

Preparation for Discipleship



“ ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven’ ” (Matt. 5:14–16, NRSV).

Preparation Begins With “The Daily Death”

Sabbath
February 9

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 15:31

“I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31, NKJV).

During one of his sermons, the assistant pastor of my church asked the congregation an interesting question. It goes like this: Once, there were three frogs on the bank of a small river. They all decided to jump into the river. Now, how many of them were left on the bank? None? One? Two? Or all three? If you just apply a little bit of your analytical skills, you can correctly answer this question. Three. Making a decision to jump and jumping are two different things. However, they are unequivocally connected. Similarly, the decision to be a disciple of Christ and actually being His disciple are two different things—or two sides of the same coin. Just because you’ve made a decision to be His disciple doesn’t mean that you’ve actually prepared to be one.

When you talk about preparation, you must start at the end. The end is death. I know this is an abrupt declaration. But when “Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die,” said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945.

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In the modern world, there is a wide-ranging debate among Christians about the possibility of being a true disciple of Christ. A media-controlled culture; immorality as part of normal life; fast-paced lifestyles mixed with work and family; peer pressure; prestige issues; and identity crises are some of the culprits working against Christian discipleship. With such as these, who has time for dying to self?

But thank God, Christ didn’t feel that way. In order to make us His disciples, He decided to become a sacrifice for all of us. Therefore, for us to be His true disciples, we must become sacrifices too. This is possible only as we daily die to self—our old habits, our old lifestyle, and anything else that hinders our preparation for being true disciples of Christ.

Not Title, Nor Position. But Heart

LOGOS

Matthew 5–7; 10:1; 10:5–11:1; Mark 3:1–19; Luke 6:12–16

Being a disciple is not just about following orders or being a good employee or even being productive. Being a disciple means that your heart is so open to the transforming power of Jesus that everything you do springs from pure motives. In this lesson, we will be looking at Jesus' recipe for genuine discipleship.

“Be Attitudes” for Disciples (Matthew 5–7)

Jesus is sitting on a mountainside surrounded by masses of people eager to hear His words. But it was His disciples He was really instructing (Matt. 5:1, 2). So listen up, if you consider yourself His disciple. Learn from Him how to do it right.

Because Jesus always works from the inside out, He lays the foundation by telling His disciples that they'll be blessed when they're willing to be “poor in spirit” and “meek,” and when they “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:3, 5, 6, NIV). Each of these requires us to realize that we can become disciples

only through God's power. In order to have any sort of success in understanding these things, we must realize that no building will stand without a strong foundation. If we don't have the type of spirit found in the Beatitudes, we'll never be strong disciples.

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involved when God wrote
the Ten Commandments.**

Once we get our foundation straight, everything else comes naturally. The Beatitudes are foundational to Christian discipleship (Matt. 5:3–12).

Salt and Light (Matt. 5:13, 14–16)

Salt is meant to enhance the flavor of food, not dominate it. Therefore, when it says to be the salt of the world, it doesn't mean you are the world, it means you are to go into the world and spice things up! Make the world a better place.

We also are called to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14–16). Most of us tend to be a flashlight with low batteries. When people grab a flashlight in the middle of the night, the brighter the better, right? But still, if the flashlight is dull, you can use that little ounce of light to help you find a brighter light. Likewise, though you may be that duller light, you still might be able to lead someone to the brighter light. But truthfully, you can't change your own batteries or light bulb. There is a Higher Source that has to help you with that. When you accept His help, you can become the brighter light.

The Law (Matt. 5:17–20)

There was no Wite-Out® involved when God wrote the Ten Commandments. These laws are absolutes. God has revealed who He is through them, so if you try to change them, you're trying to change Him.

Sinister Plotting (Matt. 5:21–37)

Most of the time actions speak louder than words. But what about when you're thinking lustful or hateful thoughts? Matthew 5:21–37 says that dwelling on evil in your heart is just as bad as if you've committed sin. So if you simply marinate in the fact that you're jealous or hateful toward someone and secretly wish he was gone, in some sense you've already killed him. If you look at a member of the opposite sex and wish that you could take off your wedding ring so you could talk to that person freely, you've already cheated on your spouse.

Who's in Charge Here? (Matt. 10:1; 28:18–20)

Matthew 10:1 states that Jesus gave His disciples authority to take on the world. But in Matthew 28:18, He said that all authority had been given to Him. Immediately after saying that, He commissioned His disciples to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So authority has been given to us by Christ, and once again, it's an outside source inside of us shining out.

Building Social Capital (Matt. 10:5–11)

In Matthew 10:5–11, we read that Jesus sent His disciples empty-handed to minister in the towns. He did so because they would be forced to connect and create community by serving others and by depending on others. Jesus knew that if they made themselves useful and then asked for help, people would automatically open up to them and value them.

Jesus: Intercessor for His Disciples (Luke 6:12–16)

After consulting with the rest of the Godhead, Jesus chose 12 disciples and sent them on their way as apostles. Mark tells us that after a frenzy of activity, Jesus called His disciples to a quiet place where He commissioned them to lead out as apostles (Mark 3:13–19). Often it is in our encounter with Jesus in the quiet places of life that our calling to discipleship is sealed.

A View of Our Sinfulness

TESTIMONY

Matt. 5:14–16

Have you ever been to a worship service where someone went up front to give their testimony for all the wrong reasons? You sit in the pew and listen, but it soon becomes apparent that the individual is talking not about what God has done in their lives, but about their own accomplishments.

Matthew 5:14–16 calls us to be witnesses for God. It's our responsibility to carry the Word of God to the world through our actions, not by reminding others of our accomplishments and gloating over our own righteousness. "We have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."¹

Being a disciple of Christ is about our ability to recognize our sins and come to Christ for forgiveness. "The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall

"We have nothing in ourselves of which to boast."

see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal

Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the Word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image."²

Being a disciple of Christ is about spending each day trying to reflect His image. Giving a testimony of our individual works doesn't make any of us a disciple. It's only through constant communion with God that we can make changes in our lives and become beacons for God's Word. God calls us to be disciples for Him, not through words or demonstrations, but by allowing Christ to come into our lives and transforming us so His remarkable glory is evident in our actions.

REACT

How do you reflect Christ in your life?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 63.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

A Culture of Entitlement

EVIDENCE

Matthew 5–7

Our society is fixated on perfection and entitlement. We need to look like the celebrities in the magazines. We need to have success at a young age. And we're entitled to whatever our heart desires. We've bought into the idea of a perfect body, a perfect family, a perfect life. And we're suffering for it. Rates of depression and anxiety are skyrocketing, particularly in young adults.*

The ideas of "work" and "learning" also are being replaced, mostly by rapid technological developments. No longer do we have to "learn" how to do anything; it's all on the Internet. And we don't have to "work" anymore. There are millions of businesses whose sole purpose is to do your work for you. Want supper? Call for delivery. Too busy to get that university paper done? Hire an online service to write it for you! Our society is full of loopholes, and we believe we're entitled to it. But there are no loopholes to entering the kingdom of God, and we're not worthy of it.

In Matthew 5–7, Jesus teaches the multitudes exactly what working for the kingdom of God entails. And it's not easy. There are sacrifices we must make. And we'll make mistakes, because we're human. We're not entitled to the kingdom of God, either. God has chosen us to join Him. He's extended an invitation to live with Him forever. He's given us His instructions, and He expects us to follow them, for His will is perfect and just. Becoming a disciple of Christ can be backbreaking work. It's not for the lazy and indifferent. It requires a decision and pledge to live one's life for God. And it requires a humble heart, one that knows that were it not for God's grace, we would never be able to shroud ourselves in Christ's perfection.

Only God is perfect. Only God is entitled. Preparation for discipleship requires a change in attitude from entitlement and perfection to an attitude of selflessness, with the realization that we are not infallible. Only God is.

Only God is entitled.

*"Under Pressure," Katie Paster (October 9, 2006). Retrieved November 27, 2006, from <http://www.dailyorange.com/media/storage/paper522/news/2006/10/09/Feature/Under.Pressure-2337937.shtml>.

How to Be a Disciple

HOW-TO

Matt. 18:1–4; 28:18–20; John 6:44, 45

Perhaps one of the most concise statements of what it means to be a disciple is found in the closing verses of Matthew. Read chapter 28:19 and 20. This directive is simple. Spread the gospel, and don't stop until everyone has heard about it. Yet at the same time, it's incredibly challenging. Going to the entire world? But before you start stressing, remember that the task of spreading the gospel isn't ours alone. God is the One who gave us this mission, and He wants us to get on board. He wants to work through us in miraculous ways. We must allow His message to flow through us and not rely on our own merits to get the job done.

So how do we go about doing this work in our daily lives? Do we just start going door-to-door or board a plane for some foreign country? While some of us may feel called to do just that, it's possible to start much more simply.

1. Drink deep draughts from the Source of life every day (John 6:44, 45).

Remember, our task is to let God work through us. Without His Spirit, we can accomplish nothing. A daily, moment-by-moment immersion in God is necessary to be a successful disciple. God will teach us what to do (John 6:44, 45).

Be real. Be ready.

2. Be humble (Matt. 18:1–4). Discipleship is about service. Look for ways to humbly serve others in your surroundings. Do you see someone completing an unpleasant task? Help them! Help someone you don't even like. Are there homeless or needy people in your area? Offer them clothing and food, or work at a food bank.

3. Be real. Be ready (1 Pet. 3:15). With daily exposure to God, and with His Spirit abounding in your life, you don't need to stress about sharing your faith. God will become an integral part of your life. Relating your experiences to others will be as simple as talking about yourself and serving others.

REACT

1. God does not need us to spread His message to the world (Luke 19:40). He has, in His wisdom, given us the privilege of serving Him in this way. How does this viewpoint change your view on discipleship? What purpose might God have in mind by working through us to complete His plans?

2. What things should we do to prepare ourselves for our life of discipleship?

3. What obstacles might we encounter as disciples of Christ?

God's Light in Your Life

OPINION

Matt. 5:14–16

Jesus called Himself the Light of the world in John 8:12. And in Matthew 5:14–16, He's telling us that we're the light of the world! He's calling us to spread His light across this dark planet. The sad thing is, many times we're not much of a light at all.

In the world we live in now, it's not cool to talk about Christ. So sometimes we don't stand up for God when we should. We've been sucked into a society where it's best to just "fit in." Sadly, that's what many of us do—just "fit-in." We disregard the life God calls us to live.

As Christians, we should not be this way! Christ tells us that we're the light of the world. But too often when we go out into the world, we either dim our light or turn it off. Ephesians 5:8 says, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (NIV).

Serving God involves giving your life to Him so you can be an instrument in spreading the good news. One way that every single person can be a disciple is by living a life that reflects Jesus' character. Shining the light is not just about attending church weekly, going to prayer meetings, and attending prophecy seminars. It's about living a life that brings honor and glory to God.

As we grow in our discipleship, we must realize that just preaching the Word isn't enough. We must live the Word! We must identify those things that hold us back from being fully devoted to God. If it's a sin we keep committing, ask God for deliverance. If it's a lifestyle habit, allow God to change it. If it's a burden, give it to God. If it's a problem, trust in Him.

As we grow in our discipleship, let us live as we are called—as children of light. Study God's Word. It's our instruction book for life. Pray. It's the divine connection to our Lord. Ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you may be a more effective disciple.

Jesus is coming soon! Let's turn our lights on now. Let's live a life that truly exemplifies the character of Jesus. Today, let God's light be revealed in your life!

Let's turn our lights on now.

REACT

1. Why do we forget to spend time with God?
2. How important is the Holy Spirit in being an effective disciple?
3. What difference does living a life in the light make when it comes to witnessing?

Friday
February 15

Discipleship 101

EXPLORATION

Matthew 5; 6

CONCLUDE

So, are you a disciple of Jesus? It's hard to say, "Yes, I am," because it feels arrogant to consider ourselves in the same company with Peter, James, and John. Besides, being a real disciple requires us to die to our selfish desires. Instead of getting up in the morning and saying, "What do I want to do today?" a disciple asks, "What does God want me to do today?" But remember, a change this dramatic rarely happens all at once. It's a commitment that grows and deepens. Try these activities to continue the discipleship process in your own life.

CONSIDER

- Creating a screensaver for your computer that illustrates the beatitude that means the most to you.
- Coming up with a T-shirt slogan that would identify you as a follower of Jesus.
- Reading through one of the Gospels until you find a text that reveals something about Jesus that you hadn't considered before.
- Choosing one book, a CD, or a video from your collection that you feel is impure and destroying it in a dramatic way—perhaps with a hammer or a blowtorch.
- Discovering something you can do for your neighbors or community that will "let your light shine."
- Finding a personal testimony of a Christian convert on a cassette tape or online. Pay attention to the point where the person was called to follow Christ. How would you have reacted in the same situation?

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chap. 7, "The Test of Discipleship."

Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*; S. M. Anderson, The Disciples Pledge, at <http://www.theboc.com/freestuff/disciplespledge/index.html>.