

# Experiencing Discipleship



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selves and take up their cross and follow me’ ”

(Mark 8:34, NRSV).

# Putting Knowledge Into Practice

## INTRODUCTION

Mark 8:34

“You must practice your piano lesson!” Those are the instructions music teachers give their students at the end of every lesson. Parents also spend time telling their sons and daughters the same thing. Children who forget about practicing their piano lessons know the consequences—they will not be able to perform well in front of their teacher the next time!

People say practice makes perfect. We all know that by doing something over and over again, we finally will be able to do it well. However, in science, practice does not necessarily make something perfect. To prove a concept true or false, scientists set up an experiment. To prevent random errors, they often replicate the experiment and take the average result.

In science class, teachers often have their students do lab work in order to understand scientific concepts and how to apply those concepts to daily life. Doing the experiment helps the students understand how to make the concepts practical.

**Doing the experiment helps the students understand how to make the concepts practical.**

Jesus followed the same method of teaching His students. “He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’” (Mark 8:34, NRSV).

In order to understand science concepts, students must put aside their previous assumptions and follow their professor’s instructions. Likewise, Jesus said that if we want to become His disciples, we have to put away all of our knowledge about right and wrong and fill our mind with the truth about God. Science students have to make science practical by following the teacher’s instructions. Likewise, Jesus instructs His disciples to make His teachings practical by taking up their cross and following Him. Following Him means to accept His instructions as a way of life.

Unfortunately, many people who profess to be disciples of Jesus never put away their concepts about right and wrong. In order for disciples to put Jesus first in their lives, they must put themselves last. For Christians, to become the highest means to become the lowest. This is contrary to worldly belief. However, without putting away worldly concepts, we never will be able to feel and appreciate God’s love. We never will be able to become disciples of Jesus without putting Him first.

# The Ultimate Task of the Church

Sunday  
February 17

## EVIDENCE

Matt. 28:19

Luke tells us that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). How did Jesus accomplish this? He called people and made them disciples.

The early church also called and built disciples:

1. Those who turned to Christ on the Day of Pentecost devoted themselves to the teaching and fellowship of the apostles (Acts 2:42).

2. Apollos had ardently accepted Jesus, but he needed Priscilla and Aquila to further enlighten him (Acts 18:26).

How can we devote ourselves to the teachings of Jesus and His disciples? On many occasions, Jesus taught with parables. He said: We must become as little children (Matt. 18:3, 4) and carry our own cross (Mark 8:34). What do these things mean? We must humble ourselves at the foot of the cross. Experiencing discipleship is to be like Him in character.

The Greek word for *disciple* is *mathētēs*, meaning “a follower,” “a learner.” The disciples were followers of Jesus and learned from Him. This is the primary emphasis of Matthew 28:19. *Making disciples* is the main verb in this verse. The other verbs—*baptizing*, *teaching*—are subordinate.<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate task of the church is making disciples.

It seems that most of us are satisfied doing only the subordinate work of baptizing and teaching rather than the main work of making disciples. We want to teach and baptize, but we forget that the ultimate task of the church is making disciples. Sweazey said, “The church neglecting the follow up for discipleship is the great scandal of evangelism.”<sup>2</sup>

As a church body, one of our goals is to make disciples. A person achieves this goal when he or she lives a consistent Christian lifestyle. When a person changes his or her behavior, we know that that person has integrated Christian beliefs regarding that behavior into his or her daily life.

## REACT

What are the differences between conducting evangelistic crusades and making disciples? What are the similarities?

1. Myron S. Augsburger, *The Communicator's Commentary: Matthew* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), p. 330.

2. Carl M. Sweazey, *Evangelism That Evangelizes!* (Ventura, Calif.; Clark's Printing Co. Inc., 1968), p. 194.

# Born to Be a Disciple

## LOGOS

Matt. 17:1–13; 18:1–4, 24; 28:19, 20; Mark 8:27–30; John 6:41–58

Ephesians 2:10 states that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (NIV).

As Christians, we were reborn to be Christ’s disciples. When they hear the word *disciple*, many people think about Christ’s 12 disciples and about ministers and pastors. But the Bible notes that whoever accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior becomes His disciple.

A disciple is a person who has been born again, joined the church, identified his or her spiritual gifts, and accepted the responsibility of a role in the church compatible with those gifts.<sup>1</sup> As Ellen White wrote: “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”<sup>2</sup>

Peter describes the people of God as “living stones, . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” “A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peo-

ple belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:5, 9, NIV). What a wonderful description of discipleship these verses are. Discipleship is part of the newborn process.

**Personally experiencing discipleship is having a relationship with Christ.**

The only way you cannot be a disciple is to openly refuse to be one.

## Personally Experiencing Discipleship (Matt. 8:27–30)

When Jesus asked His disciples what others were saying about His identity, they reported the various opinions they had heard. When He asked for their opinion, Peter identified Him as the Messiah. Personally experiencing discipleship is having a relationship with Christ. To know Him personally, we must walk with Him, talk with Him, and work with Him. Doing so helps us to make disciples of others. “Personal effort for others should be preceded by much secret prayer; for it requires great wisdom to understand the science of saving souls. Before communicating with men, commune with Christ. At the throne of heavenly grace obtain a preparation for ministering to the people.”<sup>3</sup>

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in

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Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

### **Experiencing the Humble Spirit (Matt. 18:1–3)**

To be a disciple of Christ, we must have a humble, teachable spirit, like that of a child. A humble spirit shows the world that we “are a letter from Christ, . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3, NIV).

### **Experiencing Discipleship Through the Communion Service (John 6:53–56)**

Regarding the importance of communing with our Creator, we read that nothing “is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God. We should show by our daily lives that we have peace and rest in the Saviour. His peace in the heart will shine forth in the countenance. It will give to the voice a persuasive power. Communion with God will ennoble the character and the life. Men will take knowledge of us, as of the first disciples, that we have been with Jesus. This will impart to the worker a power that nothing else can give. Of this power he must not allow himself to be deprived.”<sup>15</sup>

“When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden. Its holy influence will be felt by all with whom we come in contact.”<sup>16</sup>

### **REACT**

1. How do we maintain a personal relationship with Christ in the busy world today?
2. What can you and the church do to help all church members experience discipleship?

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1. James W. Zackrison, *From Spectators to Disciples*, p. 24.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

3. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 149.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

5. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 512.

6. *Steps to Christ*, p. 77.

Tuesday  
February 19

# The Real Partakers of Discipleship

## TESTIMONY

John 13:34, 35

“In this last meeting with His disciples, the great desire which Christ expressed for them was that they might love one another as He had loved them. Again and again He spoke of this. ‘These things I command you,’ He said repeatedly, ‘that ye love one another.’ His very first injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, ‘A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.’ To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love. The command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacrifice. The whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. During every hour of Christ’s sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.

**“This love is the evidence of their discipleship.”**

“This love is the evidence of their discipleship. ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,’ said Jesus, ‘if ye have love one to another.’ When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence.”\*

## REACT

1. What perspective does today’s lesson give regarding doctrine?
2. How does 1 Corinthians 13 describe self-sacrificing love?
3. Think of an irritating situation in which you recently found yourself. Did your reaction display the type of love that shows we are Jesus’ disciples? If not, how could you have reacted differently?

\**The Desire of Ages*, pp. 677, 678.

# The Beauty of Discipleship

## HOW-TO

Acts 18:23

Jesus—while traveling in Judea and Samaria—taught His disciples not just by telling them what to do but also by living out His own instructions. Through His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, He shows us how to help others become His disciple (John 4:1–42):

1. Because Jews and Samaritans hated each other, it was unlikely that this woman would risk a harsh reaction from Jesus by offering to draw water for Him. So He took the initiative by requesting of her the favor of a drink (verse 7).

2. Jesus served her hidden needs with information about the “living water,” her past, and the proper way to worship God (verses 10–24).

3. Jesus did not embarrass the woman regarding her past. Rather, He complimented her on her truthfulness (verses 16–18).

4. Through this information, He allowed the woman herself to draw some conclusions about who He might be (verse 19).

And so by the time Jesus finally reveals His true identity, she is convinced He is the Messiah. How do we know this? She runs back to her village, so eager to tell others that the Messiah has come that she leaves her water jug behind (verses 28–30).

Thus, Jesus showed His disciples then, and us now, how to break down barriers that prevent people from following Him.

Disciples who have been born again learn how to use their talents on behalf of their Teacher so that others also will become disciples (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:7–11; Eph. 4:11–13). Christ’s disciples must always remember that they were reborn to be workers for the kingdom of God, just like the Samaritan woman.

**Jesus did not embarrass the woman regarding her past.**

## REACT

1. How can you incorporate Jesus’ method of discipling the woman at the well in your daily life?

2. How do you think Jesus is helping you realize your full potential as His disciple?

# Humble Discipleship

## OPINION

Matt. 18:1-4

In Matthew 18:1, Jesus asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then calling a child in the crowd to stand, He said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (verses 3, 4).

There are many things that are interesting about children. Here are two:

1. While the disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest, Jesus told them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35, NRSV). Then he took a little child and said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (verse 37, NIV). “The simple trust and loving obedience of a child represent traits of character highly treasured in the kingdom of heaven. Notice that Jesus speaks of ‘little’ children, those who have not learned, from the poor examples set by adults, the sins of doubt and disobedience.”\*

**We must act and behave like  
our Teacher.**

2. Children are like magnets—people are drawn to their simplicity and trust. When we accept Christ as

our Savior and spend time with Him, we learn to follow His teaching. Many times we are busy with activities that benefit only ourselves. We forget to become like little children who attract others to them. We forget that, as disciples of Christ, we must help other people become disciples too.

When we are called to become His disciples, we must learn to act as our Teacher does—even to set aside and forget ourselves so there is only Jesus on our mind and in our heart. We need a continuous relationship with Christ, involving Him in every aspect of our lives (Col. 2:6).

## REACT

Why does today’s world make being like a little child in terms of humility and trust in Jesus even more important?

\*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 639.

# More Than a Fan Club

## EXPLORATION

Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 8:34; 1 Pet. 2:5–9

## CONCLUDE

Discipleship is different from being a member of Jesus' "fan club." Disciples aren't cheering spectators—they're in the game. And they're in it for the long haul, not merely until their Leader's popularity fades. Disciples put Jesus first in their lives by putting themselves last. They are called to create other disciples (learners) who have the same zeal for Jesus.

## CONSIDER

- Creating a 2-D or 3-D model of the wilderness tabernacle, including the courtyard. Label your role as a 1 Peter 2:5 "priest" or "priestess" at each position. (Example: Label the laver "Ask for personal forgiveness and cleansing so that I may intercede for others.")
- Writing a blog entry (or posting an e-mail to a group) that describes an event when someone "witnessed" to you—such as a salesperson who tried to interest you in a product, a friend who tried to convince you to go to a sports event, or even a person of another faith who tried to share that faith with you. Describe what the "witnesser" did effectively, and then what was ineffective.
- Composing a ballad (country or folk style) containing two or three verses and a chorus. Write the song as though sung by Jesus, on His knees at the Last Supper trying to persuade Peter to allow Him to wash his feet.
- Comparing training for your favorite sport to becoming a better disciple.
- Treating yourself to 15 uninterrupted minutes of "fish watching" at a local aquarium. What similarities do you find between the fish and the people for whom Jesus wants His disciples to "fish".
- Listing your "fish"—the people in your life who do not know Jesus. Pray for these people not merely as a Christian but as a disciple of Jesus.

## CONNECT

Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*; Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.