

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Discipleship is simple!: What does it mean to follow Jesus?

There are a great many people who have been saved by grace who remain babies in the Christian faith because, although they have trusted in Christ as the Son of God, they have not grown by learning from Him and following Him.

The word, "disciple", which is identified with following Jesus, actually means "a learner". It denotes both learning and endeavour. If we are to follow Christ, then we must study His word in order to know His will and seek to be obedient to it. John 8:31 emphasises this where Jesus spoke to Jews who believed in Him saying, *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed..."*

Yes, many have come to Him and found their sins forgiven and know that they have eternal life; but few are yoked with Him in their daily lives seeking to go His way and do His will, Matthew 11:29-30. And, unlike Mary of Bethany, they do not sit at His feet and learn from Him (Luke 10:39).

In Matthew 4:18-19 we read: *"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* This command was obeyed. The lives of Simon and Andrew were changed in an instant. They left all and followed Him. He then called James and John and they did the same (Matthew 4:22). These men became close companions of Jesus and walked the same roads as He walked.

In this talk we will take the basis of the message from an acrostic of the word **Disciple**:

D standing for **D**isciplined;
I for **I**noffensive;
S for **S**anctified;
C for **C**ommitted;
I for **I**ndustrious;
P for **P**rayerful;
L for **L**oving; and
E for **E**mpowered.

Disciplined

The disciple is an individual believer who is disciplined. Each Christian is encouraged to follow Christ individually. Do you remember the risen Christ speaking to Peter as they were walking along the beach at Galilee? (John 19:1-25). Jesus had signified that, in time, Peter would be crucified (John 19:19). He then said to this restored disciple, *"Follow me"* (John 19:19). At that point, Peter, looked behind him to see John following and said, *"Lord, and what shall this man do?"* (John 19:20-21). Jesus rebuked him saying, *"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me"* (John 19:22). It was imperative that Peter followed Jesus as an individual! He was not to overly concern himself with the plans that the Lord had for the personal lives of others. In this example, Christ's purposes for the Apostle John were to be entirely different!

Furthermore, and as indicated previously, the disciple must be disciplined in the study of the Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we read this command from Paul to Timothy: *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* This is where endeavour or diligence comes in. *"Study"* here literally means "be speedy". It is the earnest endeavour of a Christian that proves him to be acceptable to God. He is likened to a faithful workman who dissects the word of truth with precision. This shows that his interpretation of the word is both accurate and honest and not bent to any personal desires or thoughts he might have in the natural sense.

Of course, there are a number of methods by which the Bible may be studied, but the overriding principle of guidance is that the Bible interprets itself. The following advice (used by both Wycliffe and Coleridge) is pertinent to the right interpretation of Scripture: "It shall greatly help you to understand the Scriptures, if you mark not only what is spoken

or written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows.”

The disciple, being a spiritual person, has the indwelling Spirit of God as His teacher. He understands the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:11-14). On the other hand, the man who lives for self (the natural man) cannot understand such things. Do you remember when the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why He spoke in parables? (Matthew 13:10). He answered: *“Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given”* (Matthew 13:11). Those who have trusted and follow Christ have been given an ability to understand spiritual things.

Inoffensive

The disciple must be disciplined in the way he lives his life. This brings us to the first “I” of the acrostic. He is to be Inoffensive. In Philippians 2:3-4 we find the believer is to do nothing through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind each is to esteem the other as better than themselves. It is often correctly said in Christian circles that a “meek” man will never cause offence and a “longsuffering” man will never take offence.

The Lord Jesus described Himself as *“meek and humble in heart”* (Matthew 11:29). This should be the attitude of the disciple who follows His steps. The Apostle Peter shows that Christ is not only a teacher in word, but also a teacher in practice. In 1 Peter 2:21-23 he writes, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously...”*

The Christian is a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Therefore, the characteristics of the heavenly should be reflected in him on earth. This translates into him being a good citizen here as 1 Peter 2:13-14 states: *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.”*

So the disciple will be an exemplary citizen in the community. However, there is one thing in which he must withstand the authorities and that is when they ask him to do anything which is opposed to God. The early disciples did so when they were forbidden by rulers to teach in the name of Christ. In Acts 5:29, Peter and the other apostles answered them stating: *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”* They went on to boldly proclaim the name of their Lord despite much opposition.

Sanctified

The disciple is to be S for Sanctified. 1 Peter 1:15-16 puts sanctification this way, *“But [just] as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy.”* Strictly speaking, “holiness” is not the same as “moral purity”, it is, rather, a separation to God.

God is holy because He is set apart from all and stands alone. We are called to be set apart to Him in this practical sense. 2 Timothy 2:21 corroborates this: *“If a man therefore purge himself from these [i.e. false teachers], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”* The Christian who stands in the doctrine once delivered to the saints is set apart for the service of God.

In John 17:17 we read of Jesus praying to His Father for His disciples saying, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* It is the action of truth upon the believer that sets Him apart to God. Jesus Himself said as much when He spoke to the Jews who believed on Him stating, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32).

Jesus, the Son of God, was sanctified and sent into this world by the Father (John 10:36). He came both to reveal the Father and to do His works. In like manner, disciples are to reveal Christ in their lives and faithfully serve Him. It is in Antioch that believers were first called Christians (see Acts 11:26) because they lived lives that were Christ-like. The disciple is one who reflects Christ here on earth.

Committed

Another part of the discipline of being a follower of Jesus is C for Committed. In Matthew 16:24 we read, *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* The disciple must utterly disown his former life and focus upon a new life with Christ. This is full commitment. Furthermore, the disciple is to take up his cross. That is, he must be prepared, not only to suffer the reproach and

shame that goes with a cross, but also be ready to suffer - even sacrificing his life for his Master, should it prove to be necessary.

Discipleship demands commitment. We read stern words of Jesus to those who would be His disciples in Matthew 10:37: *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* Elsewhere in scripture, we are told to love and cherish our close relatives. So what is the Lord Jesus saying here? In simple terms, He is insisting on having the preeminent place in our hearts. Our relationship with Him must have priority.

So, it is no light thing to be a true disciple of Christ. If you are considering becoming one then first count the cost. Jesus said, *“...Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish”* (Luke 14:27-33).

Industrious

Additionally, following Jesus requires a believer to be I for Industrious. All true Christians are expected to be (at the least) worshippers of the Father, witnesses to Christ, workers in the context of the church and warriors in the warfare against evil.

The Lord Jesus told the woman in John 4:23 that *“true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth”*. That is to say, their worship is to be from sincere hearts (without accompanying relics) and according to the revelation of the Father in the scriptures. Of course, worship is primarily a personal activity expressing communion with the Father. However, it is also a collective activity when Christians of a local church are gathered together. Therefore, no true disciple of Christ would forsake such gatherings (Hebrews 10:25). It is vital that a Christian has fellowship with other believers in the context of teaching, the Lord’s Supper and prayer (Acts 2:42).

In Matthew 28:19-20, we read the command of Jesus to His faithful disciples: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”* The disciple must go forward in order to teach people about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not to build on another man’s foundation where Christ is already proclaimed, but go to regions beyond. In fact, he is to *make disciples* from people in different nations.

The disciple is also to bear fruit. In John 15:8, the Lord Jesus, the True Vine (see John 15:1) says, *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”* If we view Christ as the vine and believers as the branches, then the sap would represent the Holy Spirit and the fruit would be attributes reflecting the fruit of that Spirit. In other words, disciples should live a life like Christ’s who was marked by *“love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Prayerful

This leads us to P for Prayerful. A follower of Jesus must also be disciplined in prayer. Prayer shows the believer’s dependence upon His Lord and it reflects the desire to know and do His will. We read of the disciples asking the Lord Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). The Lord then gave them the pattern prayer which, generally, called the “Lord’s Prayer”. The prayer contains:

- Worship;
- A desire to see the Father’s purposes and will fulfilled;
- A request for daily needs to be met;
- A plea for forgiveness;
- A desire for a forgiving nature;
- An appeal to be free from trial; and
- A cry to be rescued from that which is evil.

As we look through the New Testament scriptures, we can see that prayer contains the following aspects:

- Adoration of the Father for who He is;
- Praise for all He has done;
- Confession of personal failures knowing He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse;
- Daily consecration of our lives to Him in order that we may serve Him faithfully;

- Thanksgiving for all His goodness (especially that seen in answered prayer); and
- Supplications for the needs of others and of ourselves.

It is one thing to know how to pray; but it is another thing to do it. Hence, there are many verses that command us to pray, for example, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 states: *“Pray without ceasing.”* In other words, we are to be constant in prayer. In Jude 1:20 we find that we are to pray *“in the Holy Ghost.”* That is to say, to pray fervently in accord with God’s will and holiness. The Holy Spirit prompts us and guides us as to that for which we should pray and the manner in which we do so.

As we search the scriptures, we also find things for which we ought to pray. For example, in Matthew 9:37-38 we are encouraged to ask the Lord to send labourers into the harvest. In 1 Timothy 2:2 we are to pray for kings and all in authority. In Ephesians 1:15-19 Paul is found praying that believers might be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God and that they might know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power.

Of course, the disciple is to be earnest in prayer as shown by Philippians 4:6: *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”*

We find encouragement for the disciple in James 5:16 which tells us *“that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*

Loving

The disciple must also be L for Loving. Here we will define love as that nature which always seeks the best for the good of its object. Each disciple has a nature capable of love. However, in John 13:34 Jesus said to His disciples, *“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”* Note, this command may be obeyed or disobeyed. So to love is a result of conscious choice. Furthermore, the love commanded is that with which Christ loved them. We are not talking about a sentimental kind of love, but the kind where a father will train his children so that they grow up to be righteous, responsible and caring adults. No doubt, this will involve the exercise of firm discipline at times. It is not the kind of “excusing” love that spoils the child so that he grows up to be self-seeking (always wanting his own way), reckless and uncaring. It is also the sort of love which is prepared to give its life for its object. It is seen perfectly in Christ who loved people so much that He died for them even though they were ungodly (See Romans 5:6). So the love of a disciple is a sacrificial love which even has his enemies as its object. It is this love that proves one to be a disciple of Christ (John 13:35). It is a love which gladly serves the needs of others (John 13:13-16).

Empowered

Finally, we conclude this talk with E for Empowered. The disciple of Christ is empowered by the Spirit of God. Upon sincerely receiving Christ, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:13). This fulfils the promise of Jesus to His disciples given in John 14:17 where He said the Spirit of Truth would be in them. Acts 1:8 says the disciples would receive power when the Spirit had come upon them. The result would be that they would be witnesses of Jesus throughout the earth. John 3 reveals that it is by the application of God’s word by the Spirit that people are born again. This means that they are given a new nature so that, as God’s children, they are empowered to live lives that glorify Him. May He give us the grace to behave accordingly.

This challenging *Truth for Today* message is entitled: “What does it mean to follow Jesus?” It is part of our series called “Discipleship Is Simple” and its reference number is 1096. Thank you for listening.

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