

DISCIPLESHIP

**A Series of
Bible Studies
Presented at the
Plymouth Church of Christ**

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LESSON ONE

WHO IS YOUR MENTOR?

In beginning a study of Christian discipleship, we appropriately begin with two questions. The first is about mentoring; the second (see Lesson Two) is about following. You simply cannot understand discipleship until you understand the relationship between a mentor and the one he has taken under his wing.

It is significant that the Biblical model for the development of Christian character is that of a mentor and mentoree (to coin a word). God did not just send prophets to instruct us in the ways of righteousness; he sent his “one and only Son” (John 3:16) to show us the way.

“Book Learning” Is Not Enough

He did this because simply giving us a set of instructions about how to live is just not enough. We need more than that; we need an example of how to live.

All of us learn more by observation than we do by instruction. While instruction is important, and we cannot do without it, instruction alone will not give the results we need. A simple illustration will show that this is true, *especially when performance is important.*

Can you become a baseball player just by reading the rulebook? The immediate and obvious answer is, Of course not! How could you expect anyone to become a player just by reading the rules of the game?” Yet, one illustration of the nature of the restoration of New Testament Christianity is that should the game of baseball be lost to the knowledge of man, the game could be restored if someone found the rulebook and started laying out a field to play the game.

Now, it is true that we would be able to play something that looked a little like baseball if that were to happen, I think you would agree that it would be but a poor caricature of baseball as serious players *at all levels* play it today. Baseball requires much more than having a diamond with three bases in the right places with home plate and pitchers mound constructed according to the rules. It needs more than having an umpire who knows all the rules, the difference between “balls and strikes” and when a base runner is safe or out.

Baseball play demands players with certain skills. Players need to know how to throw and catch the ball from different positions and in different ways. Throwing from the outfield is different from throwing someone out from third base! Throwing to catch someone stealing second is different from throwing to complete a double play. Pitching is different from all of these – and a good pitcher has many different types of pitches in his repertoire. Hitting the ball and running the bases also require skills that are very different.

But even skills alone are not enough. Good play also requires good strategy. A player may be able to throw well – but if he throws to the wrong base, his play is not adequate to the game! And, depending on the circumstances in the game, every base is the right base to receive a throw at some point. The player with the ball must be able to discriminate when those times are.

How Do You Learn These Skills & Strategies?

A new player learns in three ways: observation, coaching and practice. Seeing skillful players play helps the youthful player see what can be done, as well as something about how to do it. But just watching others play will not make you a player. You must get into the game – at first with simple practice in throwing, catching and hitting the ball. In this practice, you will receive your first coaching. Watch a father teaching

his son or daughter to play the game to see what I mean. In these early stages of learning to play baseball, the rules don't mean much to us. That's not to say the rules are unimportant; it's just that learning baseball skills are more important at that stage.

Of course, to progress enough to actually get into a game and play, even at the "T-Ball" level, some rudimentary knowledge of the rules is necessary. Otherwise, you might hit the ball and run to third base! But that knowledge of the rules is picked up almost casually. I dare say there are many very competent players at the high school (maybe even the professional) level *who have never read the baseball rulebook*. They have a functional knowledge of the rules that they have acquired through observation and coaching.

What Does This Have To Do With Christian Discipleship?

This is an illustration of the fact that merely learning the details of the "Biblical Rules" for our Christian life is not enough. We may have the physical layout down right – the organization of the church, the external facts about how to conduct a worship service, how to become a member of the team and the "do's and don'ts" we should follow as members of the Lord's team. But if we do not go beyond that to the reformation of heart that Jesus calls for, we will come short of what we are called to become.

In one of his dramatic dialogues with the Jews, Jesus told them that, though they searched the Scriptures, this was not enough without coming to him so that they could have life (John 5:39). They knew the book (although they distorted much of what it said). But they did not have life.

Jesus came to give us abundant life (John 10:10). The NIV translates that "that they may have life, and have it to the full." *The Message*, a very "free" paraphrase, has this, "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." As we read the New Testament, we realize that the life Jesus came to bring is not just that we get to go to heaven someday. It is a new way of living in the here and now that prepares us for entry into the heavenly palaces.

Yet, many Christians live their entire lives without any intention of actually becoming what Jesus has called us to become. What is even more tragic is that the church is happy to have it so – as long as people will attend worship, not become involved in some of the "grosser" forms of sin, and not be disruptive of the programs of the church. We have difficulty imagining life beyond gossip, envy, malice, lust, selfishness, resentment, and hurt feelings. True, none of these things are put away easily or quickly. We need to have patience with those who are still struggling with these in their lives. *But we can all tell of church members in "good standing" who habitually practice all of these – and more – without any censure or correction.* Is it any wonder then that the state of the church is as bleak as it is in so many places?

We need to be able to observe people with good "skills for living" as God would have us live so we can lift our expectations for ourselves. We need coaches who will help us to learn the skills needed to live as a Christian should live. We need practice in developing and applying the skills and strategies required for living the Christian life successfully. We need to train ourselves to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7-8) and to train our senses as we exercise them to be able to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Jesus himself is the "chief mentor" (cf. 1 Peter 5:4 where he is called the Chief Shepherd). We also can see the example of the early church as they followed Jesus. But we also need to be able to see living examples in the living church of how we also should live as Jesus' disciples.

Without these and without a definite plan to follow in acquiring the skills and strategies we need, we will likely continue to live much as we have lived. We will still be in the world and very much of the world. In Psalm 1:1-3, two sources of mentoring are contrasted. The first leads us in the advice of the wicked and the way of sinners to the seat of mockers. The other, through the law of the Lord leads us to the streams of living water that flow from the throne of God. The first of these is thrust at us constantly by the world around us; the second we find as we look to Jesus and to those who would help us to walk in his steps.

Who is your mentor?

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON TWO

Memorize John 6:68

Monday:

Read Lesson One and answer the following questions:

From T-Ball to World Series champions, what “level of play” do you see in the contemporary church? _____

What makes Jesus the perfect mentor for living today? _____

Tuesday: Read Acts 11:26 and answer the following questions.

Who were called Christians in Antioch? _____

What makes “Christian” a good name for a disciple of Jesus? _____

Wednesday: Read Matthew 10:24-25 and 1 John 2:6. Then answer the following questions.

What is the goal of a disciple (student)? _____

Can a person who has no intention of becoming “like Jesus” be his disciple? Why? _____

Thursday Read John 6:66-69 and answer the following questions.

Why did the Twelve not go away from Jesus when other disciples left him? _____

What caused some other “disciples” to leave Jesus? _____

Friday: Read John 12:42-43 and James 2:13-14. Then answer the following question.

“Believer” sometimes means “disciple.” Yet, some believers are not disciples. How can this be? _____

Saturday: Read John 9:26-34 and answer the following questions.

What caused the previously blind man to be a disciple of Jesus? _____

Why didn't those who were questioning this man about what happened to him become Jesus' disciples? _____

What does this suggest is necessary if we are to be Jesus' disciples? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON TWO

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Scriptural use of the word *disciple* is virtually limited to the Gospels and Acts. Except for two passages in Isaiah (8:16 & 19:11), all 295 times the various forms of *disciple* are in the NIV Bible are in the four Gospels and Acts.

Discipleship is not an Old Testament concept. The close, personal relationship and commitment to a person the word *disciple* implies is simply not there. Though the Jews once in John 9:29 called themselves “Moses’ disciples” it was only in contrast to the formerly blind man whom they styled “this fellow’s disciple.” The Old Testament expected Israel to live in Covenant with God, but not as disciples of God.

On the other hand, the New Testament uses the term *disciple* from the earliest days of Jesus’ personal ministry to refer to those who gathered around him to follow him.

What Does the Word Mean?

In the Greek world of Jesus’ day, a *disciple* was one learning information or conduct from an “authority” (or personal teacher) on whom the disciple depended. This teacher, superior in knowledge to the disciple, would always be the student’s superior (cf. Matthew 10:24f where *student* is from the word usually translated *disciple*. The greatest ambition of the *disciple* is that he be like his teacher.) A *disciple* always has a *teacher*, but more than mere instruction is involved. The *disciple* depends on the teacher for all of his thinking. The true *disciple* is committed to the teacher *and will go to no other*. (Cf. John 6:66-68 where some left Jesus, but the Twelve refused, saying, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*”)

In the New Testament the word finds its highest use in the relationship of Jesus’ followers to their Master. They left all to follow him (Mark 10:28). He called some of these to be with him that he might teach them and send them out as apostles (Mark 3:13ff). Jesus expected much from these (Luke 14:25-27, 33), and they were sure they could give him their all (Mark 14:27-31) - though their performance fell short of their own expectations. Yet, in all this you can see their commitment to the person of Jesus, not merely to his teachings. It is this complete trust in him in all things that marks them as *disciples*, not mere pupils or learners.

Relationship to Other Words:

A number of other words are similar to *disciple*. It will be instructive for us to consider how these are alike and different from *disciple*.

An *apostle* is a disciple, but not all disciples are apostles. An apostle is literally “one sent.” Most times in the New Testament, this refers to one of *The Twelve* (or Eleven, after the fall of Judas), who were called by Jesus to be his witnesses in a special way.

Believer came to be almost synonymous with *disciple*, though some believe without following (see John 12:42f). This would not be the case for a *disciple*. A *disciple* does not have a dead faith (see James 2:13-14).

Christian is used much as *disciple* (see Acts 11:26) but seems to be a derogatory name used by enemies (cf. Acts 26:28 & 1 Peter 4:15-16). The Christian gloried in this name as one by which he suffered. A *disciple* is more than a *pupil*; he is a *follower*. Learning without following is foolish (see Matthew 7:24-27). One cannot follow without learning; however, you can learn without following. For example, Dr.

James D. Bales, former professor at Harding University, was a student of Marxism. He was not, however, a disciple of Marx. He studied Marxism academically in order to refute it. On the other hand, the *disciple learns* in order to *follow*.

What Does This Mean to Us?

Are we Church Members or disciples? What is the difference? Ideally, there is none. As a practical, pragmatic matter there is a difference. The 20/80 rule says 20% of the people in the church do 80% of the work and give 80% of the money. It might cause us to cry out, “Where are the 80?” (Instead of “Where are the nine?”) If the 80% can become active, serving disciples the church will experience a true revival. The question for this class, then, is “Can the *Sunday Morning Only Church Member* become a true *disciple*? A second question is like the first: “*If so, how?*” The answer to this question is not found in cajolery but in deeper knowledge of and commitment to Jesus, our Master.

In this class, we want to examine ourselves with respect to our commitment to Jesus. Do we qualify as disciples? But we want to do more than examine ourselves: we want to give ourselves to greater levels of service and personal commitment to the person of Jesus. We want him as our mentor, teacher, guide and Master. We want to become his apprentices, protégés, pupils, followers and servants. He is willing to take us under his wing - if we are willing (cf. Matthew 23:37). If we are unwilling, the alternative to discipleship is too frightful to contemplate. It will mean “*your house is left to you desolate*” (Matthew 23:38).

Self-Evaluation:

This evaluation is private. But we urge each person to fill it out. When we honestly see where we are, we will have greater motivation and power to improve. Rate yourself on each of the following categories from 1 to 5 on the following scale: 1, very low; 2, some, but not much; 3, moderately so; 4, good, but can improve; 5, no improvement needed.

_____	_____	Church Attendance	_____	_____	Giving
_____	_____	Worship Participation	_____	_____	Personal Holiness/Christ-likeness
_____	_____	Prayer Life	_____	_____	Personal Bible Study
_____	_____	Desire for Spiritual Growth	_____	_____	Teaching Others
_____	_____	Good Reputation	_____	_____	Salt & Light in the World
_____	_____	Attitudes	_____	_____	Behavior
_____	_____	Love for God	_____	_____	Love for Neighbor
_____	_____	Goodness	_____	_____	Temperance/Self Control
_____	_____	Patience	_____	_____	Humility/Gentleness of Spirit
_____	_____	Mercy/Forgiveness	_____	_____	Servant of Others
			_____	_____	Total Scores

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON THREE

Memorize Matthew 16:24

Monday:

Read Lesson Two and complete the self-evaluation. Put your evaluation of yourself in the left-most column of blanks beside each disciple-quality or action.

Go through the self-evaluation again, and in the right-most column put what you think the Lord's evaluation of you as you are right now might be.

Tuesday: Read Luke 6:46; Matthew 12:30 and Revelation 3:15-16.

What do inactive disciples do to the Lord's harvest? _____

Why do those who fail to gather end up scattering? _____

What makes a person or church "luke-warm"? _____

How does the Lord view this condition? _____

Wednesday: Read Matthew 8:18-22.

Why would Jesus mention he had no place to lay his head when someone offered to follow him? _____

How does Jesus view social conventions when it comes to a choice between them and following him? Why was he so "hard" on the man who wanted to bury his father before following Jesus? What can be "first" before following him?

Thursday: Read Matthew 16:21-26.

What does taking up your cross mean? _____

Why did Jesus rebuke Peter so severely on this occasion? _____

Why *must* anyone who desires to follow Jesus take up a cross? _____

How does “saving” your life cause you to “lose” it? _____

How does “losing” your life cause you to “save” it? _____

Friday: Read 1 John 3:16-17 & Ephesians 5:25-30.

How does one “lay down his life for his brother”? _____

How does a husband “give himself up” for his wife? _____

How does giving up selfishness equate to dying on a cross? _____

Saturday: Read Mark 1:17; Acts 4:13 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (note footnote in NIV).

What did Jesus promise to “make” the fishermen if they would follow him? _____

How did the Jewish leaders realize Peter and John had been with Jesus? _____

What did being with Jesus cause Peter and John to become? _____

What happens when we behold the Lord’s face? _____

How are we transformed “from one degree of glory into another”? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON THREE

JESUS CALLS US TO BE DISCIPLES

Jesus has not called us to be dabblers in religion. He gives a radical call - a call repeated by his apostles. He wants our complete, full allegiance. There are no “half-measures” in being a disciple-follower of Jesus. Consider these statements and the demands implicit in them:

- ★ *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.* --Matthew 12:30
- ★ *Therefore, come out from them and be separate.* --2 Corinthians 6:17
- ★ *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer.* --2 Timothy 2:3-4
- ★ *Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say?* --Luke 6:46
- ★ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*
--Matthew 6:33

All of this leaves a flavor of “get with it - or don’t bother!” We are assured of God’s love and mercy; we are also reminded that God’s goodness is to lead us to repentance (see Romans 2:4). In other words, being a Christian is a serious matter. Jesus told one whole church, *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one of the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth* (Revelation 3:15f). He went on to call this church to repentance, for he had not given up on them. Yet it is clear he was not happy with their “neither in nor out” stance.

His Characteristic Invitation: “Come Follow Me!”

When anyone came to him, Jesus always gave a challenge: *Come after me. Follow me and let the dead bury their dead. Sell all you have and give to the poor and come follow me.*

He promised much, but he did not offer cheap grace. In following him, we follow one who left the glory of heaven for the hardship of a poor family in an oppressed country - and for death on a cross. When he calls us to follow him, he does not call us to idyllic days in green pastures with no dangers in sight. Rather, he calls us to walk in the way of the cross, for it is this way that leads to the land that is fairer than day!

Cross Bearing: At the Heart of Being a Disciple

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8:34). We simply *cannot* follow Jesus without bearing our own personal cross. The above words were not directed to the apostles alone, but to the whole crowd. Cross bearing is not an option for the disciple of Jesus. It is a requirement.

Of course, he led the way. In one sense, his entire life was a life of bearing his cross. He always put his life on the line for those who needed him most. We are called to do the same for those who need us. *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers* (1 John 3:16). (The next verse tells how we are to do this.) In another place husbands are instructed, *Love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25).

The common factor in statements like these is that self is put to death for a greater good. The early disciples declared that they would die for Jesus. He challenges us to do just that. In most cases, this is not a literal death. However, in all cases it is a death to self that we might walk with Jesus in his concern for others and for God. My pleasures, my possessions, and my pride: these are all to die on the cross so that I might be cleansed to serve him. The death of self-will is always painful. But, it must happen. “The Glory Land Way”

is “The Way of the Cross” - and this road to Golgotha leads through Gethsemane. It is at Gethsemane that we learn to pray genuinely “Not my will, but yours be done!” The Garden of Gethsemane reverses the Garden of Eden. In Eden, Mother Eve wanted to do it her way, thinking she could be wise like God to determine good and evil by her own will. In Gethsemane Jesus subjugated his will to God’s will. And he came there bearing a cross (though it was not visible for another few hours). When we bear our cross, we will meet him there.

We Are Called to Become Before We Are Called to Do

When Jesus called the Galilean fishermen to follow him he said, *Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men* (Mark 1:17). He did not call them to fish for men. He called them to follow him; as they followed him, he changed them into fishers of men. Note that he made them fishers of men before they went out to catch men. They were called to become and to be those who could catch men. But it was Jesus who made them what they needed to be.

This is the way God works with us. He calls us to follow him as disciples. When we do, he makes us into new creatures who are able to do what he needs us to do. If we choose not to follow him, he leaves us to our own devices - and to our own success or failure. This is the source of much of the frustration many find in trying to live the Christian life and fulfill his commandments. We try to live and to obey without first putting ourselves under his tutelage as disciples. The result is that we try to do God’s work in our own strength - and we become frustrated. It is only as he *makes us to become* what we need to be that our weakness will become his strength.

What We Are Determines What We Do

Jesus once said of the devil, *He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies* (John 8:44b). Why does the devil lie? Because he is a liar. Change what you are if you want to change what you do. You can no more keep a sinner from sinning than you can keep the devil from lying. If you want to keep from sinning, become something other than a sinner. Jesus works on what we are; he does not just give us some commandments about what to do. He starts with the heart, for it is the heart that makes a man unclean (see Mark 7:20-23). Jesus works on our hearts when we become his disciples.

What We Become Is Determined By Whom We Follow & To Whom We Entrust/Commit Ourselves

Being a disciple means trusting and following our Master. In following Jesus, we become like him. When the unbelieving Jews realized the apostles were unschooled men, but observed their courage, *they took note that these men had been with Jesus* (Acts 4:13). Being with Jesus as his disciples made them different. In following him, they became changed men. Unschooled men were supposed to be awed by the high Jewish court; these men spoke up with boldness born in their walk with Jesus and his Spirit.

This same Spirit will change us from ordinary people into people of glory. *And we...are being transformed into his likeness with every-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:18). How does this transformation take place? It is as we behold his face, looking to him, watching him, learning of him, following him - as a disciple. This is why he calls us to be disciples. He wants to transform us into his own image, into the very likeness of God!

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON FOUR

Memorize Galatians 2:20

Monday: Read the notes for Lesson Three. Then answer the following questions.

Do you agree or disagree with the opening statements of this lesson: “*Jesus has not called us to be dabblers in religion. He gives a radical call....*”? Why do you agree or disagree? _____

Tuesday: Read Galatians 2:19-20 and Romans 6:1-4.

When does the Christian “die” with Christ? _____

What happens with regard to sin when you die to the law? _____

How does the one crucified with Christ then live? _____

How does the Christian then live with regard to sin? _____

Wednesday: Read Romans 6:5-7 & Colossians 3:1-3.

What follows our death with Christ? _____

Can there be a resurrection with Christ without a death with Christ? Why? _____

When we are raised with Christ, how are we to live? _____

Thursday: Read Philippians 3:7-11.

What passionate desire did Paul have? _____

How does this desire mark him as a disciple of Jesus? _____

How did Paul indicate he would “attain to the resurrection of the dead”? _____

Friday: Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

Note: "this treasure" is "the knowledge of the glory of God" (v. 6). It is this that we "reflect" or "behold" (3:18), and it is this, which makes the difference in our lives.

Where does the Christian get the power to live the life of a disciple? _____

Note that the victorious life is not always a "bed of roses." In fact, there can be no victory without a battle. How does Paul describe the battle and the victory in this text? _____

Why does Paul say he is being "given over to death"? _____

How can the life of Jesus be revealed in your mortal body? _____

Saturday: Read Luke 9:23-24 and John 12:23-28.

When is the disciple to "take up his cross"? _____

Why did Jesus say the seed must die? _____

How was Jesus glorified? _____

How was the Father glorified in Jesus? _____

How, in these texts, do we serve and follow Jesus? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON FOUR

THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF THE DISCIPLE

One basic principle of the gospel is that the disciple must share the Master's suffering. The cross is not limited to the hill outside Jerusalem; it is to be carried by each disciple. Each must come to know the pain of emptying himself of himself so that he may be filled with Christ. Just as our Lord gave up his glory to take up his cross, we must give up the "glory" we *claim* for ourselves and take up our cross. Then the Father will glorify us because we will be following in the steps of his Son.

I Am Crucified with Christ

In Galatians 2:19-20 Paul made a stunning announcement: *I died to the law. I am crucified with Christ. Now Christ lives in me.* Is it possible we have become so "glib" in talking about Christ living in us we fail to marvel at how radical this concept really is? This is even more amazing than the fact the Son of God left the glory of heaven to become a babe in Mary's womb. In his own human form, he remained sinless. But if he lives in me, in my body, *he lives where sin still dwells.*

How can the holy Son of God live with me in my sin? The cross is the only answer. He died for me that I might be forgiven. I die with him that I might be sanctified (or *become holy*). The *ego* or *self* dies so that Christ might live in me. This death is a crucifixion with him.

Paul did not claim a unique experience. He reminded the Romans (6:1ff) that they, too, had died. The *old self* was crucified. They *died to sin*. They were *united with him in his death*. But crucifixion is not the end; it is but a beginning. The end is *resurrection to a new life*, a life in which we are *freed from sin*.

Paul clearly relates this sequence of events to one's baptism into Christ. It is, he says, as we are baptized into Christ that we are *baptized into his death, buried with him, and resurrected with him*. Because of all this, he says you are to *count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*.

Note, though, that Paul does not claim immunity to sin. He does say *do not let sin reign and do not offer your members to sin*. And, he adds, *offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life*. By God's grace, sin is no longer your master (Romans 6:1-14). Your new Master is Christ.

But, Christ will be Master only as we raise our sights from earth to heaven (Colossians 3:1ff). We elevate our view because *we died and have been raised with Christ*. We look to him so we may be transformed by his glory (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). But there is still some more dying to do while we are on earth! We still have to *put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature* - and the list of things to put to death is grim. Read it for yourself in Colossians 3:5-11. But do you notice what comes as we put these things to death (dare we say "crucify them")? When these are crucified, *Christ is all and is in all* (v. 11).

To Know Christ We Share His Suffering

Remember that the definition of a disciple is one who seeks to know and follow his Master. Paul shows a passionate desire to know Christ in Philippians 3:7-11. Everything he previously valued is nothing when compared to the *surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus*. He said, for his sake *I have lost all things and consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ*. He listed three things he wanted to know: 1) Christ himself. 2) The Power of His Resurrection. 3) Fellowship in His Sufferings. Through these, Paul said, he wanted to *become like him in his death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead*.

In the paragraph after this passionately expressed hunger for Christ, Paul went on to say:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

It is in this single-minded pursuit of the heavenward call that Paul's hunger to know the power of Christ's resurrection finds satisfaction.

Crucifixion of Self Allows Resurrection with Christ

There can be no resurrection with Christ without a prior crucifixion with him. You cannot live with resurrection power unless you also experience crucifixion with Christ. This is another way of saying we cannot be glorified with the Lord unless we first humble ourselves in the same way he humbled himself. Jesus humbled himself to be a servant and to be obedient - *even to death on the cross* (Philippians 2:8). When we humble ourselves to be obedient, even to death on the cross, we will be exalted with him to glory. This is what it means to be a disciple.

In the beatitude, Jesus pronounced the blessing of being filled on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). This is the hunger Paul expressed in Philippians 3 - and he was being filled so he could say, *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20).

Our Crucifixion with Him Is Not a One-Time Event

While the Christian's life with Christ begins with a once-for-all event in baptism, the dying with Christ that begins there continues. In Luke 9:23-24 he said to all his disciples: *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.* Each day as we walk with him, we take up our cross to follow him. If we shun this, if we seek to "save" our lives, Jesus said we would lose them. It is only by losing our lives (as we are crucified with him) that we save them.

The idea of losing what we try to save but saving what we are willing to lose links this text with another in which Jesus revealed his own distress at his approaching death. In Jesus' final week on earth, some Greeks wanted to meet Jesus. Andrew and Philip brought them to Jesus. In his comments, Jesus seemed to ignore these visitors - but he revealed the essence of his mission and how it connects with his death:

Jesus replied, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. -- John 12:23-26.

Without death, Jesus would remain alone; by dying, he would be fruitful. Then he repeated what he had earlier said to us. *The man who loves his life will lose it.* But here, he is focused on his own coming death. He went on to ask, *what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No! It was for this very reason I came to this hour'* (v. 27). Again he says, *whoever serves me must follow me.* But, in following him into death, we are promised honor and glory from the Father in eternity.

When we give up our glory, we gain his glory. Die to self and live with Christ; live for self and die to Christ. The choice is to be or not to be disciples of Christ.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON FIVE

Memorize 2 Corinthians 4:5

Monday: Read the notes for Lesson Four and answer the following questions.

Why is cross-bearing so much a part of the disciple's life? _____

Can the church today be what God calls it to be without a more fervent commitment to cross bearing? _____

How can we begin to make this more a part of our Christian walk? _____

Tuesday: Read John 13:12-16; John 15:20 and Matthew 10:24-25.

Note: *Servant* in these texts can be translated *slave*.

Whose feet did Jesus wash? _____

What did he say they called him? _____

What terms did he use in referring to them? _____

What do these terms suggest about the relationship of the disciples to Jesus? _____

Wednesday: Read Luke 6:46-49.

If Jesus is my Lord, what should I do? _____

What if I do not do this? _____

What does this suggest about the relationship of the disciple to Jesus? _____

Thursday: Read John 6:66-69.

Why did some disciples leave Jesus and not follow him any longer? _____

Why did the Twelve not leave him? _____

What confession did Peter make concerning the *person* of Jesus? _____

What does this suggest about the relationship of the disciples to Jesus? _____

Friday: Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 and 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Why would some say they were of Paul, Cephas, or Apollos? _____

To what extent can a disciple of Jesus follow a man? _____

How does a true disciple of Jesus present himself when teaching someone else? _____

What does this suggest about the relationship of the disciples to Jesus? _____

Saturday: Read Acts 8:30-31; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Timothy 2:2 and Hebrews 13:7-8.

When can (should) a disciple of Jesus listen to a human teacher? _____

What faith or example in others are we to imitate? _____

What does this suggest about the relationship of the disciple to Jesus? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON FIVE

THE DISCIPLE AND HIS MASTER

There is a difference in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples and other teachers and their pupils. Among the Jews, a great Rabbi might have those who followed him or sat at his feet - as Saul of Tarsus sat at the feet of Gamaliel (see Acts 23:3). Though these would learn from their Rabbi, they did not consider the Rabbi as LORD. Jesus' disciples did - and still do.

Jesus Is LORD

Since they looked to Jesus as LORD, their attitude toward him was very different. When they considered themselves in relation to him, they were servants or slaves. This is the way he taught them to think. As LORD, he did not "lord it over" them - but he taught them to acknowledge him as LORD just the same.

For example, when he washed their feet (John 13:1-16), he used the fact they accepted him as LORD to teach the lesson that they should follow his example - and wash one another's feet. They also called him "Master" and "Rabbi." As their Master, he was their LORD; as their Rabbi, he was their teacher and guide. But because he was LORD, he was much more than a mere teacher.

The Jewish Rabbi had students; Jesus had disciples. The Rabbi's students may respect and revere him; they did not worship him. Jesus' disciples did. The Rabbi's protégé might aspire to become like the Rabbi - in that he would have students of his own who would look to him in the same way he looked to his Rabbi. The disciple of Jesus, though his goal is to be like his Master, knows that he can never reach that pinnacle because Jesus is much more than mere man; he is LORD.

Jesus Is To Be Obeyed

There was never any question of who was LORD and who were the disciples. Nor was there any question of what that meant. Jesus' words were not to be debated or questioned; his words were to be believed and obeyed. *Why do you call me 'LORD, LORD,' and do not do what I say?* was Jesus' question to his listeners early in his ministry (Luke 6:46; cf. Matthew 7:21). It was important to do what he said because he was giving the very words of the Father - but he gave them as one who spoke with the full authority of the author, not as one repeating what he had heard from another.

Thus, hearing and obeying his words is a matter of eternal consequence. Mere hearing is insufficient. The man who hears without obeying is like the foolish man who builds his house on the sand; the man who hears and obeys is like the man who digs deep to build his house on solid rock.

What Made the Difference?

But Jesus expects even more than full obedience. He expects full acceptance of himself as LORD. Faith without obedience is dead - but obedience without faith is equally futile. Some, who might have accepted him as a mere teacher, were unwilling to go the full distance to accept him as *the true Bread that came down from heaven*.

Until someone accepts *who* Jesus is, he is always likely to argue with *what* Jesus says. Thus, in John 6:41, *the Jews began to grumble about him because he said 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'* Because they would not accept his LORDSHIP (the one who came down from heaven), they would not accept what he said they should do (eat his flesh and drink his blood). Therefore, they left him (v. 66).

But the Twelve were different. When Jesus asked if they would also go away, Peter asked, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* Then followed his confession: *We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.* This is roughly equivalent to his confession recorded in Matthew 16:18ff where Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

It was this faith that made them willing to accept what Jesus said they should do. In contrast, the rich young ruler would not accept what Jesus said do because he could not bring himself to confess Jesus' true relationship with God (see Mark 10:17-22). Jesus gave him the opportunity to turn his request for what to do to inherit eternal life into a confession of the source of eternal life. But the young man would not confess Jesus as being "good" after Jesus said only God is good. That is, he declined to confess Jesus as being God - but that is what would be necessary to find the eternal life he sought. Instead, he went away because he valued his wealth more than a relationship with Jesus. Had he believed Jesus to be God, it is not likely he would have turned away.

When we believe Jesus is LORD, we will obey him because we want to please him in everything.

When Do We Obey Men?

In wanting to grow as disciples, it is tempting for us to turn to men to get a definition of what it really means to be a disciple. The "Discipling Movement,"¹ popular in many congregations and in various evangelical fellowships a few years ago, was strict and definite in prescribing what it took to be a disciple. Many became emotional wrecks because they could not meet the requirements imposed by their human leaders. On the other hand, human leaders can also rationalize the radical demands of Jesus to the point his call for genuine discipleship loses its force and power. *Each of these is an extreme to be avoided.*

This is one reason the apostles warned against lining up behind men. In 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 more than the oneness of the body is in view. To turn from being a disciple of Jesus to be a follower of Paul, Peter or Apollos was to turn from the one who died for you and in whose name you were baptized. In other words, it was to turn from relationship with Jesus as LORD to follow mere men.

Whether the Corinthians were actually naming these great Christian leaders as the ones they were "of" is open to question. In 1 Corinthians 4:6, Paul suggests he used himself and Apollos as an example to show how futile it was to follow *any* man. The apostles always presented *themselves as your servants for Jesus' sake* (1 Corinthians 4:5). Notice that relationship to Jesus as LORD took priority with Paul in all of this.

Is there ever a time to listen to men? Of course. But only when they are pointing us to Jesus. The eunuch asked Philip for help to understand the Scripture - and Philip *began with that very passage and preached Christ* (Acts 8:34f). Paul said, *follow my example* - but only *as I follow Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are to *imitate the faith of our leaders* (Hebrews 13:7), for these *spoke the word of God* to us. They point us to Jesus - whom the author hastens to add (v. 8) *is the same yesterday, today and forever.*

We obey men only when they lead us closer to Jesus. If they obscure him or make him more distant, avoid them like the plague! These are those *whose god is their stomach* (Philippians 3:19). Disciples of Jesus avoid such men because they want to serve and follow none but Jesus.

¹ Known in churches of Christ as "The Boston Movement."

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON SIX

Memorize John 13:35

Monday: Read the Notes for Lesson Five and answer the following questions.

How does faith in *who* Jesus is lead us to accept his instruction about how to live? _____

What does quibbling about Jesus' words suggest about our discipleship? _____

How can you decide when to listen to a man giving religious teaching? _____

Tuesday: Read Mark 10:35-40.

Of whom were James and John thinking: Themselves, Jesus, or others? _____

How did they drink the cup Jesus drank? _____

For whom is the honor of sitting at Jesus' left and right prepared? _____

Wednesday: Read Mark 10:41-45.

Why were the other disciples indignant with James and John? _____

How did Jesus say his disciples would be great? _____

In this, whom were they following? _____

How is this related to discipleship? _____

Thursday: Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20.

Why are there many members in the one body? _____

What would the body be like if all members were alike? _____

Friday: Read Romans 14:1-4 and James 2:1-4.

What two kinds of judges are described in these texts? _____

Why is each of these rebuked? _____

Saturday: Read 1 John 4:7-12 and John 13:34-35.

Why is love important to God? _____

Why should disciples of Jesus love one another? _____

What does it show the world when Jesus' followers love each other? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON SIX

THE DISCIPLE AND HIS FELLOWS

We are not disciples of Jesus in isolation. When we become one of his, he adds us to his body (see 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47). As members of his body we have an important role to play, a function to perform. But none of us is called to LORD it over other parts of the body. Only Jesus is LORD; he is head of the body. We are members of him and of one another. We belong to him; we also belong to each other.

A Simple Truth - So Profound We Miss It

James and John lost sight of this simple, but profound truth when they asked Jesus for a special favor (see Mark 10:35-45). Mark it down. When any disciple begins to seek “special favors” not offered to everyone, he has lost sight of his God-given place in the body. It is one thing to be called to a seat of greater honor; it is another to barge in to the head of the line!

It is of more than passing interest that James and John came to Jesus apart from the other ten chosen apostles. The Ten heard about it; they did not hear James and John make their request. And when they heard about it, they were indignant. Do you wonder why? All Twelve were “in this thing together.” For two to seek special favor did not sit well with them. It didn’t sit well with the LORD either.

The LORD rebuked them all (the Ten as well as the Two) for their carnal attitudes in trying to get “a leg up” on each other. He then gave them an important lesson in discipleship: *The least is the greatest; the first is the last; the last is the first; become great through service.* In this, too, Jesus showed us the way. *He did not come to be served, but to be a servant. His glory came through giving himself as a ransom for all.*

Compare what he said here with what Paul said about him in Philippians 2:6ff. *He was in the nature of God. He made himself nothing. He became a servant. He became obedient, even to death on the cross.* But the story did not end there. Out of his humiliation, God gave him his glory. Verses 9-11 shout his praises to the highest heaven and call on every knee to bow before him. Why? Because God exalted him! Why did God exalt him? Because he humbled himself; he gave himself; he became a servant.

And this is what we are to do as well.

Present Ourselves as Your Servants for Christ’s Sake

How are we to relate to our fellow disciples? We are to be servants. I serve you. You serve me. I accept your service; you accept mine. Together we serve others. In this, we follow him and become like him. This is how Paul said he and Apollos always presented themselves - *as your servants for Christ’s sake* (2 Corinthians 4:5) while they preached *Jesus Christ as LORD.*

Forget about position. Let God concern himself with that. It is for the one for whom it is prepared (Mark 10:40), and God puts each member in the body just as he (God) chooses (1 Corinthians 12:18). All of our clamoring to be NUMBER ONE and THE GREATEST loses sight of the fact Jesus is the only one worthy of our praise and adoration. In our rush to curry favor and gain position, we elevate ourselves by judging others as inferior to ourselves in so many ways.

Judging Others or Loving Others

Some, we judge because of their limited understanding of the niceties of the gospel and of true discipleship.

In Romans 14:1ff Paul speaks of those who reject others because of what they eat (or don't eat) or because of the days they observe (or don't observe). In fact, this text leaves open the question of who has the greater understanding and who has the misunderstanding. He reminds us sharply that to look down on another is to judge *another man's servant*. How would you like for someone who is not your employer to be the one to give you your annual job evaluation - especially if that person has already rejected some of your cherished ideas?

Others we judge because of economic standing. James 2:1ff speaks of this travesty against the gospel. *My brothers, as believers in our glorious LORD Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism*. To toady up to the rich man while pushing the poor man aside springs from *evil thoughts*, not from a disciple's heart shaped by the Master's hand.

Peter confessed that he once judged men and their relationship to God by their national origins. See Acts 10 for the story. When he arrived at the house of Cornelius he started by stating his Jewish prejudice: *You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him*. But he stated this law (which he had followed carefully all of his life up to this point) only to say that God had overthrown it through the gospel of peace sent through Jesus. Now, he said, *in every nation those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted by him*. A sad footnote to this beautiful story is that Peter fell back into his old prejudice and was rebuked for it by Paul (see Galatians 2:11ff.). This is a grim reminder that we must always be careful about judging others based on their national or racial origins.

God Seeks Relationship

What is the point of all this? Simply that under God all disciples are equals. All disciples are sinners saved by God's grace in Christ Jesus. Because he has loved us and saved us, we are to love one another (1 John 4:7-12). Love originates in God *for God is love*.

If God is love, he is the greatest lover. He wants relationship. He created us to love him and to be loved by him. But what do we do? Before Jesus came into our lives, we were *being hated and hating one another* (Titus 3:3). It is he who teaches us to love: to love God and to love one another - even when the "other" hates us and is an enemy (see Matthew 5:44).

In the most fundamental sense, this is the very reason he came. *The first commandment is to love God; the second, to love one another* (Matthew 22:36-40). This restores God's purpose in creation. This renews our fellowship with God and with one another. This is what salvation is all about as God blesses us by *turning each of us from our wicked ways* (Acts 3:26). When he does, we learn to love one another.

When we obey these commands (that is, to love God and to love each other), *the world will see that we are disciples of Jesus* (John 13:34-35). As our hearts are changed into his image and purified by God's love because we are seeking him above all others, people will see him living in us. They will see the difference Christ's love makes.

Right relationship with God demands right relationship with our fellows on earth. Discipleship is demonstrated by loving one another as he has loved us.

To grow in discipleship, let us forget position and grow in loving service.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON SEVEN

Memorize Matthew 5:16

Monday: Read notes for Lesson Six and answer the following questions.

How does loving one another show the world we are Jesus' disciples? _____

Why is LORDING it over others the opposite of discipleship? _____

What are some ways we judge one another? _____

Tuesday: Read Matthew 5:14-16 and 2 Corinthians 4:6

How does letting your light shine bring glory to God? _____

The Greek words *you* and *your* are plural in this text. What does this suggest about the "*city set on the hill*" that "*cannot be hid*" with reference to the church as a light in the world? _____

Where does the church's/disciple's light originate? _____

Wednesday: Read Philippians 2:1-4 and Colossians 3:12-14.

What negative qualities do Philippians 2:1-4 say we are to avoid? _____

What qualities do Colossians 3:12-14 say we should have? _____

How would these things affect the life of a congregation? _____

Thursday: Read Ephesians 4:25-32.

The theme of Ephesians is the church. How does this text suggest we are to be a church with integrity? _____

Friday: Read 2 Peter 1:3-9.

Verse 4 gives two great blessings: Escape from _____

And participation in _____

How would these blessings and growth in the Christian virtues of vv. 5-7 affect congregational life? _____

Saturday: Read 1 Peter 2:2-3; 2 Peter 3:18 and Ephesians 5:8-10.

How is the new Christian (disciple) going to grow in the Lord? _____

Why do we need to grow? _____

How can you find out what pleases God? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON SEVEN

A CHURCH OF DISCIPLES

I remember driving into Fort Worth one Christmas season. The surrounding country to the west is flat and virtually treeless. The city, lit up for the season, was visible for miles. The tall buildings of the city created their own "hill" - and the city could not be hid.

Jesus observed, after telling his disciples *you are the light of the world*, that *a city set on a hill cannot be hidden* (Matthew 5:14-16). In Greek, the words *you* and *your* in this text are plural. This, with his reference to a *city* that cannot be hidden, lets us know it is the church collectively, not the individual disciple, that makes an impression on the world as children of light. Individual candles may be hidden under a bowl; a city of lights cannot be hidden. It is this city of light, shining in the darkness, which causes men who see the good works of the church to glorify God.

This assumes, of course, that the light is shining before men, unhidden by clouds of sin that often darken our light and cause the *lamp stand* (which is the church in Revelation 2:5) *to be removed*. The light *shining in our hearts* is the glorious light of the gospel, *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

What would the church be like if we were all disciples, not just Church Members?

A Church Where Each Yielded To the Other Instead of Insisting on His Own Way

One of the most distasteful things in church life is the political maneuvering for position and power that often occurs. We saw earlier how James and John's request for seats of honor in the kingdom created friction with the other disciples. Jesus rebuked this action and the reaction of the Ten (Mark 10:35ff.). All Twelve misunderstood the way to greatness in the kingdom of God.

Jesus did not achieve greatness through raw ambition - but through yielding to the cross. His disciples go in the same way. They achieve their goals, not through self-interest, but by looking to the interests of others. They do not act with selfish ambition or empty conceit, but with humility and love. In this, they follow their leader (see Philippians 2:1-4ff.).

Colossians 3:12ff lists qualities that should be seen in the disciples of Jesus - because these qualities were in Jesus. *Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love*. These are the virtues of yielding that are the opposite of the unbeliever's worldview - but which become second nature to those who follow Jesus.

A church with these qualities would be recognized as having the light of Christ within it.

A Church of Integrity

A church of disciples, not just members, would also be a church of integrity. Our God is a God of Truth. Jesus said, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life* (John 14:6). This may mean many things, but it certainly means God has integrity. Without integrity, God could not be trusted; nor can we.

Ephesians 4:25-32 describes this integrity: *Put off lying and speak truthfully*. Why? *You are members one of another*. That is, you are all members of Christ's body, bound to him and to each other. To deceive one who is a part of yourself (and you a part of him) is to deceive yourself. A few verses later he adds, *the thief must quit stealing and do profitable work so he can have something to share with those in need*. Here is

integrity at another level. Instead of being an economic parasite on the community, the disciple is one who supports himself - and also gives to those in need. This goes beyond armed robbery to every sort of “sharp dealing” that is shady. Feed the flock; don’t fleece the flock. Your church family is to pray for you, not be prey for your wheeling and dealing that takes advantage of their trust in you as a Christian brother.

Such a church would be a welcome haven in a world of duplicity.

A Church Growing in Grace and Knowledge

A church of true disciples would be one *growing in grace and knowledge* (2 Peter 3:18). 2 Peter 1:5ff lists eight qualities in which we need to grow. Beginning in faith and ending in love, these form a “rainbow of love” around the disciple of Jesus. Verse 8 says we are to have these *in increasing measure*. That is, we are to grow in them. These eight are sometimes called “the Christian graces.” None of these is to stand-alone. Each is interwoven with the others. Together, they describe the very character of Jesus. Similar to the qualities listed earlier from Colossians 3:12f, these will mold the heart of the disciple into the heart of his Master.

A church of disciples would also continually grow in knowledge. *As newborn babes, they would hunger for the milk of God’s Word so they can grow up in their salvation* (1 Peter 2:2). This, however, would not be knowledge for the sake of knowledge - but *to find out what pleases the LORD* (Ephesians 5:10). Such knowledge is also necessary to grow in the Christian graces.

Such a church would be vibrantly throbbing with love for its God, its members and its community.

Conclusion

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be part of a church of true disciples? But I must ask myself: Would I fit into a church like this? Am I a true disciple? Or am I a casual Christian?

What kind of church would this church be?
If every member were just like me?

The goal for this lesson is not just an exercise in imagination - but a challenge for us to become a church of true disciples. Would such a church be perfect? No, for true disciples admit their imperfections and are continuing to *press on to the prize of the heavenward call of God in Christ* (Philippians 3:14). But such a church would be a place where each person is challenged and encouraged to grow toward the image of Christ. It would be a place where fellowship would be more than social; it would be a true sharing of hearts in a way that would draw us ever closer to Jesus.

Such a church would truly be a city of light, set on a hill so that it could not be hidden.

Men would see it and glorify God.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON EIGHT

Memorize Matthew 11:28-30

Monday: Read the notes for Lesson Seven and answer the following questions.

What would be the most attractive feature of a church of true disciples? _____

What keeps the church of today from becoming a church of true disciples? _____

Tuesday: Read John 20:24-31.

What caused Thomas to believe in Jesus? _____

What causes us to believe today? _____

How can one who believes without seeing be more blessed than Thomas? _____

Wednesday: Read Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Galatians 1:11-12.

Two of these passages say the church is to continue to teach. What is the source of its teachings? _

How did Paul receive the message he communicated to Timothy? _____

Thursday: Read John 17:6-8, 14, 20 and Romans 10:17.

What message was communicated to the apostles? _____

How is that message communicated to us? _____

How does faith come for us? _____

Friday: Read Ephesians 3:2-5; 1 Corinthians 14:37-38 and 2 Peter 1:12-16.

Why did Paul say he wrote his revelation down? _____

What must the spiritual person acknowledge about what Paul wrote? _____

Why did Peter say he wrote? _____

Saturday: Read John 5:36-40 and 45-47.

What witnesses does Jesus claim to authenticate his ministry? _____

How did Jesus say the Scriptures fit into the phalanx of witnesses? _____

Why did the Jews (who studied the Scriptures diligently) not come to Jesus? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON EIGHT

THE DISCIPLE AND THE SCRIPTURES

The disciple loves his Master and looks to him for guidance in all things. But when the disciple is two millennia removed from the Master in time, a very practical issue rears its head: *How can the disciple know his Master and learn from him?* The Galilean fishermen could leave their nets and walk with Jesus beside the lake and over the hills and mountains of old Palestine. We do not have that privilege. How can we today be disciples of one who lived so long ago?

We Are More Blessed Than They

Yet, we today are more blessed than the people of the first century. Jesus told his disciples *it is for your good that I am going away* (John 16:7). Unless Jesus went away, *the Counselor will not come to you*. It was when Jesus went away that he sent the Holy Spirit from the Father, and that is for our good.

While Jesus was in the flesh, comparatively few people were able to see him, to be with him and to really know him. Today, any one who chooses to know him can spend countless hours in his company imbibing his teaching and coming to know him as an intimate friend. The few who met him were limited to what they could see, hear and remember. We are given *all we need for life and godliness* (2 Peter 1:3).

After the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples while Thomas was present, he said pointedly that *those who have not seen and yet have believed are blessed* (John 20:29). “Doubting Thomas” would not believe unless he could put his finger in the nail-prints and his hand into the spear wound. Jesus gave him that opportunity. Yet Jesus said faith without sight is blessed.

How can we believe without seeing? *The things Jesus did in the presence of his disciples are written for us that we might believe and have life in Jesus’ name* (John 20:30-31). This is why John wrote his gospel. In the gospel we are able to come to know Jesus and *know the certainty of the things we have been taught* (Luke 1:4). Because we can read the Scriptures which testify of Jesus, we can be his disciples today as certainly as were those whom he called to be with him while he was on earth.

The Chain of Discipleship

Those who were with him wrote these things for us. They were charged to *make disciples, baptize them, and teach them all Jesus had commanded* (Matthew 28:18-20). These were Jesus’ final instructions to them. In a similar vein, Paul instructed Timothy to *commit the word he had heard from Paul to faithful men who would teach others* (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul taught what he had *received by revelation* (Galatians 1:11-12). The original apostles were promised by Jesus that the *Holy Spirit would remind them of all Jesus had taught and would teach them all things* (John 14:26).

The sum of this is that the story of Jesus is communicated from him through the apostles to others. This chain is seen clearly in John 17. Jesus, praying to his Father, said, *I have given them [the apostles] the word you have given me* (vv. 8 & 14). Then v. 21 indicates that others believe *through their message*.

It is important to realize, though, that this chain does not depend on oral tradition, as much as unbelieving “scholars” would like to suggest it does. Rather, the original eyewitnesses of Jesus wrote for our learning.

Paul told the Ephesians that *the mystery of the gospel had been made known to him by revelation - but that he had written it down so they could understand his insight* (Ephesians 3:3-4). Peter told those to whom he addressed his epistle that he *wrote to remind them of the truth they had received* (2 Peter 1:12-14) so they

would have it after his death. He assured them this was a not cleverly invented story *but a true eyewitness account of Jesus* (vv. 16-18).

Thus the chain of discipleship is anchored in the experience and testimony of the original disciples communicated to us through the word they have written. The Scriptures are the source from which we are able to come to know Jesus. The words of the most familiar children's song sum it up:

Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so.

Without the Scriptures our knowledge of Jesus would be very tenuous. Non-biblical writings of the early church give us a lot - but most of what they give is what they quote from the Scriptures. The Scriptures are essential to our knowledge of Jesus - either directly, as we read for ourselves, or indirectly as others teach us the Scriptures.

Scripture Points to Jesus

Yet, we must remember that Scripture is not God. It tells us of God and his Son, but we do not worship the Scriptures; we worship God. The value of Scripture is that it points us to the Father and to his Son.

The Jews of Jesus' day made a tragic mistake. They mistook knowledge of Scripture for knowledge of God. Though they were diligent in their study of Scripture, Jesus said *God's word was not abiding in them because they refused to come to the one of whom Scripture testified* (John 5:38-40). Though they set their hopes on Moses and the Law, Moses himself accused them because *Moses testified of Jesus in what he wrote, but the Jews would not believe that testimony* (John 5:45-47).

The intellectual pursuit of the Scriptures is not an end within itself. We need to search the Scriptures. We need to *hide the Scriptures in our hearts* (Psalm 119:11). We need to *meditate on God's law day and night* (Psalm 1:2). But we always need to remember Scripture is given by God to point us to Jesus.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would *testify of me* (John 15:26). It was the testimony of the Spirit of God that the apostles passed on to us in the Scriptures. This Spirit, Jesus added, would *bring glory to me* (John 16:14). It is this *glory of the light of the gospel shining in the face of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:4-6) that we must seek in the Scripture.

Sirs, We Would See Jesus

If we would see Jesus, we must look to the Scriptures. That is why it is so important that we become students of the Bible. Yet, we must use the Scriptures as a tool, not as an end within themselves. Our goal is to come to know Jesus. We come to know him in the Scriptures. So our methodology in approaching the study of the Scriptures must be one that will allow us to see Jesus throughout the entire Bible, Old Testament and New Testament.

We must get into the written word of God if we want the Incarnate Word of God to get into us.

Our next lesson will have some practical suggestions for Bible Study that will help us to do just that.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON NINE

Luke 10:26

Monday: Read the Notes for Lesson Eight and answer the following questions.

Where can we go to learn from Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:28-30) today? _____

Comment on the statement near the end of Lesson Seven: We must get into the written word of God if we want the Incarnate Word of God to get into us. _____

Tuesday: Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

How were the ancient Israelite parents to communicate God's law to their children? _____

What does this suggest about how God, our Father, wants to communicate his Word to us today? _

Wednesday: Read Psalm 1:1-6.

Where does the godly man go for his counsel? _____

How does he learn to apply this to his life? _____

What is the result of doing this? _____

Thursday: Read Luke 10:25-37.

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus about eternal life, what question did Jesus ask him? _____

How did Jesus make application of what the Scripture said to the practical matters of life? _____

What does this suggest about how we are to come to understand our Lord's commands and teachings? _____

Friday: Read Matthew 22:23-32.

What two things did Jesus say the Sadducee leaders did not know? _____

What question did he ask them concerning the resurrection? _____

Jesus' point about what God said about himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob hinged on the tense of the verb: *am*, not *was*. What does this suggest about how we are to read and study the Scriptures?

Saturday: Read Matthew 11:28-30.

Why did Jesus say we are to learn from him? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON NINE

HOW A DISCIPLE STUDIES THE BIBLE

How does a disciple of Jesus study the Bible? There is no one single, “right” answer to this question. Since people are different, they will study differently. Some are highly analytic; others are more intuitive. Some seek just the factual material; others gravitate to poetic soaring praise of God. All of these have much to commend them - and we should have some of each of these in our study of God’s word.

In spite of all our different temperaments and interests, there are principles that will help us to see Jesus more clearly in our study of the Scriptures. Focusing on these principles will probably help us more than memorizing “rules of interpretation” (or *hermeneutics* - the science of interpretation).

Principle #1: Be Systematic

Every part of the Scripture is given to us for a reason. While it is certainly true that some parts are more inspiring than others, *all of Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for our teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16f). If all of Scripture is profitable, I need to spend time in all of it - and this demands a systematic approach. Adapt your system to your personality and interest. But make sure you include all of Scripture in your study.

Some parts of Scripture, however, are of greater significance to us as disciples of Jesus. It stands to reason that Jesus’ disciples will have more interest in those parts of the Bible that relate to him most definitely. By that, I mean the four accounts of his life: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. However, if that were all we ever read, we would have little idea of how he came to be born of the virgin, why he died, or how we are to live as his disciples. In other words, our view of Jesus would lack context.

The Old Testament is context for the New Testament. It provides the context of a loving creator who is rejected by his people. Yet, his heart cannot deny his love for them. In his love, he pleads, threatens, cajoles and even punishes them - with little impact. He even asks himself, *what more could I do than I have done for my people* (Isaiah 5:4)? That is the background of his doing something more: send his Son who would give himself a ransom for fallen humanity. Without the context provided by the Old Testament, we cannot appreciate God’s gift as much as we should.

But the epistles are also the context for the life of the Christian. Every epistle is written to address a practical issue in walking as Jesus walked. If we neglect them, we will falter in our intention of following him. Note in the epistles how the practical instruction for living the Christian life is based on the great themes of salvation and redemption through God’s grace in Christ. The principles of grace are applied to life in practical ways - and demands are made that we see as impossible to meet until we focus first on Jesus and his gift of love.

Principle #2: Be Consistent

A disciple cannot afford to start and stop in his pursuit of the Master. *He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven* (Luke 9:62). A little time each day is better than large blocks of time spent studying the Scriptures - with large gaps in between them. Think of how we feed the physical body. If we had to eat enough for a week at one sitting, we would not be very healthy. Is it any wonder that those who try to gain their week’s supply of spiritual sustenance in one dose are weak and sickly - and that some have even fallen asleep? Israel was taught to teach their children *when they lay down, when they got up, when they were in the house, and when they were on the road* (Deuteronomy 6:7). God, our Heavenly Father, would like to communicate with us in the same way today.

Principle #3: Be Meditative

Think about what you read. It is the man who *meditates on God's law both day and night* who is blessed (Psalm 1:1-6). Meditation here is not a transcendental trance induced by hypnotic repetition of some mantra. Rather, it is diligent thought that seeks to understand and apply the word of God as we read it.

Meditation will also involve prayer that will bring us nearer to God so that we might understand him. Alexander Campbell called this the "understanding distance." This, he said, is the circle that has God at its center and humility as its circumference. (*The Christian System*, p. 5) When we think of God and his word, we of necessity think of ourselves as well. And it is only when we see ourselves with God's eyes that true humility follows. It is this humility that allows us to become as *little children and understand the things that are revealed to babes instead of to the wise* (Matthew 11:25).

Principle #4: Ask Questions

This is really a part of meditation. Ask yourself questions. Ask questions of the text you are reading. Ask other disciples as well.

What questions should I ask? *Who?* Who is speaking? To whom? Of whom? *What?* What is said? What did the speaker mean by it? What did his hearers understand (or misunderstand) him to mean? *Why?* Why was it said? What in the context prompted this comment? *So what?* What difference does this make to me? *How?* How does this relate to the rest of the Scripture? How can I apply this lesson?

In looking for application, continue to ask questions: Is there a promise to be received, a command to be obeyed, a warning to be remembered, advice to be cherished, a glory in which to rejoice, a principle to understand, or an example to follow or avoid? The stories of the Bible are not just stories. They are the vehicles God uses to convey his truth to us. The Scripture offers a whole convoy of these vehicles. We understand his truth through the stories - but also through the commentary of the prophets and apostles. That is, we understand it if we ask questions.

Principle #5: Seek to Do God's Will

This may be the most important principle of all. Jesus said, *If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own* (John 7:17). Without a genuine desire to follow Jesus, our study will bear little practical fruit. This is because Bible study is not an end within itself; it is a means to the end of becoming more like Jesus.

Do you *hunger and thirst for righteousness*? If so, Jesus said you will be filled (Matthew 5:6). But notice that he did not say hunger and thirst for *knowledge*. Our hunger must be for *righteousness* (or Christ-likeness). Peter said we are to desire the pure milk of God's word *that we may grow by it in our salvation* (1 Peter 2:2). The word of God, again, is not the end; it is a means to the end. If our study is to bear much fruit, we must keep our eye focused sharply on the end: becoming like Jesus in doing God's will.

These principles will help us to get started - and they will help us to grow. Are they complete? No, but they are crucial. With these, the plowboy can know the true meaning of Scripture better than the theologian who seeks knowledge only for its own sake.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON TEN

Memorize Luke 11:1

Monday: Read the notes for Lesson Nine and answer the following questions.

Do you agree that knowledge of the Scripture is not an end within itself but a means to an end? _____

Why? _____

What is the purpose for knowing the Scriptures? _____

Tuesday: Read Luke 11:1-4 and Romans 8:26-27.

What was Jesus doing when the disciples asked him to teach them how to pray? _____

Why would they ask him to teach them to pray? _____

What limitation did Paul say we have in our prayers? _____

How does God help us overcome this limitation? _____

Does this cancel our need to be taught how to pray? Why? _____

Wednesday: Read Matthew 6:9-10 and Matthew 26:39-44.

To whom is our prayer addressed? _____

What is the significance of this address to God? _____

What does "*hallowed be your name*" mean to you? _____

Why did Jesus say to pray, "*Your kingdom come*"? _____

What is the significance of praying "*your will be done*"? _____

Thursday: Read Matthew 6:11 and Exodus 16:14-20.

Prayer for *daily bread* suggests what? _____

Some of the Israelites did not follow Moses' instruction concerning keeping some of the manna for the next day. How does this illustrate the meaning of praying for daily bread? _____

What does this prayer for daily bread suggest about our trust in God? _____

Friday: Read Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Matthew 18:32-35 and Romans 6:1.

Why does Jesus teach us to pray for forgiveness “*as we forgive others*”? _____

This suggests pointedly that prayer is to change us as well as to praise or petition God. How does prayer change us? _____

Forgiveness of sins is not enough; we are also to pray what else about sin and evil? Why? _____

Saturday: Read Matthew 6:13 (including foot. note) and Revelation 4:9-11.

The Lord’s Prayer begins and ends focused where? _____

Why does this prayer conclude with praise to God? _____

What does this suggest the content of our prayers should be? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON TEN

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Is there any disciple who believes he knows all he needs to know about how to pray? While the untutored prayers of children often thrill our hearts and stir our souls, yet in our own prayers we feel inadequate and sometimes are tongue-tied. Even Paul of Tarsus once said, “*We do not know what we ought to pray for*” (Romans 8:26).

Why?

Callers to radio talk shows are often nervous and have trouble saying what they want to say. Why shouldn't we be nervous when talking to the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Eternal One?

The Twelve once asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus' prayer life prompted this request. His easy familiarity with God, the earnestness and intensity of his prayer, the humility with which he approached the Father: we do not know exactly what caused them to ask. It may have been any of these or something else entirely. Yet, we do know they asked for a lesson in prayer. Since John the Baptist had also taught his disciples to pray, we may infer that this lesson is one all disciples need to learn.

In response, Jesus gave them what is often called *The Lord's Prayer*. In a few dozen words he gave almost inexhaustible teaching concerning our prayer life. We will study these from the account in Matthew 6:9ff.

Exaltation of God

Jesus taught us to address our prayer to *Our Father in Heaven*. When we approach God, relationship is important. We do not pray to the *Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth*. We pray to *Our Father in Heaven who happens to be the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth*. He is our Father because as *sons of God through faith in Christ* (Galatians 3:26) we have been *born again* (1 Peter 1:3). We are able to *come with confidence to God's throne* because of the relationship we have to him in Christ (Hebrews 4:16). This is the significance of praying *in Jesus' name* (John 16:23f).

In coming to God as our Father, we do not take a casual attitude. We recognize *his name is hallowed*. That is, his name is to be revered because it is holy and sanctified. The Psalmist said, *Holy and awesome is his name* (Psalm 111:9). This is similar to what Peter had in mind when he charged us, “*in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord*” (1 Peter 3:15). Give him the special place in your heart his name merits.

In praying for *his kingdom to come*, we lift our sights above our mundane, personal, parochial interest to the universal kingdom and purposes of God. While God has our personal interests in his eye, our hearts must also realize his purposes go far beyond our horizons. It is in this connection that Jesus adds, *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. This is, perhaps, one of the most difficult portions of this prayer - for it subjugates our will to his will. But this is always the true prayer of the disciple. Just as Jesus in Gethsemane prayed for the Father's will to be done, we are to pray for God's will to be done in all things.

Supplication for Our Needs

With our focus firmly fixed on God - his name, his kingdom, his will - Jesus now turns to petition for our personal needs. *Give us today our daily bread*. In the wilderness, Israel was instructed to gather enough manna for the day and not to hoard it for tomorrow (Exodus 16:14ff). Each day they were to trust God would supply their need. This is how we are to live each day. In this prayer, *our daily bread* is inclusive of all our physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, health, etc. In all these, we are to trustingly depend on our

Father who knows what we need before we ask. He who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies has promised to provide all our needs as well. This prayer shows daily trust in him to do what he has promised.

But our needs are more than physical. We also have spiritual needs. The prayer addresses two of these: our need for forgiveness and our need for deliverance. Put into theological terms, these address our need for *justification* and for *sanctification*. Either of these without the other is inadequate. To be forgiven without being delivered from the power of sin to dominate our lives leaves us enslaved; to be delivered from the practice of sin without having been delivered from its guilt leaves us condemned. In the beautiful hymn, we sing, “*Be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*”¹ The thought of this song has its root in the Lord’s Prayer.

Note that these requests suggest prayer can and will change us. To pray for forgiveness *as we forgive* and to pray *do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil* both imply a change in our conduct and attitudes. God is to have an impact and influence in our lives. In this, the prayers of the disciples promote discipleship!

A Final Doxology of Praise

This prayer begins and ends with God: *for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever!* More than half the words of this prayer are in praise of God or in recognition of his place in our lives and in the universe. It is this recognition of God’s place that causes us to follow his Son as disciples. Compare this prayer with the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.

Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
For everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

Jesus said more in fewer words than did David - but the concepts are much the same. In prayer, we should put God first, our wants and needs second. But he promises that when we put him first, our wants and needs will be supplied.

In prayer, as well as in other parts of life, we are to *seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness*. If we do, *all these things will be provided you* (Matthew 6:33). Yet, how many of our prayers are lists of what we want God to do for us? We need such lists - but we also need to focus our hearts on the LORD in our prayers. When we exalt him as LORD and praise him for all his wonderful works, our needs - whether physical or spiritual - will be provided.

If the LORD’s Prayer teaches us nothing other than to look to God as God, we will have learned its most important lesson.

¹ Augustus M. Toplady, “Rock of Ages” in *Praise for the Lord*, John P. Wiegand, Editor (Nashville: Praise Press, 6th printing, © 1992 by Song Supplements, Inc.), #557, v. 1.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON ELEVEN

Memorize Ephesians 1:17

Monday: Read Lesson Ten and Answer the following questions.

What is the “center of gravity” of the Lord’s Prayer? Explain your reason for your answer. _____

Why is it necessary that we be taught how to pray? _____

Tuesday: Read Acts 4:23-3.

What were the circumstances of this prayer? _____

What did the apostles and the church ask God to do in this prayer? _____

How would we likely pray in similar circumstances? _____

Wednesday: Read Ephesians 1:15-21.

Why did Paul say he always gave thanks for the Ephesian saints? _____

What spiritual benefits did Paul ask God to give those saints? _____

How is this prayer similar to or different from the prayers prayed in the church today? _____

Thursday: Read Ephesians 3:14-19.

What spiritual power does Paul seek for the Ephesian brethren in this prayer? _____

What does Paul pray about their relationship with Christ? _____

What knowledge does Paul pray that they may have? _____

Friday: Read Ephesians 3:20-21.

What powers does Paul attribute to God in this doxology? _____

What glory does Paul pray God may have? _____

Saturday: Read Ephesians 6:18-20 and Colossians 4:12.

How does Paul say we are to pray? _____

What prayer request does he make for himself? _____

What did Epaphras pray for the Colossian church? _____

How does Paul characterize the earnestness of Epaphras' prayer? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON ELEVEN

EXAMPLES OF DISCIPLES PRAYING

One way we can learn to pray is by observing others pray. In fact, that is exactly how most of us learn to pray. If you do not believe that, listen to expressions common to prayer - but never heard in other places. How do we develop such a special “prayer vocabulary”? By listening to others pray.

Instead of just listening to ourselves, though, let’s listen to some of the early disciples in their prayers. From them, we might learn something about *what* to pray for as well as *how* we are to pray.

In Time of Persecution

Soon after Pentecost, the first wave of persecution began. Peter and John were arrested while preaching in the temple after they had healed the man born crippled (Acts 3 -4). The Sanhedrin asked the disciples by what authority or in what name they had done this. This question evidently meant that they preaching in the temple. In reply, Peter though spoke of the power that made the lame man whole. He declared *this was by the name of Jesus whom the rulers of Israel had crucified. Jesus, he said, is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the capstone. In fact, he added, there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved.* (Acts 4:8-12)

Not being able to deny the miracle (Everyone knew the man who had been healed, and he was standing right there with the apostles.), no direct action was taken at this time. However, *to stop this from going further the Jews warned the apostles not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus* (4:13-18).

The apostles responded, *“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19-20). They were then released, after further threats. On being released, the apostles reported to the church what had transpired.

Then they prayed. This prayer is recorded in Acts 4:24-30. This was not a prayer of complaint, though they did ask *why do the nations and authorities rage against the Lord.* In the prayer, they recognized the sovereignty of God (though it was defied by the Jewish and Gentile courts). They saw that the coming persecution was a part of God’s plan - *and they prayed for boldness to speak the word of the Lord and for more of the mighty works in the name of Jesus for which they had been arrested.*

Today, most Christians would be praying for deliverance from persecution; the apostles prayed for courage to face it, even to do that which they knew would provoke it. Why the difference? The apostles were first of all disciples of the Lord - and he had warned them that they would face the same opposition he had endured. To them, it was a normal part of following Jesus; they just prayed for strength and courage to accept it and face it.

Paul’s Prayers for the Ephesians

Consistently, the prayers we read from the early Christians were different from those heard in the average Sunday morning worship assembly. They were different in what they prayed for and in the intensity of the prayers themselves. This is seen clearly in two different prayers Paul offered for the Ephesian saints.

Ephesians opens with a paragraph of praise to God: Father, Son and Spirit. Then, he offered a prayer of thanksgiving and petition for the church (Ephesians 1:15-20). In this prayer, he thanked God for what he was hearing about the church - their love and faithfulness. Yet, he was not satisfied with their current spiritual attainments. Rather, he asked that they might grow in discipleship. Specifically he asked that God

grant them:

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation so they would know him better.

Enlightened eyes to know the hope to which they were called.

Eyes that would know his riches and the glorious inheritance of the saints.

Knowledge of his power working in them, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Each of these elements of Paul's prayer contributes to greater discipleship. How different this is from the prayers for all of the physical ailments that grace our ears at each gathering of the saints! Not that we should fail to pray for the sick - but prayers for the physically sick should be subservient to prayers for the spiritual afflictions we face. Paul focused on first things first.

This pattern of prayer is continued in Ephesians 3:14-19. There, he recognized the dependence of the *whole family of believers in heaven and on earth* on our heavenly Father for our very identity. He prayed that God may *strengthen us with power from his Spirit in our inner being so that Christ can live in our hearts through faith*. This prayer is truly for our discipleship. The disciple gets his personal identity from the Master who lives again in the person of the disciple.

Paul continued by praying for a mind-stretching knowledge of God's love to comprehend its width, length, height and depth - and *to know this love that surpasses knowledge*. As if that were not enough, he prayed that *we be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*. What that involves is at least suggested in the following verses where he offers full praise to God *who is able to do far more than we can even imagine*.

Add to this the intensity of prayer that seems to be implied by his charge to *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests* (Ephesians 6:18) as you are always alert and always praying for all the saints. This calls to mind Jesus' charge to the disciples in Gethsemane to *watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation* (Matthew 26:41). Had they done this, they would not have slept while he prayed. Epaphras, Paul's companion, was intense in his prayers for his brethren. Paul said *he is always wrestling in prayer for you*. His prayer was that the Colossians *stand firm in all of God's will, be mature, and fully confident* (Colossians 4:12-13). In these prayers, Paul said, *he is working hard for you*. Do we work hard in prayer for our friends that they be faithfully committed to the Lord's way and mature in all they do?

Paul's personal request for prayer is also instructive: *Pray for me that I may be given the right words to say and that I may say them fearlessly as I should* (Ephesians 6:19-20). Remember that he was in chains when this epistle was written (cf. also Ephesians 3:1). Yet, he wanted God's help in being fearless. (Is this a hint that he was not always as fearless as we sometimes believe?) To get God's help, he begged his brothers to pray for him.

This prayer request is specific. Paul named the issue that needed prayer. He did not beat around the bush about what was needed the way we sometimes do. We all confess we need prayer - but we do not always say *why* we need specific prayers at specific times. So we end up praying for one another that the Lord bless us in some undefined way. If it weren't that the Lord knows our needs even better than we know them ourselves, how would he know what to do for us? More to the point, how will we be able to recognize answered prayer if we are not specific in our requests?

Is one reason the church is weak today simply that we do not pray for the strength and boldness God wants his disciples to have? If we prayed more like disciples, we might act more like disciples.

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON TWELVE

Memorize 1 John 2:15

Monday: Read Lesson Eleven and answer the following questions.

What was the focus of the prayers of the early disciples? _____

How can the example of their prayers change the way we pray? _____

Tuesday: Read John 17:13-19 and Matthew 6:33.

Why did Jesus say that he is not “of the world?” _____

Jesus was sent into the world and sanctified himself. What does this mean? _____

It is in the context of being in the world but not of the world that Jesus spoke of sanctifying his disciples by the truth. What is the significance of sanctification as it concerns our relationship to the world? _____

Why does Jesus want his disciples to seek his kingdom first over worldly pursuits? _____

Wednesday: Read 1 John 2:15-17; Luke 8:14 and 2 Timothy 2:4.

How does loving the world block out loving the Father? _____

What will entanglement in “civilian pursuits” do to the soldier of the cross? _____

What are the “thorns” that choke the word of God and keep it from being fruitful? _____

Thursday: Read Philippians 3:17-21.

Paul contrasted himself with those whose god is their stomach. What essential difference did he stress? _____

What political allegiance (citizenship) did Paul claim in this text? _____

How could he also claim Roman citizenship (see Acts 22:25-28)? _____

Friday: Read Romans 12:1-2 and 1 Peter 4:1-4.

How does the conduct of the disciple differ from that of people in the world? _____

Why this difference? _____

Saturday: Read Romans 12:9-16.

What statements in this text show a different social context within the fellowship of the church? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON TWELVE

THE DISCIPLE AND THE WORLD

When we speak of “the world” in this lesson, we do not mean the physical cosmos or universe. Rather, we speak of the moral-social-political-cultural world in which human beings live and interact with one another - and with God. This is the arena where the combat between good and evil, between God and the devil occurs. “This world” is used in Scripture to contrast with “the heavenly realms” (cf. Ephesians 1:3).

In the World but Not of the World

As creatures of flesh and blood, who are also living as disciples of Jesus, we occupy a unique place. We are *in the world but not of the world* (John 17:14). Jesus occupied this same position, but with a difference. He came down from heaven to be in this world to redeem it; we, who are redeemed, are going from this world into the heavenly realms. His origin was there; our origin is here; but both of us belong there.

Yet, we have a mission in this world, just as Jesus had a mission in this world. While we are here, we are to give glory to God in this world. We cannot turn our backs on the world to live in a monastery. If we do, we refuse to walk in the steps of Jesus. Nor can we adopt the thought patterns and the life style of the world. That would also refuse the heavenly walk.

As disciples, we are called to demonstrate heavenly patterns of thought and life in this world. That is what Jesus did, and that is what his disciples today do as well. To decline this challenge is to decline the life of a disciple.

That is why the first concern of the disciple is not the essentials of life in this world. Disciples are told, *seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness all the physical necessities of life will be given to us* (Matthew 6:33). This promise challenges faith - but it is a solemn promise from our Master himself.

Do Not Love the World

The problem is that the world presents a constant, powerful appeal to physical, human senses. It is so much with us we are tempted to fall in love with its charms. *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you* (1 John 2:15). The things in the world in this context are moral: *the cravings of sinful man, the cravings of his eyes, and his vain pride in his accomplishments*. When we love our lusts and are proud of our petty accomplishments, we have fallen out of love with God and into love with the world.

It is *life’s worries, riches and pleasures* that originate in these lusts and pride that choke the word of God so it is unfruitful (Luke 8:14). It is *entanglement in these affairs* that keep a soldier of Christ from pleasing his commanding officer (2 Timothy 2:4).

Many times, these pursuits are harmless except that they distract us from the important things of life for empty pleasures. Though not sinful, they become sin because they steal our hearts from the one whom we are to adore and love beyond all others. Thus, they become weapons in the Devil’s arsenal to separate us from our God.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

When the Devil can turn our hearts from God, he has taken us captive (as spiritual POW's). Yet, the disciple's heart is fixed firmly on the heavenly city. That is his homeland even though he has never been there in person. People who are third or fourth generation New Zealanders used to talk about going "home" to England. They had never been there; their parents had never been there. But that is still what they thought of as home. This changed when England entered the European Common Market and cut its former colony off from the British market. When it was evident the "homeland" had little "love" for its erstwhile children, the children began to think of "home" in different ways.

We will be justified in turning our love away from heaven when heaven shows it has turned its love away from us. But nothing will separate us from God's love (Romans 8:35-39) - so we never have an excuse for turning our hearts away from him. And if our heart is with him, our homeland will be in heaven.

We live in this world as strangers and pilgrims. We are here. We have work to do here. But we know one day we will go home. So, we do not "put down roots" in this world. Our "roots" are in heaven.

Christian Non-Conformity

As people whose hearts and homes are in heaven, we live in this world without adopting its way of life. The apostle charged us, *do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2). This transformation comes through the influence of our Master. The effect of this non-conformity is seen in 1 Peter 4:1-4. There, the one who has suffered with Christ (that is, who is crucified with Christ) is one who no longer lives as the pagans do: *living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and idolatry*. If these words did not come from a book nearly 2,000 years old, you would think they were written about the very world we live in today. The disciple of Jesus consciously rejects the life-style of the world because he, in the words of the song, "can't feel at home in this world anymore."

This rejection is to be complete - and will be obvious. Peter went on to observe that the *pagans think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation - and they heap abuse on you*. From the time of Cain and Able, evil men have abused those who choose to serve and love God. It is no different today. Why do we think the American democratic society has somehow neutralized the powers of darkness and robbed them of the power to persecute those who choose not to conform to the patterns of this world, but to conform instead to the image of God's Son?

The Church: A New Society in This World

Disciples of Jesus, each of them *a new creature* (2 Corinthians 5:17), form a new society in this world, a *city of light that is set on a hill* (Matthew 5:15). After talking about not being conformed to the world of darkness, Paul continued in Romans 12 to talk about the new society God is forming in this world with his church. This is a society where *love is sincere, where people are devoted to one another in brotherly love. In this society, people honor each other over themselves and share with those who are in need. They bless instead of curse. They are not arrogant, but associate even with those of low position. It is a society that is harmonious, not vengeful*.

In reading this description of the heavenly society, I am reminded of the story of the boy whose father told him what a Christian is: one who loves everyone, is patient, kind, forgiving, and pure. The boy then asked his father, "Have I ever seen one?" Can we honestly say we have seen a society like this? Yet, this is what God is training his disciples to be. Are we willing to be trained?

ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON THIRTEEN

Memorize 1 Corinthians 9:25

Monday: Read Lesson Twelve and answer the following questions.

How can the disciple of Jesus be in the world but not of the world? _____

What happens to the disciple when he puts down roots in this world and feels at home here? _____

Tuesday: Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 11:31-32.

Why is the disciple of Jesus, who is running the heavenly race, to be purposeful and disciplined in life? _____

What happens to disciples who do not discipline themselves? _____

Wednesday: Read Proverbs 1:1-3; Proverbs 5:11-12 and Proverbs 10:17.

Why did Solomon say he wrote the book of Proverbs? _____

When one rejects discipline in life, what does he do at the end of life? _____

When one walks a disciplined life, how does it impact others? _____

Thursday: Read Hebrews 12:4-11.

Is God a doting Father who spoils his children? Why? _____

When hardship comes into our lives, how are we to consider it? _____

Why does God discipline his children? _____

How does God discipline his children? _____

Friday: Read 1 Timothy 4:7-8 and Titus 1:6-9.

How was Timothy to train himself? _____

Why is this contrasted with “godless myths and old wives’ tales”? _____

Why does Paul say the elder is to be a disciplined man? _____

Saturday: Read James 3:1-4 and James 3:13-18.

Bits and rudders provide guidance or discipline for horses and ships. What do we need to discipline? _____

If we do not discipline our tongues, what spectacle do we present to others? _____

What else needs to be disciplined besides our tongues? _____

MY NOTES:

LESSON THIRTEEN

DISCIPLINE AS DISCIPLES

The first definition of “discipline” is “*Systematic training or subjection to authority; especially, the training of the mental, moral, and physical powers by instruction and exercise.*” In Lesson One of this series, we observed, “In the Greek world of Jesus’ day, a *disciple* was one learning information or conduct from an “authority” (or personal teacher) on whom the disciple depended.” In other words, a disciple is one who is being disciplined by his Master. The two words have similar meaning and spelling.

While *discipline* is often used to refer to *punishment*, the base meaning is *training*. When punishment is the meaning, it is *punishment for the purpose of training*, not mere abuse.

Why Discipline Is Needed

Disciples are to be disciplined people. In fact, an “undisciplined disciple” is an oxymoron. Paul gives the reason for discipline in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. There he compared the disciple’s mission to an athlete competing in a race or a fight. The Olympic champion succeeds because he endures *strict training to win a laurel wreath crown that will soon wilt*. But Paul says, *we do it to get a crown that will last forever*. Because this is serious stuff, he added, *I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air*.

Being a disciple of Jesus is too important for our training regimen to be haphazard. We not only need discipline, we need purposeful training so our mission of walking as Jesus walked may be fulfilled.

Paul said he disciplined himself. Two chapters later (1 Corinthians 11:31-32) he added *if we do not judge ourselves we will be disciplined by the Lord*. This context is discussing the Lord’s Supper. He just said *a man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks the cup* (v. 28). This has discipline as its purpose. Self-control is certainly implied in this text: *wait for each other instead of going ahead without considering others - with the result that one is drunk and another is hungry* (cf. v. 33 and v. 21).

How Do We Learn Discipline?

Solomon wrote the *Book of Proverbs* so we can *acquire a disciplined and prudent life* (Proverbs 1:3). In it he gives advice on how to live and makes observations on human nature. Some listen to that advice - and are both blessed and a blessing to those around them. Others foolishly reject that advice with disastrous consequences. The disciple of Jesus sits at the feet of “One greater than Solomon” (Luke 11:31). To reject his advice is even more disastrous - and to follow it is even more of a blessing.

Yet, God does not leave us alone without his intervention. While his teaching is all in the Scripture, there is still God’s discipline. He is not a doting Father who spoils his children. Life conducts a school for us - The University of Hard Knocks. The school colors are Black and Blue. God is the headmaster, and in this school *we are disciplined for our own good because God loves us* (Hebrews 12:4-11; cf. Proverbs 3:11-12). If life were always easy, we would not learn the discipline that makes us more like Jesus.

What Are We Disciplined To Do?

An army is under discipline so it can fight. We learn discipline so we can walk as Jesus walked (cf. 1 John 2:6). This is always at the heart of the Christian message. Paul, the *expert builder* (1 Corinthians 3:10), instructed his protégée in some things he needed to know about discipline (or training): *Stay away from myths and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly* (1 Timothy 4:7-8). The godless myths and old wives' tales mentioned here are likely based in early Gnosticism, a system that suggested esoteric knowledge was the way to come to God. Paul said, "Just stick to godliness."

He added that *physical training has some value, but godliness has value for all things*. Physical training here is probably not the exercise you get in the gym. It is likely rules and regulations that try to guide the Christian into the life of a disciple. Such rules, Paul said in Colossians 2:21-23, *appear wise but lack value in restraining sensual indulgence*. Human rules cannot develop spiritual qualities. Yet, the appearance of wisdom and humility in them can be deceptive. Many religious systems are based on human rules that try to impose the life of the disciple on the Christian. They are all doomed to failure.

On the other hand, *godliness holds promise for both time and eternity* (1 Timothy 4:8). The next verses add that *we put our hope in the living God*, not in the rules of men.

If not rules, then what? How about character? This certainly seems to be the focus in Titus 1:8. *An elder must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined*. The disciplined man is a man of Christ-like character and conduct. He does not merely follow rules of conduct; he acts with right conduct because Christ is living in his heart.

An illustration of this can be seen in James 3. This chapter, which deals with controlling the tongue, starts by admitting that if anyone can control his tongue he is perfect and able to control the whole body. He adds that no man can tame the tongue. Does this mean that our tongues cannot be disciplined? No. He just says we cannot do it. But Christ in our heart can tame our tongues, for *out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks* (Matthew 12:34).

The last part of James 3 illustrates the point again. In verses 13-18 he speaks of two different kinds of wisdom: that which is from heaven and that which is from the devil. One leads to confusion and evil works; the other is pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial and sincere. Such wisdom bears good fruit shown by a good life and good deeds. When Christ lives in us, when *he is our wisdom* (1 Corinthians 1:30), we have wisdom from above.

Concluding Observations

The disciple of Jesus is not one who whines when life is tough. He knows he has not yet suffered as Jesus suffered. When he falls into sin he does not complain, "The devil made me do it." He does not have a "victim mentality" that tries to make excuses for sin by saying, "I just couldn't help it."

He faces up to the fact that his choices have consequences - and that actions bear fruit. But he also appreciates the loving mercy of God while accepting the challenge of holy living in Christ. The mercy of God gives him forgiveness - but it also leads him to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Repentance comes because his love for Christ makes him truly sorry for his sin and weakness. This love makes him seek God's righteousness in every action and attitude. As Jesus said, *if you love me you will keep my commandments* (John 14:15). It is his love for Jesus that ultimately disciplines him. Love for the Lord keeps him from being satisfied with less than his best, but always pressing on the upward way. He does not boast of his achievements - for he knows he has far to go before he is completely like Jesus. To be with Jesus is his goal and his passion. Nothing else will satisfy the deepest yearning of his heart.