

# **SCHOOL**

**OF THE**

# **HOLY SPIRIT**

**(DISCIPLESHIP)**

**COURSE:** The Basics of Discipleship 1

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**TOPIC: Discipleship 2:**  
**Requirements / Rewards / People / Process**

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**Note:**

This book is not a replacement for your Bible or Bible reading.

As you read this text book:

1. OPEN your Bible and
2. READ all the Bible references specified.

This is your part in this study.

The Holy Spirit's part is to give you the *Rhema* of the word that you read, i.e. He will make the word you read ALIVE in your heart. This is called Divine Revelation. This is important in your Discipleship Study. Without this, you only have head knowledge of the word, not heart knowledge. (2Cor. 3:6).

Remember, you must "study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Tim. 2:15).

Also remember that there will be questions/tests on each topic. Please, ask your questions before this time.

Shalom!

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# Section 1: It's Requirements and It's Rewards

## 1. Introduction

I find that I am always prone to overestimate the benefits of things I desire and to underestimate the price involved. My wife and I recently committed ourselves to a 'small' remodeling project. Any of you who have done the same know that it has become a far bigger commitment than we anticipated.

This is also a danger in the matter of discipleship. Repeatedly, our Lord cooled the enthusiasm of eager candidates for discipleship by urging them to consider its cost.<sup>216</sup> In evangelical circles today, there seems to be a trend in the opposite direction. We urge people to be saved and to become disciples of our Lord, highlighting its benefits and blessings. We conceal the true cost of discipleship and any liabilities in the fine print, if we mention them at all.<sup>217</sup>

If we truly desire to be followers of our Lord along the path of discipleship, it is imperative that we first heed the words of our Lord and count the cost of discipleship. Lest we become falsely discouraged or disillusioned, we should also weigh these costs against the benefits of being a follower of Jesus. In this way only can we make an intelligent decision in this decisive matter of discipleship.

## 2. The Requirements of Discipleship

In the gospel of Luke, we find the requirements of discipleship outlined by our Lord.

“Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms for peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:25-33).

From one perspective, discipleship centers upon the issue of dependence and submission. Taken from another direction, we might say that discipleship entails a complete rearrangement of our priorities. To be a disciple of our Lord demands that He become the most important thing in our life. This is what Luke sought to remind us of when he recorded the words of our Lord in the fourteenth chapter of his gospel. Consider with me the rearrangement of our priorities demanded by discipleship.

- (1) The disciple of Jesus Christ must put his Master above those nearest and dearest to him.** “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, ... he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

We should all understand that Jesus did not mean by this that we cannot love God and family at the same time—that we can only love God while hating those nearest and

dearest to us.<sup>218</sup> The Scriptures speak too plainly elsewhere of our obligations to our families, husbands, wives and children.

What our Lord means is that our love for Him must have precedence over any other. Our attachment to Him must be greater than any other. While husbands are to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25), they are to love the Savior more. No human relationship should be more intimate, no human bond more inseparable than that between the disciple and his Master.

We in America can hardly grasp the potential threat that family ties pose to true discipleship. In the days of the New Testament as well as down through church history, individuals have been confronted with the ultimatum to choose either Jesus or family, but not both. Many Christians have been totally disowned and disinherited because of their faith in Christ, the Savior.

Several years ago when I was teaching school, I had a little Jewish girl as a student. More than anything else in the world she dreaded telling her parents of her new faith. She was a handicapped child and to be put out by her family would seemingly be disastrous.

Not only is our relationship to Christ to have priority over family ties, our union with Him is to have precedence over all human relationship. Friendship (or identification) with Christ will inevitably result in enmity with the world.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you” (John 15:18-19).

The disciple of Christ may not desire persecution, but he can depend on it.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!” (Matthew 10:24-25).

2. **The disciple of the Lord Jesus must value following Jesus Christ above life itself.** The basic instinct to preserve life is inherent in all of creation. Discipleship demands a devotion to the Lord Jesus that surpasses the instinct to preserve our own life. The history of the church sufficiently proves that this requirement has resulted in the death of countless Christians through the centuries. Once again, we Americans can scarcely comprehend the demands of discipleship as faced by many of our persecuted and oppressed brethren. Perhaps even in our own lifetime conditions in our nation may become such that we will come to appreciate the significance of this requirement of devotion to Christ above life itself.
3. **The disciple of Jesus Christ must place his commitment to Christ above material possessions.** I have the distinct impression that we are now beginning to arrive at the real crunch for those of us who are complacent, affluent, American Christians. “So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33).

Simply put, we must love God more than we love money and what it can buy. The story of the rich young ruler illustrates this requirement of discipleship. He wanted to be a disciple of our Lord (and therefore obtain the fringe benefit of eternal life), but not at the cost of his material possessions.

I do not think that the Bible teaches that one can become a Christian only after disposing of his material assets. It is the attitude behind our affluence that is the crucial factor. Oftentimes the poor are more materialistic than the rich, for they assign too much importance to material things. The desire to have money and material goods is what is sinful. In biblical terms, “The love of money (not the possession of it) is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Paul instructed those who were rich in material things to be rich in good works, and not to trust in the uncertainty of riches (1 Timothy 6:17-19). That is the point. Nothing must compete with our devotion to and our dependence upon the Lord Jesus.

4. **The disciple of Jesus Christ must daily die to self-interest.** Even as our Lord spoke of His destiny leading Him to a cross, so also every true disciple must also bear a cross. “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). Our cross must not be confused with the cross of our Lord. His was a cross borne once for all, while ours must be taken up daily. “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’” (Luke 9:23).

His cross was the instrument which put to death the sinless Son of God. Taking up our cross involves the daily putting to death of the selfish desires and ambitions of the old self, our lower nature (cf. Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Colossians 2:20; 3:11). There is a “Christian” song which is nicely done, but its theology makes me cringe. The words go something like this (be grateful I don’t attempt to sing it):

Must Jesus bear the cross alone  
And all the world go free?  
No, there’s a cross for everyone  
And there’s a cross for me.

Now I would agree that all of us must suffer in this life and bear the reproach of Christ. Paul calls this: “... Filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1:24). As Christians, we will suffer and be persecuted for the sake of Christ, even as our Lord told us. But our sufferings are not atoning; they contribute nothing to our salvation, nor to anyone else’s.

Taking up our cross daily is speaking of our willingness to lay aside all self-seeking and selfish ambition. It means that our desire and ambition is not to satisfy ourselves, but to please the Savior. He, rather than self, is the object of our supreme affection. Pleasing Him is the highest, most compelling motive of our lives.

We, like the disciples, do not come out looking very good on this point. Over and over the disciples evidenced a jockeying for position, and a desire to get ahead of the other eleven. And repeatedly our Lord rebuked and instructed them on this very point (cf. Matthew 18:1ff.;

23:11-12; Mark 9:34ff.; Luke 9:46-43; 22:24,26). The supreme example is that of our Lord who looked not after His own pleasure and comfort, but Who was obedient to the point of infinite suffering and death for our salvation (Philippians 2:4-8).

Putting all these elements together we can conclude that true discipleship puts Jesus Christ above everything and everyone else. We esteem His fellowship above that of any other. We consider it a far greater thing to be related to Him than any human kinship. We see His purposes, His desires, as vastly more important than our own.

On a human plane, discipleship is something like joining the armed forces. No one can sign up and yet retain his autonomy. (At least, this is the way it used to be!) When you are enlisted, your own interests are subservient to your superiors. You eat when you are told, you get leave when it is granted. You contribute to a greater cause by making yourself expendable to that cause. And so, to some degree, it is with discipleship (cf. Luke 9:57-62).

### 3. The Rewards of Discipleship

With the requirements of discipleship so demanding, we are not greatly shocked that so few chose the path of discipleship to our Lord. In fact, we may wonder why anyone would choose to do so. Let me suggest several principles of discipleship which prove to be compelling reasons for being a follower of Jesus Christ. As we shall see, the rewards of discipleship make its requirements look pale. The first principles of discipleship are found in Matthew's Gospel: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-30).

**Principle 1: We must all have a master, and none is more gentle than the Savior.**

The Scriptures make it clear that we are the slaves of whatever it is that controls us (Romans 6:16). Some are the slaves of the body and its appetites. Others submit to a religious system. Our Lord described those enslaved in the Judaism of their time as 'weary and heavy-laden' (Matthew 11:28). It is hard to think of a more fitting description. Ultimately, if we are not the servants of Jesus Christ we are slaves to sin and to Satan (Romans 6:16). What a cruel taskmaster he is!

In contrast, our Lord is 'gentle and humble in heart' (Matthew 11:29). To be His disciple is not a dreary task, not a drudgery, but a delight; not a burden, but a blessing. While the scribes and Pharisees lorded it over the people and ruled in pride and arrogance, Jesus gave His life for His sheep. He humble and gently leads His own. Though the path is rough, the way is sure, for we have a gentle and skillful guide.

**Principle 2: Although the demands of discipleship are great, He never requires of us anything which He does not enable us to do.**

We have seen that the requirements for discipleship are rigorous. How, then, can Jesus speak of His burden as 'light' and His yoke as 'easy'? Why is the way of the Jewish scribes and Pharisees hard and their burden heavy? It is because they demand much and do not give so much as one bit of help (Matthew 23:4). But what our Lord expects, He enables us to do. This is the crucial difference. Let us not think about the demands of discipleship without also contemplating the dynamic enablement which He provides to meet them.

**Principle 3: It is only to His disciples that our Lord reveals His innermost thoughts and most intimate secrets.**

While our Lord spoke plainly to His disciples of His purposes, these were carefully concealed from the masses. "And He was not speaking to them without parables; but He was explaining everything privately to His

own disciples” (Mark 4:34). The reason for this was sought by His disciples, and the Lord explained it when He said, “To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables” (Mark 4:11, cf. also verse 12). Discipleship brings one into a level of intimacy with the Lord that others cannot experience. It is to His intimate friends (cf. John 15:15) that His intimate secrets are revealed.

**Principle 4: Our rewards as disciples are based not on the magnitude of our actions, but on their motive.** Many, in my opinion, shy away from discipleship because they sense that they have little or nothing to contribute, and hence, that their rewards will be few. We have already established the principle that God does not choose us on the basis of our potential contribution. He chooses the foolish things of this world (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The basis for our rewards as disciples is defined in the Gospel of Matthew:

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly, I say to you he shall not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:40-42).

I understand from this text that rewards are based not so much on the magnitude of our service, but on the sincerity of our motives; not so much on the response to our service as on the reason for it. If we are obedient to our Lord and live so as to please Him, we shall have a reward.

**Principle 5: Our great reward is Jesus Himself.** Whenever we begin to think about this matter of rewards and blessing, let us never forget that He is our great reward. In the book of Hebrews we are told that God is “a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). God also told Abram, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1 KJV).

If we seek to be followers of our Lord only for the fringe benefits we have succeeded only in kicking materialism and self-interest out the front door while inviting them in through the back door. He is our reward. The cost of discipleship is nothing compared to the riches of fellowship with Him.

**Principle 6: There is nothing which the Lord denies His disciple which is for his ultimate good, and nothing which He takes away which He does not replace with something better.** In the Garden of Eden, Satan succeeded in deceiving Eve into thinking that what God forbade was really good and that in so doing, God was not really good. Satan is always changing the price tags and the labels. When we come to the matter of discipleship, Satan wants us to dwell on the negative side of the ledger. He wants us to ponder what we are missing. But God withholds no good thing from those who follow Him: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11; cf. Psalm 34:10).

But even more than this, what God takes away He replaces with something even better. Look at these words from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10:

“Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers (notice the omission of father) and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life’” (Mark 10:29-30).

Do you see the principle behind this promise? God only withholds what is not for our good. What He does withhold, He replaces with something far better. Now Christianity is often accused of promising ‘pie in the sky, bye and bye.’ And, with certain qualifications, we must say this is surely true. God does promise many great blessings in the future. But, to quote an insightful writer,<sup>219</sup> most disciples would insist that they have received a good sized slice of the pie already.

#### **4. Implications and Application**

The relevance of these things is almost too obvious to mention, but let me reiterate some areas of application. First, we should neither underemphasize nor overemphasize the demands of discipleship. Many who discover what is involved in true discipleship will avoid it, as did the rich young ruler. But if we thoughtfully consider the rewards of following Jesus, along with the alternatives to it, we should quickly conclude that there is no other way, there is no better way, there is no easier way, than His way.

Second, we should see the folly of those who suppose that they are getting the ‘best of both worlds’ when they trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and then walk far behind in daily life. The theory is that by straddling the spiritual fence we can enjoy the blessings of heaven while also soaking up the pleasures of sin for the present. Discipleship is not to be understood only as the sacrifice of pleasant joys for future rewards.<sup>220</sup> Discipleship is God’s provision for a purposeful and pleasurable life in the present, as well as a blissful eternity in the presence of God, His angels, and the saints. No one but the disciple of our Lord is living life to the maximum.

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is He the most important person in your life? If not, you are being cheated out of life at its fullest. Have you considered the cost of discipleship, as well as its rewards? If you do, you will conclude that the way of discipleship is not a way; it is the way. May God grant that we may become His disciples by His grace.

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216 Cf. Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33.

217 “The type of ministry that is here in mind starts by stressing, in an evangelistic context, the difference that becoming a Christian will make. Not only will it bring a man forgiveness of sins, peace of conscience, and fellowship with God as his Father; it will also mean that through the power of the indwelling Spirit, he will be able to overcome the sins that previously mastered him, and the light and leading that God will give him will enable him to find a way through problems of guidance, self-fulfillment, personal relations, heart’s desire, and such like, which had hitherto defeated him completely. Now, put like that, in general

terms, these great assurances are scriptural and true—praise God, they are! But it is possible so to stress them, and so to play down the rougher side of the Christian life—the daily chastening, the endless way with sin and Satan, the periodic walk in darkness—as to give the impression that normal Christian living is a perfect bed of roses, a state of affairs in which everything in the garden is lovely all the time, and problems no longer exist—or, if they come, they have only to be taken to the throne of grace, and they will melt away at once. This is to suggest that the world, the flesh, and the devil, will give a man no serious trouble once he is a Christian; nor will his circumstances and personal relationships ever be a problem to him; nor will he ever be a problem to himself. Such suggestions are mischievous, however, because they are false.” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 222.

218 I must comment here that some, in the name of Christian commitment to Christ, have neglected or forsaken their family responsibilities, and with considerable harm, while sincerely supposing that they were obeying our Lord’s instructions in this passage. This text, as all others, must be interpreted and applied in the light of all other Scriptures on this point. When the Lord has highest priority in our lives, we find that our family obligations are taken more seriously, too. We obey Him by loving our wives as He loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). We submit to our husbands as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22). We obey parents and honor them (Ephesians 6:1,2). We deal lovingly with our children (Ephesians 6:4).

219 R. T. France, *I Came to Set the Earth on Fire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 64.

220 This is, however, one aspect of the Christian life (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Hebrews 11:24-26). The point I wish to make is that the sacrifices we make in this present life are to our benefit now, as well as in eternity.

## Section 2: Its People and Process

### 5. Introduction

I don't know how many times I have heard a statement something to this effect: "If John were ever saved, just think how God could use him. Why with his enthusiasm, leadership ability, and bank account, there would be no stopping him."

Such reasoning is far from the mentality of the New Testament. By these standards our Lord made a terrible mistake when he was approached by the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16ff; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-30). You will remember that in order to become a follower of Jesus he would first have to sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and then come after Jesus (Matthew 19:21). In our modern and enlightened times, we probably would have handled it much differently. The rich young ruler would have been put high on the list of 'contacts' to pursue as a member of the board of directors. Why, think of what God could do with his money and influence. And perhaps if he sat through the business meetings and had close association with Jesus, he might even get converted and committed.

But the very thing which in our minds would have commended him before our Lord, Jesus told him to get rid of. Here was a self-righteous man who felt he could 'use his influence' to get to heaven. Jesus loved this man, we are told (Mark 10:21), and invited him to become a disciple, but not because of his potential to contribute. Rather, he loved him as a person.

One of the most rewarding studies in the Word of God is an investigation of the kind of people God has chosen to be His followers. I believe we shall learn from a study of the disciples of our Lord that God does not choose men because of their potential, but because of their person. He chooses few who are prosperous and prestigious, but many who are in poverty and spiritual hunger. In short, I believe our study will indicate that God chooses people like you and me to do great things, and that it is by His power and His process that these things come to pass.

### 6. The Kind of People God Chose as Disciples

What kind of men did our Lord choose to commence the greatest endeavor of all time? They were to establish the church of Jesus Christ. They were to do so with no financial 'clout,' with no formal theological training, opposed by the combined forces of Satan, the Judaism of their day, the paganism of other religions, and (later) the power of Rome. Whatever kind of man God could use to overcome these difficulties is surely needed today as well.

As we consider the twelve disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, there are a number of characteristics that strike us.

- (1) They were young men.** By and large, it would seem that the greatest impact of our Lord was upon the younger generation. The terms (*tekna*, *teknia* or *paidia*), often used by our Lord in reference to His disciples, imply youthfulness. Our Lord Himself was in the prime of His youth. So the early church applied Psalm 110:3 to Jesus:<sup>210</sup> "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth" (King James Version).<sup>211</sup>

In the original version of Isaac Watt's great hymn,<sup>212</sup> the youth of our Lord was emphasized: "When I survey the wondrous cross where the young Prince of Glory died."

It is also noteworthy that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians nearly a generation after the death of our Lord that he could say that of the 500 who saw our Lord raised from the grave, “the greater part remain unto this present” (1 Corinthians 15:6). If most of these witnesses were still alive, they surely were not old when they saw the resurrected Lord.

- (2) **They were from the middle class of their society.** In our efforts to emphasize the humbleness of these men and their lack of position or formal training (cf. Acts 4:13), let us not suppose that they were the dregs of society. As a group, these men were relatively successful businessmen, who came from the middle class of their society. Peter and Andrew, James and John, were fishermen (Mark 1:16-20). Matthew was a government employee (Matthew 5:27). I probably should go on to say that these men were intelligent and capable, not blundering idiots.
- (3) **They were Galileans.** With the possible exception of Judas,<sup>213</sup> all of the disciples seem to be Galileans. The significance of this may be easily overlooked. To be a Jerusalem Jew was a matter of real status. To be a theologically trained Jerusalem Jew was like being a “Harvard man.” To be a Galilean was like coming from somewhere in the Ozarks, to be a real unsophisticated, uncultured “country bumpkin.”<sup>214</sup>
- (4) **They were a diverse group in personality and philosophy.** Though all of the eleven had their status as native Galileans in common, they were a very diverse group. In personality, they ranged from the flamboyance of Peter to the hesitance of Thomas, from the political conservatism of Matthew (who was a government-employee and supporter) to the radicalism of Simon, the Zealot, a political revolutionary. Only the strength of their commitment to our Lord could have bound these dramatically diverse men together.
- (5) **They were men who had a heart which sought God.** We do not know the backgrounds of all of the twelve disciples, but we do know that some were previously the followers of John the Baptist (John 1:35ff). These had come to the point of acknowledging the emptiness of contemporary Judaism and recognized the need for repentance and the coming Messiah. Nathaniel (John 1:45-51) was clearly described as a pious man, spiritually prepared for Messiah’s appearing.
- (6) **They were men without formal religious training.** What most amazed the religious establishment was the fact that the apostles had such power and authority, and yet had never been formally trained in their schools of theology.

“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Now there is no great virtue in having no formal training, nor is there a curse to a theological education. But being trained in the Rabbinical schools of theology would have been of very restricted value, since their whole system of interpretation was defective. Being trained in the Jewish rabbinical schools would be somewhat parallel to your going to the most liberal seminary in this country. There would be some value, but you would have to unlearn most of what you were taught. As theologically uneducated Galileans, the disciples were to a great extent undefiled by the religious pollutions of their time. Just as John the Baptist spent much of his life in the wilderness, so the disciples were from an area remote to the evils of Judaism, and as such more open to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 7. Implications for Discipleship Today

We would have to conclude from what we have seen of the disciples that they would not have been tagged as ‘most likely to succeed’ by many in Christian circles today. Our Lord did not choose them because of what they could do for Him, so much as that He (due to their inabilities and limitations) could do great things through them.

There is a principle underlying the Lord’s choice of His disciples which is as applicable to us today as it was in New Testament times. Paul verbalized it in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31:

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

We are not told here that God never chooses the wise, the noble, or the prosperous, but that He seldom does so. Why has God chosen to work through the weak and the foolish things? First, so that He receives all the glory whenever great things are accomplished. And, second, those who are weak must trust in God to work in them, and in spite of them. As Paul recorded elsewhere, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9b).

If we really believe this principle to be true, then we must recognize at least two specific applications. First of all, we must recognize that much of evangelicalism is flatly in error when they place the emphasis on reaching what they call ‘key people’ with the gospel so that by means of their prestige, influence, and money, the work of God can be furthered. God’s work is furthered in God’s way and through God’s resources.

Several times I have told the story of my uncle who tells of an interview between the owner of a gas station and a prospective employee. When asked for his qualifications, the young man quickly responded that he was a college graduate. “Well, my boy,” responded the owner, “I think that can be overcome.” It is my conviction that what many feel are assets to the cause of Christ are really liabilities. We make far too much of the superstars in Christian circles, and conduct ourselves in a way far from in keeping with the New Testament.

In my short lifetime, it has been interesting to observe how easily money comes in to support the ‘ministries’ of very popular or prestigious individuals while those who are not as spectacular learn to do without. It is because we all love to associate ourselves with a winner. Let me remind you, my Christian friend, that neither in days gone by, nor in the present, is our Lord Jesus considered a winner by the world’s standards. As I view the gift of giving, it is the ability to recognize real ministry and real needs in the plethora of solicitations in the name of Christian ministry.

But since neither you nor I are superstars anyway, there is a very personal application for us. We are the kind of people that God chooses through whom to do His work. Now isn’t that an amazing and wonderful truth? God has chosen to use men and women like you and me, insignificant and having little ‘clout’ in the world, to carry on the greatest cause in the world, the building up of His church. Martin Luther is reported to have said, “Let no man lose the faith that God willeth to do a great work through him.”<sup>215</sup>

Nothing is more exciting and motivating in my own Christian life than to realize that this is true.

## 8. The Process of Discipleship

Some biblical scholars have puzzled over the fact that the Gospels record several ‘calls’ of the twelve disciples. The skeptic is predictably quick to draw the conclusion that the Gospel accounts are in conflict with one another, thereby giving credence to his presupposition that the Bible is not the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

There is a much more plausible, biblical, and simple explanation; one that has too often been overlooked. Put in its simplest form, we must conclude that there was no one call to discipleship. Now it sounds very impressive when we read in the Gospels that Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, called Peter and Andrew, James and John, and they immediately left everything and followed Jesus. We almost get the impression that this was their first encounter with Jesus, and yet, they made a life-long commitment on the basis of His invitation.

But such does not appear to be the case when we look at the Gospels as a whole. Although the chronology of the life of Christ is subject to much discussion and debate, the following sequence of events seems to occur:

- (1) Jesus was proclaimed as the Messiah by John the Baptist and several followed Him and spent the day with Him** (John 1:35ff).
- (2) Jesus, at some later time, invited these men (and others) to be His followers.** They left their nets and followed him (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). It is in no way evident to me that they left their jobs and spent all their time with Jesus at this time. They may have temporarily taken leave of their work to follow Jesus on a particular campaign.
- (3) It was sometime later that Jesus appointed the twelve to be apostles, that is, to be commissioned to go out as His emissaries and preach the gospel and display His power** (Matthew 10:1ff; Mark 3:13ff; Luke 6:12ff). This assignment was limited, and their power apparently temporary.
- (4) Not until after our Lord’s resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit did the disciples rise to the task of establishing the church of Jesus Christ.**

What we should learn from these various calls to follow Jesus in the Gospels is that there is no one decisive call to discipleship, but rather a life-long process with many decision points along the way.

G. Campbell Morgan has written a classic work entitled *The Crises of the Christ*. In this book, he deals with the critical, destiny-determining situations and decisions in the life of our Lord. What he has done with reference to our Lord’s life and ministry could likewise be done for His disciples. The initial call(s) to follow Jesus were an invitation to an intimate personal relationship. All the time they spent together was seasoned with practical and biblical instruction. As their relationship grew and their faith deepened, they left home and occupation to be with Him continually. When the masses left Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:60ff), the disciples, also, were faced with a decision to stay with Him or leave. The more our Lord taught about His suffering and death (and theirs), the more the implications of discipleship came home to them.

And so we see an extended process of disciple-making in our Lord's ministry to the twelve. It was not a one-time decision, but a sequence of decisions each based upon further realization of the implications of true discipleship.

## **9. Implications of New Testament Discipleship for Today**

Discipleship, then, was not something instantaneously and casually presented, nor immediately and totally accepted by the twelve. Rather, it was a gradual process of revelation and response. Discipleship, like sanctification, is progressive, not instantaneous.

What does this truth imply for the Christian today, who truly desires to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Let me suggest several possibilities.

- (1) Discipleship is a life-long process.** In a day of instant mashed potatoes, instant coffee, and microwave ovens, most of us want to accelerate processes that take time to accomplish. God has no instant formulas for discipleship. God invites you to follow Him at whatever point in life you may be.

I must emphasize that there are no shortcuts at the outset. All enter into discipleship by personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior. Every disciple of our Lord must come to the point of recognizing that he or she has nothing to offer God. Rather, we are in rebellion against Him because of our sin. God has removed that barrier by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the penalty for our sin and to provide a righteousness which is acceptable to Him. Those who become His disciples stop trusting in themselves, in anything they can do for God, and trust only in what God has done through Jesus Christ.

Once saved, the disciple of our Lord need not re-experience his initial conversion, nor continually rededicate himself to our Lord. Instead of this, he or she should continue to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and as further revelation is grasped, their commitment should become fuller and deeper.

- (2) There is a distinct sequence in discipleship.** In the lives of the twelve, there was a clear sequence. The first phase of their discipleship centered on knowing Jesus Christ intimately. It was considerably later that Jesus sent them out to preach and heal. I fear that in too many churches we have equated discipleship with service. We immediately urge new Christians to begin to go to work for our Lord. It was a number of years until those who were physically present with our Lord were qualified to carry on His work. Paul spent years in preparation also (Galatians 1:15-18).

What I am suggesting is that those who are newly saved need to spend their initial efforts in getting to know their Lord in a much more intimate way. Once this is done (though it never is fully arrived at, cf. Philippians 3:10ff), the quality of our service will be vastly superior.

- (3) Discipleship is a life-long process by which we become servants (and friends, John 15:14,15) of our Lord Jesus Christ.** On one occasion, I was invited to preach at a church in the Northwest, and I (unwisely) chose to speak on a somewhat emotional and controversial issue. I tried to forewarn the pastor, and I shall never forget his response. He said, "Go right ahead, brother, you're the Lord's servant, not mine."

I am not at all certain that most Christians really believe this. It seems that all too often we measure service to our Lord by service to us. “If you are really a disciple, then you will do thus and so ...” That is not the way I understand the New Testament.

How graciously our Lord dealt with the failures and weaknesses and ineptitude of His disciples. How harsh and demanding we are. So often we establish a rigid program and imply that all who are truly committed will follow it (and us!).

The discipleship process of our Lord was personal and individualized. It took people at whatever level of commitment and maturity they were and encouraged them to press on. When they failed, our Lord stood by them, suggesting that even their failure would enhance their value as His disciple (cf. Luke 22:31-32).

There are some who teach the doctrine of so-called “Lordship Salvation” and by this they imply that the salvation is a final and once for all commitment to salvation by faith and service. I do not see this in the training of the twelve.

Are you a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ? Have you trusted in Him as your Savior? If you have, you have begun a life-long process. It is an exciting process by which you will grow in an intimate relationship with the Savior, and in time, you will be given work to do in His name.

Since much of the present discipleship emphasis falls upon human responsibility and commitment, let me conclude with a reminder that it is our Lord Who is in complete control, not only in the calling of disciples, but in the process of making them. Our Lord assured His disciples,

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that Your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you” (John 15:16).

May God grant that you may wonder at the fact that God has chosen to reveal Himself to you and to use you in His service. May you find comfort that, while the requirements of discipleship are rigorous, the Savior is gentle and gracious, and the process, though life-long, is sure.

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210 James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), p. 66.

211 Although this verse is variously translated, it would seem to emphasize either the youth of our Lord (as the King James Version implies) or the youth of His disciples (which the NASV and the Berkeley Version suggest).

212 *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, p. 66.

213 Cf. R. T. France, *I Came to Set the Earth on Fire* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 53.

214 “A certain Galilean once went about enquiring, ‘Who has ‘amar’? ‘Foolish Galilean,’ they said to him, ‘do you mean an “ass” for riding, “wine” to drink, “wool” for clothing, or a “lamb” for killing?’” This Jewish joke, which pokes fun at the slovenly speech of Galilee with its indistinct vowels and dropped aitches, indicates the Jerusalem Jew’s attitude to his

northern neighbours. Galilee had once been predominately Gentile territory, and even now its population was far from completely Jewish. Cut off from Judaea by the hostile territory of Scamaria, and under a different system of government, it tended to develop along its own independent lines of speech and character, and of religious tradition. Hence the great disdain in which a Judaeen Jew held his Galilean brother.” Ibid., p. 30.

215 James S. Stewart, p. 69.