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“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple,” Luke 14:17.

Jesus Teaches on Discipleship

Lesson Subject: To discover and practice true discipleship as set forth by Jesus.

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Have you ever wished that you could have lived in Bible days and have been a disciple of Jesus? It would have been wonderful to have heard His teachings, seen His miracles, and received the revelation of God which was manifest in Him. Yes, it would have been wonderful to be His disciple.

The Bible makes it clear, however, that discipleship is to be the normal Christian experience. The call of the Lord Jesus upon the life of each believer is a call to discipleship. The privilege is still available though you do not live in Bible times.

What is a disciple? A disciple is “one who gives personal adherence to the views and doctrines of his teacher, personally accepting them and assisting in passing them to others.” Discipleship involves two things. (1) The disciple is personally and intimately devoted to the Master. (2) The disciple is committed to bringing others to believe and to obey the teachings of the Master. In view of that definition, are you a disciple of Jesus? You are, if you are a truly committed Christian.

This study aims “to discover and practice true discipleship as set forth by Jesus.” Keep your heart open as you study. Let the Holy Spirit teach you how to be a disciple of the lovely Lord Jesus.

I. DEFINITION

How did the term, “disciple,” come to be applied to one who is a

follower of the Lord? The English word, “disciple,” is derived from a Latin term “**discipulus.**” It is used to translate the term, “**mathetes**” in the Greek language of the New Testament. “**Mathetes**” is the term originally used to refer to a follower of Jesus. The term means “a pupil or learner.” In secular literature, it was used to refer to a philosopher's understudy. The first and basic meaning of “disciple,” therefore, is “one who learns under the guidance of a teacher.”

The New Testament uses the term, “disciple,” in a larger sense. It is equivalent to “believers in Jesus,” Acts 11:26. It means “one committed to a sacrificial life for Jesus' sake,” Luke 14:26-27, 33. It means “one who makes disciples of others,” Matthew 28:19. A disciple is, therefore, one who having learned of the Lord Jesus commits his life to enlisting others in the service of the Lord. Are you a disciple?

Would you feel proud to be listed as one of Jesus' disciples? If so, you have missed the basic concept of discipleship. Responsibility, not honor, is the key to true spiritual discipleship.

Above all else, the disciple is subject to his master. He learns from Him, obeys Him, and promotes His interests. Jesus said, “**The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord,**” Matthew 10:24-25.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? If not, what change would need to be made in your life for you to be His faithful and fruitful disciple? Are you willing for those changes to be made? Will you start making them today?

II. APPLICATION

The concept of discipleship should be applied to all of life for each believer. Examine its application in four areas: persons, possessions, service, and conduct.

Persons — Applied in the family circle, discipleship means one's devotion to Jesus must be greater than devotion to father, mother, son, or daughter, Matthew 10:37.

Applied outside the family circle, true discipleship means believers love one another without consideration of the differences which divide other people. Superior love for Jesus, expressed in love toward fellow believers, is an undeniable sign of discipleship, John 13:35. Applied to one's own person, discipleship means, “. . . **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me,**” Luke 9:23. That phase of discipleship is essential to all others. Therefore, examine the words

of Jesus very carefully.

The basic requirement is to “take up the cross daily and follow Jesus.” The demand is not for mere self-denial, nor assuming a responsibility in religious service, nor to bear an oppressive burden in the name of religion. No, the meaning lies much deeper than that.

Examine the term, “follow.” It means to do what another does, as a lad imitates his father. Jesus said discipleship involves “following” Him. He calls us to take up our cross as He took up His cross and to do with our cross what He did with His. What did He do? He died upon His cross! Real discipleship, therefore, means that carnal “self” dies that the Lord Jesus may control the life and that His divine life may be lived through the believer.

Jesus illustrated the principle of discipleship when He said, **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,”** John 12:24. Only one living such a life can truly say, “. . . it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me,” Galatians 2:20.

The principle of discipleship applies to each person who would follow Jesus. It is not applicable only to those whom God calls for special service — missionaries, evangelists, pastors, teachers, or soul-winners. Jesus included “them all,” saying if “any man” came after Him he must meet that kind of disciple demand. Listen to His solemn words, **“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple,”** Luke 14:27. What a solemn truth!

What is meant by taking up the cross daily? It means that there must be a daily reckoning of your death to self and of your new life in Christ. Here is the principle: **“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Romans 6:11. At each point of decision the believer must remember that self is dead and Christ controls his life. He then makes his decision in the light of that truth. That is “daily reckoning” of discipleship.

Trusting Jesus as Saviour does not make you a full and true disciple. Church membership does not make you His disciple. Occasional acts of religious service do not make you a real disciple. You become His disciple only when you admit by faith that your old carnal self died with Jesus upon His cross, that His resurrection life lives in you, and you then go forth living in the full light of that principle. Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus?

Possessions — Jesus warned, **“. . . Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple,”** Luke 14:33. That is the application of discipleship to earthly possessions.

How literally should the principle be applied? Does one have to forsake

all earthly possessions in order to be His disciple? Should the Christian not engage in a business where he owns merchandise? Should he refuse to own property? No, that is not the demand that Jesus made.

Jesus was saying that all our possessions should take a place in our interests second to His kingdom. The disciple must renounce any allegiance which would be superior to allegiance to Jesus Christ. With such a spirit, one can “forsake all that he hath” at the same time that he administers it and enjoys the benefits of it, but it must always be held available to the purposes of the Lord Jesus.

Can you honestly apply that principle of discipleship to your possessions and have a witness of the Spirit in your heart that all is well? You can only if you are a committed Christian.

Service — John 15:1-8 sets forth the secret of success in the service of the Lord. Using an analogy of a grapevine, Jesus related how we can serve Him so as to bear fruit for His glory.

Examine a grapevine or a fruit tree to get the picture, Fruit is borne on branches, not on the main stalk, but the branches are powerless to produce fruit or even to sustain life, apart from the stalk. They are totally dependent upon the stalk, and the stalk is absolutely dependable to provide all that they need for life and fruitfulness.

Jesus said that He is the stalk in the analogy and we are the branches. Discipleship means that the believer (the branch) in his own strength gives up any hope of doing any good thing for Jesus (the stalk). He depends solely upon the provision of the Lord Jesus in him to produce fruit. Whatever fruit comes in the life of the believer, therefore, is to the glory of God, and not man, because it came through the provision of God. God provides ability; man provides availability. Thus fruit is produced. In view of that principle, are you a faithful steward in your service for Jesus? **“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples,”** John 15:8. How fruitful are you to God's glory?

Conduct — Applied to conduct, discipleship means to live according to the principles set forth in God's Word. Jesus said, **“, . . If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed,”** John 8:31. That applies discipleship to conduct. The disciple hides God's Word in his heart, and it produces fruit in the form of a life consistent with the will of God. A normal Christian life is the out-living of the in-dwelling Word.

Do you dare apply that principle of discipleship to your life? Is there a look of lust, a sin of pride, an element of personal ambition, a wrong investment of time? Are you really a faithful steward in conduct? How much time do you spend with the newspaper or television in relation to time spent

with the Bible? How many opportunities to witness are passed and forever gone? What kind of disciple are you?

III. REWARD

The disciple is rewarded with the joy of a full and abundant life here and now. Jesus said that whoever would “lose” his life would “find” it. On the other hand, he who would try to keep his life for himself, not considering the will of God nor the demands of discipleship, would “lose” it forever, Matthew 10:39; 16:25. It would be a loss, not a gain, for one to receive the whole world but fail to enter into the larger life in Christ, Matthew 16:25-27. Those who are true disciples “shall receive manifold more in the present time, and in the world to come life everlasting,” Luke 18:30.

How tragic that many believers are living poor, infantile, defeated lives simply because they have not entered into the spirit of real discipleship. True discipleship is rewarded by a full and fruitful life day by day as the disciple follows his Master. If your life seems fruitless and empty, live by that principle, John 12:24.

The disciple will be rewarded when Jesus comes again. **“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works,”** Matthew 16:27. Belief of that truth has inspired multitudes to serve their Lord selflessly, knowing that they will be “recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” Are you willing to live in the light of that promised reward?

Discipleship is a wonderful opportunity. Discipleship is a solemn responsibility. Jesus warned, **“... unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required . . .”** Luke 12:48.

The only choice which the believer has regarding discipleship is whether or not he will be faithful. Each will answer to God in the final day for the quality of his Christian stewardship. So live as a disciple of Jesus that He may say to you, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,”** Matthew 25:21. That will be worth it all!

Questions

1. What is a disciple?
2. How is a disciple related to His master?
3. How does discipleship apply to your family?

4. How does discipleship apply to your possessions?
5. How does discipleship relate to Luke 9:23?