

The Process of Discipleship

Continuous Learning in Christ

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Christian Discipleship

Because Jesus Christ is King of kings...and He knows the consequences of following Him are eternal...He is bold to make **strong demands** of those who would be His disciples.

SELF-DENIAL: Matthew 16:24-26

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

TOTAL COMMITMENT: Luke 14:26-33

“If any man come to me, and hate not [love less] his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple...whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

LOVE, ABIDING AND FRUITFULNESS: John 13:34-35 + 15:1-8

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another...Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

In Mark 7:5-13, religious leaders wondered why His disciples were so non-traditional:

“Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites...This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men...Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition...Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”

The definitions of the word “disciple” are helpful in understanding Christ’s call to discipleship. Here is the meaning of the word in Greek (the main language of the New Testament) and in English:

STRONG’S GREEK DICTIONARY

3101 μαθητης mathētēs, math-ay-tes’; from 3129; a learner, i.e., pupil:—disciple.
3129 manthanō, man-than’-o; to learn (in any way):—learn, understand.

WEBSTER’S UNABRIDGED ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Dis•ci•ple (di si’ pəl), —noun:

1. Religiously:
 - a. One of the 12 personal followers of Christ.
 - b. One of the 70 followers sent forth by Christ. Luke 10:1.
 - c. Any other professed follower of Christ in His lifetime.
2. Any follower of Christ.
3. A member of the Disciples of Christ [religious group].
4. A person who is a pupil or an adherent of the doctrines of another; a follower...

A Christian disciple is a **learner** who **follows** Jesus Christ. As long as we continue to learn of—and from—the Lord Jesus, we are His pupils. When we cease learning from, and discontinue adhering to, Christ’s teachings and following Him, we are (by definition) no longer His disciples. This should motivate us to avoid the pride of thinking we “know it all.” All Christ’s disciples continue to learn from—and follow—their Lord. For there is *so much* God will continue to show those who truly love Him enough to obey Him. Acts 17:10-12 tells us the Berean Jews had the right idea when learning about following the Lord Jesus from Paul the Apostle:

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Continuing Discipleship

The Christian experiences of discipleship are many and varied along the path that leads from **faithlessness** to **faithfulness**. Becoming—and being—a true believer is A PROCESS that never ends...until we leave this world. Sincere disciples are “on the way,” in A CONTINUAL JOURNEY. They never arrive at a final destination...until they die, or are resurrected to ever be with their Lord.

For example, when Peter first heeded Christ’s call and stepped out of his fishing boat to follow Jesus...the new disciple had incomplete understanding of who Jesus really was—and what He came to do. At first, Peter observed Christ’s words, works and ways. In a relatively short time, Matthew 10:7-8 tells us, Jesus was having Peter preach; heal the sick; cleanse the lepers; raise the dead and cast out devils. It is noteworthy that he had not yet made his **confession** that Jesus was, “...the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16). He certainly was not completely faithful after making his confession, for Matthew, Chapter 26, tells us Peter denied the Lord during Christ’s passion and crucifixion. After Jesus had died, was buried and risen again, Peter renewed His **love** for, and **faith** in, Christ (John 21). We assume he also **repented** [*to think differently; compunction for guilt, including reformation**] of his sins in denying the Lord. Understand that Peter had not yet experienced being **baptized** [*overwhelmed; fully wet; covered with fluid*] **in Jesus’ name** until after Christ’s Ascension. Nor was he yet **baptized** [*overwhelmed*] **with the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues**. These things happened later, in Acts, Chapter 2. At long last, Peter became a dedicated Christian; prominent leader in the New Testament Church and writer of two books of the Bible. History tells us he died a **faithful** martyr. Peter’s discipleship was OBVIOUSLY A PROCESS that started in Galilee when Jesus said, “Follow me...,” and took many years until it ended in death. This was true even though he lived day and night with the Son of God for over three years!

*[Bracketed] definitions from: New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance’s Greek Dictionary, 1995

In like manner, our experiences following Jesus Christ will be with LONG AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING...but only *if* we continue to follow the Lord in whatever He reveals to us—all the days of our lives. In John 8:31, Jesus told the Jews who believed on Him that their discipleship was conditional upon whether or not they would continue learning from, and following, Him:

“...**IF** *ye continue in my word, THEN are ye my disciples indeed...*”

Whether we have experienced: none...some...most...or nearly all...of what is available to us in Christ, *none of us* has yet comprehended or experienced *everything!* All the issues presented in this Bible study should instruct us NOT TO:

- be closed-minded about learning more than we already know.
- deny scripturally valid truths we have not experienced.
- look down on the “incomplete” experiences of others.
- promote limited, exclusive and divisive “Plans of Salvation.”*









Instead, we should understand salvation is a “**Process of Discipleship**” that respectfully believes we all have more to continually learn: from God and each other. It includes not just one event...or only a few events...but A LIFETIME of obediently responding to God’s Word and Spirit. Our teachings and experiences should be based on ALL the truths of the ENTIRE New Testament, including:

- *Gospels* (Christ’s life, death, burial and resurrection);
- *Acts of the Apostles* (the Apostle’s preaching and practices), and
- *Epistles* (Letters written by the Apostles to Christians converted in *Acts*)!

*The phrase, “Plan of Salvation” is often controversial. There IS a Bible way to be saved, but when different groups have their various “plans,” many unnecessary contentions and condemnations arise.

Discipleship Continuum

As you read the Gospels, imagine yourself back in the days of Christ...hearing His words; seeing His miracles; experiencing His Death, Burial and Resurrection and listening to His commands before and after His Ascension. Then, as you read the Book of Acts, consider what it would be like to be with the Apostles, and others...listening to their messages; experiencing or seeing for yourself: faith in Christ as Savior, repentance, water and Spirit baptisms, healings, demonic deliverances, and other miracles. After your conversion, contemplate hearing an Epistle (letter) from Peter or Paul, written to your congregation, explaining the Christian life. The experiences in the table below represent what many have found to be a common discipleship process, covering three general “phases,” including: SALVATION, SANCTIFICATION and SERVICE. All scriptural experiences, especially the ones below, should be: **welcomed** rather than rejected; **desired** rather than denied; **obeyed** rather than argued; **enjoyed** rather than dreaded; **celebrated** rather than condemned. Regardless of where you might find yourself on this continuum...or where you would like to be...ask the Lord to allow you to experience *all* that He has for you!

| <i>Keep on learning and following!</i>  | | SALVATION | | | | | SANCTIFICATION  | | | | SERVICE  | | | |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---------------------|
| Experiences | <i>Embrace God's Word</i> | <i>Receive Christ as Lord</i> | <i>Confess Jesus Christ</i> | <i>Be Born Again and Believe</i> | <i>Exercise Faith</i> | <i>Repent of Sins</i> | <i>Be Baptized in Water</i> | <i>Be Baptized in the Spirit</i> | <i>Display the Spirit's Fruit</i> | <i>Practice Holiness</i> | <i>Manifest the Spirit's Gifts</i> | <i>Be Fruitful in Christ</i> | | |
| EXPLANATIONS | <i>Faithlessness</i> | <i>Understand Christ's words are the final authority in all areas of faith and practice. Only the Word of God will judge us.¹</i> | <i>Accept the Lord Jesus as the Son of the one true and living Father, who has—by His Holy Spirit—manifested Himself in flesh.²</i> | <i>Declare “Jesus Christ is Lord and Son of God.” If you confess (acknowledge) Him, He will confess you before God... and God's angels.³</i> | <i>Know the need to be born of water and Spirit... and to believe in Jesus for His sacrifice of grace (unmerited favor; divine influence).⁴</i> | <i>Trust in the risen Jesus and His ascension promises. Call on His great name. Believe in His Death, Burial and Resurrection.</i> | <i>Turn from sin to God with a change of mind that results in a change of life. Submit to Jesus' Lordship in all things.</i> | <i>Obey commands of Christ's preachers to be immersed in water, in the name of Jesus, for the remission (forgiveness) of sins.⁵</i> | <i>Receive the powerful filling of the gift of the Holy Ghost, as in Acts 2:4—speaking with other tongues as the Spirit enables.⁶</i> | <i>Show God's presence in your life through: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, temperance, goodness, righteousness, truth, etc.</i> | <i>Live a life pleasing to God by separating yourself—with His help—from the world and unto God.⁷</i> | <i>Operate the service and power gifts of the Spirit—in whichever way God may enable you to edify His Body and reach others.</i> | <i>Continue to abound in all godly virtues. Meet, share your finances, and witness, with God's people until Jesus comes again.⁸</i> | <i>Faithfulness</i> |
| | | Examples | <i>John 5:24 + 12:44-48</i> | <i>John 1:1-14 + 14:1-29</i> | <i>Mt. 10:32-33 Luke 12:8-9</i> | <i>John 3:1-18 + 20:29-31</i> | <i>Acts 1:1-11 + 2:1-37</i> | <i>Acts 2:38 + 3:19; 17:30</i> | <i>Acts 2:38-41 + 8:1-17</i> | <i>Acts 10:34-48 + 19:1-6</i> | <i>Gal. 5:16-25 Eph. 5:1-20</i> | <i>2 Corinth. 6:14-7:1</i> | <i>Romans 12 1 Corinth. 12</i> | |
| <i>Know the proper time periods for...</i> | | GOSPELS  | | |  ACTS  |  EPISTLES  | | | | | | | | |

¹ The Bible is absolutely the Word of God; not to be “privately interpreted,” (2 Peter 1:20-21) added to...or taken away from. We are “born again” by the Word of God which endures forever and by which the gospel is preached to us (1 Pet. 1:22-25).
² There is one God with three manifestations...rather than three co-equal, co-eternal Gods. Scripture mentions Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but never the words, “Trinity” or “Oneness.” 1 John 5:20 says Jesus is, “...the true God and eternal life.”
³ Our confession shall save us (Romans 10:9-17), and assure us God dwells in us (1 John 4:15). However, our works must follow our words: for devils believe (James 2:19-20) and say, “Christ the Son of God” (Luke 4:41), yet they are not saved.
⁴ Jesus was referring to a *man* being born *again*, “when he is old” by: being baptized in water and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Believing in the grace-payment of Jesus' blood for our sins, on the cross, is required in order to be born again.
⁵ Jesus emphasized baptism in Mark 16:16. Baptism is not for infants (they cannot believe or repent) and is scripturally done only by immersion—using the name of Jesus. See Paul's baptism in Acts 22:16, and Peter's remarks in 1 Peter 3:18-22.
⁶ Jesus promises and commands being Spirit-baptized (Luke 24:44-49 + Acts 1:4-8). Acts 2:4, 10:46 and 19:6 show the common tongues experience. Paul spoke in tongues more than others and said it should not be forbidden (1 Corin. 14:18+39).
⁷ Holiness is not to be interpreted in light of man-made “standards,” such as: women with uncut hair; no pants, makeup or jewelry; no movies or TV, etc. Only valid New Testament prohibitions and admonitions are required—no more and no less.
⁸ Ultimately, we: have been (at past conversion)...are being (in present consecration)...and will be (at future consummation)...saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Fully follow Jesus—experiencing *everything*—and you WILL be saved!

Discipleship Challenge



The challenge of discipleship is continuous learning in the Lord. Please put a check mark (X) next to whichever of the things below you are willing to do:

ARE YOU WILLING TO:

- be a true disciple of Jesus—ever and always learning from the Lord?
- love Him...and His people...with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?
- do all that is commanded—and receive all that is promised—in the New Testament of the Holy Bible?
- avoid compromising with—or condemning—those who may not follow the Lord as you do?

WILL YOU THEN:

- receive Jesus as Lord of your life—intending to obey Him in all things?
- confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God and call on His name to be saved?
- believe God’s grace provided His Son as the only payment for your sin?
- have faith Jesus died, was buried and rose again for you to be set free?
- acknowledge you are a sinner...and sincerely repent of your sins?
- be baptized—by immersion in water—in the name of Jesus Christ?
- be filled/baptized with the Holy Ghost, speaking with other tongues?
- display the fruit of the Spirit and live in scriptural separation unto God?
- serve God...and others...with your spiritual gifts and natural talents?
- be faithful to Christ’s Body, the church, by gathering, giving and “going?”
- continue to learn from Him—and of Him—all the days of your life?

IF SO, CONGRATULATIONS—YOU’RE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP!