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Living Discipleship Principles

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Faithful Men

PlymouthBrethren.org · KEE Philippine Missions

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“The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

How to Get the Most Out of This Course

Your study of *Living Discipleship Principles* will be the most profitable if you give heed to the following guidelines for personal preparation and class participation.

Personal Preparation Before Class

Set aside adequate time each week for the completion of your homework. You should take the following steps for each lesson:

1. **Pray To God.** Ask Him to help you understand and apply His word. Let your prayer be: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of THY law” (Psa. 119:18).
2. **Read The Notes.** Underline important thoughts and anything that you do not understand, or about which you have questions. Look up key Scripture references and read them from a modern translation.
3. **Answer The Study Guide Questions.** After reading the notes, complete all items of the study guide. If you have difficulty with a question, pass on to the next question and return later to the troublesome question.

Introduction: Call to Discipleship

“Follow Me,” He said to them (John 1:43; Luke 5:27). They forsook their nets, their boats, their homes to enter upon a pilgrimage that was to shake the world. Multitudes besieged the Lord Jesus, but He seems not to have been much impressed. Much of His valuable time was spent upon individuals whom He called unto Himself and who became known as disciples. It was uniquely a call to Himself. “Come unto Me” was His word (Mark 1:17, 20). The Great Cause was the Lord Jesus Himself. He was the object, the rallying point, the sole attraction. All that had been valued before Him paled into nothingness. It was not Christianity, as it came afterward to be known, but Christ Himself who was the magnet.

His call to discipleship was first given to the Twelve, then to the Seventy (Luke 10:1), and then appointed for proclamation throughout the world. It became known as the Great Commission. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19 RSV). All believers were to be summoned to discipleship and disciple-making, not merely a select group of the most devoted followers. It was a call for all they were and all they had. The principles of discipleship would enable them to live properly for God, and then to influence a community, a nation and the world. His plan was to reach the world through using the method of developing men and women into disciples that would truly represent the Savior before all mankind.

Nature of Discipleship

The word “disciple” was used long before the time of the Lord Jesus. It was applied to anyone who professed to follow a teacher. The Greeks used it of that teacher-student relationship between their famous philosophers and those who followed their principles and way of life. The Greek word *mathetes* (a learner) became the Latin word *discipulus* (pupil) and then our word “disciple.” It is mentioned scores of times in the four Gospels as is its companion word, “follow,” with which it is frequently connected. The latter is used in the other parts of the New Testament, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). Professed followers of several teachers are mentioned in Scripture: (a) disciples of John the Baptist (Matt. 9:14; Luke 7:18; John 3:25); (b) disciples of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15-16; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33); and (c) disciples of Moses (John 9:28, as the Pharisees claimed to be). Thus, the term was readily applied to the disciples of Jesus. Not all these disciples were of the same category. There were *secret disciples*, such as Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38). There were disciples who defected from Jesus and thus showed that they were false or *pseudo disciples* (John 6:66). They thought His teachings were far too demanding and difficult to understand. They forsook Him to walk no more after Him. The term also was applied in a special way to the Twelve, who were also called *apostles* (Matt. 10:1-2; Luke 6:13). The Bible seems to indicate the use of the term “disciple” in three different ways.

1. **Broadly.** This included all who professed to follow Jesus or came to learn (Matt. 5:1-2). Some of these seem to have been merely curious “camp followers,” without any real personal commitment to the Lord.

2. **Generally.** It is used as a synonym for “Christian.” The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). This sense occurs several times (Acts 6:1; 11:29; 21:16). This includes both genuine believers and those who professed to follow Him.
3. **Narrowly.** This word describes those who met the requirements of strict devotion given by the Savior. These were called by the Lord “disciples indeed” or “truly disciples” (John 8:31). Such disciples were to “continue in My Word,” to follow Him in the fullest sense, with the necessary renunciation of the self-life. It is this group of disciples, those recognized by the Lord Jesus as the true ones, with which we are primarily concerned in this study. The following definitions of disciples, in this narrow sense, have been suggested:
- a. “One who follows one’s teaching not only as a pupil, but as an adherent; hence spoken of as imitators of their teacher (John 8:31; 15:8)” (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*).
 - b. “It implies that the person not only accepts the views of the teacher, but that he also in practice is an adherent” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).
 - c. “One who is totally and completely committed to the Person of Jesus Christ and His Word ... He acknowledges His right to rule over him and is completely at His disposal ... There is no retention of certain rights for self” (Dwight Pentecost).
 - d. “A disciple is a Christian who is growing in conformity to Christ, is achieving fruit in evangelism and is working in follow-up to conserve his fruit” (Gary Kuhne, *The Dynamics*

of *Personal Follow-Up*). This might be called a functional definition of a disciple.

Obviously these definitions involve more than professing to be a Christian and attending church services regularly, even becoming somewhat involved. They take in factors specified by the Lord for those who would become “disciples indeed.” More than simple salvation is in view.

Resistance to Discipleship

There is no reason for a call to this kind of discipleship to be popular. The defectors of John 6 saw this, as did the majority of the multitudes who heard His invitation and did not respond (Luke 14:25-26). To give up the self-life for the Christ life, to sacrifice all for Him is something that has no appeal for the natural man or the flesh. Our lifestyle of ease, affluence and self-pleasing is contrary to the spirit of discipleship. Institutional Christianity has no place for it on the road to ministry or in organizational advancement. In fact, it would be an embarrassment. There are objections to discipleship from many sources and for different reasons:

1. **The Word Disciple Is Not In The Epistles.** The words “follow” and “follower” do occur in this sense in other parts of the New Testament, as we have noted. Moreover, such men as Paul, Timothy and others certainly exemplified discipleship. Should the mere absence of the word disqualify the call of Jesus to believers in the Gospels? On what Biblical authority?
2. **It Is Limited To The Twelve, Or The Exceptionally Devoted Ones.** The Great Commission is given for all the

nations. The Lord Jesus spoke of discipleship to the multitudes. Our very mission is disciple-making.

3. **Details Of Discipleship Are Debated Or Rejected.** If one objects to the views of certain writers or disputes the meaning of certain terms given by the Lord, this should not relegate discipleship to a discarded doctrine. It still needs to be understood, faced and accepted by every believer.

Devaluation of this term may be the greatest foe of discipleship today. In many circles it has become a catchword to attract followers. Discipleship is often applied loosely to a Bible study, follow-up work with new converts or a special program that does not seriously study or practice the following of Jesus Christ on His terms.

Part of the vanished glory of Israel was the decline of the Nazarites, that group of separated followers of God (Num. 6). These consecrated ones were “holy to the Lord,” belonging to Him and dedicated to His service. From the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11) to John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), they were part of the spiritual glory of the nation (Lam. 4:7; Amos 2:11). They faded from view as the nation departed from God. In the same way, true discipleship faded in the church as the zeal of apostolic times turned to spiritual deadness. Today it is being revived, especially among young people who want to reach the world for Christ.

Necessity of Discipleship

It was said prophetically, and in New Testament fulfillment, of the Lord Jesus, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten Me up” (Psa. 69:9; cf. John 2:17). The fire of God’s Spirit burned within

Him as He served the Father. The Lord said of John the Baptist: “He was a burning and a shining light” (John 5:35). It is those who burn brightly for God in the fervor of their commitment to Him that can shake the world in the Spirit’s power. Such spiritual energy and blessing only flow on God’s terms.

The Bible assures us that our spiritual adversaries are great. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). How can we prevail unless we follow the Lord Jesus as His disciples? We are called to “war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18) and to be “a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3-4). How can we do this without following the Commander? Will spiritual warfare be successful in the hands of the uncommitted? The Lord Jesus knew what it would take to be victorious when He specified the stern requirements of being a disciple. The call that He issued 2000 years ago must be reissued today. We must call upon men and women to “Take up your cross” and to “deny self.” Only a few will respond in truth, just as in those days. But these few can become powerful instruments in the hands of God to turn the world “right side up,” at least in that part in which they labor.

If Jesus said today, “Follow Me,” would you do it? Would you join Him in the Great Commission to “make disciples”? Or will the sad words, “he cannot be My disciple,” be uttered because you refused Him?

Study Guide: Call to Discipleship

1. Why did you decide to take this course?

2. As you understand it, what does it mean to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus?
3. Who does the Lord Jesus call to be His disciples? Support your answer with Scripture.
4. Answer, if possible, the statement, "Not all of us are called to be disciples."
5. Is it necessary to be a disciple of Jesus? Why? Why not?
6. Which personal application will you make as a result of this lesson?

Lesson 1: Cost of Discipleship

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37). “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). These are plain invitations by the Lord to anyone who wishes to come unto Him for rest, peace, forgiveness and eternal life. A willingness to come to the Lord Jesus as a lost sinner is the requirement of salvation (Luke 19:10; John 1:12). But when it comes to calling others to be “disciples indeed” there are stern requirements. If these terms are not met, “he cannot be my disciple,” said the Lord (Luke 14:26, 27, 33). These requirements are extremely costly. They demand total submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ without retention of any rights for self. Acceptance of these terms is not for salvation merit. There is no indication in Scripture that we must earn God’s love by becoming true disciples. All discipleship is voluntary. Those who respond to Him in this way are expressing their belief in His wisdom and are committing their lives to Him as an act of loving devotion.

Success in the varied interests of this life is a major focus of the world. Professions, sports, and the business and social realms are areas in which extreme demands are made upon people in order for them to achieve outstanding recognition. A distance runner may practice by running 50 miles or more per day. A man may work 16-hour days for as many as seven days a week. Musicians practice for hours every day over a period of many years, even for life. All of these extreme demands are met to be successful. Only when extreme demands are made by the Lord Jesus Christ does it seem to be fanatically extreme. What is logical and necessary to the man or woman

of the world to be successful seems illogical and needless if it concerns the priority demands of the Kingdom of God in the light of eternity. True spiritual success, of which the Word of God speaks, comes from the strength and courage of strict obedience and daily meditation upon that same Word (Josh. 1:7-8). It is this Book that records the costly demands of true discipleship from the lips of Jesus Christ.

One of the great sections on discipleship is found in Luke 14. The insecure religious critics of our Lord had refused to come unto Him (vv. 1-14). At this point He told them the parable of the Great Supper (vv. 16-24). Many were bidden and they responded by making various empty excuses. This obviously referred to the empty excuses of the critics for not receiving the Lord. The master in the parable then ordered his servants to go out to the highways and hedges and bring in the poor and the handicapped to his supper. This was an obvious reference to the despised Gentiles. Those who had made light of his invitation were now to be shut out. At this point, the Lord turns to the multitude and gives His stern demands for being genuine disciples. It was not to a select group but to the general crowd that the Lord Jesus states these terms. Therefore, we cannot restrict this appeal to a few devoted believers. It is for all who profess to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No Rival: Allegiance to Christ

“If any come to Me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

The Lord Jesus asked would-be disciples for their supreme love. The Savior is to be above and beyond all earthly loyalties and affections. He is to be above the nearest and dearest ones in family ties. The expression of “hate not” is not an endorsement of hatred as we understand it. It is an expression meaning in effect to “regard less.” The choice is expressed as loving one and hating the other. Our Lord illustrated this in His own earthly life. When told that His mother and brothers were calling Him aside to speak to Him, He gave a surprising response. “Who is My mother? And who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, ‘Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother’” (Matt. 12:48-50).

Those who obediently do the will of the Lord stand closer to Him than even His earthly family. Often strong opposition to doing God’s will comes from near relatives. Jesus said, “A man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Matt. 10:36). The Lord must come first. He must be loved preeminently above all other persons.

Even self cannot be placed before Christ. The disciple must place Christ before his own life also. Fulfillment in careers, travel, education, position and self-development can never come before the Lord Jesus in the life of a disciple. He must stand first and foremost and have no rival.

No Refusal: Obedience to Christ

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

The Lord Jesus asked his disciples for absolute obedience in following any path to which He called them. The cross was the principal weapon of public execution used by the government of this period. It clearly signified death to all who watched the victims carry their means of execution to the place where they were crucified. There was nothing pleasant, comfortable or glamorous about it. It meant the end of earthly life. It was a terrible scene when Jesus carried His own cross up the hill called Calvary and there was nailed to die. Since “the servant is not above His Lord,” we cannot expect anything easy when He bids us to take up our cross (Matt. 10:38; 16:24). He says, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23-24).

Did any other great leader ever offer his followers a cross? Certainly it was not a call to an easy life. But the Lord Jesus never promised His followers an easy life. “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). His Cross was not easy. How could our cross be easy? He calls disciples to the place of death to self and makes it a matter for volunteers. These make the best soldiers and are the ones who so gallantly offer to go on dangerous missions which have death as a prospect. It is the forefront of the battle where the valiant men are usually found (2 Sam. 11:15-16). It is the place of glory, but it is also the place of death.

Whatever the Lord calls upon His disciples to do, they must obey. He calls us to death by the Cross, and there can be no refusal.

No Return: Persistence for Christ

The Lord asked His disciples for an irrevocable commitment to come after Him after first warning them of the cost. Many invitations have been given to follow Him while neglecting to warn them as He did. He told them to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28). It costs nothing to *become* a Christian. Salvation is without money and without price (Isa. 55:1). It is by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). But it costs a great deal to *follow* the Lord Jesus. Before we elect to become “disciples indeed” we should be ready to face the cost. One illustration given by the Lord concerns a man who sought to build a tower without the money to complete the project. He could not finish it and was mocked. Another illustration concerns a king who unwisely began a battle without realizing he was outnumbered two to one. Thus he had to plead for peace before the battle had begun (Luke 14:28-32).

The lesson is clear. No one should volunteer to be a disciple of Jesus without first considering whether he is willing to pay the necessary price of never dropping out.

In the third demand of this section, the Lord makes clear that the disciple must accept the fact that he can never turn back. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (v. 33).

To forsake all that we have is to burn our bridges behind us so that we cannot ever return. There is nothing left to which we can return. All props are removed except the Lord Himself. Each believer must determine before the Lord what is meant by the expression “forsake all” when it applies to his own life. The Twelve left such things as boats, nets, homes, occupations and families to follow the Lord. Peter said, “Lo, we have left all,

and have followed Thee” (Mark 10:28). The Savior replied that to leave family and lands for His sake and that of the Gospel would be rewarded one hundredfold in the present life as well as eternal life in the age to come. Many believers have had to leave their homes and native lands to serve the Lord. They have left good occupations and good incomes. They have even sold their possessions and used them in God’s work. Whatever is required by the Lord will be given by the disciple. For Him there is no return to the former way of life.

Terms in Summary

In his well-known book, *True Discipleship*, William MacDonald has listed the following seven requirements for being a disciple of Jesus Christ:

1. A supreme love for Jesus Christ (Luke 14:26)
2. A denial of self (Matt. 16:24)
3. A deliberate choosing of the cross (Matt. 16:24)
4. A life spent in following Christ (Matt. 16:24)
5. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ (John 13:35)
6. An unswerving continuance in His Word (John 8:31)
7. A forsaking of all to follow Him (Luke 14:33)

There were those who came to Christ with offers to follow Him wherever He went (Luke 9:57). It was evident that He saw where they had underestimated the task. They were apt to love comfort, and He had no comfortable place to live daily (v. 58). When He called, they were apt to mention that material claims must come first (v. 59). But He said that He must be first. They were apt to think of family claims (v. 61). But He

replied, “No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God” (v. 62). The claims of the Lord Jesus must be first for the true disciple. Once he has begun that path, there can be no looking back to the old life.

Conclusion

A thoughtful person asked, “What are the *benefits* of being a disciple?” With the cost so great, is it really beneficial? The question was raised in a different form by Peter long ago, “Behold we have left our own homes and followed you.” And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God who shall not receive many times as much *at this time* and in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:28-30). Aside from treasure in Heaven and reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, what do we receive here? Consecrated living may involve affliction, tribulation and sacrifice. Are there earthly benefits to following the Lord Jesus with diligent attention to His commands? That depends on the value we place upon spiritual blessings from living close to the Lord. Power in prayer, peace, joy, effective ministry, the fruits of the Spirit and other Christlike character traits are all related to consecrated, yielded, obedient living. Surely, the benefits of being a true follower of Jesus, not a seat warmer in church, are far greater than living for the passing scene of earth. It is these that shall “suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:15). Even if there should be no earthly benefits, as there are, it is enough for many to serve Him now out of deep love and gratitude (2 Cor. 5:14-15), whatever the cost.

Study Guide: Cost of Discipleship

1. The primary teaching of Luke 14:28-33 is the cost of discipleship. How would you apply this to yourself?
2. Matthew 10:38; 16:24 and Luke 9:23-26 reveal the *terms* of disciples. According to these verses, define and apply to your life the following principles:

“his cross”

“follow Me”

“loses his life”

3. What are the principal truths taught from the following verses?

Luke 14:26

Luke 14:33

John 8:31-32

John 13:35

4. Which hindrances to following Christ can you identify in Luke 9:57-62?
5. Sit down and count the cost. Upon reviewing your answers to questions 3 and 4, what would most easily hinder you from total commitment to following Jesus as His disciple? Explain what action you plan to undertake to overcome these obstacles.

Lesson 2: Jesus Christ: The True Disciple

He was the True Disciple, the embodiment of what God wanted men to be in every aspect of life. He was the perfect example of the ones our Lord Jesus called “disciples indeed.” The greatest and noblest of those among the servants of God were not fit to loosen His sandals, as John the Baptist said. No one can compare with Him in any area. Yet we are still called to face His example and pattern ourselves accordingly (1 John 2:6). Though He forever towers above us in every way, though He cannot be equaled, still His is the image to which we are to be conformed (Rom. 8:29). We are to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). That very God came in flesh as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Pattern of true discipleship.

Messianic prophecy speaks of this aspect of His life, the true disciple, just as it does with respect to His offices of Prophet, Priest and King. “The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth me morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as disciples” (Isa. 50:4 ASV, marginal reading).

When the Lord called disciples unto Himself, He taught them the demanding terms of that calling which were necessary for discipleship. It was ever a part of His character to be the faithful model of everything He taught. He called them to the way of the cross. He trod that path and never turned His face backward. He said they must deny self. He was the Selfless One who ever lived to please the Father and to minister to others. He called them to a life of sacrifice (Luke 9:58). He was the one that had not a place to lay His head at times, while

even the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests. He said they must “forsake all.” He had nothing but the clothes on His back and ate the simplest fare, while living the life of an itinerant preacher. All that He preached, He lived. The life that He lived was the life of a true disciple.

No summation of His characteristics as a disciple could be exhaustive. “The world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). Nevertheless, for our study let us consider seven aspects of discipleship that are illustrated in His matchless life.

His Motivation

Why should He leave the ivory palaces to come here? There He was the delight of the Father (Prov. 8:30). The angels worshipped Him and the glories of Heaven surrounded Him. Why come to this scene of woe to be despised and rejected by men? Supremely it was because He loved the Father and sought to do His will. “I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). He cried, “I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:9).

The true disciple is committed to do the will of the Father, whatever the painful cost (Luke 22:42). He sought not His own glory but the Father’s glory (John 7:18; 8:50). The will of the Father directed Him to the needs of a lost world, and so He came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He poured out His life for others, including the careless, the unlovely, the rejecters of His love. He loved those who did not love Him. But above all this, He loved the Father and sought His glory. His very death was to glorify God (John 21:19). He did it all voluntarily and not by compulsion, for true discipleship is

never compelled. The call of the Godhead came, speaking prophetically of Christ, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then said I, ‘Here am I, send me’” (Isa. 6:8).

His Obedience

It is ever the mark of the volunteer follower and pupil that He obeys and emulates His teacher. From the perspective of His manhood, that was Jesus’ path, walking under the direction of the Father as the Son of Man. “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). There was no disobedience in Him, not ever. He was obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8). “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” is the amazing tribute of Hebrews 5:8. That is, He learned the experience of this discipline; He never had to learn to obey because of any trait of disobedience. The disobedient person cannot be a disciple. That would be alien to the concept. The disciple learns to please God and not self. Thus even “Christ pleased not Himself” (Rom. 15:3). The disciple is interested in receiving and relaying the message of God rather than his own words. “He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God” (John 3:34). “The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself” (John 14:10). “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me” (John 17:8).

The deeds of the disciple are those which are commissioned by the Master. He is never called to do his own will. Thus our Lord says, “I have finished the work which *Thou* gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). “The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). The mark of the disciple is total obedience. That was the characteristic of the Lord Jesus.

His Servanthood

Every believer is called to supremely serve God (Luke 4:8b; Deut. 6:13). We are further warned that we cannot serve two masters (Luke 16:13; Matt. 6:24). It is not merely the preacher or other minister who is properly the servant of God. All of us are so called. Yet it is the disciple who uniquely understands the implications of this calling in his personal life. To serve the Lord is to follow Him (John 12:26). That means discipleship. Our Lord was the perfect Servant of God.

The Gospel of Mark is devoted to presenting this picture in varying ways. Jesus said, “I am among you as He that serveth” (Luke 22:27). He stated this in the context of taking a lowly place (vv. 25-26). Servanthood is a lowly calling, not a lofty one. If we wish to be chief, then we must be servant of all. If we wish to be great, then we must serve. So taught the Savior. Then He exemplified this by saying, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45 NASB). Even He took the towel, and knelt to do the lowly work that the disciples had overlooked or avoided. Like the lowly slave He did what represented the will of God. He made Himself the object lesson. The servant is not above his Lord. If the Master had done this for them, then they were called upon to do this for others while taking the servant’s place.

His Love

It is John who gives us one of the supreme marks of the Christian. “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). All disciples are called upon to love. We are called to love the Lord (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27), to love our

neighbors (Matt. 22:39), to love our fellow believers (1 John 3:14), and to love even our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27). The very personification of love is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfectly righteous, just, holy and faithful in every utterance or deed, yet He unfailingly expressed love.

Millions of little ones have sung, "Jesus loves the little children of the world." For did He not overrule the disciples and call the children unto Himself, saying, "Of such is the Kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14)? But the list is endless. He loved the rich young ruler who went away sadly from His summons (Mark 10:21). He expressed love to the outcasts. He loved even His enemies and persecutors and prayed for them from the cross (Luke 23:34). But He loved the Father supremely and said so publicly (John 14:31). The disciple must first love God intensely before He can properly love others.

The great *agape* love, which is the love of God, is sacrificial, not sentimental. It springs from the will, not just the emotions. It depends not upon a lovely object, but proceeds from a great heart. It is not understood by those of this world (John 1:5-10). The determination and zeal of the disciple must always be tempered by love. The True Disciple was the perfect demonstration of true love.

His Compassion

It may appear that compassion is the same as love, but there is a difference. Admittedly there is a relationship between the two. Compassion has the thought of a sympathetic inward suffering when conscious of the distress of others and then a desire to help them. The disciple cannot be unmoved by the needs of others. His compassion was enormous inward

sympathy toward the sorrows and needs of others. His compassion was associated with action. He noted the multitudes that were as “sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). His heart went out to the sick (Matt. 14:14), the hungry (Matt. 15:32), the blind (Matt. 20:34), the lepers (Mark 1:41), and the bereaved (Luke 7:13). He moved to relieve their affliction in dramatic fashion.

Our God is a God of compassion, unlike the heathen or mythological gods. He has intimate personal concern for the needs that abound in this world. The terrible scenes of suffering and pain are the product of a sin-sick scene and are not the perfect will of Him who created everything beautiful. Though sin has desolated the world, the Lord cares deeply. The disciple must also care and be touched with the feeling of the infirmities of others. As our Savior was active on earth, so He continues to minister compassionately in Heaven as our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:15). The Lord Jesus has compassion like no other person that ever lived.

His Praying

The disciple must commune often with his teacher. He needs to listen carefully. He must wait for instructions at times. He must report on his ministries. There must be a review of what he does. He should express appreciation for the help given. He must contemplate the Master at great length. Thus, prayer is the lifeline of the disciple.

Our Lord was a man of prayer. “Early in the morning, a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). The disciples noted their Master’s habit of prayer. “As He was praying in a certain place,

when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1). It was because He was a man of prayer that they saw their need as disciples to be men of prayer. He taught prayer by example and not simply by precept. He prayed as His public ministry began (Luke 3:21).

He prayed before important decisions (Luke 6:12-13). In great agony He prayed searching for the will of God (Luke 22:44). He prayed for His disciples that their faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). Marvelously, He continues His present ministry in Heaven, still praying for His own (Heb. 7:25). Never was a disciple more characterized by prayer than the Lord Jesus.

His Faith

The life of a disciple is the life of faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (God) (Heb. 11:6). “The just shall live by faith” is a phrase repeated four times in the Word of God. Faith’s proper object is the Lord and His Word. Faith is dependency, a leaning upon Him, a looking to Him, a reliance on Him for every need that is in accord with the Word of God. That dependency is seen in the True Disciple. “I can of mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30).

He taught the disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). For in whatever was needed, He looked to God the Father. He depended upon Him for bread to feed the multitudes (Matt. 14:19), for tax money with which to pay His and Peter’s taxes (Matt. 17:27), for a colt to ride into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:2). It is never recorded that He publicized a personal need, yet neither He nor the disciples ever lacked. He never showed anxiety about personal needs and taught His disciples

to refrain from worrying about tomorrow (Matt. 6:25-34). His ministry appointments were by Divine arrangement, without advance communication (John 4:4-7). His future was Divinely planned, and He rested securely in that plan, living His life one day at a time.

Conclusion

The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of all He asks His followers to be. His motivation was rooted in love for His Father. His obedience reflected that love. His servant attitude was a leadership model. His love was supreme, for God, for others. It was marked by tenderness and compassion. He waged spiritual warfare by prayer, by faith, by the Word of God. All that He was and did, we are called to follow.

It is convenient at times for us to think of Him as so far above us that we excuse our own lack of effort to imitate Him. That is one extreme. The other side is to feel guilty because we are not *all* that He is in character at present. This is not helpful either. Yet His life is the perfect standard which should not be lowered. As long as we are conscientiously “pressing toward” this standard, we can be sure God is pleased. We will be perfected only in Heaven. But we need now to “pursue” godly character traits, to make them goals toward which we strive, in the power of the Spirit.

Study Guide: Jesus Christ: The True Disciple

1. The life of Jesus was a life of obedience to the Father (Phil. 2:8; John 17:4). What hinders your complete obedience to the Lord and His Word? How can you overcome this hindrance?

2. The life of our Master eloquently demonstrated what it means to be a disciple. We are to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). As you have read this lesson, what one or two characteristics of Jesus Christ, the True Disciple, have challenged your way of serving Him or living for God?
3. The glory of the Lord, the King of all, took the lowest place when He came to earth (Luke 22:27; Mark 10:45). In what way is it difficult for you to have inward humility of attitude?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 4-7. How did Jesus exemplify this in His life, as your example?
5. What is genuine compassion, as shown in the life of Christ? In what areas do you sense a lack of compassion in your life toward others?
6. Give at least *three* examples of Jesus' prayer life which demonstrate areas where you need to be praying more effectively or intensively. Consider such verses as Mark 1:35; Luke 22:32, 41-44, as well as John 17:1-26.
7. How did faith characterize the life of Jesus? List at least *three* examples of the prayers or actions of dependency on God the Father.
8. Give an example of at least *one* area in your life where you are inclined to worry rather than committing a matter to God with full confidence.

Lesson 3: Jesus Christ: Man with a Mission

“I come ... to do thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7; Psa. 40:7). Jesus had a mission in this life. As the supreme man of destiny He was ever mindful of the purpose for which He came. His life had a far higher purpose than to be taken up with nothing greater than eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. That was the way of the doomed and the damned (Luke 17:28-29). He said, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work” (John 9:4). Others were anxious about daily necessities, but He told His disciples to be seekers of the Kingdom of God rather than seekers of the ordinary things of life (Luke 12:22-31). He was true to that same mission.

He was straitened or constrained to complete that great work on the cross. “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50). It was to this destiny that He steadfastly set His face (Luke 9:51). He constantly referred to “His hour.” They could not take His life beforehand because His hour was not yet come, but when it did come He knew it (John 12:23). He exclaimed on this occasion, “What shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But to this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27 NASB).

On the eve of His death, he said, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). On the cross He cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He was a man with a mission, and He finished that mission to the everlasting glory of God.

His Purpose: Coming with a Mission

Two thousand years ago the Son of God stepped across the threshold of eternity into time to become the Son of Man, the One sent by the Father to be the embodiment of every Messianic promise. His name Jesus (“Jehovah is Salvation”) spelled out the purpose of His incarnation. He was truly *Immanuel* (“God with us”). “A body Thou has prepared for Me,” said the Son (Heb. 10:5). That body was to be used by the Lord Jesus in the realization of God’s eternal plan. He came—

1. **To Accomplish Redemption.** The Lord was introduced to His future disciples as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). God looked upon a suffering, dying, hell-bound humanity, and sent His well-beloved Son to save us. “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity” (Tit. 2:14).
2. **To Put Away Sin.** “The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8). Messiah’s mission was to “make an end of sins” and “to bring in everlasting righteousness” {Dan. 9:24}. Through death He brought to nothing him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). He abolished, or annulled, death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). The total defeat of sin, death and the Devil was brought about by our great Savior.
3. **To Fulfill Scripture.** Our Lord was ever mindful of the sacred character of the Word of God, and that it must be confirmed. Every detail of His life was conformed to the

prophetic Word. His arrest by wicked men was seen as essential for “the Scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mark 14:49). It was this thought that moved Him to cry, “I thirst” (John 19:28), as He hung upon the cross. He said that twelve legions of angels stood by to come to His rescue against those who had seized Him. But this was morally impossible for Him. For “how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt. 26:54).

4. **To Establish His Church.** As He tabernacled among men, Jesus accomplished yet another phase of His heavenly mission, the laying of the groundwork for the establishment of the Church. At the culmination of His teaching ministry, upon the confession of Himself as the Messiah, God’s Son, Jesus said, “Upon this Rock I *will build* My church” (Matt. 16:18). By preaching, teaching and training His disciples, the Lord prepared His disciples to co-labor with Him in the construction of His spiritual house. Our Lord laid down His life for His sheep from many folds, that they might become “one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:14-16).

His Perspective: Comprehending the Mission

Jesus never suffered from emptiness or despair, a common experience of those who lack meaning and purpose in life. True meaning comes with a sense of mission in life, particularly in connection with God and in the light of those realities which lie beyond time and earth. Jesus was a man with eternity in His heart in the truest sense (see Ecc. 3:11, marginal rendering). His life was lived with an eternal perspective, a vision of how events or actions here will count beyond time. He knew the accomplishment of His mission was

of supreme importance. This sense of mission was a powerful motivating force and involved several elements.

1. **His Priorities In Life.** The Lord Jesus taught and exemplified the primacy of the Kingdom of God in the believer's life (Matt. 6:33). His life was ordered by this concept of "seeking first the Kingdom of God." He was always about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). He never spoke an idle word or acted in a haphazard manner. His consideration of a possible course of action was not dominated by His own desires or by difficult consequences. He related every prospective action to the furtherance of His mission. That mission gave significance to whatever He did. Things that might have been good or harmless in themselves were not allowed to displace God's best. Anything that would detract from the accomplishment of His goal was viewed as an encumbrance or weight. Although Jesus participated in the affairs of everyday life, as a soldier He never allowed them to entangle Him (2 Tim. 2:3-4).
2. **His Burden For People.** There are those who are indifferent to people, those who use people, and those who care for people. The Lord Jesus had a burden for them. They were on His heart. In fact, as one has said, His entire life and ministry could be summed up in the word "others." Two illustrations picture for us the way in which He looked upon the multitudes. "And having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion concerning them because they were exhausted by their troubles and their long, aimless wanderings, and had thrown themselves to the ground in

an utterly prostrate condition as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36 Wuest).

He lamented over the people who had rejected Him by crying “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!” (Matt. 23:37). He yearned for the people in the terms of Psalm 23 to “lie down in green pastures” where He would fulfill their needs. He wanted to lead them “beside the still waters” where He might restore their souls. What a tender heart He had for others!

3. **His Vision For Laborers.** “Then saith He unto His disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38). His burden reminded the Lord Jesus of His mission: to seek and save that which was lost. He had a sense of urgency about His work. The harvest must not be left to spoil in the field but must be gathered. The problem then, and the problem now, is that the laborers are few, too few for such a vast field. The Lord envisioned laborers being raised up and sent out (literally, “thrust out”) into the harvest. His disciples were enlisted as prayer partners to this end. Then He sent out those whom He had called to pray about the matter (Matt. 10).

His Perseverance: Carrying Out the Mission

Courageous persistence is essential in worthwhile accomplishment. Our Savior taught this in connection with prayer in the parables of the pleading friend and the unjust judge (Luke 11:5-8; 18:2-7). Great and noble missions have been

abandoned because of discouragement in the face of difficulty. No one ever had a more formidable task than our Savior. Yet He did not quit. Said the prophet of Him, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He has set judgment in the earth” (Isa. 42:4).

1. **His Commitment.** The Lord Jesus was a man of conviction. He had deep-seated beliefs concerning what was on the heart of God the Father. He was totally committed to the accomplishment of that purpose. Nothing, not even the cross, could stand in the way of His intrepid determination to fulfill His mission. “I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed” (Isa. 50:5-7). Our matchless Leader put His hand to the plow and refused to turn back in spite of the cost.
2. **His Labor.** During the days of His flesh, the Lord Jesus put “shoe leather” to His convictions. His attitudes resulted in action. Viewing Himself as a laborer, Jesus carried out His mission with dogged perseverance. “And Jesus was going about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness” (Matt. 9:35 NASB). Or again, “there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31).

We read the touching words, “Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey” (John 4:6). We sense this same fatigue when Jesus slept in a boat in the midst of a great storm (Mark 4:38).

His labors often continued through the night. Diligence and hard work are written large over the life of Him who was the True Disciple.

3. **His Selflessness.** Jesus refused to set His mind on His own interests but rather the interests of God and His Kingdom. He was concerned also for the interests of others rather than His own. The attitude of Christ is set before us in Philippians 2:5-8 as our example. His self-emptying led Him from heaven to earth to die a criminal's death for others. His disregard for His own welfare is seen throughout the four Gospels. Jesus said, "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). Because the pressure of the multitudes at times prevented the Lord and His disciples from eating, His earthly relatives said, "He is beside Himself," questioning whether He was even in His right mind (Mark 3:20-21).

But His food was to do the will of Him that sent Him (John 4:34). He forsook all, just as He taught His disciples to do. The Lord Jesus, like most of the population, both then and now, was a poor man. He became poor merely by coming to a scene such as this (2 Cor. 8:9). The soldiers at the foot of the cross gambled for *all He possessed—the clothes on His back*.

Conclusion

The New Testament records "all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). The Lord Jesus today *continues* to carry out His mission through His people. Having finished the mission given by His Father, He commissions His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

The resurrected Christ commands us, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). He continues to work through the people of God. Thus we become “workers together with God” as He builds His spiritual house (1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Study Guide: Jesus Christ: Man with a Mission

1. According to the following verses, what was the mission of Jesus on earth?

Matthew 16:18

Mark 14:49

Luke 19:10

2 Timothy 1:10

What does it mean to you to have a vision of the Lord and His purposes for your life? By *vision*, we mean your awareness of God’s purpose for your life and service in the days to come, in the light of eternity. We mean also a compelling urge to see beyond the immediate circumstance’s concern.

3. What does Matthew 6:33 teach you about priorities in regard to the way you are *now* living. Compare this with the way you *should be* living as a follower of Jesus?
4. What can we learn from Luke 11:5-8? How can this be beneficial to our purposes and effect our action as disciples of Christ?

5. How has the awareness of your mission in life changed as a result of this lesson, if it has? What changes do you plan to make in your life as a result of this lesson?

Lesson 4: Priorities in Discipleship

The follower of the Lord Jesus cannot fail to notice how His sense of mission led directly to life filled with great accomplishments. He understood clearly the meaning of what are called *priorities*. It means preferential attention to what is most important among many demands. He put first things first each day, and He knew what they were from God's perspective. He knew life was a one-time-only opportunity, and He would not be able to repeat the course later. Scriptures dealing with the length of life emphasize its brevity. The Lord was not a procrastinator, because time was not to be wasted or opportunities lost in doing less important things. The writer of Ecclesiastes said that there is "an appointed time for everything" (Ecc. 3:1-8) but there is not enough time to do every *possible* thing that we might like. A wise man decides his priorities in life and lives by them. A fool does not. A diligent man directs his energies to accomplishing priorities, but the sluggard does not. The disciple should be like His teacher in being a person who lives according to wise priorities, in either personal decisions or in use of his time.

Putting God First

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the *first* and great commandment" (Matt. 22:37-38). Mark 12:30 adds, "and with all thy strength." This summary statement of human obligations states what is first. The command to love our neighbors as ourselves is numbered second. Both are obligations. The first must precede the second. That is a priority. "Thou shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod. 20:3).

Whatever men may venerate, real or imagined, should not come before the only true God. He must take precedence. That is a priority. Whether speaking of God in the Old Testament or the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament, He is called the *First* and the *Last* (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:11,17; 2:8; 22:13). He is the *Beginning* and the *End* (Rev. 22:13). He has the title of priority, “firstborn” (Rom. 8:29; Psa. 89:27), for in *all things* He must have “the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

He is the *First* in time and the *First* in eternity. We are to seek His kingdom and its interests first (Matt. 6:33). Offerings that are given to Him must be “the first-fruits” (Exod. 13:2). As Ruskin has said, “He who offers God second place offers Him no place.”

Rather, we have insulted the Most High God when He is not afforded first place in our lives.

Developing God’s Priorities

The concept of “God first” is difficult to implement without an understanding of God’s perspective. What are God’s priorities? The following general considerations are principles that should direct our thinking when weighing responsibilities and making decisions, because they are rooted in God’s character.

1. **Priority Of The Eternal Over The Temporal.** God is an eternal Being. He lives beyond any limitation of time. We are more temporal (time oriented) in our thinking. The following things are significant only in time: earthly fame and honor, investments in property, comforts, sight-seeing tours, pleasures of earth, thrilling or romantic sensations. The following are eternal in value: God’s Word (Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:23,25), doing God’s will (1 John 2:17), the salvation of

souls and work in the Kingdom of God. The disciple must learn the greater value of the permanent over the temporary. “Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). An investment return which lasts for eternity is much superior to one which lasts for a speck of time. If lasting quality matters, we ought to invest our lives for an eternal profit.

2. **Priority Of The Spiritual Over The Physical.** “God is Spirit” (John 4:24). We are more apt to care for the body than the soul. Jesus told the woman at the well, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14). Spiritual water is more significant and enduring than physical water.

Building in this life a house of godly deeds is better than accumulating earthly real estate (1 Cor. 3:11-15). “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). His words are spirit and life (John 6:63), unlike man’s best words. One observes in these comparisons that the nature of spiritual things makes them superior to the things of this world. Obviously, we ought to invest our lives in spiritual priorities whenever possible.

3. **Priority Of People Over Things.** The Lord told a story of a certain rich man who lived only to accumulate goods. He called the man a fool (Luke 12:16-21). Things are subject to decay, deterioration and destruction. All that is part of our

present material world will pass away. By contrast, man is constituted an immortal soul. He will never cease to exist. That is why Jesus asked, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37).

The soul of a man is so precious that Jesus laid down His life to save it. He did not do this for things. He told us that kindness to others (a cup of cold water) and giving our assistance to prisoners, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and the stranger for His sake would not lose its reward (Matt. 25:35-40). The Lord Himself showed a great concern for people but very little concern for things. Wherever possible, we ought to invest first in people! The Lord loved people and used things. His disciples should do the same, not the opposite.

Fulfilling Our Responsibilities

Scripture does not leave us with a view that man is to spend all his time just contemplating God. From the earliest days of Creation, man has had responsibilities (Gen. 2:15). He also had privileges and blessings. Unfortunately, he used his privileges of marrying, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, to shut out God from the place of priority (Luke 17:27-32; Matt. 24:38, 39). The judgment of man came when he had no time for God.

How shall our days be ordered in proper balance? The following areas of responsibility are dictated, in order of priority, by the Word of God:

1. **Responsibility Toward God.** In a general sense, the Lord should be a part of every area of our lives. But here we consider that which intimately concerns our fellowship

with Him. The Psalmist cried, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psa. 27:8b). He said, “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa. 84:2). The disciples spent time alone with the Lord Jesus, even as He took time out to be alone with the Father (Mark 1:35). We are often worried and bothered about many unimportant things, “but only a few things are necessary” (Luke 10:41, 42). In fact, really only one thing is supremely important. It is giving priority to sitting at the feet of Jesus even when one is a busy disciple.

2. **Responsibility Toward God’s People.** “While we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). The Church of Christ is our spiritual family. Believers are our brothers and God’s child ought to feel this way. Spiritual gifts are granted to us that we might build up other believers to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). The goal of Paul was to see every believer perfect, or mature, in Christ (Col. 1:28). The Lord asked Peter if he loved Him. When Peter said that he did, the Lord three times told him to feed and tend “My sheep” (John 21:15-17). We are told not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). Rather we are to minister to other believers in the body as active functioning members.

3. **Responsibility Toward Those Without Christ.** When millions are perishing around us without Christ daily, the disciple cannot be indifferent. Early in their ministry, the disciples were called by Jesus to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17; Matt. 4:19). His “Great Commission” to them was to go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature. Before His resurrection, Jesus called them to be “witnesses unto Me”

(Acts 1:8). We are to warn the unsaved of their peril (Ezek. 3:18-19; 33:8-11). The task, then, of every disciple is to continually witness to the lost, rather than to relegate it to the work of a few believers.

4. Responsibilities Of Normal Living. There are certain activities that are usual and customary for all people and which take time. The wise handling of these responsibilities will keep us from being consumed by them to the extent that the priorities previously mentioned fall by the wayside. Examples are:

- a. Wives, children, family. These closest to us in earthly ties should enjoy a very high priority. To neglect our family obligations is “to act worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Quality time investment and Christlike sacrificial love are necessary in the family (Eph. 5:25; Tit. 2:4). Yet plainly Christ and His spiritual family, the Church, take priority over even the closest family ties. How could we otherwise explain Luke 14:26 and Luke 8:19-21? Some who reject this sound teaching seek to use Genesis 2. They say the family existed prior to the church and therefore takes precedence. However, the Church was in God’s mind from eternity (Eph. 1:4; 3:10-11).

Furthermore Paul’s insight into the ultimate meaning of Genesis 2 reveals the eternal relationship of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:31-32). In view of the world’s temporary nature and the shortened opportunity to serve the Lord, Paul exhorts those who “have wives to be as though they had none” (1 Cor. 7:29). This clearly teaches an understanding of greater priorities. Remember that, when history has run its course,

temporal relationships will be no more. However, the Bride of Christ, the family of God, will remain and be glorified.

- b. Job performance. Career or work involvements more often cripple service for Christ than family demands. A believer should always be a profitable worker (Col. 3:22-24), knowing that all labor is to be “as to the Lord.” He should also be honest and fair (Luke 3:12-14). However, pouring time into jobs over and above the required amount, and thereby neglecting the things of the Lord, is an offense against Him. We need to be concerned primarily about our Father’s business (Luke 2:49), not slaves of men and work (1 Cor. 9:23).
- c. Routine duties. These can claim a disproportionate amount of our time. Listening to the Lord is more important than doing household chores (Luke 10:39-41), even though the latter must be done. Even necessities should not be the occasion of anxiety (Matt. 6:31). Many believers are encumbered with the routine and so are lagging in the things of God.
- d. Rest and recreation. For those working tirelessly in His service our Lord advocated rest from time to time (Mark 6:31). He grew physically and socially (Luke 2:52). Yet we cannot conclude from observing His life in the Gospels that He spent a great deal of time taking it easy or engaging in everyday sports. Keeping in good condition is helpful. A rest can improve our ability to serve Him. Recreation, however, should be kept within bounds.

Making Right Decisions

Lofty principles on priorities must be translated into day-to-day actions. Decisions have to be made in determining and then implementing godly priorities in daily living.

1. **Time Use.** Many decisions hinge on time availability. We do not have time for everything that might be done or that others want us to do. Each day we do have time for everything we ought to do and that we can do. This can only be true by prayerfully and carefully “redeeming the time” (buying up opportunities). These steps may be helpful.
 - a. Analyze your present time use by keeping track of a typical week.
 - b. Cut out lower priority items and consider how to salvage fragments.
 - c. Consider how to do two things at once that do not conflict (eating/reading, riding/listening, exercising/fellowship, dishwashing/memorizing).
 - d. Be careful about commitments. If you make them, keep them, but make them on a priority basis. Learn to say “No.”
2. **Major Decision Areas.** Our priorities are usually tested under one of the three areas considered below. Wrong priorities in these areas will impair or destroy the disciple’s effectiveness for God.
 - a. Job or educational decisions. These ought to be made on the basis of divine priorities, not on the basis of career advantage. How is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ being considered primarily in this decision?

- b. Geographic moves. A move must be made on the same basis, whether it be relocation in the same community or moving to a distant city or state. Jonah was not anxious to go to Nineveh, but that is where God wanted him. A divine burden is more important than personal preference about climate, location near family and friends, etc. Ministry objectives and personal growth must be considered.
 - c. Relationships. These must be evaluated in the light of the interests of Christ, not on the basis of personal preference. Paul may have preferred the company of Jews to Gentiles, but he was called to be an apostle to the latter, not the former. Romantic interests in particular must be so evaluated by the single person. Hospitality in the New Testament clearly goes against normal preferential lines (Luke 14:12-13).
3. **Evaluation Of Decisions.** When critical issues are under consideration, we ought to ask about the possible consequences of a decision. Will I carry it through to completion? How deeply will I be involved? How will this fit in with my life commitment to the Lord and to the ministry? The costliness of discipleship is clearly manifested when decisions are being made. Our priorities become evident in deeds, not high-sounding words spoken in discussions and conversations.

Conclusion

The following checklist, from Lesson 3 in *Basic Christian Training* on “The Lordship of Christ” bears review here:

Does every day begin with a fresh *commitment of my body to Jesus*? Does every other *interest* take second place to His

interests? Does every *decision* consider Him first? Does every *commitment* live up to my commitment to Him? Does every *relationship* have His approval? Does every *activity* enable Him to be present? Does every *area of life* come under His rule?

When we have finished life's course, most believers will wish they had lived differently, according to a higher standard of responsibility. When God's investment in us is considered and the return to Him is evaluated (Matt. 25:15-30; Luke 19:12-27; 16:9-13) at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), we may have cause to regret that our priorities on earth were not in order. Now is the time to set them straight and live accordingly. Then we will live as wise men or women and not as fools.

Study Guide: Priorities in Discipleship

First, carefully read Matthew 6:19-34 and answer the following questions.

1. Our priorities are those things we put first in our lives.
What often comes first in the eyes of the world (vv. 19, 25)?
2. How would you define "Treasures in Heaven"? Contrast the advantages and disadvantages of treasures in heaven versus treasures upon earth.

TREASURES UPON EARTH

Advantages

Disadvantages

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Advantages

Disadvantages

3. What is the connection between verses 19 and 20?
4. From verse 24, what is the major issue involved in determining right priorities?

In what ways do wrong priorities lead to reduced effectiveness for Christ (2 Tim. 2:4)?

5. What comfort and promises does Christ give to those who choose God's priorities (v. 33)?

What does Christ say about those who put material needs first (vv. 27-30)?

What does Christ's emphasis in the areas of eating, clothing, and shelter tell us about the probability of priority problems in these areas?

6. How would you apply Matthew 6:31-34 in your responsibilities of everyday life; in your responsibilities of making major decisions for your life's direction?
7. In connection with "treasure in Heaven," read Matt. 25:15-30; Luke 19:12-27 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Make one personal application to your life from *any* of these passages. What does "treasure in Heaven" mean to you?

Lesson 5: The Disciple as a Slave of Christ

“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16 NASB). The believer is distinctly called “Christ’s slave” (1 Cor. 7:22). Once we were “slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6). Now we are enslaved to God. It is a rare unbeliever who sees himself as a slave to sin. It is almost as rare as a believer who sees himself as a slave to the Lord Jesus. Yet it is the natural derivative of the doctrine that Jesus is Lord and Master to every true believer.

Slave is an offensive word to most of us. Slavery involves the idea of injustice, a forced compliance which is demeaning to our humanity as those made in the image of God. Being a slave seems unacceptable. It seems so out of place because the ancient practice of slavery has largely been eliminated in the world. However, it is possible to see the word in a different perspective. Man is a creation of God and lives in a closed system under His Creator. He cannot escape. Even pagan religions often recognized that all people are captives to almighty God. Our rights to make choices are only those which the moral Governor of the universe sees fit to allow. Man is self-governing only to the extent that God allows.

Enslavement to God means unconditional submission to Him. It is to bow down before His majesty, the all powerful Creator and Sustainer who is totally superior to us in every way. Whether or not we understand every implication of this role, we cannot claim to be the King’s subjects if we are not willing

to have Him rule over us (Luke 19:27). It is not demeaning to any person to be the willing slave of One who loves us and gave Himself for us, paying the price of His life (Gal. 2:20).

The Meaning of Slave

The Bible has two words for one who serves God. The first is *diakonos*, meaning an ordinary servant or attendant. Such were usually hired for wages and had certain rights. The word is used in Scripture both in an ordinary sense and also for those who serve the Lord. The word is translated ministers, as “minister of the Gospel” and is used for the office of deacons (1 Tim. 3:8; Phil. 1:1). There is however another word in Scripture for one who served—*doulos*, meaning bondservant or slave. Slaves were either bought at auction or captured and enslaved. They had *no rights* and received no wages. This word is used of believers, of the apostles, and even of the Lord Jesus Himself. It indicated total subservience to the will of God.

Believers are the slaves of God. We have been “bought with a price” and therefore are no longer our own (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). The price paid was His precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Believers are redeemed people. The idea of redemption or ransom is to buy for a price. A redeemed person is one purchased by the Lord, therefore belonging to Him. This includes all he is, has or hopes to be. Money, time, enablements, knowledge of the truth are all His investment and gracious gifts. They are to be used for His glory.

The Example of Godly Slaves

The apostles were completely dedicated to the Lord and showed this by assuming the position of slaves of Christ. Paul used this reference to himself repeatedly (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10;

Tit. 1:1). He included Timothy (Phil. 1:1) and Epaphras (Col. 4:12) in this company. He was so shut up to the purposes of God that he called himself “the prisoner of the Lord.” Peter belonged to this group (2 Pet. 1:1), as did James (Jas. 1:1).

All of the Lord’s followers are called to this designation and function (Eph. 6:6; Rev. 1:1). A believer, though free, is to consider himself or herself “Christ’s slave” (1 Cor. 7:22).

Realizing this position, Christ’s slave must not be quarrelsome but patient when wronged (2 Tim. 2:24). If he wishes to be first, then let him be “the slave of all” (Mark 10:44).

The follower of Christ is only imitating his Master by becoming a slave. Jesus took the role of a slave, obedient to God the Father and served humbly as a lowly man. The Lord laid aside the privileges of divine glory to take the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7). He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). It was in consequence of this that God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. The Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah show Him as a true disciple whose ears were ever open to God (Isa. 50:4-6; Psa. 40:6-8).

The Master made a point of illustrating this truth, setting an example for His followers when He washed their feet (John 13:1-17). He took a towel and performed the work of a slave, asking them if they understood the meaning of what He had done. He said that although He was their Lord and Master, He had given them this example. He said, “a slave is not greater than his master.” He was the Master who had done this. They were the slaves. They were not greater than He and should not assume this same role, which was completely proper for them. True, He did not *call them* slaves, but friends (John 15:14-15),

but they called themselves that, for such they unashamedly were.

Would you willingly accept this term for yourself in relation to the Lord Jesus? Would you be willing to apply the significance of the term to the way you live?

The Function of Godly Slaves

The obligations of total commitment to the Master, faithful service and loyalty, are basic to this role. We might add the need to be profitable to the Owner, as in the parables of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) and of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27). Each story illustrates the Lord's expectation that His people live in such a way as to use what He gives us to advance His interests and increase the profit to Him. It is the unprofitable slave who is declared to be worthless and wicked. It is the good and faithful slave who is commended, having invested what was given in a wise way. The profit of a slave is truly evidenced only when he exceeds what might be called basic obligations. He is unprofitable if he has only done what he *ought* to have done, the minimum duties (Luke 17:10).

The typical professing Christian ought to consider this carefully when weighing the acceptability of his lifestyle, priorities and service. Most are living on a very low level indeed in this respect.

How can we know what the Lord desires for us to be in this role? How shall we personally apply this profound realization? More is required than mental agreement, especially when it is without remedial action.

We might begin by ridding our minds of the thought that God is obligated to us in the slightest way. The reverse is true. "It is

of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). We are the object of undeserved favor called grace, not under any divine obligation. By seeing ourselves as being on a grace basis with God and by strengthening the attitude of loving appreciation we will have less difficulty in accepting our proper roles. It would help us to see that we are simply stewards (managers) of what God has given to us, not owners ourselves. That is how the Lord views us.

Each day therefore should be dedicated to God with the sincere prayer that we might be profitable to Him that day. What matters is what He wants, not what *we* want. Complete availability to the Master, at His beck and call, is the responsibility of a good slave.

We might reflect upon the qualities of a good worker or servant and seek to incorporate these qualities into our lives. These include:

1. *Prompt response* to requests or orders is a positive trait, especially when accompanied by a cheerful spirit that does not complain.
2. *Hard work or diligence* endears a worker to any boss. The lazy man or slacker is a bane on the workplace (Prov. 10:26; 18:19; 24:30-31).
3. *Dependability* is a must. Jeremiah 48:10 reads, "Cursed be the one who does the Lord's work negligently." Careless or poor service in the things of God is an insult to Him.
4. *Skill or competence* in what we do is important. One should be a "worker that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15).
5. *Loyalty* has become a rare quality, but workers who are loyal to their employers are the backbone of any group. We

should be loyal to Christ, to the church where we fellowship and to our fellow servants or slaves. The devoted slave in the Old Testament never wanted to leave his master (Exod. 21:5-6; Deut. 15:17) even when he could.

6. *Observant* workers should not need to be told every thing they need to do. They see needs and quietly do what is needed without prompting. The servant looks for opportunities to serve.
7. *Getting along with others* on the team is a must. Those who are easily offended, critical, complaining and argumentative never seem to be in short supply. Wherever they are they seem to cause problems instead of helping form solutions. If they will not change, it is usually necessary to get rid of them in the interests of peace and unity on the team.

The Hindrances to Living as Godly Saints

No believer will be a godly slave who considers this role to be demeaning or something to be resented. Such a person will be far more interested in his rights, his fulfillment in life, his own interests, than in seeking the glory of God. Can we joyfully accept our role out of deep gratitude to the One to whom we owe everything? Can love for Christ motivate us to the necessary life of sacrifice?

Like any aspect of godly living, we will need to be grounded upon a deep and sincere faith. Do we believe what the Word of God says as to our calling? A superficial faith which agrees with truth, without personal application, will never lead to godly service. If we are satisfied with the outward forms of Christian living such as church attendance, plus generally

moral lives, then we will never rise above this. If Christ is worth anything, is He not worth all?

The role of a slave requires humility and submission to proper authority. Neither of these qualities is widely respected today. Pride in the form of independent and unteachable attitudes is common. Few would accept the challenge of the Lord Jesus. “Take My yoke and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly” (Matt. 11:29). Many want to give orders who have never learned to accept orders. They are too undisciplined to be good soldiers. People are taught that submission means inferiority and denial of proper respect or rights. This teaching has been extended even to small children.

The underlying truth simply is that when people *lack* deep commitment to Christ and a real consecration of their lives, they will never accept the role of being His slaves. Those who do accept this role will still need to work daily to improve their function and profitability to the Lord. They will need to seek opportunities to serve others in His name.

Does the church of Christ have responsibility to cater to weak and carnal believers to make *them* happy? Or to preach only what they want to hear? Read 2 Timothy 4:3 on this point. Is this consistent with the spirit of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:12 who had legitimate rights that he was not willing to claim in order to advance the Gospel? Luke 17:7-10 illustrates the proper attitude of a true slave who claims no rights and expects no thanks but serves faithfully.

In the end, he says he is unworthy as a slave because he has only done what he should have done. This is light years apart from contemporary attitudes. Believers today expect to be admired, appreciated, recognized, affirmed and asked their

opinion. No doubt this is effective in handling (or manipulating) people for one's own purposes. However, the slave of Christ will neither seek nor expect such flattering treatment. Our loving service is to the Lord Jesus Christ, not unto men.

The Rewards of Being Godly Slaves to Christ

Why should anyone want to be a slave of Christ? Many think that it is enough to say they have “accepted Christ,” and have assurance of Heaven and eternal life. Now they are free to live as they please, gaining the most they can squeeze out for themselves. They can have all this and Heaven too, the best of *both* worlds. The fallacy of this thinking is shown by the Lord's words in John 12:25 and Luke 9:24. To live for Christ here and now is to save your life. To live for the present life only will mean that you will throw it away. Think that through carefully.

The believer now is building his eternal home out of his present deeds (1 Cor. 3:11-15). His acts which are like gold can be precious in God's sight, or they can be mere wood, hay and stubble. He can lay up treasure in Heaven (Matt. 6:20; 19:21) increasing his heavenly reward, gaining reward for so much as a cup of water given in the Lord's Name (Mark 9:41). The same passage that calls attention to the evaluation of our own lives and service as believers also stresses the highest motivation — loving appreciation for the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10, 14-15).

Peter wondered if serving the Lord by leaving everything would be fully rewarded. The Lord assured him that he would not only receive a hundred times as much *in the present life* but much more eternally (Mark 10:28-30). Do you think it will

pay to be regarded as Christ's faithful and wise slave (Matt. 24:45-47)?

Study Guide: The Disciple as a Slave of Christ

1. The New Testament mentions many who considered themselves slaves of Christ. In what way did these men demonstrate this truth in their lives?
2. Read Philippians 2:3-11 and John 13:1-17. What qualities of a servant do you see Jesus displaying in these passages?

Paul reminds us that we are “bought with a price” and therefore are Christ's slaves (1 Cor. 7:22-23). Consider what it means to be a slave of Christ. Share your thoughts on this. Refer back to the checklist at the end of lesson 4 for some practical applications.

The Lord of Glory relinquished His “rights,” the enjoyment of His divine prerogatives, when He humbled Himself to the point of slavery (Phil. 2:6-7). What “rights” or self-interests do you cherish which may hinder your giving yourself to the wholehearted service of God? What specific steps are needed to overcome these hindrances?

Many believers say they are not familiar with the doctrine of the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). However, Matthew 6:20; 19:21; Mark 10:28-30; 1 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 6:10; 2 Peter 1:11 are among many verses teaching this subject. Would you consider it righteous of God to make *no* special recognition of a devoted and sacrificial life here on earth? In what practical way *should* it affect your daily life? Should this add to the supreme motive of love for Jesus (2 Cor. 5:14-15)?

6. In all honesty, explain if this teaching troubles or offends you in any way. What then is the answer to you?

Lesson 6: The School of God in Discipleship

Making disciples means teaching others to observe all the Lord's commands. Therefore discipleship supposes a learning process. The disciple as a learner first listens, then observes, then practices what he has learned. There is a pondering of the ways of the Master which are often mysterious. There are crisis experiences, testings, times of drawing near, and times of failure. The Lord's disciples were often astonished at His doctrine (Matt. 13:54; Mark 10:26), at His ways (Mark 5:42; 6:2), at His skill (Mark 7:37). He told them many precious things repeatedly, and they failed to understand (John 8:43; Matt. 15:16). Despite His many miracles, they were slow to believe (Luke 24:25; Mark 16:14). As the people of the Old Testament did not know the ways of the Lord, nor regard them when instructed, so the disciples often did not understand His ways when they followed.

It is that we might know the ways of the Lord and prepare for eternal fellowship with Him that we are being trained now. When we have what one might call "the eternal perspective" on life, it helps us avoid too much emphasis on present circumstances, which may be difficult. The growth of character for eternity is evidently part of God's purpose for our present lives.

The Teacher

God is the Great Teacher in His school, the master instructor who is the Beginning and End, the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega. No student ever had a better or wiser teacher.

Who is able to instruct the Lord on any matter (1 Cor. 2:16)? The Lord's examination of Job develops this question very well (Job 38). It must be a source of amazement to all the heavenly host that man, God's sinful creature, should presume to argue with God and pretend to a higher wisdom than the One who has all-knowledge.

God was the Teacher of Israel by means of His servant Moses (Deut. 4:5). His providential dealings were evident with the patriarchs, and He often communicated with them by direct revelation, by dreams and by visions. The Psalmist cried out to be instructed in the ways of the Lord (Psa. 25:4, 8-9, 12; 27:11). It is the Word of God which is the instructional instrument of the Great Teacher (Psa. 119). Life is the classroom. The disciple is the learner. God is the Teacher (1 Thess. 4:9).

"Teacher" was a very common form of address to the Lord Jesus, using the ordinary word *didaskalos*. It was one of His greatest functions. Whether by the seashore, in the ship, on the mountain, before the crowds, or with the Twelve, He was the Teacher supreme. Also, He was often accorded the respectful title of *rabbi*, meaning "my master," a term given to Jewish leaders then and now as a religious title. This more formal address was used in John 1:38; 3:2; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8, by His disciples, and still retained by the traitor, Judas, until the end (Matt. 26:25; 26:49).

The most respectful title of all was *rabboni*, "my great master," usually applied to the president of the ruling council (Sanhedrin), if he was a descendant of the revered Hillel. This was accorded our Lord by blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47-51) and Mary Magdalene (John 20:16). It should cause us to pause and reflect that a one-time demon-possessed woman and a

blind man are the only two persons to give the Lord Jesus the supreme title of respect as a teacher. The supreme teacher has always been the Lord Himself, who invited all, “Take My yoke upon you and *learn from Me!*” (Matt. 11:29).

The Subjects

One often hears this statement: “I know that God is trying to teach me something, but I don’t know what it is.” As with any course of study, it behooves us to know the subjects we are taking. What is the Great Teacher seeking to convey to us?

1. **About Himself.** The chief subject of theology is God Himself. He complained that even the ox and ass knew their owners, but the nation of Israel did not know their God (Isa. 1:3). Well along in his ministry, the Apostle Paul still had for his goal, “that I might know *Him*” (Phil. 3:10). The greatest glory of any man is his knowledge of God (Jer. 9:24). He teaches us the fear of the Lord (Psa. 45:4), the ways of the Lord (Psa. 51:13), the Word of the Lord (Psa. 119:12, 26, 64, 68) and the need to do His will (Psa. 143:10). We need to know the meaning of having a Master who has all-power, all-knowledge, all-presence; One who is perfectly holy, just, righteous, true, faithful, sufficient, loving and gracious; One who is infinite, self-existent, sovereign and beyond total comprehension. The chief purpose of Bible study is to know God. Every day we should make it our aim to know more of Him, experiential knowledge included.
2. **About The Centrality Of Jesus Christ.** It has pleased God to reveal Himself in all fullness in the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He has given Him a name which is above

every name, so that every knee must bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). He has given all judgment into His hands (John 5:22). In all things Christ must have the preeminence (Col.1:18). He is Lord over all, central in time and eternity and is to be central in the lives of those who have discovered that they are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). “Christ is our life” (Col. 3:4). He has saved us, not to find satisfaction in seeking personal fulfillment, but to glorify Him. That is the purpose of our creation. Eternity will unfold in the great job of knowing more and more every day about the inexhaustible riches of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are learning this now when we make Him the central person in our lives.

3. **About Ourselves.** We need to realize the tremendous value that God has placed on us. We are made in His image in the moral and spiritual realm (Gen. 1:27; 5:1; 9:6). He cries out to us, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). He so loved us that He gave His well-beloved Son for us (John 3:16). The Son has mightily loved us and sacrificed Himself for us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4; 5:2), going even unto the death of the Cross (Phil. 2:7-8). One soul is worth the precious blood of the Lamb of God. That makes us of infinite value as persons.

When it comes to our flesh, our nature which has been corrupted by sin, our self-will, then this is a different lesson. We are not to put “confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3), nor rely upon self in any way (2 Cor. 1:9). “All flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of grass” (1 Pet. 1:24). The Psalmist pleads for God to help him in knowing how frail he is, how fleeting life is (Psa. 39:4). “The flesh profits nothing” (John

6:63). It is said to those who are weak, sinful and faulty, “They whom are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). How important for man to learn to rely upon God, not upon self! To lean upon Him, not unto his own understanding (Prov. 3:5).

We are destined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). All that comprises His character is to be implanted into our lives. We want to observe His attitudes, sense His priorities, imitate His relationships with others and give attention to people and their needs as He did. We want to adopt His principles of thought and action, His responses to situations and His way of speaking. We want to grow in love, the most emphasized of all Christian virtues. We need to be concerned about obedience, lowliness, faith, zeal, patience, kindness and holiness. True character is being Christ-like. We want to add to our faith every virtue commanded of God (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

The Purpose

The child of God is training for eternity, not for time. He thought about us in eternity past, choosing us in Christ from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He predestined us to the adoption of children and heirs of God (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:17). He makes us an object lesson of His grace and manifold wisdom unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10).

God has an eternal plan for us. We are now involved in building “the house of life” in the light of our eternal future (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Our future responsibilities correspond to our present stewardship (Luke 19:17-19). We are being prepared to judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3). We shall be worshipping forever in the very

presence of the Eternal God (Rev. 5:7-14). Therefore, the purpose of the School of God is to prepare us for eternity.

God's "thoughts which are to us-ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order... they are more than can be numbered" (Psa. 40:5). His voice speaks to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21). "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psa. 37:23). God has a plan for our lives, and it is glorious to seek and to live out the details of that plan.

The Discipline

1. **Experiential.** Learning must go beyond increasing information. Certain lessons cannot be learned merely from reading books, even the Bible. There are those things which must be learned, in a human sense, by experience. "Experience" is not used here in the sense of subjective feeling but in the context of "living through an event or events." The Hebrew word *paideia* is translated *chastening* or *instruction* in our language. It is from the root meaning "child" and refers to child-training but is also used in the instruction of a disciple (Acts 22:3; 7:22). Hebrew children of an earlier day were trained in the Scriptures, in desirable moral or intellectual qualities and in behavior. At times, this involved physical discipline with a "rod" (Prov. 22:15; 23:13-14). It is interesting that the same word translated "chastise" is used in the physical sense of our Lord's afflictions (Luke 23:16, 22) and in a figurative way of God's discipline of the believer (Heb. 12:5-11).

Strict discipline is a part of our training by God, and is largely taught in the classroom of life. Experience must never be used

to override truth taught in Scripture. However, it can illustrate and make practical what Scripture teaches.

2. **Corrective.** This word for corrective training is translated “teach” or “instruct” in Titus 2:12-13, 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:25 and 3:16, referring to necessary discipline. In this last passage this word is translated “instruction in righteousness” and might also be rendered “discipline in righteousness.” The chastening or discipline is a sign of the Lord’s love and concern for our growth as sons (Heb. 12:6-7). There is emphasis on the necessity of right attitude toward this discipline if it is to be profitable. This is conveyed by showing the necessity of discipline. The result of this training is that “it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11 NIV). We must be receptive. Those who refuse instruction are not seen in a favorable light in Scripture (Psa.50:17; Prov. 1:7; 5:12; 13:1). They are like mules, noted for their stubbornness (Psa. 32:9). The patience of God with such is emphasized in Jeremiah 32:33 and 35:13, but in Isaiah 50:4-7 there is a portrait of the coming Messiah as a true disciple, prepared above all to truly obey God. “The Lord God has opened my ears and I was not disobedient, nor did I turn back.”

That attitude is the beginning requirement for spiritual learning. You *want* to obey God. You *want* to learn for this purpose, not for mere academic inquiry or personal adornment. For this reason, not many professed believers are good learners. Moreover, not many Bible teachers are good instructors from God’s perspective. Add to this that the Lord Jesus counsels would-be disciples this way: “Take My yoke

upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). When you have no wish to accept a yoke and no sense of need for humility before God or man, then you will not be a spiritual learner.

Much teaching has been too complex for the simple minds of ordinary people. Simplicity of expression, even in the most profound truths, was the mark of the Master Teacher. That is one reason why “the common people heard Him gladly.” They understood Him, at least in some measure, unlike the teaching of the more learned Rabbis. Those who fancy themselves as learned men often write and speak for the approval of their peers, not to help the common man know God. How does God speak to the unlearned? “Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there,” He says (Isa. 28:10). The Lord Jesus withheld certain teaching at times, in consideration of the listeners’ capacity. “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). If some seem “dull of hearing,” the Lord may give the *milk* of the Word when He would prefer to provide more solid food (Heb. 5:11-14).

The problem of absorbing, applying and living according to godly principles might be explained by these observations:

- a. Said is not always *heard*.
- b. Heard is not always *understood*.
- c. Understood is not always *agreed*.
- d. Agreed is not always *done*.
- e. Done is not always *continued*.

The Word of God is the Spirit's principal tool in producing spiritual transformation in believers. Yet it is evident that a typical believer listens to messages with little or no intention of singling out truths and personally applying them. He is a listener, not a learner, and he is not trying to listen to God. The practice continues in personal reading of the Scriptures. A small minority have achieved consistent fruit from devotional times in the Word, when God's voice is clearly and accurately heard. Most "see print" when they read the Scriptures, as someone has said. They absorb *information* and *facts*. They agree with well-known truths. They review the familiar. They do their duty by reading the Bible and then close it, untouched spiritually. Nothing has truly been learned that will make any difference in their lives *today*. They didn't really expect that to happen and it did not happen. Perhaps no one helped them learn how to develop this ability. Certainly, an effective spiritual helper would make sure this practice was happening daily. There are five major actions in the learning process.

How We Learn in God's School

1. **By Listening.** This must be done with a view to taking heed. The Lord Jesus often said, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears." Or again, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." He complained when their ears were "dull of hearing" (Matt. 13:15). If we do not carefully listen to the Word of God or hear the Word when we ponder it in writing, then we learn very little. Those who have "ears that hear not" are condemned to their own ignorance (Psa. 115:6; 135:17) and will be given a judicial deadening (Isa. 6:10) for refusing to listen.

2. **By Observing.** The disciples were constantly watching the Lord. It was on the occasion of observing Him in the practice of prayer that they asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). The example of the Lord Jesus was their model and it is ours (1 John 2:6). It is always well in the most trying of circumstances to ask ourselves, "What would He do?" We will know what He would do by taking note of what He did in some parallel situation. That is why we should get up in the morning to pray for our enemies. This is why we must live a life of dependency upon Him and cultivate simplicity of life. That is why we must proclaim the Name of the Lord to others. Refusal to heed His example as applicable to our own lives is refusal to learn.
3. **By Meditating.** We have largely lost the art of reflection today. The constant assault of activities, television, radio, music, mindless rattling and plain noise have robbed the believer of time apart to think upon the Lord. It was while the Psalmist mused that the "fire burned" (Psa. 39:3). Learning comes not from mere reading or observation. We must take time to evaluate or sort out. When we evaluate, we begin to enter into experiences like recognition, understanding and perception. We bring together divergent things into a whole (synthesis). We enter into problem-solving which is a form of advanced perception. We are called by God to meditate in order to learn as disciples (Josh. 1:8; Psa. 1:2; 63:6; 77:12). The one who neglects reflection will dismiss from his mind the most profound of lessons or drown them out by ceaseless activity and social interchange.

4. **By Doing.** True learning involves a commitment to what we have learned. God is not educating us to merely observe or critique. Doctrine is to be applied to practice. That is the typical order of the epistles of Paul. The Lord practiced all He taught (Acts 1:1). He has called us to do the same. Those who are hearers of the Word and not doers are condemned by that Word {Jas. 1:22). It is self-deception. Teaching without accompanying practical training is contrary to the divine example. Making disciples involves practical training as well as head knowledge.

The School of God, under the Master Teacher, will therefore involve the disciples in hearing the Word of God, in observing the example of the Lord Jesus, and that of godly leaders and mature Christians who are proper models. Reflection will come by spending time in reviewing the lessons which come daily. Good teaching requires repetition. It is evident that this is not without limit. The disciple should cultivate a teachable spirit (Prov. 4:13; 8:33; 23:23). The learner obeys the voice of his teachers and inclines his ear to those who instruct him (Prov. 5:1). How much more should the disciple heed the Great Teacher!

5. **By Instruction.** What might the Lord be teaching us experientially? He may be expected to expose us to the great truths of the Word of God because of their effect in our lives. We should not expect lessons that are contrary to the Word of God. God will not cause us to neglect His Word while teaching us experientially. We must learn the ways of God (Matt. 22:16; Luke 20:21). We must learn all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20). God will seek to implant the virtues of our Lord Jesus into our inner being.

He will teach us how to love (1 Thess. 4:9). It is the preeminent Christian virtue (1 Cor. 13:13). He will teach us obedience (1 Sam. 15:22). How otherwise could we honor Him or instruct others? He will teach us faith, for without it we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). He will teach us hope, for it rests upon the promises of God (Rom. 8:20-25). He will teach us godliness (1 Tim. 6:2-3) for we are to be in His likeness. He will teach us zeal, because this challenges others and imitates our Savior (2 Cor. 9:2; John 2:17). He will teach us dependency on God's sufficiency during our greatest needs (2 Cor. 12:9). He will show us a need for an end to self-will and death to self, for "except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24). He will bring us to the cross and bid us take it to follow Him (Luke 9:23; Mark 10:21; Matt. 10:38). He will teach us that humiliation precedes glorification in God's order (Phil. 2:5-9). He will show us that the earthen vessel must first be broken before it gives forth light (Judg. 7:20). The alabaster vial must be broken before it releases its costly perfume (Mark 14:3). It is the way of the cross.

Conclusion

What is the central purpose of this lesson? It is to give us a larger perspective about experiences in life from the viewpoint of God's eternal purposes. We need to enlarge our vision beyond our present circumstances. If we are being conformed to the image of Christ, then character formation is very important in what happens. The lessons of some believers may differ from others, depending on what each needs to learn, what changes need to be achieved. God gives us comfort and

encouragement at times, teaching us of His great love and compassion.

The Holy Spirit is called the helper. We need to know God continually wants to help us. The Lord Jesus is the Great High Priest who continually intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25). We often need to discover afresh that His grace is sufficient for us even when we feel weak or afflicted. The Apostle Paul wrote that he could pleasure in infirmities (2 Cor. 12:9-10). He sensed there was the opportunity for the development of patience, trust and the ability to comfort others (Jas. 1:2-4; 2 Cor. 1:3-6).

Study Guide: The School of God in Discipleship

1. An oft-given explanation to believers in distress is that “it’s just the will of God” or “sovereignty of God,” meaning His right as supreme being to do as He sees fit. Read Romans 8:28-29 and write briefly how you might use this passage to help someone better understand and accept some difficulty.
2. How have you seen God working in your life that was instructive to you? How did this relate to your learning and character?
3. In what way do you rely upon the Word of God for direction in your life? How do you achieve this?
4. What are the major purposes of God’s instruction and dealing in your life experiences, as you interpret them?
5. What in your estimation makes you a good student in God’s School? Or what has made you a poor one? Consider the comparison given in Hebrews 5:12-14 in this

connection. Why the differing growth rate? Consider the motivation of love for Christ or the depth of your faith.

6. What could you do to be a better student in the School of God? What major truth do you intend to apply to your life as a result of this lesson?

Lesson 7: The Disciple's Vision for a Lost World

The Son of Man visited our planet with the stated intent of seeking and saving that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Although limiting His activities primarily to the confines of Judea and Galilee, His mission extended well beyond only the salvation of the “lost sheep of Israel.” He spoke of the Gentile peoples, who knew nothing of a promised Messiah, “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Jesus was the Mediator sent by a God who desired “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-6). His blood was the ransom payment necessary for the purchase of people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

As our Lord traveled from village to village teaching, evangelizing and healing, the mere sight of the masses gripped His heart. Observing the distressing spiritual state of the lost sheep of Israel and their sad lack of any shepherding care, He was visibly moved with deep compassion for them. Deeply burdened for people, He began speaking to His disciples. He said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send our workers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:35-38). Jesus envisioned a mighty army of willing workers being sent out to harvest men and women who needed His salvation. It would be necessary for these laborers to share His vision in order to fulfill it.

The global nature of our Lord's vision for reaching the lost, indicated in the gospels, was most clearly expressed during His resurrection appearances. This spirit-empowered enterprise would commence in Jerusalem and would not be

completed until the gospel had been preached in “the remotest part of the earth ... to all creation” (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15). The Lord of the harvest commanded His disciples first to go to all the peoples, and second, to make disciples of them by baptizing them, and teaching them to adhere to all of His teachings. Furthermore, the responsibility for global evangelization would be shared by all disciples, since this last command is to be observed by all true disciples (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Vision Which Overcomes Narrow Vision

As the Lord began sharing His plans for world evangelism with His original disciples, He had to contend with the prejudice and narrowness prevalent in those times. The Jews misunderstood their privileged position. Instead of conceiving their role as God's witnesses and instruments of blessing to the nations, they despised them. Some rabbis even considered the Gentiles to be so much fuel for the fires of hell. The Book of Acts records a long teaching process necessary to overcome this error. The Christians literally had to be forced by persecution beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem (Acts 11:19). Supernatural visions, the miraculous convergence of circumstance and the believing gentiles' visible, audible reception of the Holy Spirit were necessary to convince the apostle Peter and his Jewish brethren. They saw that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to approach Him (Acts 10:34-35).

The Jewish antipathy toward the neighboring despised Samaritans was even more drastic. On one occasion, upon being denied lodging in a Samaritan village, our Lord had to

remind His followers of their wrong attitude (Luke 9:51-56). He intended that one day these same Jewish apostles would call down upon Samaritans not fire from heaven, but the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). He spoke favorably of Samaritans (Luke 10:33). To the astonishment of the twelve the Master would begin His Samaritan campaign by speaking to a despised woman.

The Lord exclaimed, "Behold I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields, that they are white for harvest." Then lifting their eyes, the twelve beheld the Samaritan village near at hand. This unexpected harvest field was indeed ripe (John 4:1-42)!

Most Christians would deny having any racial or religious prejudice, yet the same ones would have a very limited vision for world evangelization. Most believers never point anyone to Christ. Perhaps this is due to fear, or lack of training, or ignorance of their responsibility. Still others might be wrapped up in their own comfortable existences. They are not gripped by the utter lostness of the lost. Their concern does not extend beyond the confines of their own family, church or region. This is what is meant by narrow vision.

Henry Martyn, the great missionary to India, said, "The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of missions and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become." How un-Christlike have many Christians become!

The Vision for Worldwide Harvest

"Eyes that look are common. Eyes that see are rare," said Oswald Sanders.

It is very difficult to visualize the vast multitudes without Christ. At the outset of the 1990's, there were about 5.3 billion people inhabiting our planet. About one-third of this number are church members or professing Christians. Less than 300 million belong to church movements that could be termed "evangelical" by any stretch of the imagination. Many of these are only nominal Christians. Even assuming that a good number of true believers are present in non-evangelical churches, this might be offset by the number in evangelical churches who are living with a false profession. The total then would still be only 300 million at best, though we could hope for more.

If we deduct from the total population those who are true believers, we arrive at a figure of 5 billion people who need Christ as Lord and Savior. Half of these scarcely know anything at all about Him, let alone have a clear understanding of the gospel. Visualize this great multitude in this way: Picture a great mass of humanity walking past, one hundred persons abreast. At a brisk march, 80 rows per minute might pass, 8,000 a minute. In a day there would be 12 million. That would be scarcely a beginning, marching steadily day and night at this rate, it would take a month for 360 million to pass. It would take two months of this for the population of India alone to pass. It would take 14 months of this to review the total number of people who are presently bound for a Christless eternity. Half again more of this number will come into this company by birth during the coming 15 years. So vast is this number that some have estimated that half of the people who ever lived may be numbered in this generation. It is little wonder that unbelievers have challenged us about our belief that all men are lost without Christ. "If you truly believe

this, why haven't you done more to spread your message by every means?" Our answer is weak and unconvincing.

The Vision for Cross-Cultural Outreach Penetration

If we would lift up our eyes and behold this gigantic harvest field, we would recognize that understanding the immense task is merely preliminary. The vast *majority* of those lost souls live on the wrong side of a formidable cultural and linguistic barrier which deprives them of the witness of vital evangelizing churches. While it is true that churches exist in about every nation in this world, there are various peoples, tribes, ethnic groups and differing languages within each nation who are almost totally unreached.

This challenge of cross-cultural evangelism is exemplified by Pakistan. It is a country with a population of 100 million, but with only 1 million *nominal* Christians. For a Muslim country a ratio of 1 in 100 as believers does not seem bad. However, 99% of these professed believers are from nominal Christian homes or out of the lowest Hindu castes. Moreover, the Christians are called "the sweepers" because many come from those employed as street sweepers. They have no social links whatever with the 97% Muslim majority. The gospel impact on this huge majority of the population is negligible. Only 3% of the populace can be reached without radical cross-cultural evangelism, which has *not* taken place. This same phenomena repeats itself around the globe!

The Vision for Present Action

Our mandate extends to the *entire world* and we cannot pretend we are already there. However, we must think about future events in connection with our own present actions. A

global vision calls for local action. What role can we play in this gigantic effort?

A. Involvement At Home

1. *Personal Prayer.* Informed prayer is needed daily. Correspondence with workers on the field, special handbooks such as “Operation World”¹ or the “Missionary Handbook” can jog your memory for systematic prayer. Remember our Lord’s own prayer request for laborers for the harvest (Matt. 9:38).
2. *Prayer Groups.* Those who meet regularly have proven to be an effective means of intercession. Good leadership and preparation of such meetings is needed.
3. *Missions Emphasis.* Support the missions work of your local assembly. Know the missionaries commended to the Lord’s work on the foreign field. Attend and support missionary conferences. In some places a limited type of missions emphasis has been substituted for a global vision. The focal point of the undertaking has often been shifted from “the fields” (John 4:35) to the workers; from the needs of the national churches to those of the missionaries themselves. Instead of identifying ourselves with the spiritual condition of the churches and the lost among a people, we find ourselves admiring the sacrifice of the missionary. A balanced approach to missions will emphasize the one without neglecting the other.
4. *Financial Support.* As God leads, give generously to support missionary enterprise. Resist responding to the fervent direct mail appeals, with multicolored brochures. Workers who don’t resort to such solicitation methods, but

trust God instead for the supply of their needs, deserve the highest priority. Don't overlook your assembly as a means of forwarding funds to workers (Phil. 1:7; 4:15-18).

5. *International Students Ministry*. While many countries still restrict Christian endeavor, visitors from these countries pour into the colleges of the free world. Educational opportunities lure thousands of gifted nationals from these lands. The opportunities to evangelize on campus or to extend hospitality are as strategic as they are numerous.
6. *Refugees and Minorities*. Multitudes of internationals have come within range of the gospel while fleeing oppression and war. Many more Cambodians have been won to Christ in the U.S. than in their entire history previous to the recent war.

Here are unique opportunities to demonstrate Christian love and to reach the otherwise unreachable. Many are interested in improving their language skills.

B. Involvement Overseas—Should I consider long-term involvement overseas? This is a question calling for serious consideration and realism. Many gifted and otherwise committed Christians, who could have been greatly used on the mission field haven't given this question adequate consideration. It would seem that young men especially are prone to giving themselves to career goals. The educational track on which they run leads them elsewhere. Many young aspirants are deflected from the mission field by affairs of this life only.

Not everyone is called to service overseas, but the desire to do so is to be commended and will be rewarded by God (1 Kgs.

8:18). Many missionaries serving on the foreign field are qualified neither in character nor in ability, and God did not lead them there. It is of utmost importance that we use sound judgment when appraising our gifts and suitability for this work. The danger exists of thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3-6). Godly elders should be more objective in their appraisal. Their counsel can be a valuable help in ascertaining God's call (Acts 16:1-3; 18:27-28; 1 Tim. 4:14). If God is leading us to serve Him in some greater capacity, ask Him to confirm this conviction through other godly leaders (Acts 13:1-3).

C. Other Suggestions

1. Cooperate with God in dealing with your character flaws now. The biggest problems on the mission field today are often the missionaries themselves. Learn to resolve grievances quickly. Get along with and work well with others. A disciplined devotional life is a must! Self-discipline in general will be at a premium. If you haven't learned to manage the limited time remaining after your work week, how will you work efficiently with more time on your hands?
2. Demonstrate your ministry skills in the local assembly. Fruitfulness in evangelism should not wait until you become a financial care for the people of God. Fruitfulness should be a prerequisite for going. We should demonstrate effectiveness in our major gift area as well.
3. Correspond with experienced workers on the field. It will encourage them and stimulate your prayers. Try to capitalize on their experience; try to avoid any mistakes they may have made.

4. Preview the work through a preliminary trip to a field in which you are interested. If married, have both husband and wife go as a team. It might avoid a mistake when the stakes may be higher.
5. It is possible to check out a field through a parachurch organization. It might be a good way, but not always the best. If possible, work for a time with a seasoned senior worker (Phil. 2:19-22, etc.) This is better than working on a team with inexperienced and sometimes ill-prepared young people.

The Vision with Lasting Motivation

1. **There Must Be A Sense Of Urgency.** Present missionary activity is totally insufficient to meet the need. The task of reaching every tribe, language, people and nation is unfinished (Rev. 5:9).
2. **There Must Be A Sense Of Personal Responsibility.** A certain man once asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). His answer was the famed story of the Good Samaritan. This man was a despised racial outcast who helped a wounded stranger while many religious people passed by. If believers are not responsible to carry out God’s desire to reach a world of lost sinners, then who is? The clear command of Jesus Christ in the Great Commission is all that we really need (Matt. 28:19).
3. **There Must Be A Proper Motivation.** Because Christ loved me and reached down to my need, then I ought to hear His voice of concern for others. It is His love that should constrain us (2 Cor. 5:14), not to gain acceptance with God.

Charles Marsh in his missionary classic² tells this touching story of an Algerian Muslim youth with whom the good news about Jesus Christ, the Savior sent from heaven, was shared. The Muslim asked the believer:

“Are there any beside yourself who know this?” “Indeed there are, for there are millions in the world who have believed in Jesus Christ and through Him have found peace and joy and forgiveness.” “But surely no one else in this land knows it?” “Oh yes, they do.” “How many others know it?” “There must be many in Algiers alone and many, many more in Europe.”

“Then, if they really believe it, why has no one ever been to tell us? No, you Christians do not really believe your message. If you did really believe you would have come to us before!”

Study Guide: The Disciple's Vision for a Lost World

1. What idea or concept has challenged you most? What response do you have to the number of people who need to be reached with the Gospel?
2. In what way has your sense of responsibility towards world missions *changed* through this lesson?
3. In what way have you involved yourself in world missions? Review the list under “Vision for Present Action.”
4. How might you be more personally involved in world mission efforts in the future?
5. What prayer efforts are you currently involved in for world missions? For what foreign missionaries or countries do you frequently pray?

6. What can you do to keep the urgency of this task before you? Read Appendix A, *A Strange but True Story*, before answering.

Lesson 8: The Disciple's Vision for the Church

The Apostle Paul was concerned that believers grasp God's great vision for His church. "I pray that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling ..." (Eph. 1:18a). God wants His people to know the exalted role and responsibilities to which He has called and saved them. He has prepared us "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man ..." {1 Cor. 2:9-10). Certain mysteries were revealed to and recorded by the apostles, including that of the formation of the church. As fellow heirs of Christ, we need the Spirit's enlightenment and spiritual vision in order to properly understand God's truths. God would also have us marvel at "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18b). God deems Himself to be exceedingly wealthy as the possessor of the saints. When heaven and earth are discarded, like a well-worn garment, those things which God values will shine forth in glory, including this vision for His church. The disciple should have this same high vision.

Paul's prayer for the readers of the Ephesian epistle (Eph. 3:14-21) strikes this chord. He petitions the Father on behalf of his readers. Having just written of the "mystery of Christ," meaning the incorporation of believing Jew and Gentile jointly into the body of Christ, he prays that Christ might dwell in our hearts so that we might be in a position to fathom the four-dimensional expanse of the mystery of Christ and His church (Eph. 3:14-18). Feeble and often self-centered hearts need the inward strengthening of the Spirit in order to receive what

God wants to reveal. “The breadth” reminds us of the insurmountable chasm existing between Jew and Gentile. Those “who were formerly far off have been brought near” in Christ (Eph. 2:13-14).

The “length” may express the boundless blessings of God’s church, being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be shown the surpassing riches of His grace in Christ in the ages to come (Eph. 1:3-4; 2:7). Oh, to what unsearchable “height” has God’s assembly been raised! Joined to Him “who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things,” we are “seated in the heavenlies” in Christ (Eph. 2:6; 4:10).

But to which unfathomable “depth” did our Savior descend as He “gave Himself up” for the church, His bride, redeeming her through His blood (Eph. 5:25; 1:7)? In the middle of this four-dimensional reality stands Christ, in whom the purpose of the ages was carried out (Eph. 3:11). Oh, that God would grant us a strengthening of heart to gain a vision for Christ and His church!

The Church, Universal and Local

The *church* or *assembly* is a term describing the totality of believers called out of Judaism and from among the nations. These believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit to become a spiritual body, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). This process began at the time of Pentecost and will continue until the rapture, or translation, of the church to be with the Lord in glory (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). We sometimes call this body *the universal church*, as there is only *one* church in existence, which is made up of *all true* believers. Believers

gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus in various locations were called the *churches of Christ* (Rom. 16:16), *churches of God* (1 Cor. 11:16), and *churches of the saints* (1 Cor. 14:33). New Testament letters were addressed to such bodies bearing the name of their respective cities: Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica and Philippi. Therefore we term them *local churches*. These serve as outposts of heaven in a hellish world. The Lord Jesus promises every group of believers, regardless of group size, the power of the Name of the Lord Jesus and Heaven's authority in dealing with sin (Matt. 18:15-20).

Christians read the Scriptures and make applications in a highly individualistic way today. The Bible emphasizes the community aspect of spiritual life and addresses believers corporately. The local church is seen as both competent and responsible to correctly interpret doctrine.

The Centrality of the Church

The assembly of Christ is not an afterthought. We're corporately "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4). God's eternal purpose remained a secret, hidden deep in His heart, until He chose to reveal the mystery of the Church to the apostles and the New Testament prophets (Eph. 3:2-11). Although God's plan remained concealed, great events often cast their shadows before them. God hinted time and again at His mystery. He provided the first man with a bride, suitable to him, one taken from the man's pierced side (Gen. 2). This theme keeps building through both Testaments, up to its climax. This is when the Bride is to be presented to the second Man, Christ (Rev. 21:2; Eph. 5:25-32). It has been said that the Old Testament is the history of a people for whom a man called Messiah was to come. The New

Testament is the history of that Man and of the spiritual woman formed out of His pierced side—His Bride, the Church of Christ. The theme of the coming hallelujahs in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb will be the readiness of the Bride (the Church) and not the solitary individual. The importance of the church is to be found in its relationship with the heavenly Bridegroom in the heavenly places with Him. The beauty of the church cannot be seen by examining the flaws of its earthly manifestation. God views the Church in accordance with its destiny, “chosen in Christ ... holy and blameless before Him in love” (Eph. 1:3-4).

The Exceeding Worth of the Church

The worth of anything is measured by the price anyone is willing to pay for it. God placed great value upon His flock at Ephesus. This is evident because He purchased it with the precious blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28). Believers have often overlooked the fact that Christ died not only for their own personal sins, but “that He might also gather together into one (assembly) the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51-52). We hear the good Shepherd saying that, “He would lay down His life for the sheep,” meaning the Jews (Ezek. 34:11-16). He added, however, “and I have other sheep, which are not of this fold (*the gentiles*). I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice: and they shall become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:11, 16). The shepherd died and now lives to unify His flock, the assembly of God (John 10:17)¹

The 24 elders representing the Church sing out, “Worthy art Thou ... for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and

nation” (Rev. 5:9). Oh, what inestimable value God places upon the church!

The Son of God came into our world like a merchant seeking fine pearls. Where we may have seen weakness, failure and unseemliness, He found “a pearl of great value,” the church. So great was His joy at the prospect of possessing the pearl, He willingly sold all that He had and bought it! That joyous prospect sustained Him through all the shame men could heap upon Him, as well as through the judgment of the cross (Matt. 13:45-46; Heb. 12:2). “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25), and there is no greater love than this self-sacrificial love (John 15:13). His love extends to each local church as well as the universal Church.

This is seen in Paul’s sharing Christ’s jealousy for His fiancée, the local assembly in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:2-3). Christ Himself views His Bride in terms of the outcome of His labor of love. It will be redeemed, sanctified, cleansed and presented to Himself, “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph. 5:25-27). We, as His disciples, would do well to adopt His perspective. His constraining love should cause us to view His people, especially His local assemblies, in terms of what we actually are, His new creation (2 Cor. 5:14-17).

The Importance of the Church

1. **The Early Church And Apostolic Practice.** The first local assembly evidenced a distinct sense of community (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:12). They were well aware of the importance of life together in the church. Upon conversion, these early disciples were baptized and demonstrated the reality of their conversion by continuing steadfastly in the apostles’

teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (John 8:31-32; Acts 2:41-42). This holy company of believers was admired by the public, who nonetheless feared to come in and associate with them. Still, God added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47; 5:11-13).

Being aware that they gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and that they represented Him on earth, the local churches exercised godly discipline, thus maintaining their holy testimony (Matt. 18:17-20; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6-7). Congregations of believers, who carry on in this way today, are churches legitimately representing the Lord. The local church is the principal unit of God's people on earth and has been since its inception.

2. The Ministry Of The Apostle Paul. Paul certainly shared Christ's vision of the church. He longed after the church in Philippi "with all the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:8). Weakness and dissension among God's people gave him no cause to criticize it in some detached way. The concern for all the local assemblies should impress itself upon the true disciple of Jesus daily (2 Cor. 11:28). The welfare of the local churches was his life (1 Thess. 3:5-10). He labored and struggled on behalf of local churches he had never seen personally. He deemed his anguished suffering as a contribution to "filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" on behalf of His Body (Col. 1:24; 2:2). Not thriving on the acclaim and gratitude of men, he even wrote the unthankful Corinthian church, "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" (2 Cor. 12:15).

Paul conceived of himself as one of God's fellow-workers. The Lord Jesus had promised to build His church and Paul was a wise master builder working according to his Master's plan (1 Cor. 3:9-11; Matt. 16:18). Paul's missionary journeys were intended to visit the new assemblies, strengthening them in the faith and preaching the gospel in the regions beyond. He thus laid the groundwork for more churches. Wherever Paul labored, churches were planted (Acts 15:36; 16:4-5). Paul gave himself to the training of men who would in turn train others, thus providing leadership of the churches (2 Tim. 2:2).

Timothy, unlike many Christians, shared Paul's vision and burden for the churches (Phil. 2:19-22). The letters to Timothy and Titus are largely concerned with assembly life (1 Tim. 3:15) and adequate leadership and care of the churches. Other Pauline letters are a form of pastoral work, by extension, being addressed to the churches.

The Lord's Disciples in the Local Church Today

1. THE DISCIPLE'S COMMITMENT TO FELLOWSHIP. As we have seen, every believer is introduced into the Body of Christ through baptism in the Holy Spirit. They were added to the local church and were seen taking their place in the local church fellowship, devoting themselves to the church and its gatherings (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 12:12-28). They were subject to the leadership of the local elders (1 Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:17). Working in specialized ministries or Christian organizations is no substitute for involvement in what God has established as the Biblical functioning unit, the local church. Lip service to the universal body of Christ, without constructive involvement locally, should not be acceptable to the disciple of Jesus.

2. **The Disciple's Ministry Center.** Wherever the Word of God grew according to the New Testament account, it left local assemblies in its wake (Acts 12:24; 16:5). There is no evidence of a "great commission movement" alongside the local churches in the New Testament. Next to the church today, we can observe myriads of these "parachurch" organizations. This is an idea foreign to the Scriptural record. The disciple of Christ should examine his own ideas relating to the issue and rediscover how God designed discipleship in its relationship to the church. Literally thousands of parachurch ministries have sprung up in the U.S. alone in the past few decades. While disclaiming being local churches, they often carry on specialized ministries to groups of people, which local churches have often neglected. The majority of these works could, and should, be carried out by local churches. Will disciples with the Master's vision take up the challenge?

The Lord Jesus gave the church such great men as the apostles, prophets and evangelists to equip His saints for the work of the ministry of building up the church (Eph. 4:11-16). Each member of Christ's body has a gift entrusted to him to be employed in the service of the other members of the body (1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

3. **The Disciple's Training Center.** Both our Lord and His apostles devoted a considerable amount of time to the training of workers. These would become the leaders of the churches. The manner of training was both "to do and teach" (Acts 1:1; Mark 3:14). Neither the Master nor the apostles seemed to have employed the typical, academic

style of training familiar both to the rabbis of that day or to the modern college or seminary. Much Christian training is now modeled after the secular, academic world rather than according to the pattern of our Lord and the apostolic company. Life and ministry in the local church provides many training opportunities. Spiritual and experienced men are required to carry on this much needed ministry.

4. **The Multiplication Of Local Churches.** The Book of Acts tells of the spread of the Word and the multiplication of churches. Existing local churches ought to provide assistance in the formation of other local churches. Paul's work in Ephesus resulted in the spread of the Word through the whole Asian province. New churches were established in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 1:6; 4:13). The Biblical base for the expansion of God's work is in the local assemblies, not in independent organizations or boards.

Conclusion

Such a vision for the church might seem unusual for many Christians. They tend to understand salvation in a purely individual sense. Many Scriptures that seem to communicate in the individual sense actually refer to the people of God corporately. Christians sometimes think too much in terms of "me" and too little in terms of "us"!

Alan Stibbs, in his book *God's Church*, expresses our concern in this way. "It is God's unmistakable purpose to have a people of His own and by His amazing grace it is the utterly undeserved privilege of all who belong to Christ to belong to this community, the people of God. How could we possibly share the Master's vision and yet view the local church as a

secondary matter or an embarrassment? What could be more nobler than the church, of which He is Head?" "Christ loved the church"... and the churches ... and still does. Do you?

Study Guide: The Disciple's Vision for the Church

1. Write a definition for a local assembly.
2. Sum up how the Lord Jesus Christ feels about His assembly (Eph. 3:14-18; 5:25). Considering weakness and failure often seen in the assembly, what is the basis of His attitude?
3. "I don't feel that I need to go to church. I read my Bible and pray. I have a *personal* relationship with God." How would you reply to this statement?
4. What response/Scripture would you give to someone who mentions that he has spiritual fellowship in home study groups, campus groups or by visiting various churches to hear speakers and meet other believers? (Include also those who watch/listen to the "electronic church" [i.e., T.V./radio] and listen to tapes of outstanding preachers at home.)
5. "If the local church was doing her job, our (parachurch) organization would not be needed." Defend or challenge this statement.
6.
 - a. If you were going to a new community, how would you select a local church? What criteria would you use or suggest to others that they use? If possible, cite Scripture.
 - b. How and for what reason could you Scripturally leave a local church?

7. What must be present in a local assembly to provide in a basic way the training necessary to equip fresh leadership? List what is available or lacking in your home assembly?
8. If God laid it on your heart to go with others into a new area to start an assembly, what would you need to get started? What would be your objective within five years?
9. Has this lesson effected how you view the assembly? If so, in what regard? How will you apply what you have learned?

Lesson 9: Laboring in Discipleship

“I must work the works of Him that sent Me” (John 9:4). The Lord Jesus Christ was a worker. In this He joined together with the One who sent Him. “My Father has been working until now” (John 5:17). God is seen as a worker from the opening pages of Scripture (Gen. 2:2-3). Creation was His work. The accomplishment of salvation was a work which the Son finished (John 17:4; 19:30). The labors of believers even now are to be seen as making us “workers together” with God (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. 1 Cor. 3:9). The picture of the Lord in Scripture is that of the Great Worker, not the Great Bystander. The Lord’s people, who are called “to walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6), should follow in His steps.

All are Called to Labor

Since the times of our Lord Jesus there have never been enough laborers to adequately carry on the work of God. It was this problem that caused the Lord to say, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the *laborers* are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38). There have been many Christians, but there have been few laborers. Many believers do not know that God has called *all* of His people to labor.

1. **As Taught In The New Testament.** It is easy to see that the laborers in the New Testament included the Twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:1-4), the Seventy (Luke 10:1-2), Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2), Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10; Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). However, the list widens beyond this company to a larger group of believers. These would include Mary (Rom. 16:6),

Tryphena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12), Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Persis (Rom. 16:12), all of Rome. Among those in Philippi were Euodia, Syntyche and Clement (Phil. 4:2-3). Add Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17), Gaius (3 John 1), Philemon (Philemon 1), Justus and Epaphras (Col. 4:11-12), and no doubt Aristarchus and Mark (Col. 4:10). Note that women were very active.

The Spirit speaks of *all* believers as workers (Eph. 4:12, 16; 1 Cor. 15:58), just as they are *all* servants, *all* priests, *all* saints. This includes the single and the married, those with families and those who have none, male and female, old and young. No distinction is made in calling a certain group to “the work of the Lord” and others not so, based on whether they have full or part time jobs, or have been professionally trained.

- 2. Yet Neglected Since Apostolic Times.** One of the great problems of contemporary Christianity is the limited conception of the role of the average believer. With the rise of the “clergy-laity” distinction among believers, it was thought that the work of the Lord was set apart essentially for a professional class of ministers, bearing titles and being divinely “ordained.” Supposedly, these were the ones who understood the Scriptures and did whatever was to be done. Others were called “laymen” (common people), doing common or lesser tasks. There is no Scriptural basis for this distinction. Among other unfortunate effects, this has resulted in blinding believers to their universal calling to work together with God in a mighty, worldwide endeavor to make Christ known and then spiritually build up those being won to Him.

All Are Needed to Labor

1. **As Full-Time Workers.** Whether we hold a secular job or work for God “full-time,” we still “serve the Lord Jesus Christ” (Col. 3:24). Jesus Christ served the Father no less during His years as a carpenter than the three and a half years in itinerant ministry. If we are in the will of God, we are all full-timers in this larger sense. Just as there is no Biblical distinction between clergy and laity, there is also no distinction between secular and sacred employment, although we sometimes use those terms. Whether we give up our jobs to concentrate on the work of the Lord depends on the effectiveness of our current ministry, the demonstrated need for more ministry in our gift area(s) and the recognition of these needs by the church leadership.

The Biblical pattern for ministry is seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. As a young man, he learned a trade (tent-making). After conversion, he yielded his occupation to the priorities of the kingdom. Sometimes he is seen working “full-time” in his trade while pouring all his spare time into the ministry. At other times, it was expedient to set aside his tent-making job and spend all of his time in direct ministry. In the latter case, he was entitled to the financial support of fellow-believers (Luke 10:7; Matt. 10:10; 1 Tim. 5:17).

2. **As Specialists And Generalists.** It is one thing to declare that Scripture calls for every believer to be a laborer, but what are we supposed to do? Are there not differences in gifts? Yes! The very fact that each believer has a spiritual gift and is called to function in the Body by use of that gift, reinforces the idea of a working function (1 Cor. 12). In spite

of this, at times there seems to be a paralysis of function within the church due to the claim that we do not know what our gift is. Believers are called upon to function in numerous gift areas whether they have that gift or not. We can all give, show mercy, exhort, help and many similar things. However, we should not minimize the particular gifts given us, but use them (2 Tim. 1:6). These develop only as we use them. Spiritual gifts are for the “equipping of the saints” (Eph. 4:11-12). This is the divine provision for “building up the Body” through the saints themselves. The people are “God’s building” and we are builders together with Him (1 Cor. 3:9-10). The disciple’s goal is to help present “every man mature in Christ” {Col. 1:28-29}. That is the chief part of our labor for God.

3. **As People Persons.** Supremely, the work of God is bound up with people. It has been said that the life of Jesus could be summed up in one word—“others.” He poured out His earthly life for other people. He continues to intercede now in heaven for us (Heb. 7:25). He demonstrated a quality that each of us needs. He is a “people person”; one with a “heart for people.” This calls us away from isolation to be involved with others for Christ’s sake. We are to look after the interests of others, not just our own (Phil. 2:4). Unhappy people are often occupied with themselves. Our circle of involvement should not be confined to family and a few other contacts.
4. **Workers In A United Body.** The passage in Corinthians 15:58 pictures the entire church being involved in the work of the Lord. This high view of our function, like that of being members of the Body, moves beyond the usual view

of membership. We are all to be workers “unto the Kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11), and are all to labor in prayer in the advancement of this kingdom (Col. 4:12). In an exclusive sense (Acts 6:4) all believers are called to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word. But all can be involved in the work of evangelism in the general sense (2 Tim. 4:5). We are all to be laborers toiling in the work of the Gospel (Phil. 4:3). To each of us has been committed the “word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). There is also practical work (1 Cor. 16:15-16) in the area of helps or service.

5. **As Pioneers In New Fields.** It is from the ranks of diligent workers in local churches that the Lord no doubt will “thrust out” workers into the larger field (Matt. 9:38). Barnabas and Saul were separated by the Holy Spirit for missionary ministry elsewhere, only when they had *first proven themselves* where they were (Acts 13:2), even endangering their lives for the work of Christ (Acts 15:25, 26). Mobile workers such as Judas and Silas were sent forth, as well as John Mark (Acts 15:37). Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, Trophimus, Silas, Epaphroditus were also among the many workers moving about the world as God’s representatives. They saw a mighty harvest field, to which the Lord Jesus called them. They knew that reapers received wages and gathered fruit unto life eternal (John 4:35-36). What a life vision!

Why Don’t Many Believers Become Laborers?

In spite of the vital importance and the unbelievable immensity of the tasks facing the church today the workers

remain but few (Matt. 9:37-38). How can it be, with so many Christians, that so few can be termed laborers?

1. **Relying Upon Paid “Professional” Staff.** The unbiblical clergy-laity division of labor continues to stifle so-called “laypersons,” even in Bible oriented movements. Believers are largely reduced to the role of money-givers and listeners. Gifted members of the body are denied meaningful ministry opportunities, especially in pastoral and preaching areas. The tendency to relegate ministry of a spiritual nature to full-time workers remains even in churches who may not appreciate this system. The layperson expects the full-time worker to do what he’s hired him to do. When asked why they are not engaged in the work and service of the Lord many reply that they don’t feel called or prepared. This is a gross misunderstanding of the call for all believers to serve. Many more would labor if they were given challenge, opportunity and “in house” training. Believers should be challenged to consider the Lord’s work as their *chief* occupation and their job income as support.
2. **Insufficient Training.** Most Christian movements provide some specialized training yet they still look to professional schools to do most of this. However, little practical training for meaningful ministry is made available to ordinary church members. The risen Christ has given His church great gifts in people with God-given capabilities. Evangelists, pastors and teachers are called of God to equip the rest of the saints for *meaningful ministry in the body* (Eph. 4:11-13). The usage of the word translated “equip” is quite instructive. It is used of fishermen mending

(repairing) their nets (Matt. 4:21). The nautical term was used for *preparing* a ship for voyage. As a medical term this word describes the *restoration* of a disjointed member of the body to its proper function (Gal. 6:1).

The potential contribution of many Christians lies dormant, often buried under unresolved problems and ill-training. They need repair! Those believers who lack “know-how” need preparation for the Lord’s work. Still others need supervision and help to find their proper place of function in the body. Such training and care has been sadly lacking in most churches.

3. **Fear Of Signing Up For Life.** Some believers hesitate to take on a responsibility for fear of committing themselves to “serving a life sentence” in a certain ministry. Instead of performing a task at which they may possibly fail, they do nothing. Rather than running the risk of involvement in a ministry, of which they may grow weary, they play it safe while remaining idle. Initial involvement ought properly to be for a specific period.
4. **LACK OF MOTIVATION.** Some believers seem content in the pursuit of secondary life goals. The crying needs of the church fall upon deaf ears. The plight of lost souls doesn’t move them. The call of the Lord leaves them cold. Many a Christian is spiritually “blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins” (2 Pet. 1:9).

What Can You Do to Become an Effectual Laborer?

1. **Make Yourself Available For The Service Of God.** As a young man Isaiah received a prostrating vision of the sovereign Lord of hosts. Isaiah became keenly aware of his

profound unworthiness as a spokesman for God, being overwhelmed by the beauty of His holiness. Then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” The prophet responded, “*Here I am. Send me/*” (Isa. 6:1-8). God delights in the voluntary service of those who feel greatly privileged to serve such a wonderful Lord (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12). God wants to use people who feel overwhelmed with a sense of His greatness. His great mercies should move believers to present themselves for service (Rom. 12:1-2).

2. Consider Where Your Aptitudes Or Gifts May Lie.

Scripture stresses the need for sound judgment when considering our gifts and function within the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3). Seek opportunity for service in the area of your supposed gift and get started. It's impossible to steer a ship that's sitting dead in the water! Be open to suggestions or needs which at first seem to intimidate you.

3. Seek Training In The Specific Area Of Concern. Take the initiative. What ministry and learning opportunities are available? Who has the necessary expertise to train you for this task? On-the-job training is most valuable. “Learning by doing” under supervision of experienced workers is ideal.

How Can You Improve Your Labor?

1. Set High Standards For Yourself. Although unrealistic expectations can discourage the beginner from initiating necessary action, we should never allow ourselves to be satisfied with mediocrity. The Jews offered sacrifices to the Lord which they wouldn't have thought of giving to the governor. Lame and sickly sacrifices are a disgrace to the

Lord of glory and dishonor Him (Mal. 1). His work deserves excellence! Evaluate your ministry performance. Set realistic and ambitious goals. “Cursed is the one who does the Lord’s work negligently!” (Jer. 48:10).

2. **Confer With Others And Review Your Ministry.** We stand or fall before our Lord. His commendation is of primary concern. Also, the constructive criticism and counsel of concerned co-workers can be a real help in our quest to improve our work for the Lord. Individualism and the lack of teachability are the arch-enemies of improvement. The book of Proverbs expresses the beneficial effect of working with others. “Iron sharpens iron. So one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

Conclusion

New believers should be taught that they are called to be spiritual *workers* in the Kingdom of God. There is nothing wrong with attending services, preparing church dinners, singing in the choir, ushering and being committee members in the church. Many professed believers do not even take part to this extent. A careful consideration of the Scriptures, however, will indicate that we are called to a life and ministry that far exceeds these familiar activities. Had the church been doing this, and teaching its converts to do this, its history might have been far different. Long ago, the believers went forth and proclaimed their message of Christ everywhere and “the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the Word with signs following” (Mark 16:20). The early Christians, even when persecuted, “went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4). The tragedy of the church is that it ceased to see that this was its great mission and that every believer should be active in

that mission. Investing our lives in believers who become fruitful workers is one means of knowing we have not labored in vain.

Study Guide: Laboring in Discipleship

1. Read Matthew 9:36-38. What caused Jesus to be moved with compassion? What great need did He see? What observations did He make regarding laborers?
2. Who has the Lord called to participate in the work of the harvest (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 15:58; Acts 8:1; Matt. 10:8b)?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Explain how specialization of function is necessary for effective ministry.
4. In what sense must we be “general practitioners” in the body as well as specialists?
5. What is our responsibility regarding our spiritual gift (2 Tim. 1:6)? What do you think your spiritual gift is? How are you using it in your local church now?
6. What is God’s view on the difference between a “full-time” Christian worker and a Christian worker who holds down a “secular” occupation (see Acts 18:1-5, 11, 24-26)? How would you determine whether to hold a “tent-making” job or to concentrate all your time in direct ministry?
7. Often workers are thrust out from a local area to other areas. Who sends out these workers (Acts 13:2)? How is this carried out by the church (Acts 15:22-25)? How had these men proved themselves *before* they were sent out (Acts 15:25-26)?
8. If the Lord evaluated your work in the church today, in what way would He speak to you about your activity, in

your opinion? Are your activities commensurate with your gift and calling?

Lesson 10: Multiplication in Discipleship

“The number of the disciples multiplied” (Acts 6:7). The multiplication process in the disciples of the Lord Jesus began when He called the Twelve (Luke 6:13-16). It increased when He raised up the additional seventy (Luke 10:1). On the Day of Pentecost when the church was formed by the baptism of the Spirit, the number of the disciples gathered was 120 (Acts 1:15). Their ranks soon were increased by thousands (Acts 2:41). As their number and zeal for God increased, their enemies complained, “These men ... have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 RSV). They were doing exactly what their Teacher had told them to do. They had gone out into the world and made disciples among the nations.

Making disciples is the expressed will of God (Matt. 28:19). The term disciple is used in Scripture at times as a synonym for any professed Christians (Acts 11:26). However, the Lord Jesus spoke of those who were genuine or true disciples (John 8:31). They had responded to the very strict terms which He laid down in such passages as Luke 14:26-33. Therefore they took heed to His words in the Great Commission, “teaching them to observe *all things whatsoever* I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). This was more than a call to being a convert or “deciding for Christ.” Disciples, like all living things, are made by God to reproduce themselves.

At the *minimum*, a disciple should certainly be expected to obey the Lord in *baptism*, be in *active fellowship* in the local assembly, and be *serving the Lord* in accordance with his or her gifts and abilities. The most humble and limited believer can certainly do this much, if willing. It is important for leaders

to seek to bring everyone who makes a profession of faith to this *minimum* standard. That is what has been called “follow up work.” It occurs when a more mature believer accepts the responsibility of helping a new convert make a start in this new life by regularly reading the Word, praying, attending assembly meetings and getting rid of the grave clothes of the former life. The convert’s progress during this period is a good indication of willingness to follow the Lord fully despite any obstacles. It is their own attitude, not *our* desire, that affects development. Our desire should be to help *any* believer progress to the fullest extent of which they are capable and willing (Col. 1:28-29).

Beyond this stage of being a somewhat basic disciple is the one who is willing to become a spiritual worker. This entails the willingness of some to invest their lives in helping others be their best for God, just as they have been helped themselves. It also means the ability and dedication to be faithful in helping others become spiritual workers. If we are to make disciples, as the Lord commanded, then we must give ourselves to this ministry of *disciple-making*. People are helped by someone, not something. If disciples are made, not born, then there is a need to be doing this. We cannot expect that merely listening to sermons or attending church will make believers into disciples who *observe* all that the Lord commanded. Some might become prayer warriors or fill some other key function. The final result, however, will be an increase in the number of laborers for Christ.

We face an immense task in the harvest field. It can only be accomplished by an increase of laborers. There are too few of them, according to the Lord Jesus {Matt. 9:37-38}. There

certainly is a shortage of those responding to the Lord's invitation to *all* to become followers. Multiplication of followers who become disciple-makers is crucial to the increase of laborers who will carry out the Lord's assigned mission. Multiplication is necessary in a world with an exploding population. A penny *multiplied* each day will exceed a million *added* each day in less than a month. Converts need to be followed up effectively, then disciplined to a higher level of spiritual maturity and effectiveness. Disciple-makers can help believers mature by spiritual parenting (1 Thess. 2:7-12).

The Quality of Multiplying Disciples

There is a great need for people who are sold out to Christ and who have convictions about the kind of life God intended for His people. Such people have a vision of this life as the path to eternal glory. They know that we are merely pilgrims and strangers here on earth (1 Pet. 2:11). Such disciples are voluntarily willing, not compelled or coerced, to live a life of sacrificial devotion to the Lord they love. Even though brilliance and great talents are not necessary, they do need to be willing to obey the Lord and be faithful to Him. What are other characteristics a genuine disciple should display?

1. Love the Lord Jesus above all others (Luke 14:26).
2. Willingly carry their cross to follow Him (Luke 14:27).
3. Hold to His teaching (John 8:31-32), observing all that He has commanded (Matt. 28:20).
4. Love one another (John 13:34-35).
5. Bear fruit (John 15:7-8).
6. Share their faith (witness) effectively (Acts 1:8).

7. Be rooted, built up, established in the faith (Col. 2:7).
8. Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) as Spirit-filled people.
9. Live holy lives, separated unto God (1 Pet. 1:15-16), manifesting Christlike characteristics.
10. Have fruitful, regular devotional times with God (Isa. 50:4-5).

Since the goal of God is to bring every believer to maturity in Christ, in life and ministry, the disciple maker must be willing to labor to this end in helping others by utilizing God's power (Col. 1:28-29). Indeed, he must have a great vision of a ministry of multiplication of productive disciples. The disciple maker must understand that the most effective means of multiplication are not to be found in techniques, sermon listening or church programs. The discipler must realize that people who are fueled by God's mighty strength, of which he or she wishes to be included, are the only way of furthering Christ's commands, reproducing even to the third generation.

The Process of Multiplying Disciples

One must begin right to finish right. Our time is limited and we can only give intensive attention to a very few people. Therefore, it is important to invest precious private time wisely. The Lord Jesus, our example, prayed all night before He selected twelve men {Luke 6:12-13}. Some of those we contact may not be ready for special discipling now, but could be ready later. The Lord Jesus took three years to work with His men and even then, they seemed scarcely ready until after His resurrection. It is recommended that you test a person's faithfulness over a few weeks as you initially meet together.

Effective training can be possible through two mutually complementary means.

Training in Groups

Doctrinal and factual knowledge can be best transmitted in groups. However “sound doctrine” is more than giving sermons to mere listeners (Tit. 2:1-10; 1 Tim. 1:5; 4:6). It must also be taught in a life-changing way by those who model what they teach (2 Tim. 3:10; Phil. 4:9). Ideally, there should be opportunity to interact and respond to the material with a trained discussion leader. Personal study with homework assignments and thought provoking questions will help foster the formation of personal convictions.

Training Individually

Both personal and private counsel and prayer stimulate the growth and development of believers, according to their specific and differing needs. This is a matter of *parenting*, not manipulating, pushing, intruding and lording it over people (1 Thess. 2:5-11). This is the true arena of disciple-making.

A disciple-maker should seek to close the gap between what the believer *knows* and what he needs to *be and do*. Strong convictions need to be established from the Word. Teaching is best understood when given *life to life*, not from notebook to notebook. We should deal with issues of the other person's life; not as someone who has already attained some peak (Phil. 3:12), but as one who is seeking to press upward towards a common goal.

The following Biblical principles will greatly enhance effective individual training:

1. **Selection** of faithful people willing to commit themselves to the task of ministering to others is basic to the multiplication of disciples. The Master selected and trained 12 to minister to others (Mark 3:14). The importance of careful selection is punctuated by the preceding night spent in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). Paul followed in the Master's steps and encouraged Timothy to do the same by investing his life in faithful and capable people, who would in turn teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). It has been well said that Jesus loved all, served many, and trained a few.
2. **Time Together** in order to concentrate our efforts is essential. The Lord appointed His disciples to be "with Him" (Mark 3:14). This training through association took place, not in a classroom setting, but on the job—while traveling and ministering to the multitudes, at meal time, and as the Lord and His disciples retired to private discussion and teaching. Our Lord answered many questions privately arising from His teaching ministry (Luke 8:9-10). Private time is where true friendship can be developed and deeper lessons learned. This time requirement limits the number of people with whom we can work.
3. **Demonstration** involves joint ministry together. We should be examples (Tit. 2:7-8). In this way we can show in specific, practical ways what needs to be done and how. We can demonstrate servanthood, hospitality, care for others and prayer life. We can show that we really do depend on God. Be a model (2 Tim. 3:10; 1 Cor. 4:16-17).
4. **Planning Your Time** together makes for greater effectiveness. This step is often neglected entirely. How

can we improve what we are doing? What is necessary to deepen the quality of his commitment to Christ?

Major Areas for Growth and Development of Disciples and Workers

The disciple-maker's planning and working at disciple-making needs to keep clear objectives before him. We suggest four major areas for growth and development:

1. **An Effective Regular Devotional Time** with God is absolutely indispensable and non-negotiable. If this battle is not won, the cause is lost. This will require the ability to make a clear personal application from the Word that is directly related to a text of Scripture. When the Holy Spirit uses His Word on the soul and spirit of a responsive disciple, there is meaning, change and growth.
2. **Witnessing Or Sharing Our Faith As A Way Of Life** is an integral part of disciple-making. Believers must learn to break any pattern of timidity or apathy in sharing their faith with those in their own circle of relationships. This will require motivation, training and a vision of a lost world without Christ. Demonstration is the best method (Phil. 2:19-22). It is helpful to give training in how to give a testimony and share the Gospel clearly.
3. **Character Development** is a major part of God's work in the souls of His people. It must be of primary concern in our ministry (1 Tim. 1:5; Col. 1:28). Unless deficiencies are noted and overcome, as well as strengths sharpened, disciples will pass on their weaknesses and hinder the fruitfulness of those with whom they are working.

4. **Ministry Skills** are important to perfect. Disciples need to know how to study the Scripture and feed themselves from the Word. This includes accurate and thoughtful study with an intelligent use of study tools. One must know how to use time wisely and to prioritize tasks in order of importance, according to God's Word. They should understand spiritual gifts and how to use what the Lord has entrusted to them. They should memorize Scripture. It is helpful if they learn basic counseling skills. They may need to improve their ability to effectively communicate conversationally or to teach. The importance of the church as the central unit of God's work on earth should be made clear. They need to be actively involved in the local assembly.

Resolving Problems in Multiplying Disciples

The path of helping others mature is often a difficult one, requiring careful thought and prayer. Spiritual development is often thought to be based upon the steady increase in factual information about the Scriptures, or mere knowledge. Yet knowledge without personal application and obedience to the truth can be spiritually deadening. Some of the most knowledgeable believers are completely lacking in spiritual power in their lives. Some young and zealous believers, with limited knowledge, can be very effective. Of course, they can also do harm in their zeal. The difference in people is in their commitment to *do* the will of God in a wholehearted manner. We seek to train those who are committed to God's interests rather than their own.

The secret of power is in the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Zech. 4:6). The truly Spirit-filled person is one who fully

yields himself to the work of God without reservation each day and is like clay in the Potter's hands (Jer. 18:6). His motivation is love for Christ. He labors, with the knowledge that he is accepted already in the finished work of Christ and is fully justified, because he is in Christ (Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 1:7). He pursues a life of spiritual service out of gratitude to the Lord and in the knowledge of potential reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10, 14). Decisions, priorities and lifestyle are based upon these considerations. The Holy Spirit requires that we be holy vessels for His work. Christ is not an "add on" to our lives to make us more comfortable. "Christ is our life" (Col. 3:4). A faithful life is an outflowing of fellowship with Christ, as shown in the illustration of the vine and branches in John 15. It is vital that we persevere in appropriating His strength.

It is good to help less mature believers understand that three great foes—the *world* (system), the *flesh* (sinful natures) and the *Devil* (deceit, temptation)—seek to destroy their usefulness for God. Christ has given us full provision to defeat these foes. They must be appropriated daily, not just admired. Practical problems usually involve these areas:

1. Discouragement.
2. Excessive job demands.
3. Unresolved family problems.
4. Moral impurity.
5. Materialistic preoccupation.
6. Dim vision of the purpose of redeemed lives.
7. Irregular, unfruitful devotional times.
8. Failure to crucify daily the self-life.

9. Educational deficiencies (reading, listening, absorbing).

We must exercise discernment and constant watchfulness, first in our own lives and then in theirs, if we are to recognize symptoms of these problems early in their development (Acts 20:28). We can be most effective if the one being helped feels that we truly care for them in a sacrificial way (Phil. 1:8; Prov. 17:17). They particularly resent being considered as a “project.” Anyone who has helped raise children will understand the need for patience and kindness, as well as firmness, in helping them grow up. The same applies with adults. Our expectations must be realistic. Love is often demonstrated by persevering with people to help them overcome their problems.

At the same time we must convey that through Christ they can be whatever God has called them to be, by His enablement. Excuses which will not be acceptable before the Judgment Seat of Christ should not be used down here. Unfaithfulness, blame-shifting, and lack of genuine honesty in our mutual dealings should not be accepted. A good friend will not insult your intelligence by trying to flatter you or ignore what is wrong. We ought to seek to be respected before being concerned about whether we are liked.

Suppose it becomes obvious that another person does not want to pay the price of being a multiplying disciple. They should not be rejected for that reason *on a personal basis*. After all, most believers are in this category. God loves them anyway and so should we. At the same time, we cannot justify continuing to pour extra private time into people who are not going to be prepared to sacrifice themselves for others. As gracefully as possible, put your meetings “on hold”; and indicate that both of you need to pray about how the Lord

wants you to proceed in the future. Be careful not to convey the attitude of thinking they are permanent failures. Rather, we should pray and convey hope that positive change will occur in the future.

Conclusion

The Lord has called us to make and then multiply disciples, those who are genuine, true followers. They bear His image, serve His interests, glorify His Name. The goal is that one becomes two, then two become four, and so on, to a multiplication of spiritual laborers and worshippers. We want to give opportunity to as many who are willing to pay the price to do this. Investing our lives in training a few, even as we minister more broadly to the many, is not to create a spiritual elite for its own sake, but to accomplish the task which the Lord assigned to us. We understand that God works through spiritual people to accomplish much of His great work in other people. We wish to be a part of that sacred mission.

Study Guide: Multiplication in Discipleship

1. The Bible speaks of multiplication in two ways: physical (Gen. 1:28) and spiritual (Matt. 13:23; John 15:1-16). The Lord Jesus in John 15 talks about spiritual fruit. How can we be sure that we will be fruitful and that our fruit would remain?
2. Trace the multiplication of Christ's disciples from the choosing of the Twelve to the Day of Pentecost (Luke 6:13-16; 10:1; Acts 1:15; 2:41).

Of the multitudes that followed Him, upon how many did Jesus concentrate?

3. What practical reasons can you give for concentrating your ministry with one or two people, yet maintain contact with many (Luke 8:49-51; 9:28-36; Mark 14:32-33)?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12. What are the major reasons listed for lack of effective spiritual reproduction? How can these be avoided in our lives?
5. What do the following verses indicate about spiritual reproduction (Acts 14:21-22; 18:11)?
6. If you are not presently meeting with anyone, what is needed to help you get started?
7. If you are presently meeting with someone on a personal discipleship basis, how well has it progressed in use of time, personal growth and in equipping you to be of help to another person? How have you been influenced by either a meeting or a “role model”?

Lesson 11: Spiritual Warfare in Discipleship

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness, against the spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The following verse calls upon believers to put on the armor of God. It parts the veil to reveal an unseen world of deadly warfare involving invisible forces of evil working to control people and events on earth. The Bible speaks of *weapons* of warfare which are not of the flesh (2 Cor. 10:4). Believers are called *soldiers* (2 Tim. 2:3-4). We are to fight *spiritually*, not physically (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:7). We are to use weapons of righteousness (2 Cor. 6:7) in the power of God. We must be protected against fiery darts (Eph. 6:16), or subtle intrigues.

Who are the participants in this war? They are not earthly armies but spiritual forces. The Commander of the forces of light is our warrior God whose name is the Lord of Hosts. He will one day come to earth in the Person of the Lord Jesus to take possession and vanquish evil (Rev. 19:11-14). The evil leader of the forces of darkness, the prince of darkness, is the Devil (Eph. 6:11; Luke 4:6), supported by his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41). Evil spirits are arrayed in combat against angels of God in this warfare which reaches to heavenly places at times (Rev. 12:7). The objects of this struggle are the souls of men and women. Temptation, deceit, seduction, affliction and oppression are the tools of the enemy. Strength, enablement, guidance, protection and encouragement are the ministries of

the forces of light. In the background are the very prayers of the Son of God (Luke 22:32; Heb. 7:25).

Among significant weapons mentioned in Ephesians 6 are the “shield of faith” (v. 16), “the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God” (v. 17) and the need to “pray at all times in the Spirit” (v. 18). We must understand each weapon, how it works and how to use it effectively, that we might be mighty soldiers for the Lord. These three are foundational weapons, but not the only ones.

The Weapon of Faith

“Taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16) suggests the defensive side of this foundational virtue. “The just shall *live by faith*” we are told four times, in Habakkuk, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. However, it is also offensive in its capabilities, for by this channel believers connect with God’s power to achieve His chosen purposes.

Some languages have no available word to translate the concept. Commonly, faith tends to take on whatever meaning that casual usage assigns. We can say, “I believe someone will come,” or that it will rain, in a kind of vague hope without any sure basis. Another might say, “I believe in God,” meaning that by intuition he thinks He exists. However, it may only signify mental agreement to certain statements without the slightest personal commitment. These ideas are inadequate to express the Biblical meaning of faith.

Faith, or believing, means Biblically “to rely upon, have confidence, to have a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing” to quote W.E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New*

Testament Words. Faith must have an object. That object is God's Word, or the Lord Himself. It is not believing in yourself, believing in your intuition or believing in believing. Faith must have some Word from the Lord to which it is connected (John 2:22). You hear or read and believe the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith is not presumption. It would have been presumption had the Lord accepted the challenge to leap from the Temple pinnacle to demonstrate God's power to deliver (Luke 4:5-12). Faith does not presume to think that every thought which passes into our minds is a specific revelation from God. We are fallen, imperfect creatures and think imperfectly. Because of this, we need the check of God's Word and the counsel of godly minds to temper impulsive actions.

1. **How Does Faith Work?** It links us with the spiritual world in a way we do not fully understand. John Wesley called it "the sixth sense," but faith goes beyond the senses. Faith enables us to walk correctly without seeing (2 Cor. 5:7). We can do things beyond natural possibilities, such as when Peter walked on water at the invitation of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 14:25-31), but could not continue walking when he ceased to trust Christ's Word and instead looked at the threatening waves. This illustrates how faith may vary even from moment to moment. Elijah had dynamic faith on Mt. Carmel but little faith in facing Jezebel (1 Kgs. 18:20-40). We have heard that it does not matter *how much* faith we have but only in whom. This seems inconsistent with the rebuke of the Lord for those who had "little faith" or His commending those who had "great faith" (Luke 7:9; Matt. 8:10; 15:28). Even the disciples begged, "Lord, *increase* our faith" (Luke 17:5). The Lord prayed that Peter's faith would not fail under trial (Luke 22:32). Faith may be weak or

strong (Rom. 4:19-20). Its effectiveness depends upon the ability to resist doubts, to focus unhesitatingly upon the naked promises of God (Jas. 1:6-8). This corresponds to the mountain-moving faith of which the Lord spoke (Mark 11:23). Such faith can only be present in those who walk closely with God, in whom the Word of Christ dwells richly, who consciously yield themselves to the control of the Spirit. It may also be true that those who have experienced God in life's varying situations have learned how to trust Him.

2. **How Do We Exercise Faith Effectively?** Faith grows in strength by practice. We learn to trust God for a small amount before learning to trust Him for a greater amount. We find by experience that He is reliable when we depend upon Him, not our own devices. We must purpose to change our mental acceptance of certain truths into real action by living according to what we say we believe. We should stop saying that we believe what we refuse to live.

It is evident that faith is nurtured and strengthened by feeding on the Word of God regularly and by appropriating the promises and provisions of God. The Lord who does not lie expects us to believe His Word. He rebuked those of His disciples who did not believe Him (Luke 24:25; Mark 16:14). "Where is your faith?" He asked. It is necessary to reject doubt. Fix your eye firmly on what He promises. Claim what He promises. Claim these promises for yourself, if they legitimately apply. Depend on Him. Step out in faith where you are called to do so in daily living. Receive by faith what others cannot see in the hand of the unseen God. Persevering prayer

is an act of faith and will break through the discouragement of obstacles, delays and other opposition.

It is by faith that our lives can be changed from impotency to power (Matt. 17:14-20). Any failure may be due to a lack of faith in matters where God wills success. “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” was Jesus’ searching question to a blind man. *According* to his faith, his sight was restored. We must claim the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:16), by which there is authority over elements, demons, diseases and death itself. Exercise the authority of His Name (Acts 19:11; 3:6-8). Lay hold of God and refuse to let go in matters where His will is laid out in the Word. Claim victory even in circumstantial matters where you sense a clear assurance that it is God’s will, not just your own desires. This is exercising the weapon of faith.

The Weapon of the Word

“And take ... the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17). In its living and active power it is able to penetrate the innermost being of the soul and spirit (Heb. 4:12). It examines the very thought and intent of man’s heart. It is like a fire in the mouth of God’s prophets and it is capable of devouring people like wood (Jer. 5:14). It is like a hammer which breaks rocks in pieces (Jer. 23:29). It is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It bears fruit when sown on proper ground (Mark 4:14,20). It accomplishes what God sends it forth to do (Isa. 55:11). It cannot be broken or nullified, no matter how hard men may try (John 10:35). It will not lose a single dot or comma until its purpose is complete (Matt. 5:18). It can give life, sustain life, and consume life. Here is a formidable weapon indeed.

One may define the written Word as the Sacred Scriptures in their entirety, the revealed mind of God given through chosen men as “God-breathed” truth (2 Tim. 3:16). The Word, in a *secondary sense*, may also come from God through the mouths of His prophets (1 Thess. 2:13), or those who authoritatively declare what He has written. Such utterances from human instruments should always be tested for their harmony and consistency with the written Word (Acts 17:11).

1. **How Does The Word Work?** It works in a supernatural way that is beyond human explanation. It is life rather than magic that accounts for its effectiveness, since God is its source and author. When a sinful person hears the message, is convicted of sin and turns to God (John 8:9; 16:8), that is a miracle. When there is the birth of a new spiritual life it will be due to the agency of the divine Word, not human words (1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18). When we are liberated from the slavery of sin, it is this Truth that will make us free. When there is cleansing from the defilement of moral uncleanness, it is the Word which is a primary instrument (John 15:3; Eph. 5:26). When men and women are set apart for God’s use, it is usually through the Word (John 17:17); so also even non-living things (1 Tim. 4:5). What gives us life and guidance? It is God’s holy Lamp (Psa. 119:105, 130). What most fitly nourishes even the new believer? It is divine food for the soul (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:1-2). What can encourage us in dark times? That which uplifts us is from God’s mouth (Rom. 15:4; 1 Thess. 4:18).
2. **How Do I Use The Word Effectively?** You cannot be honest with yourself or others if you do not respect and obey what it teaches (Eph. 6:6; John 14:15, 21). If you respect this

book as the very oracle of God, then you will esteem it more important than ordinary food (Job 23:12). You will “eat the Word” daily and rejoice (Jer. 15:16). You will claim its promises, not just store its information (Rom. 4:20-21). You will meditate upon it day and night (Josh. 1:8). As you understand, apply and act upon what you are taught by the Spirit from this book, you will begin to make proper use of it. A mind saturated with the Book is the most prepared. Memorizing is most helpful in this regard.

As a good soldier knows and uses his weapons, so the spiritual warrior will use skillfully the Word of God against enemies (Luke 4:1-13), with the unconverted or with other believers. By the Word you can refute unsound doctrine as well as give sound teaching (Tit. 1:9). You can sustain the weary one when needed (Isa. 50:4). In particular, we want to sow the seed of the Word of the Gospel in the hearts of the unconverted (Isa. 32:20) in a widespread way. Where possible, we want to distribute literature which contains the Word. We should imitate the Lord as He dealt with Satan by using the Word authoritatively.

The Weapon of Prayer

“Pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). To “pray without ceasing” is a command of God (1 Thess. 5:17). It is a source of astonishment even to God that believers fail to intercede for others in prayer (Isa. 59:16). The prophet Samuel felt that it was a sin against the Lord if he ceased to pray for his own people (1 Sam. 12:23). The Lord Jesus in His earthly life demonstrated a continuous life of prayer dependence. It is so vital that He *still* continues this ministry

from Heaven (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34), as does the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26).

1. **How Does Prayer Work?** There are some amazing promises made by God in connection with prayer. “If you ask anything in My Name I will do it” (John 14:14). These and like verses should not be separated from conditions specified by God elsewhere. These include praying in the Name of Jesus (John 14:13), praying in the will of God (1 John 5:14), the need of true faith (Mark 9:23) and personal purity (Psa. 24:3-4). These conditions might also be called the laws or requirements for effective prayer.

Prayer is communication with God. It is much more than asking. It includes worship (which unlocks divine blessings), thanksgiving and confession. Prayer seems also to have the power of an invisible spiritual force. One thinks of Moses having his hands lifted in order for Israel to prevail over Amalek (Exod. 17:11-14), or in the clash of spiritual forces contending with each other (Psa. 18:6-10).

2. **How Do I Pray Effectively?** We still need the Lord to “teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). This no doubt means to teach that we *need* to do it in all circumstances, and also how to do it according to the mind of God. Conviction that it is indispensable in our lives, and commitment to pray perseveringly, are both necessary. It is something that we must do regularly, rather than study the subject more.

Conclusion

A good soldier will keep in mind that he is always ready for battle, for a call to duty. We must know our weapons and be using them properly at all times.

Our major opposition is not in the visible world. Our major weapons therefore are not worldly or fleshly weapons. No earthly armies rely primarily upon faith, prayer and the Word of God. The war is deadly and, like other conflicts, there will be casualties. It is sad when believers are knocked out of combat through their own sin and unbelief. It is worse when they become disabled or even lose their lives, thereby being removed permanently from the battle.

The Lord says He has made us to be more than conquerors. He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. He has defeated our major foes at the Cross. He is always there to lead us in triumph if we follow Him. There is no provision that He has not made to enable us to be victorious warriors. In light of this, we need to use our spiritual weapons fully each day of this continuing conflict until we go to meet Him.

Study Guide: Spiritual Warfare in Discipleship

1. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Why do you think this passage likens our struggles to warfare while here on earth? Support your conclusion from your own observations, as well as from Scripture.
2. Ephesians 6:11 admonishes us to put on the “whole armor of God.” What is meant by the whole armor of God and what does it include?
3. Describe faith, according to *your* understanding.
4. What has in the past, or perhaps even now, prevented you from living this life of faith? What can be done about these deficiencies?

5. The Word of God is called the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). How does the Word function in your personal Christian life? Be specific. Read Psalms 119:11,105; Joshua 1:8; Ezra 7:10; John 15:3.
6. From the following verses, explain how and why the Word must be used in evangelism (1 Pet. 1:23; Rom. 1:16; Isa. 55:11). How could this be applied in your life?
7. Daniel was a warrior in prayer and an example for us. Consider his well known prayer of Daniel 9. How can you apply any observations from this prayer to your own life?
8. What have you learned from the list of conditions for answered prayer that you need to apply personally in a more definite way?

Lesson 12: The Disciple's Sacrificial Lifestyle

“Do you remember the generosity towards us of Jesus Christ, Lord of us all? He was rich beyond our telling, yet He became poor for your sakes so that His poverty might make you rich” (2 Cor. 8:9 Phillips). When the eternal Son of God stepped into time to be implanted into Mary’s womb, He was in fact saying goodbye to all the wealth, splendor and glory which had been His with the Father for all eternity (John 17:5). He forsook all His possessions, “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7).

Choosing to be born into a poor working-class home, the Architect of galaxies became a worker of wood in Joseph’s carpenter shop. The townspeople heard Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah’s mission from the lips of Joseph’s son, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18, 22). Jesus came as a poor man and remained poor in order to reach the poor. Untold millions have found their way to the Man born in a feeding trough who would never have gained admittance to a King’s palace.

One would-be disciple must have been disappointed by Jesus’ reply to His offer to follow Him: “Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:19-20). As He hung there on the cross, He watched the soldiers as they gambled for His only material possession, His cloak. Having nothing left to give in an earthly way, He gave up His life (John 19:23-24, 30).

Sacrificial Living is Reasonable Service

The apostle Paul pleads with us “to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual or reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). The grounds of his plea are the mercies of God. This centered in God’s great salvation work in justifying poor, inexcusably guilty, helpless sinners by sending His beloved Son to bear our sins on the cross. In so doing He provided liberation from the power of sin and the penalty of the law. Having reconciled us to God through His death, Christ is now saving us by His life, interceding for us from the place of power at God’s right hand. Here below, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us and accompanies us as heirs of God on our way to glory. God spared not His own Son. For us to become a living sacrifice unto God is the most reasonable thing we could do in the light of such mercies. Overwhelmed by Calvary logic, the missionary C.T. Studd exclaimed, “If Jesus Christ be God, and He died for me, then no sacrifice I can make for him could be too great”.³

We Christians love to sing of such reasonable sacrifice in this way:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were an offering far too small.

Love so amazing so Divine

Demands my soul, my life, my all!

—Isaac Watts

Are we prepared to live as sacrificially as we sing?

Sacrificial Living Means Spending and Being Expended

Paul aptly expressed the idea of sacrifice as he wrote to the Corinthians, “I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15).

1. **Spending.** Paul used an illustration of the financial sacrifice some parents make for their children (2 Cor. 12:14-15). It is not uncommon for them to live sacrificially for the sake of a child’s education or medical treatment. Others have foregone normal pleasures in order to purchase the children’s home or car. Jesus assures us that sacrifice for His name’s sake will be rewarded many times over (Matt. 19:29). Paul spoke of our Lord’s self-imposed poverty as he thought of the sacrificial giving of the Macedonian churches. They, “according to their ability, and *beyond* their ability, gave of their own accord” (2 Cor. 8:1-3, 9). This was “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18).
2. **Being Expendable.** We speak of something being expendable when the intrinsic value of a cause or person justifies the offering. This is a basic consideration in sacrificial living. Does this cause or person merit my effort and sacrifice? Paul evidently thought that even the ungrateful Corinthians did. Paul, Silas and Timothy evidenced their sacrificial love for the Thessalonians by their willingness “to impart to you, not only the gospel of God but also our own lives” (1 Thess. 2:8). Epaphroditus literally laid his life on the line for the work of Christ by ministering sacrificially to Paul’s needs (Phil. 2:29-30). Priscilla and Aquila did not shrink back from doing the same (Rom. 16:3-4). Paul faced death with calmness not

knowing whether to prefer life or death, merely wanting to glorify Christ one way or the other. For him, life meant service for others for Christ's sake. He put it this way, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Some have asked themselves the searching question, "Would I be willing to die for Christ?" The more fundamental question is rather, "Am I willing to die to self and *live for Christ* serving others?" If to me living is Christ, I will be willing to lay down my life for Him when the time comes. One of the Church fathers said, "The martyr dies but once for his Lord. The shepherd dies hundreds of times for his sheep." Are you a living sacrifice? Does your life demonstrate that you are available to be "poured out" for others?

Financial Sacrifice is Commanded for Disciples

"No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33). Jesus had just challenged the multitudes to count the cost of becoming His followers, and to decide if they were willing to commit themselves without reservation to following Him (vv. 28-32). The disciple must be prepared for the fact that following Christ can cost everything! This can occur in several ways. For many Christians following Christ has meant the joyful acceptance of "the seizure of their property" (Heb. 10:34). Disinheritance, loss of employment, demotion, have often followed on the heels of a clear stand for the One who was despised of men. Others have been led into service requiring them to leave businesses, homes and even family behind to follow Christ (Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:11, 27-28; Matt. 19:29). Still others have honored our Lord's command without such extenuating circumstances. Our Lord's injunction is clear, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on

earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, but lay up treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20; see also Luke 18:22-34). “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make for yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys” (Luke 12:33).

Stockpiling possessions and saving for some rainy day is disobedience to God’s Word. God, the only dependable object of our trust, knows the inclination of the human heart to seek security in material things and by trusting in riches. The disciple’s heart belongs in heaven, not in a bank vault.

Some have objected to a literal interpretation of the above passages. The following considerations prove that Jesus intended His statements to be taken literally:

1. **The Example Of The Master Himself.** The Lord Jesus forsook all His heavenly possessions and never accumulated any during the days of His flesh. Jesus preached what He Himself practiced, and He expects His disciples to follow Him. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master” (Matt. 10:24). This prompted George Muller to say, “It ill becomes the servant to seek to be rich, and great, and honored in this world where his Lord was poor, meek and despised.”⁴
2. **The Endorsement Of The Master.** Jesus endorsed the actions of the poor widow who dropped two copper coins in the treasury saying, “I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for they have all put in what they can easily spare, but she in her poverty has given away her whole living” (Luke 21:3, 4 Phillips). Why did

He not voice His concern over such improvidence, if we are not to take His commands literally?

3. **The Response Of His Disciples.** His disciples took Him literally. Peter said, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You” to which the Lord replied, “Everyone who has left houses ... or farms for My name’s sake shall receive many times as much” (Matt. 19:27, 29).
4. **The Response Of The Early Churches.** The vibrant young assembly in Jerusalem evidenced its belief in a literal interpretation (Acts 4:32-37). Paul’s description of the sacrificial giving of the churches in Macedonia is couched in much the same terms as the Lord’s commendation of the widow, who gave out of her own poverty (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Luke 21:3-4).
5. **The Teaching Of The Apostles.** After reminding Timothy of the perils of riches, Paul exhorts the rich “to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up treasure ... for the future.” He taught that the believer should be content with the necessities of life: food, clothing and a roof over your head (1 Tim. 6:7-10, 17-19). James’ warning on the subject could be summed up in these words: “Woe to you rich!” (Jas. 5:1-6; 1:9-11; Luke 6:24).
6. **The Response Of Love.** When the rich young ruler indicated that he had loved his neighbor as himself, Jesus replied, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come and follow Me” (Matt. 19:21). If seeing the need and poverty of many fellow-Christians, knowing that one half of the world has not yet heard the gospel and that hundreds of millions are

malnourished doesn't cause us to live sacrificially, "how does the love of God abide in us?" (1 John 3:17).

The teachings of our Lord have sometimes been called His "hard sayings" as they have always cut across prevalent materialism and covetousness. The burden of proving that these passages are not to be taken literally lies on the skeptic. He should ask himself these questions: "What then did Jesus mean?" "Does my unwillingness to take His commands literally stem from love and devotion for Christ?" No alternative to the literal interpretation, based on serious Bible study has been offered. Instead the worldly wise appeals to wisdom and prudence, and reproves the seeming folly of those seeking to seriously follow the Lord in this matter. Jesus' reply to one group of first-century money lovers was, "That which is highly esteemed by men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:14-15). Christians who lay up treasure for themselves and their children in this life have joined company with a man to whom God said, "You fool!" (Luke 12:13-21).

Sacrificial Living in Practice

Missionary A.N. Groves embodied the sacrificial lifestyle of a disciple and summed it up in these words, "Labor hard, consume little, give much and all to Christ."⁵

1. **Work Hard.** Paul showed the Ephesian elders the calloused hands that supported both himself and his apostolic team. He said, "I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak" (Acts 20:34-35). He exhorted the undisciplined Thessalonians "to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12). Industry, hard work

and providing for our own should characterize the lives of disciples.

2. **Consume Little.** The world around us wants to squeeze us into its own mold (Rom. 12:2 Phillips). Spiritual discernment, not advertising pressures, must dictate the disciple's mode of living. The Master was concerned about waste (John 6:12). His steward (manager) will resist the urge to waste the Lord's money on superfluous buying and unnecessary luxuries. Planning, budgeting, careful buying and self-denial are a part of living economically.

Paul helped clarify the Lord's command to give up all our possessions (Luke 14:33). We are to "engage in good deeds (honorable employment) to meet pressing needs" (Tit. 3:14). Furthermore, we are to be content with food and covering (clothing and housing) (1 Tim. 6:8). Jesus spoke of daily bread and a place to lay your head. David Livingstone said, "I am determined to own nothing which does not relate to the Kingdom of God."

Sometimes extreme notions have clouded the issues and raised serious objections about sacrificial living in the minds of believers. Some may ask if a believer may buy insurance. Ultimately those who seek first God's kingdom and righteousness have the best coverage available (Matt. 6:33). The best answer would be, "be it unto you according to your faith" (Matt. 9:29). Others ask if a true disciple can own a house. Certainly he needs to live someplace, and buying may be the best use of the money the Lord has entrusted to him. Can a true disciple own a car? He may need even two. The same question rephrased in the language of discipleship is "Do I need it?" All disciples have had needs known to God. Many

need special clothing, expensive education, transportation or capital for their businesses.

Everything essentially boils down to one fundamental question. What is required? Our Father knows our legitimate needs and “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (Matt. 6:32; 1 Tim. 6:17). However, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived. Mammon (riches) is intrinsically unrighteous and can control our lives (Luke 16:9-11; Matt. 6:24). Riches are deceitful (Matt. 13:22). Many a would-be disciple, confusing his wants and his legitimate needs, has been sucked up in an insane, materialistic rat race, his life becoming an endless quest for more. Some have been so intent in getting into a house, buying a certain car, or maintaining a certain lifestyle that they have sacrificed their freedom to serve the Lord through undue financial commitments and increased work. The service of mammon has infringed upon the Lord’s prerogatives over their lives (Matt. 6:24). Some would seek refuge from the clear implications of this teaching by appealing to the example of certain rich Christians who love the Lord and have been used greatly by Him. It is not our place to judge others. God has instructions for rich Christians (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Let us not forget, however, that the New Testament holds up Paul as the model of Christian living. After chiding the Corinthians for Irving like kings before the kingdom has come, he exhorts them to imitate him, and of course ultimately Christ, who did not remain rich (1 Cor. 4:6-14; 11:1). As Paul says, we write this to warn, not shame believers. Although these principles are clear and unmistakable, each disciple must review his own life before the Lord. Discipleship is voluntary

and an issue of the heart (Matt. 6:21, 24). Within Scriptural principles there is a wide latitude for individual application in widely varying circumstances.

3. **Give Much And All For Christ.** The sacrificial Christian will not only resist the urge to live selfishly or lay up treasure on this earth, he will send assets ahead to heaven. He will invest as much as possible above his pressing needs (legitimate, necessary commitments for self and family) in the work of the Son of Man.

Many have “made friends for themselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness” by shrewdly financing gospel work, literature, Christian nurture and by helping meet physical need in Jesus’ name (Luke 16:8-9). Such have learned to seek security not in earthly savings or investments, but in their relationship with a Father who knows their every need. They trust Him for unforeseeable eventualities (Tit. 3:14; Matt. 6:19-34).

The Reward for Living Sacrificially

“Fixing His eyes on His disciples, He spoke, ‘Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’ ” (Luke 6:20 Berkeley). This statement is not to be confused with the beatitudes. It pronounces blessing on those who live sacrificially “for the sake of the Son of Man” (v. 22). The following are some of the rich rewards that the sacrificial follower of Jesus will enjoy here, and in the hereafter.

1. **Treasures In Heaven.** By living sacrificially the disciple becomes rich toward God. He can’t take anything with him, but he can store up for himself “the treasure of a good

foundation for the future ... and take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:7, 19; Luke 12:21,33; Matt. 6:20).

2. **Illumination.** The disciple with a single eye, the simple desire to put God first in his life, has a healthy perspective on life. Unlike the man with double vision, who is living for two worlds, his whole body is being flooded with light (Matt. 6:22-23).
3. **Freedom To Serve God.** The rivalry between materialism and God can never end in a draw. One or the other will gain mastery. Mammon was never intended to be our master (Matt. 6:24). Sacrificial living is liberating!
4. **Supply Of All Our Needs** (Phil. 4:19). God is not committed to fulfill all our wants but He promises to meet all the needs of those who live for Him.
5. **Effective Prayer.** "Is He not much more likely to clothe you little faiths?" (Matt. 6:30 Phillips). "Little faiths" rob themselves of the joy of walking by faith. They have their security *not so safely* stored in their earthly treasures. Self-sufficiency is the antithesis of faith, and we are in danger of hypocrisy when we could answer our own prayers for others by our own action. When life ceases to be a perpetual dependence on the Lord, our prayers become superficial and lifeless.
6. **The Good Of Our Children.** Parents wondering why their children went wrong in spite of Sunday School, Christian school, Christian camps and everything they gave them, may not need to look very far for the answer. It may be their own lifestyle and priorities. No wonder children grow up to be "worldlings," whose parents are no different from

“men of the world, whose portion is in this life; and whose belly Thou dost fill with Thy treasures; they are satisfied with children, and leave their abundance to their babes” (Psa. 17:14). A child growing up in a materialistic Christian family may not survive this horrible stumbling block. Consider the promises made to those who fear the Lord concerning their children {Psa. 112:1-3; 128:1-4}.

7. **The Progress Of The Gospel.** One of the most gratifying rewards for the disciple of Jesus would lead to great gains in world evangelism—when Christians live and give sacrificially. Sacrificial living for Christ has an impact on those who do not know the Lord, since they see so much in the world of religion that makes them cynical. Moreover, it enhances our power in prayer with God as we intercede and witness.

Conclusion

Consider the greatness of God’s grace in giving us His Son, the inexpressible gift. Then turn your attention to the generosity of the Lord Jesus in His own self-sacrifice. Take into account the undeniable and clear teaching of our Master concerning the sacrificial living embodied and demonstrated in His perfect life. Add to that the demonstrated adherence of His early followers to these unpopular teachings. Consider the eternal rewards of a sacrificial life. What will your life response be? Do you want to join the company who forsook all to follow Him? Will you sing from an honest heart:

Take my life and let it be

Consecrated Lord to Thee;...

Take my silver and my gold

Not a mite would I withhold

— Frances Havergal

Study Guide: The Disciple's Sacrificial Lifestyle

1. How do Matthew 8:20 and 2 Corinthians 8:9 help to summarize the life of our Lord Jesus?
2. Note what each of the following passages teach us about sacrificial living:

Matthew 19:21

Acts 2:44-45

Matthew 19:27

Acts 4:32-37

Luke 12:16-34

1 Timothy 6:8

Luke 21:3-4

Philippians 2:20-21

Now summarize your conclusions:

3. Compare the results of the selfish and the sacrificial lifestyle:

Verse Selfish Lifestyle

Sacrificial Lifestyle

Matthew 6:20

Matthew 6:22-23

Matthew 6:24

Verse Selfish Lifestyle

Sacrificial Lifestyle

Luke 6:20

Luke 18:24-25

James 2:5

Now summarize your conclusions:

4. It has been suggested that Matthew 6:19 uses three figures of speech to show stewardship: *the moth* (referring to things that are not used often), *rust* (suggesting things that have high depreciation), and *thieves* (implying things that others covet to possess). What might you ask yourself to determine violation of these principles where the interests of the Kingdom of God are concerned?
5. What adjustments do you need to make in response to the teaching of this lesson? How will you implement any changes?

Lesson 13: Character Development in Discipleship

When first created, one of the glories of man was that he was “made in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-27), in God’s moral and spiritual likeness. The fall of man marred that image and moved him away from his likeness to God. It is God’s will to restore that image fully in His redeemed people, beginning here and now. It is our destiny. “For whom He did foreknow, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). “Though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). This involves our cooperation. “Put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:10). “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). The goal of the Apostle Paul in his ministry was to “present *every man* mature in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28).

The working of God in our lives, with all the varying circumstances, some difficult and even tragic, can best be understood by seeing His master work. God’s master work is the development of Christlikeness in our characters, and it is preparing us for eternity. It follows that in disciple-making we should give attention to this same area. As we pray with those with whom we work, share personally, maintain accountability to monitor progress, we can better move toward growth. The salvation of God should be expressed through translating into our lives His character, as seen in the Lord Jesus. It is for this purpose that the apostle prayed that Christ might be formed in the believers (Gal. 4:19).

The Means and Motivation of Character Development

One thinks of character as something that is somehow fixed from birth. Some say, “That is just the way I am.” Others think of character growth as that which is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, as though we had no part. This ignores all the passages that are exhortations, appeals to the will, to cooperate with God in His holy work in us. If everything rested upon God, with no responsibility upon man, all believers would be spiritual. Obviously this is not the case.

Those who live holy lives do so because they want to do so.

They love the Lord deeply and want to please Him in every way in which His love constrains them (2 Cor. 5:14). They admire the Lord greatly and want to be like Him by being imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), as well as imitators of godly believers who model His life (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). There is a hunger for God in deeper fellowship and knowledge of Him. These attitudes and actions are quite different from the mediocrity present in most church attenders. There are always those who are content to be saved and sure of Heaven. They are comfortable in conventional religious patterns of church activities. But there is a lack of spiritual vitality, fruitfulness, vision for Christ’s kingdom and sacrificial living. This certainly is insensitivity to God’s deeper purposes in our inner being and hinders character growth.

Character growth is the work of the Spirit in a yielded vessel. God is working in us to do His good pleasure but we are also to work out our own deliverance (Phil. 2:12-13). Our salvation is not by works (merit) but it is *unto* works (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:8).

Our own spiritual diligence can be encouraged by the labors of others who invest their lives in ministering to us (Col. 1:29). There is also the unique ministry of the resident, indwelling Spirit who seeks to work in yielded lives in such a way as to bring forth character fruit (Gal. 5:22-23) such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-discipline. On the side of man's responsibility, we are summoned to crucify the flesh (Gal. 5:24), to take up our cross (Luke 9:23) and to surrender our lives for His glory (John 12:25).

God may well use trials to develop character, even using the evil others do for that purpose (Jas. 1:3). This requires that we understand life through the eyes of God and our own eyes of faith. Having a prayer partner, helper and friend to whom we are willing to be accountable can be of great help if we are not too proud to accept that. It is a voluntary thing, requiring willingness towards both God and man.

The Traits and Goals of Character Development

The obvious reason for lists of godly character traits in Scripture, as well as bad ones, is to alert us to proper goals. The lists have no practical effect in our lives unless we meditate upon them, consider our lives in the light of them and seek to grow in these areas. That is why James reminds us that trials can develop patience or why waiting on God can help us develop perseverance. The fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and the virtues of 2 Peter 1:5-8 are two examples of these lists. Here are some major traits mentioned more than once in Scripture. By keeping in mind both character goals and the power of God's indwelling Spirit, we can expect greater maturity in Christlikeness.

1. **Sacrificial Love.** We use this description to distinguish the highest form of divine love (*agape*) from the popular ideas that govern our usage. The Lord's compassion, steadfastness, forgiveness and self-giving are absolute marvels of perfect love. He demonstrated that love is more than what we feel. It is what we do. Love is to be towards God and then towards others (Matt. 22:37-40). Contrary to popular notions, there is no command to love yourself. Self love is considered a negative trait in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:2). Love is a mark of being a true disciple of the Lord Jesus (John 13:35). It is a direct command of Christ appealing to the will, not our emotions (John 15:12). It is a test of spiritual life and a basis of assurance that we are truly His (1 John 3:14). Love is to be extended beyond those who love us even to our enemies (Matt. 5:44), which is certainly a matter of the will.

The description in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is considered to be a classic. What is said may be classified in this way:

- a. *The feelings of love:* kind (goodness in action), compassionate (sensitive to needs), forgiving (not holding grudges), not envious or jealous.
- b. *The manners of love:* patient (not irritable), considerate (not rude or thoughtless).
- c. *The necessities of love:* unselfish, dependable, obedient when required.

Love is not something to be “worked up” but rather of Christ living out His life in us as yielded vessels. Our lives should reflect and transmit His love. Humanly speaking, we are not capable in ourselves of loving in this way.

2. **Self-Discipline.** The word derives from disciple and there can be no discipleship without it. It is one of the fruits of a Spirit-controlled life (Gal. 5:23). The Lord Jesus was the most disciplined man that ever lived. You cannot even conceive of Him as wasting time, wavering on spiritual priorities or leading a disorderly life. Failure in life is commonly due to lack of self-discipline. It applies to the use of the mind, the use of the tongue, the appetites of the body, the exercise of prayer and the use of time. It is also urgently necessary in difficult tests to endure hardships and to do what we need to do when we do not *feel* like doing it. Determined action places self-life squarely in the place of being denied or crucified in the interests of Christ and others. Self-discipline is not a matter of days or weeks but of a lifetime of daily applying the principle of “yes” to God and “no” to selfishness. It is oriented to being responsible, not *self-indulgent*. Self-discipline enables us to submit to God and to proper authority. It leads us to walk by faith and not by sight, living by every Word from God’s mouth (Matt. 4:4). It helps us persevere when we want to give up (Prov. 24:10; Eph. 3:13), and to be a finisher, like He was, not a quitter.
3. **Patience** (long suffering). This is self-restraint even when provoked. It does not retaliate {Eph. 4:2; Col. 1:11; 3:12}. A person who cannot control his or her emotions, such as anger, is not following Christ.
4. **Faithfulness** (dependability). This is required of any good manager or worker (1 Cor. 4:2). Small matters of unfaithfulness indicate a likelihood to the same trait in

greater matters (Luke 16:10-12). We may want to test this, as God does, in working with people.

5. **Courage** (boldness in trial). The Holy Spirit has not given us a spirit of fear or timidity (2 Tim. 1:7). The typical word of the Lord to His disciples was continually, "Fear not." Courage does not require being unaware of danger. It does require us, despite difficulties and sorrows, to depend on God in a determined way. A fearful person is a liability, not an asset, in a difficult situation.
6. **Zeal** (eagerness, passion, in the things of God). It was present in the actions of the Lord (John 2:17). It is opposed to lukewarmness, which is sickening to God (Rev. 3:15-16). It should not be misguided or impulsive (Rom. 10:2; Phil. 3:6). Zeal according to knowledge is good fire for the work of God.
7. **Humility** (lowly and meek are associated ideas). The Lord said that His disciples needed to learn this from Him (Matt. 11:29). God favors such people (Isa. 57:15; 66:2), just as He hates pride. This restrains us from being argumentative, unteachable and difficult in personal dealings. It is a key character trait in God's eyes.
8. **Grace** (undeserved favor). It has been said that the disciple should be dominated by grace in all dealings. Because God has dealt with us in grace we have the obligation to extend the same treatment to others. If God dealt with us according to our sins, even in daily life, who could stand (Psa. 130:3-4)? We need to remember this in our dealings with others.

9. **Holiness** (separation unto God and from defilement). This is a direct command of God that is linked with His own character (1 Pet. 1:16). He will not fellowship with us or hear us when we walk in unholy ways (Psa. 66:18).
10. **Joy**. This is God's desire for us because it is present in Him (John 15:11). Gloom, pessimism and discouragement are *not* the mark of godly attitudes. Joy must go beyond circumstances because we are fixed by faith upon the Lord and His exceeding great and precious promises.

Many other virtues might be mentioned. These include *peace* (inner tranquility, unworried), *kindness*, *gentleness*, *goodness*, *honesty* and *whole-heartedness* or *diligence*. All that is evident in Christ is a model for us in moral excellence. The disciple should be daily before God and His Word in evaluating character needs.

Conclusion

How can we help others grow in these virtues? How can we develop them to a great degree in our own lives? Certainly it will not be by looking at our own weakness or failure, nor will it be by the devices of popular psychology surrounding image-building or self-confidence techniques. Scripturally, development is based upon the Spirit's work in shaping us like clay in the Potter's hands. It is by setting our eyes on Christ, and becoming His imitators. It is by praying with godly people with whom we work concerning growth. It is by claiming God's promises to help us and by claiming Christ's victory which has broken the power of sin over us (Rom. 6:6). It is by being saturated in the Word. It is by active involvement in serving the Lord. The wind of the Spirit is available to blow upon the

sails of the vessel which moves in the direction God leads, not upon the ship that is anchored in idle self-absorption. It is for the *spiritually* ambitious. It is not for the spiritually self-satisfied or uninterested.

Experience has demonstrated that character flaws or weaknesses usually are not corrected by *group* teaching. We need *individual* attention that comes from making ourselves willingly accountable to a person we respect. This accountability will necessitate dealing frankly and directly with our deficiencies, even as the Spirit of God does through the Word, written or spoken. Those who would disciple must remember that “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) is part of true friendship. It is necessary in growth. There is a shortage of such mature believers and disciples. Still we should seek out the best available, while seeking to develop more of them.

Study Guide: Character Development in Discipleship

1. God created man perfectly and in God’s own image (Gen. 1:26-27, 31). Man’s sin has marred both him and God’s perfect creation (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12). Consider Romans 6:13, 16-17, 22; 8:11-13.
2. What does it mean to be *yielded* to the Spirit or to *walk* according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5; Phil. 2:12-13)?
3. Which major character traits should a mature disciple possess according to the following verses?

Matthew 22:37-40

2 Peter 1:5-8

Galatians 5:22

2 Timothy 1:7

1 Peter 1:16

Select two or more that calls for the most attention in your life.

4. Discipline has been defined as doing the right thing, whether one feels like it or not. A major component of discipline is self-control. The undisciplined man is described in Proverbs 10:26; 18:9; 20:4. How would you advise him with a view for helping him?
5. How could you develop a more sacrificial love characteristic? Apply and comment on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 in this analysis.
6. Identify the principles mentioned in the following verses which can help in the development of a disciplined thought-life.

Psalm 51:10

Proverbs 4:23

Philippians 4:8

Proverbs 16:3

2 Corinthians 10:5-6

Why is this a key to character development?

7. Discipline of the physical desires is also important. What motivated Paul to discipline himself in this respect?

1 Corinthians 9:22

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

2 Corinthians 5:9-15

8. What are the benefits of a Christlike character (John 15:8; 2 Pet. 1:4-11)?
9. Referring to specific character traits, list the three most important areas in which you need improvement. What do you intend to do about it?

Conclusion: Fit for the Kingdom

“No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). How graphic and challenging were the Lord’s remarks to the would-be disciples! The words are particularly instructive when we view them in their context. The Lord had sent out the twelve to preach the Gospel in the towns and villages (Luke 9:1-6). The ministry of Jesus was attracting more attention and producing a greater following (vv. 7-11). The healings and feeding of the five thousand continued to swell the ranks (vv. 23-26). He restated His strong requirements just prior to sending out an additional seventy workers (10:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ is still interested in increasing the number of true disciples. His standards are the same. He still attracts many followers who often have an insufficient view of the true demands of discipleship. Many of us are at a crossroads in our Christian life just as the three disciples in Luke 9:57-62. We have followed Jesus for varying motives and to different degrees. We may call ourselves disciples; we have completed a Discipleship Training Class. Now we come face to face with the admonition of Christ: “If ye continue ... then ye are my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

We discover that discipleship is a continuous yielding to His goals and priorities. Let us examine again the Lord’s challenge to those who would be His disciples.

Having Put His Hand to the Plow

We have put our hands to a plow. Sometimes this is a jolting realization. Discipleship involves *laboring* for Christ. The

plowman labors all day, wrestling with a crude instrument behind a slow animal. The *work* is hot, dirty and tedious. Row after row, day after day, he labors in the elements. How fitting that the Lord Jesus chose the plowman as a picture of discipleship. Did He not try to tell us that true discipleship was hard, tedious and sometimes dirty work? That we would have to work with crude instruments and slow animals, plodding along day after day, struggling against the same problems? We should re-evaluate our discipleship as laborers.

1. **Helping Others** (follow-up, personal discipling, shepherding). It should not be continuously necessary for someone to assign the discipling tasks to do or people to help.

The follower of the Lord will, without prompting, initiate relationships that will help others in their growth. They may need practical assistance, comfort, exhortation, correction or simply fellowship. If we are doing this consistently, our ministry will begin to show fruit in the lives of others. Are the people we are helping making progress or standing still?

2. **Serving** (giving, ministering to the Lord and others). The disciple is the slave of Christ and displays a servant heart toward others, having escaped the life of barren self-centeredness and selfish thinking. The faithful servant does not have to be reminded of what to do constantly. All forms of ministry, including that of giving, will naturally flow out of a stream of Spirit-directed living that focuses on the needs of others.
3. **Evangelism As A Way Of Life**. When the disciples were scattered by persecution in the days of the early church, they still went everywhere proclaiming the Word (Acts 8:4).

The Lord commissioned them to witness and they did so (Acts 1:8). Sharing their faith was a way of life. The disciple is active in winning others to Christ and engaged in spiritual multiplication at its first stage—soul winning. If the seed is faithfully sown, watered by prayer, and supported by a consistent life, inevitably there will be fruit. Can you point to one person whom you have won to Christ who is today going on for the Lord?

4. **Looking On The Fields.** The Lord called His disciples to consider that which was already white unto harvest and said, “He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto eternal life” (John 4:35-36). Here is no narrow vision limited to my personal life and home church. This involves world vision, prayer, fellowship with those places, and even a willingness to go myself if the Lord so desires. Missions and church-planting are on the heart of the Savior. Are they on yours?

And Looking Back ... (Our Hindrances)

No plowman can plow a straight furrow while looking back. The Lord saw these major hindrances represented in the three would-be disciples:

1. **Possessions** (Luke 9:57-58—cars, cash, careers, homes).

The Lord called on us to lay up treasure, but indicated that the treasure house was to be heaven and not earth (Matt. 6:19-20). Many believers are bogged down with buying automobiles, boats, summer homes, and taking lavish trips. Careers and earthly ambitions destroy the vision of the eternal and replace it with the temporal, which will have little value at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Where is your heart?

2. **Family Ties** (Luke 9:61-62—romances, friendships). Other human ties, such as close associates, and those in whom we have a romantic interest, can hinder us. The disciple must never raise the cry of “me first” in taking care of such interests before heeding the commands of Christ.

Fit for the Kingdom (Our Goal)

A plowman must not only not look back, but he must also fix his attention on a reference point in front of him if he is to be a fit plowman. Likewise, the best way to overcome hindrances to true discipleship is to have a proper perspective toward our mission in life.

1. **One Calling** (our life focus). “We pray ... that our God would count you worthy of this calling” (2 Thess. 1:11). To what are you supremely committed in life? Is there anyone or anything to which you have a higher commitment than the Lord Jesus Christ? What are your life objectives and where does the Lord Jesus enter into the picture? Do you “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14)?
2. **One Task** (our priorities). We can be so divided by various tasks and competing interests that we are of no value in the work of the Kingdom of God. That is why the Savior strictly warned, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). The Lord of all knows what ought to come first. The disciple must know the same thing. Do jobs, houses, hobbies, even families yield to the claims of the primacy of Christ? If there are conflicts, in what way will we resolve them so as to not disown the principle of putting Christ and His interests first in my life?

3. **One Life** (our fitness for the Kingdom). “Only one life. It will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” So wrote one wise man long ago. If that life is a holy life, a dedicated life, a fruitful life, an obedient life, then it will be worthy of the Kingdom of God. If it is frittered away on petty tasks and interests or self-centered pursuits, then our life will be recorded as essentially a mistake. At the end of time, how will you wish you had spent your life as a believer?

Conclusion

It is a commendable thing to finish a course in discipleship. Most believers do not even start a course. Now that we have completed a searching series of lessons, where do we go? The above sections indicate areas of functioning discipleship. Where there is lack of effectiveness, there is apt to be lack of fruitfulness. Thus, we must continue to rigorously press ahead on these areas as we actively function in ministry. When we are prepared to meet our blessed Savior and to fall at His feet, let us hope that we will be able to repeat the great words of the Apostle, on the eve of a martyr’s death, “I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Do you, as His disciple, await His appearing with that same anticipation and joy?

Appendix A: A Strange but True Story

by Mrs. H Grattan Guinness

A wealthy farmer who cultivated some thousands of acres had by his benevolence endeared himself greatly to his large staff of laborers. He had occasion to leave the country (in which his property was situated) for some years.

But before doing so, he gave his people clearly to understand that he wished the whole of the cultivated land to be kept in hand, and all the unreclaimed moor and marsh lands to be enclosed and drained and brought into cultivation; that even the hills were to be terraced, and the poor mountain pastures manured, so that no single corner of the estate should remain neglected and barren. Ample resources were left for the execution of these works, and there were sufficient hands to have accomplished the whole within the first few years of the proprietor's absence.

He was detained in the country to which he had been called very many years. Those whom he had left as children were men and women when he came back, so the number of his tenantry and laborers was vastly multiplied. Was the task he had given them to do accomplished?

Alas! No. Bog and moor and mountain waste were only wilder and more desolate than ever. Fine rich virgin soil by thousands of acres was bearing only briars and thistles. Meadow after meadow was utterly barren for want of culture. Nay, by far the greater part of the farm seemed never to have been visited by his servants.

Had they been idle? Some had. But large numbers had been industrious enough. They had expended a vast amount of labor, and skilled labor, too; but they had bestowed it all on the park immediately around the house. This had been cultivated to such a pitch of perfection that the workmen had scores of times quarrelled with one another because the operations of each workman had interfered with those of his neighbor.

And a vast amount of labor had been lost, in sowing the very same patch, for instance, with corn fifty times over in one season, so that the seed never had time to germinate and grow and bear fruit; in caring for the forest trees, as if they had been tender saplings; in manuring the soils already too fat, and watering pastures already too wet.

The farmer was positively astonished at the misplaced ingenuity with which labor and seed and manure, skill and time and strength, had been wasted with no result. The very same amount of toil and capital, *expended according to his directions*, would have brought the whole demesne (estate) into culture, and yielded a noble revenue. But season after season rolled away in sad succession, leaving those unbounded acres of various but all *reclaimable* soils barren and useless; and as to the park, it would have been far more productive and perfect had it been relieved of the extraordinary and unaccountable amount of energy expended on it.

Why did these laborers act so absurdly? Did they wish to labor in vain? On the contrary! They were forever craving for fruit, coveting good crops, longing for great results. Did they not wish to carry out the farmer's views about his property? Well, they seemed to have that desire, for they were always reading the directions he wrote, and said continually to one another,

“You know, we have to bring the *whole property* into order.”
But they did not do it.

Some few tried and plowed up a little plot here and there, and sowed corn and other crops. Perhaps these failed, and so the rest got discouraged? Oh, no; they saw that the yield was magnificent; far richer in proportion than they got themselves. They clearly perceived that, but yet they failed to follow this good example. Nay—when the labor of a few in some distant valley had resulted in a crop they were unable to gather by themselves, the others would not even go and help them bring home the sheaves! *They preferred watching for weeds among the roses, in the overcrowded garden, and counting blades of grass in the park, and the leaves on the trees.*

Then they were fools, surely, not wise men? Traitors, not true servants to their Lord? Ah, I can’t tell! You must ask Him that! I only know their Master said, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” and that 1900 years afterward they had *not even mentioned that there was a Gospel to one half of the world.*

“And why call ye Me Lord, Lord and DO NOT THE THINGS I SAY?”

(From *World Missions Total War*, L.E. Maxwell, Prairie Press, 1979).

Notes

1. P.J. Johnstone, *Operation World* (Bromley, Kent, England: STL Books, 1978)
2. Charles Marsh, *Too Hard for God* (Bath, England: Echoes of Service, 1976)
3. *C.T. Studd Athlete and Pioneer*, Norman Grubb (Zondervan Publisher: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1933)
4. George Muller, quoted by William MacDonald in *True Discipleship* (Walterick Publishers: Kansas City, Kansas, 1962)
5. *Christian Devotedness*, Anthony Norris Groves (Walterick Publishers: Kansas City, Kansas, 1995)

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To God be the glory.