how Phinehas the priest behaved so that the plague might cease.
- And **Judas Iscariot** who betrayed him (Mark 3:19). He does not wipe away his sin through repentance, nor is the sin ever wiped from God’s memory. For this reason, it is said to him, may his mother’s sin not be wiped out; may it be before the Lord always. Judas means either “confessing” or “boastful”. Iscariot means the “memory of death”.

These are the Twelve different types of apostles and preachers who in four groups of three, kept watch around the tabernacle of the Lord. *They carry* the holy words of the Lord on their own *shoulders* of works, as they carry the one tabernacle *with many abodes* to the promised land. The example of one preserve them in humble fear, just as the fall of the infamous Lucifer does for the angels. *Let the wise man not be conceited who in his wisdom, but let him who boasts, boast in the Lord*.<sup>19</sup> Stein posited that, “The changing of a person’s name recalls how in the OT [Old Testament] God gave new names to certain people (cf. Abram to Abraham, Gen. 17:5; Sarai to Sarah, 17:15; Jacob to Israel, 32:38) and bears witness to the status of Jesus in renaming Simon and to the new stage in the life of the one renamed. The name “Peter” (Πέτρος *Petros*) is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic... (Képā, Cephaz; cf. John 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12) and means “stone” ... Whereas the name “Peter” given to Simon signifies the role he is to play in the life of the church, “Boanerges, which means [lit. ‘is’] Sons of Thunder,” given to James and John seems to reveal the temperament of these two brothers (9:38; 10:35 – 40; Luke 9:54)”.<sup>20</sup>

The discussion appears to give us some insights about the significance of the number Twelve especially among the apostles, probably that might have been the reason why the apostles restored to the Eleven Matthias to complete the group for the purpose which they were appointed by Christ, and moreover to fulfill Scripture (Acts 1:20; Psa. 109:8). It has also enlightened us with the meanings of the names of the apostles. Names and their meanings are vital because it portrays an individual’s identity, disposition, and the root of the individual which likewise has some positive or negative consequence with people’s relationship.

### Jesus’ objective for choosing the Twelve

Mark (3:13 – 19) identifies three main objectives or values for which the disciples were called or appointed, even though some scholars grouped them into two by adding (2 and 3 as one), thus, (1) “*to be with him (Jesus)*”; (2) *that he might send them to preach*; and (3) *to have authority to drive out demons*”. The questions that comes to mind is, what are the implications of these objectives?

<sup>19</sup> Michael Cahill, *The First Commentary on Mark: An Annotated Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, Amridge University Research Log, 2014-05-27), 44-47.

<sup>20</sup> Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 171-178.

### Discipleship and (Association)

On the aspect of *'being with him'* Painter proposed that, “The purpose of being with Jesus is not explained, but it is probable that the earlier references to disciples being with Jesus (2:18,23) imply that the purpose was to learn from the teacher so that the disciples’ words and action were a reflection on the teacher”.<sup>21</sup> Boring posited that “Being with him” distinguishes the twelve from the other followers and disciples. The Twelve leave their homes and jobs and follow him on his itinerant ministry”.<sup>22</sup> Robert E Coleman submitted that,

The initial objective of Jesus’ plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the father...One cannot transform a world except as individuals in the world are transformed, and individuals cannot be changed except as they are molded in the hands of the Master...Jesus “called his disciples, and he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles” (Luke 6:13 – 17; see Mark 3:13 – 19). Regardless of the symbolical meaning one prefers to put on the number twelve...Jesus intended these men to have unique privileges and responsibilities in the Kingdom work...Jesus devoted most of his remaining life on earth to these few disciples. He literally staked his whole ministry on them...Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program – just letting his disciples follow him...It was by virtue of this fellowship that the disciples were permitted “to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:10).<sup>23</sup>

According to Stein,

The first reason for Jesus appointing the Twelve is “in order that they might be with him” (ἵνα ὄσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, *hina ὄsin met’ autou*; cf. Mark 14:67). This does not refer to a desire by Jesus for companionship. The twelve are not chosen because “no man is an island” and Jesus craves friends. Rather, the Twelve are to accompany Jesus during his ministry (contrast 5:18- 19). In so doing, they will learn from him (4:10 – 12, 33 – 34), witness his actions (4:35 – 5:43), and learn his teachings. As a result, they will serve as his apostles and witnesses (Acts 10:39 – 41) and supervise the traditions concerning him (Luke 1:2). During his ministry, they will assist him (Mark 4:36; 6:41 – 43; 8:6 – 9; 11:2 – 7; 14:12 – 16) and preach/heal/exorcise in his name (3:14 – 15; 6:7 – 13).<sup>24</sup>

The discussion suggests that *being with Jesus* (Mark 3:14) appears to be a matter of *association* or with one accord with him as far as his divine vision, purpose and plan for humanity is concerned. Also, being with him symbolizes a *transformation of character* conforming to the likeness of the Master in speech and deeds. No wonder the Sanhedrin ‘when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus’ (Acts 4:13).

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<sup>21</sup>Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 64.

<sup>22</sup>Boring, *Mark*, 101.

<sup>23</sup>Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 21-22,24,25,26.

<sup>24</sup>Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 170.

Again, being with him likewise suggests *teaching/learning* of God’s word from the master. Mark recounted one of Jesus’ methodology thus, ‘parables’<sup>25</sup> [παροβολή]<sup>26</sup> which he used to teach the people about the word of God, “Again Jesus began to teach by the lake.

The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. He taught them many things by parables ... ‘With many similar parables, Jesus spoke the **word** [*logos*, λόγος], to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything” (Mark 4:1 – 34). Longman submitted that “Word” is used in the Bible to refer to the speech of God in oral, written, or incarnate form. In each of these uses, God desires to make himself known to his people. The communication of God is always personal and relational, whether he speaks to call things into existence (Gen.1) or to address an individual directly (Gen. 2:16 – 17); Exod. 3:14). The prophets and the apostles received the word of God (Deut.18:14 -22; John 16:13), some of which were proclaimed but not recorded. The greatest revelation in this regard is the person of Jesus Christ, who is called the “Word” of God (John 1:1,14)”.<sup>27</sup>

PHEME PERKINS, in his article on ‘Mark 4:30 – 34’ submitted that “Verses 33-34 conclude the parables discourse in Mark 4:1-34. Rabbinic parables were used to illustrate or clarify a point. Mark 4:10-12 suggests that speaking in parables served another function. It concealed Jesus' message from those in the crowd who were not able to respond to God's call (v. 12, referring to Isa 6:9-10). Even Jesus' disciples are confused (v. 13). An allegorical reading of the parable of the Sower (w. 14-20) provides a code for applying that story to living as disciples”.<sup>28</sup> The implication of the discussion gives the impression about how Jesus taught the crowd and his disciples the Word of God with regards to issues about the Kingdom of God. His disciples were privilege to hear, comprehend and learn every detail of Jesus’ information, and nothing was hidden from them.

Howard I. Marshall claimed that “Mark sees Jesus as giving such instructions to people as they could comprehend (Mk 4:33). To be a disciple is to possess the mystery of the kingdom, i.e., to understand what is going on and to partake of it. It is to recognize Jesus as who he really is and to see that the kingdom really is present in him”.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, being with him also implies *observation* from Jesus’ activities. Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” So, he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons (Mark 1:38 – 39). It seems certain that, while Jesus performs his duty, the disciples were likewise observing

<sup>25</sup> Longman III, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1266-88, ‘The word “parable” is used to speak of a particular literary form that communicates indirectly by means of comparative language, often for the purpose of challenging the listener to accept or reject a new way of thinking about a particular matter...it is quite clear that Jesus regularly employed parables in his teaching, but his reason for doing so is less evident. Jesus’ own somewhat perplexing statement in Mark 4:10 – 12 indicates that his parables have the dual purpose of both revealing and concealing the secret of the kingdom, but one may wonder how it is that parables perform both functions simultaneously.

<sup>26</sup> Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with topical index*, 457. ‘*parabolē* denotes “a placing beside” “to throw” or “lay besides, to compare”. Christ’s “parables” most frequently convey truths connected with the subject of the kingdom of God. His withholding the meaning from His hearers as He did from the multitudes, Matt. 13:34, was a divine judgment upon the unworthy’.

<sup>27</sup> Longman III, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1727. The sovereign glory of Christ as the Word of God is depicted in the vision of John in Rev. 19:13. As the Word of God, Jesus Christ ultimately gives us our lives (John 1:4; 6:33; 10:10), sustains our lives (John 5:24; 6:51, 54; 8:51), and ultimately renders a just judgment regarding our lives (John 5:30; 8:16, 26; 9:39; cf. Matt. 25:31 – 33; Heb. 4:12).

<sup>28</sup> PHEME PERKINS, Professor of New Testament Boston College, ‘Mark 4:30 – 34’ (Amridge University Research Log, accessed 7/25/17), 313.

<sup>29</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Illinois, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 81.

him which imply an aspect of training while being with him. Jesus deliberately associated with his disciples, taught them the word of God which appears to be vital as far as discipleship is concern, to live a Christ-like life and have the Christ-likeness replicated in others. The disciples in this manner observed all the events that took place which they would likewise put into practice in the future. The whole episode seems to remind Israel and the church, as God’s representatives to be abreast with sound instructions from God’s word, live accordingly to its precepts, and emphatically impact future generation (2Tim. 2:2).

### Discipleship and (Experiment/Practice)

With regards to Jesus’ second objective that is, *he might send them out to preach*, (Mark 3:14), Stein postulated that, ‘The verb “send out” (ἀποστέλλω) and the noun “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) come from the same root and connote official representation of the sender” ... [and]” to preach” (κηρύσσειν, kēryssein). This verb is used with reference to the preaching of John the Baptist (1:4,7), Jesus (1:14, 38 – 39), a healed leper (1:45), a healed demoniac (5:20), a healed deaf and mute man (7:36), the Twelve (3:14; 6:12), and the early church (13:10; 14:9). It is always used positively in Mark and refers to proclaiming the word and acts of God, that is the “gospel” (cf. 13:10; 14:9).<sup>30</sup> Pero asserted that,

Between the time Jesus appointed the Twelve in 3:14-15 and vs. 6:7 and 13, the Twelve have done exactly what Jesus required: they stayed with him. They have been Jesus’ companions and primary audience. Their interactions, comments, and questions are “the focus for some Jesus’ teachings and action (3:16-37; 3:32; 4:10,5:31). Mark narrated the incidents through which the Twelve stayed with Jesus in these chapters: Mark identified each of the Twelve by name (3:16-19); Jesus redefined “family” (3:20-21, 31-35); Jesus is embroiled in the Beelzebub Controversy (3:22-30); Jesus told a number of parables about seeds and growth (4:1-34); Jesus stilled the storm (4:35 – 41); Jesus exorcised the Gerasene demonic (5:1-20); Jesus healed two females (5:21-43) and Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (6:16).<sup>31</sup>

The implication of the statement suggests that the apostles were now ready to go, so Mark told the sending out of the twelve for a mission trip by Jesus. “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two... They went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:7, 12). Painter speculated that “They [Apostles]<sup>32</sup> were to replicate or perhaps better expressed, to extend geographically the mission of Jesus. Jesus preached; now they will preach also”.<sup>33</sup> Boring likewise postulated that, “Just as God sends Jesus, so Jesus sends his missionaries (9:37; 6:7). Jesus’ ultimate purpose in selecting them is not the spiritual self-indulgence of “being with Jesus” but “that he might send them out””.<sup>34</sup> Coleman declared that,

But as Jesus was beginning his third general tour of Galilee (Mark 6:6; Matt. 9:35), he doubtless realized that the time had come when his disciples could join him more directly in the work. They had seen enough at least to get started. They needed now to put into practice what they had seen their Master do. So “he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth” (Mark 6:7; see Matt. 10:5; Luke 9:1 – 2). Like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly by pushing them out of the nest, Jesus pushed his disciples out into the world to try their own wings.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Pero, *Liberation from Empire: Demonic possession and Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark*, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with topical index*, 30. *Ἀπόστολος*, “One sent forth”, The twelve disciples chosen by the Lord for special training were so called, Luke 6:19; 9:10.

<sup>33</sup> Painter, *Mark Gospel*, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 81.



This discourse implies that learners would not continue to be with the Master for all time. This is because after going through some training, teaching, and observation from the master, there is the need for learners to experiment the actual skill as a way of evaluating how far they have mastered what have been taught. This appears to be the reason why Jesus tested them to see their capability level. Moreover, the discourse also suggests the necessity for teamwork, because Jesus cannot do the work alone, but also would not be with them at some point hence, appointed of the Twelve and sending them in pairs for the mission trip.

### Discipleship and (Empowerment)

The third objective as recounted by Mark was *to have authority to drive out demons* (Mark 3:15). Mark stated that “They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mark 6:13). “To have authority to cast out demons” (ἔχειν ἐξουσίαν ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια, *echein exousian ekballein ta daimonia*) ... Thus, the Twelve’s authority to cast out demons serves a Christological purpose. It demonstrates the greatness of Jesus of Nazareth, who possesses such authority and is able to give it to his representatives”.<sup>36</sup> Boring surmised that “The Twelve’s mission is the extension of Jesus’ own, and represents his authority... Jesus and the Twelve’s mission is summarized as a ministry of word and deed, and Mark is here content to summarize their deeds under the one heading of expulsion of the demonic from this world, the meaning of the Christ-event as such (cf., 1:27, 39; 3:22; cf., John 12:31)”.<sup>37</sup> In the words of Cheryl,

Jesus firstly appointed the Twelve “ἐποίησεν δώδεκα” normally meaning “appointed” or “consecrated” is a Semitic usage found in the LXX (1 kgdms 12:6; 3 kgdms 12:31, 13:33) ... to share his work of preaching and exorcism it obviously has something to do with the people of Israel being comprised of Twelve tribes. The Twelve are ... representative of the Twelve tribes of Israel that are undergoing renewal as a people in the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the healing and exorcism. The Markan narrator was very clear about exactly what characteristic the Twelve needed in order to succeed at their mission. “To fulfill them requires “ἐξουσία exousia,” [power to act, authority] ... a term which has hitherto been used exclusively of Jesus (1:22,27; 2:10), but which will recur with a wider reference when the Twelve begin their mission (6:7). The summary in 6:13 indicates that the exorcist ministry of the Twelve was broadly successful. “On the one hand, they represent the eschatological discontinuity of the people of God from historic Israel... The Twelve are symbols of the ultimate fulfillment of Israel’s destiny; “The Twelve are instituted to proclaim the good news and to cast out demons, activities ... linked with the arrival of the new age in the Markan narrative.”<sup>38</sup>

Keener likewise capitulated that, “Apostle” means commissioned representative, the point here being that Jesus’ authority to proclaim the Kingdom and expel \*demons continue through his agents who act on his behalf”.<sup>39</sup> The efficacious outcome of the evangelistic enterprise of the group substantiate the fact that, the apostles are probably almost through to their career to hold the mantle in the absence of Jesus’ valedictory. Again, the power to exorcise demons and to heal the sick does not come from human’s ability but Christ’s. Moreover, this entire conversation serves as an encouragement to Israel and the church to continue the example of training others till Christ imminent Parousia, and more so to occupy as far as the Kingdom business is concerned.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* 170-171.

<sup>37</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> Pero, *Liberation from Empire: Demonic possession and Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark*, 104.

<sup>39</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition*, 136.

### Discipleship and self-denial

Mark narrated Jesus' sayings about self-denial as part of discipleship package, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:31 – 38). R. T. France asserted that self-denial appears to be "A basic condition of discipleship. It is to join Jesus on the way to execution. [Taking up one's cross] implies the refusal to be guided by one's own interest, to surrender control of one's own destiny".<sup>40</sup> Strauss likewise submitted that,

To "follow Jesus" means more than just identifying yourself as a Christ-follower. It means renouncing self and journeying with him even to death. To "deny oneself" does not mean to live a life of self-denial or self-discipline. It is to renounce your claim to yourself – desires, ambitions, personal goals – and to submit to Christ as his slave. It is a denial of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Similarly, to "take up your cross" does not mean to accept a life of hardship, as the idiom is sometimes used. It means to subject oneself to excruciating and shameful execution by crucifixion. Of course, this will not mean actual martyrdom for all, but a willingness to renounce all for Christ'.<sup>41</sup>

To be a disciple of the master means, one has no control of his/her will, desires, and personal gratification, all other fulfillment must be under the subjection of the Master, which implies total submission. This appears to be the reason why Jesus prayed, "... Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36).

### Discipleship and service/humility

Jesus' disciples were competing for positions and arguing about greatness, which Jesus addressed and used that opportunity to educate them about the need for humility, ... "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" ... "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 9:33 – 37; 10:42 - 45). DeSilva wrote that "Jesus explicitly contrasts the world's way of evaluating greatness, which had dominated the disciples' vision of Jesus and their own calling, and the way God measures greatness (see Mk 10:42 – 45). In the world greatness is preeminence, power, and recognition. It includes being honored and being served by others. In God's sight greatness consist in serving others and pouring oneself out for them, even as Jesus himself came "not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many".<sup>42</sup> Marshal likewise concurred that "Entry into the Kingdom is entry into the realm of service for God".<sup>43</sup>

It was radical for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood; despite Jewish rules requiring that slaves be well treated, Jewish free persons, like their Gentile counterparts, considered slaves socially inferior... By calling himself a "servant" and defining his mission as "giving his life a ransom for many," Jesus probably identifies himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:10 – 12 (despite contemporary debate surrounding this claim).<sup>44</sup> Discipleship is not about greatness but servanthood and self-effacement, therefore, Christians are expected to serve one another and those in need. Jesus admonished his disciples to serve one another when he washed their feet in John 14, the task or service was reserved for the servants or slaves in a household, but Christ demonstrated this service to show his disciples an example for them to emulate. Service appears to be Jesus' central mission, that is why probably he emphasized that greatness is

<sup>40</sup> R.T France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary NIGTC The Gospel of Mark* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 339-340.

<sup>41</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 372.

<sup>42</sup> DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament Context*, 206.

<sup>43</sup> Marshall, *New Testament Theology, Many Witnesses, One Gospel*, 110.

<sup>44</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition*, 155.

associated with service which requires humility and obedience (Matt 23:12; Mark 10:43 – 44). No wonder he acquired the status of greatness as posited by Paul in (Philippians 2:5 – 11). Peter in his first letter urges believers to love and serve one another as Christ gave them an example (1Peter 4:7 – 11).

### Discipleship and sacrifice

Mark recounted the story of the rich man who came to ask Jesus about what he must do to inherit eternal life. It appears Jesus' answer was not pleasant to him, thus, "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth (Mark 10:21 – 22). Keener orated that, "Judaism stressed charity heavily, but ordinary Jewish teachers did not require a prospective disciple to divest himself entirely of funds. Several teachers, especially some radical Greek teachers, made such demands on rich students to see if they would value true teaching above their wealth: a few rich persons would give up their goods, but most disappointed are such teachers. Jewish \*Essenes relinquished property when they joined their movement; some Old Testament prophets also made radical sacrifices to follow God's (see, e.g., 1Kings 19:19 – 21)".<sup>45</sup>

Strauss emphasized that "The man's wealth was his first love and was keeping him from fulfilling the greatest commandment – to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. He loved his riches more than he loved God and was trusting in them instead of in God... The man's sincerity is evident as he leaves, sad and grieving. Yet he leaves without salvation because the power of riches has such a firm grip on him. The blessing of riches becomes a curse when they become an obstacle to a right relationship with God".<sup>46</sup> Stein likewise stressed that "The issue here is not ethical in nature but soteriological. The man kept his possessions and this world but lost his life (8:36; cf. also 4:19), for one cannot serve God and things (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). He failed to exchange his riches for the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45 – 46). The disciples' amazement at Jesus' words reflects the contemporary view of that day (and tragically often among Christians today) that wealth and prosperity are usually an indication of God's favor and blessing. For this man, however, they were a curse leading to his damnation".<sup>47</sup> The conversation advocates the need to sacrifice our lot for the sake of Christ as a vital necessity to discipleship. The utmost priority for Israel and the church should be to love the Lord rather than riches and more so prosperity and riches should not be a hindrance to salvation and discipleship, but rather complements the course of God and his kingdom initiatives. The sacrifice of discipleship was seen in the life of the apostles who were promised with everlasting rewards package (Mark 10:28 – 31).

### The Apostles' failure

The discussions thus far have affirmed the apostle's accomplishment with their discipleship enterprise with Christ. But there are some aspects of their journey where it appears – they similarly failed. Mark 8:31 – 33), recounted where Jesus rebuked Peter, ... 'But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." France is of the view that, "The characterization of Peter's ideas as τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, as opposed to τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, sums up the problem which we have seen in considering the call to secrecy in v.30. The divine purpose revealed in v.31 makes no sense in human terms. If even the privileged disciples are unable to get beyond their 'human' understanding of the Messiah's role, what hope is there for people, in general, to get it right? The problem lies not at the level of competing loyalties..., but at that of incompatible ideologies, of human perspective which cannot grasp the divine purpose".<sup>48</sup> Apart from Peter's denial (Mark 14:66 – 72), another possible failure is where the disciples deserted Jesus when

<sup>45</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition*, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 441-442.

<sup>47</sup> Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 471.

<sup>48</sup> France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary NIGTC The Gospel of Mark*, 339.

he was arrested for trial. Keener mentioned that “In antiquity, the loyalty of one’s followers normally brought one honor; their abandonment brought one shame”.<sup>49</sup> In the Gospel of Mark Jesus predicted his disciples will desert him, “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered (Mark 14:27), the passage is a fulfilment of Zechariah prophetic utterance (Zech. 13:7).

Werner H. Kelber similarly highlighted that “As Jesus' decision to assent to suffering is finalized at Gethsemane, so also is the disciples' rejection of suffering sealed once and for all. Gethsemane, then, is the point, from which Jesus and his disciples part company. Jesus, determined to make the supreme commitment, moves into death, and through death and resurrection toward the Parousia. The disciples, unable to reconcile themselves with the logic of suffering and death, enter the passion events ill-prepared, consequently fall by the wayside, and never reach the goal. Subsequent to the happening at Gethsemane Judas masterminds the Sons of Man’s delivery into the hands of sinners. In the ensuing scuffle, all of Jesus’ followers flee”.<sup>50</sup> “Another inappropriate response to Jesus is seen in the disciple, who though vehemently proclaiming their allegiance (14:31), flee the scene at the first sign of trouble (14:50- 52). Many people are attracted to Christianity or come to church for social reasons or business opportunities. Others hope Christianity will meet their emotional needs or make their problems go away. Yet when temptations, difficulties, or hardships come, they decide it is not worth it and move on to other self-help fads. They are like the seed that falls on the rocky ground in Jesus; parable, who receive the Word with joy but then fall away when trouble or persecution comes (4:16 – 17)”.<sup>51</sup> The deliberations give the impression of the failure of the disciples in one way or the other, possibly due to their misunderstanding of Jesus’ divine mandate. But there is an adage which states that *failure is not the end of a matter but an opportunity or a stepping stone to greater heights*. Even though there appears to be a failure on the part of the disciples, their successes of discipleship enterprise were evident observing from the Book of Acts accounts thus, their evangelistic ethos, leadership, persecution etc., (Acts 2; 4; 6).

## CONCLUSION

This work has brought to the fore the implications of discipleship in the gospel of Mark thus, the choosing of the Twelve to replicate Christ in his absence, and serve as a teamwork for the course of the kingdom business; issues relating to being associated with Christ – thus to be modeled for Christ-like character; sending forth to preach; and to have authority to set people free from satanic entanglements. Other matters associated to self-denial as subjection of one’s ambitions and goals under the will of the Master (Christ), as a key factor for discipleship, and the demand for service, humility, and sacrifice which cannot be bargained for the sake of true discipleship. Moreover, their failures have also been discussed.

Reflecting on the theme of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, we shall concur with Strauss that, “Everyone in the Christian ministry should be training their replacement, encouraging others to carry on the ministry after them. Too often pastors jealously guard their pulpits for fear of losing status or because of their own insecurities. Associates and others with teaching or leadership gifts can be viewed as competition rather than as partners in ministry to be encouraged and lifted up. Yet the ministry is not about personal achievement or influence, but about the kingdom of God. By appointing the Twelve, Jesus was beginning to implement a strategy that will take the message of salvation to the ends of the earth”.<sup>52</sup> Paul in his pastoral letter to Timothy encouraged him thus, “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” (2Tim. 2:2).

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<sup>49</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament Second Edition*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> Werner H. Kelber, ‘Mark 14:32 – 42, Gethsemane *Passion Christology and Discipleship Failure*’ (University of Dayton, Ohio: 45409, U.S. A., Amridge University Research Log, accessed 8/12/17), 184.

<sup>51</sup> Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 648.

<sup>52</sup> Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* 163.

Again, reverberations from the discoursed likewise speaks to the *ecclesia* to train her members or followers especially those in active vocation or ministry to be in accordance with biblical discipleship standards. This will help to curtail some form of manipulations that leads to self-centeredness, narrow-mindedness, ignorance and false teachings in the Christendom as far as the kingdom business is concerned. Moreover, For the sake of efficiency, and greater success, churches or organizations must adopt the principles of delegation or team work, thus the ability to relinquish power and responsibility to members of the church or institution for effective growth. Jesus applied the principle of delegation by sending the twelve and the seventy respectively, (Matt 10:1 – 5; Luke10:1 – 20).

Steve Chalk, *Making a Team Work*, asserted that, ‘Teamwork makes sense. It is the logical way to achieve your task at the same time as giving other people the opportunity to develop their gifts and skills’.<sup>53</sup> Francisco Pérez Herrero similarly postulated that “As Jesus' disciples have already enjoyed a long and deep experience of their relationship with him, now receive from him the command to "make disciples" of all peoples... The fellowship of life that they have had with Jesus is not, therefore, a particular privilege, reserved only for them... such an experience must be transmitted, communicated, caught; this is the basis and reason for all their future activity. The transmission of this experience of "disciples" knows no barriers of race, of language or of social class. All people without exception are called and invited to become disciples of Jesus [Mark 16:15-18].<sup>54</sup> Obedience to Christ’s calling and its mandate serves as a determinant for true and resolute discipleship.

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<sup>53</sup> Steve Chalk, *Making A Team Work* (East Bourne: Kingsway Publications Ltd. 1998)12.

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