

A Revolution of the Committed

Becoming a Disciple

Session 2

Warm-up Question: As a kid what profession did you want to go into and why? Was there a relative whose line of work you admired?

The Call to Commitment

In the late 1800's Ernest Shackleton, the famous explorer, when he was about to set out on an expedition to the South Pole, put an ad in the London Times, 'Men wanted for hazardous journey to the South Pole. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.' In speaking of it afterward he said that so overwhelming was the response to his appeal that it seemed as though all the men of Great Britain were determined to accompany him. In fact, Shackleton had over 5000 replies to his ad. ¹

We have a tendency in the Western church of Jesus Christ to want to make it easier for people. We're afraid that the message of Jesus Christ and His call to commitment will put some people off. We put coffee cup holders at the back of the seats, and only brew premium coffee. We make the room warm, but not too warm in case we put people to sleep. The music has to be just right, with perfect sound reproduction. The children's classrooms have to have enough toys, with no hint of a stain or blemish on any of them. Our Western culture has permeated our church culture. As a result, we have a marketing mentality. People are used to this. When we think of Shackleton's advertisement, why would this draw anyone? When calling for a commitment, Earnest Shackleton told them that this would not be easy, and only those who were ready to give up their lives for the cause should apply. He wrote, "Safe return doubtful." This would be a trip of great hardship, with a small wage, bitter cold and long months of darkness. Why then did 5000 men respond to such an advertisement?

I think many are looking for something to give themselves to that would live on after their deaths. Men need a challenge. Even though there was a possibility of death, the response was overwhelming and surprising.

However, out of those 5000 people only 27 were chosen for the trip. Advertisements for young men to join the Marines play on this desire for challenge, commitment, hardship, honor and recognition. I would think that if we could have questioned the 5000 responders their main motive would have been the same as those that join the Marines, that of the challenge, glory, hardship, and the desire to be part of something that will live on beyond their death. Many today are aware that the future does not look bright for anyone who has a mind to look at what is happening in the world. It will become increasingly dangerous to be a Christian as we approach the end times, yes, even here in America. There will be increasing pressure to compromise your faith and your values.

What things do you see happening that is pressuring Christians to compromise their faith?

Without a deep commitment to the cause of Christ and an intimate love for the King of Love we will be swept away from the centrality of Christ and obedience to His Word. We are called to go beyond being believers to being disciples. Let me ask you this question, if it were illegal to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence against you? Your answer to that question may shed light on whether you are a believer, or a disciple. I believe that many who have never taken steps toward actually following Christ on the discipleship path will fall away when difficulties come. The Bible says that there will be a time when many will fall away, or apostatize, when the going gets tough in the End Times (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Disciples Are Made Not Born

When you came to Christ, you started on a journey that will continue for the rest of your life. The journey is to know and experience Christ and to be like Him. It is very likely that you knew very little about Christ when you made a commitment to follow Him. You became a Christian and were born again (John 3:3) or born spiritually from above, when you placed your faith in the

¹ Quit You like Men, Carl Hopkins Elmore (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

Lord Jesus. Something happened deep in your soul if you have earnestly and sincerely believed on the finished work of Christ on the Cross. He died in your place for you and as you. He became your substitute, taking the wrath of God that you and I deserved as the just consequences of our sin. You became aware of these truths, and embraced them, and a journey began. Some people become disciples as soon as they believe. It just seems like they hit the ground running as soon as they turn from their sin and believe the good news. Then there are others that, as they grow in love for Christ, move on to become disciples, disowning self and wanting to embody all that they see in the life of Christ. It involves a choice that you make with your will. Will you choose to lay aside all other loves for the sake of Christ? In the New Testament, the name ‘Christian’ is found only three times as a title for believers, whereas the word ‘disciple’ is found more than 270 times. William Barclay writes:

“It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one’s weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, “So and so tells me that he was one of your students.” The teacher answered devastatingly, “He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.” There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few disciples.”²

How would you classify yourself in your early walk with Christ? Were you an out and out disciple from the beginning, or are you still in transition from being a believer to being a disciple?

The common concepts of a ‘disciple’ are found in the expectations that Jesus had with those He called to be His followers.

We will use the acronym F.L.A.M.E. to describe these concepts:

F- FOLLOWER

Come, follow me, Jesus said, and **I will make you** fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

What do you think Jesus meant when he used the words “follow me” to the disciples?

Would you underline the words, *Come, follow me, and I will make you* in the above scripture? He didn’t say go and make disciples at this point—first they were to come to Him, and then to follow Him. In the process of following Him, He would be working in their lives to make them to be fishers of men.

Let me put it this way. If I asked you what you make in your work, if you were an artist, you would probably respond by saying that you were in the business of making paintings. If you were a baker, you would say that you make bread. If you were a chippy you would be making... no, not chips. A chippy is British slang for a carpenter. Jesus was a chippy!—you get the picture. All of us are making something with our lives—I am in the business of making words into sentences in the hope that I am making stronger Christians who will grow in their relationship to Christ. What are **you** making with your life? The passage above is about what Christ is making. If men will follow Him—He is making transformed, empowered disciples. A disciple is a learner—someone who has abandoned their old life to follow Christ and to live their lives in submission to Him and His kingdom purposes. To be powerfully transformed into the image of Christ by the Spirit of God, is to come to Him and follow Him as to His person and His teaching. He will **make us** to become all that we are meant to be. This is Empowered Transformation.

L- LEARNER

Take my yoke upon you and **learn from me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:29).

If we desire to be a disciple, we are first called to “learn Christ” in Ephesians 4:20. The Lord Jesus, while He lived on earth lived a life of modeling behavior. He taught the disciples by on the job training. They watched while He did the work and modeled the behavior. He did not pick His disciples from the local seminary/yeshiva. He chose His disciples by prayer. He didn’t choose super saints. He chose regular guys like you and me. It was His training of the twelve that made them into men of God. All they had was the raw material of a willing

² William Barclay, the Gospel of Luke, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, Pa, Westminster Press, 1956), Page 203.

heart and a teachable attitude. They learned how to be men of God by watching and learning from the Master. It is no different for us today. The Spirit can so show us Christ in the scriptures that we ‘see’ how He lived His life and follow His behavior and example. We are to be like children with our eyes on our Father learning how to follow Christ from seeing the model that He gave us. We “see” Jesus by giving our attention to the Word of God, the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the godly example of others who are also following Christ.

A- APPRENTICE

He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher (Luke 6:39-40).

We are to apply ourselves to living out what we are learning of Christ. We must make sure that the blindness of our previous life outside of Christ is at an end. Only when we can see the way ahead ourselves are we in a position to lead others. There is accountability to what we are learning. People will follow us, so we had better make sure that we are not leading them into a pit. Let us make sure that we are becoming like our teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word apprentice comes from a Latin word meaning to apprehend. We have to hold on with a strong grip to the things we learn, carefully applying them to our life. Our life is connected to others in the body of Christ, and we affect them by the example we give to them.

M- MULTIPLYING MENTOR

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

If we have truly seen and experienced the love of Christ, we will have a hard time keeping it to ourselves. Imagine that you had stumbled on the cure for cancer... could you keep it to yourself? In the same way, a “turned on” Christ follower cannot keep the life changing message to himself. He uses everything in his power to share

the secret that he has found—it is just too valuable to keep to himself. You may not feel that you have a gift to communicate with words the gospel of Christ, but there are a million ways to get the message out. Invest your life, time, money, energy, talents and gifts to get the gospel to hearts that are empty and longing for true life. The Lord says that He will be with us in the endeavor and that it is not dependent on just our own resources. The Lord will supply us our needs if we will step out in faith.

E- EXAMPLE

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you (John 13:15).

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Who is your favorite actor or actress? Please think of talent when you answer this question, and not just good looks.

A good actor or actress brings a character to life. They are able to immerse themselves in the life of a character to the point where they appear to “become” that person. They take on their character’s example of how they lived their life, their mannerisms, speech, and actions. They behave in such a way as to make the viewer believe they are watching the genuine character. The character is real to the viewer, whether the character is fictitious or factual. Spencer Tracey has been nominated the most times ever for the award of best actor (9) and has won the Oscar for best actor twice. No other actor has had so many nominations and been awarded twice. We have been given the life of Christ as a believer, and have the Holy Spirit within us. Whatever your natural talent or abilities, you have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to exhibit the genuine life of Christ. We should all earn nominations for best actor of the life of Christ! It is not merely an act however, we are to “tell His story”, and tell it well. We have been given the greatest message, the greatest story ever told. Let us live up to the challenge of taking Christ’s example of daily living for God rather than live to ourselves and share His Word and His life to all. Live with passion and conviction in such a way that others will want to follow. In seeing the powerful example of Christ in our lives, others will want to tell His story also.

Listen to the words of the Lord:

²⁵ “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:25-26)

²⁴ “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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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 12:24-26).

Both of the passages above speak of dying to self. We are to no longer live for ourselves with the motivating factor in our lives being that of self-promotion. As disciples we are called to live for Jesus Christ and His kingdom purposes. This kind of living is not easy, for we want to pursue our rights, what we want and what is good for us. But a disciple has given up his life into the hands of Christ and is called to lay himself down upon the altar and to give his body, with its many members and all its different desires, as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). C.S. Lewis puts it this way:

The Christian way is different...Christ says, “Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit.”³

Can you think of individuals who have endured risk and hardship in order to accomplish something they believed in? (Past or present examples.) What do you think motivated them to do what they did?

Listen to words from the past:

“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.” (CT Studd, wealthy and famous sportsman in England who became a Christian and gave his life to share the gospel, founding the China Inland Mission.)

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep that he might have what he cannot lose.” (Jim Eliot, Christian missionary and martyr to the Auca Indians).

The Goal of Discipleship – A Revolution of Love

Jesus initiated a unique revolution. He had a vision for a renewed society. But this revolution would not be a political or military movement. He Himself did not seek a political office nor did he outline a political manifesto. He did not trust in military might. He rejected all initiatives of force and violence. He knew that all utopian visions were doomed if they failed to recognize the truth about God and the truth about mankind.

Based on a True Commitment

History has left a sad legacy of utopian experiments that failed to recognize the truth about the nature of God (as He has revealed Himself in Scripture) and have equally disregarded the truth about the nature of man—the corruption of our human selfishness.

Jesus knew the Truth about God and the truth about man. He never solicited support from political or religious leaders, nor did He commit Himself to any human being. John writes in his gospel:

²⁴ “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them (people who believed on Him due to His miracles), for He knew all men, and because ²⁵ He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25).

Rather than being committed to man, **Jesus committed Himself fully to God the Father** for that purpose for which He (the Father) was committed to do in Himself (the Son) FOR MAN: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV).

Jesus demonstrated the self-sacrificing love of God to us.

He said, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21b, KJV). We are to commit ourselves to Christ for that which He is committed to do through us by His Spirit.

We know that He is committed to making disciples

³ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (London: Fontana Books, 1995), pp.163, 164.

through us.

18b "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE" (Matthew 28:18b-20).

The Lord recognized that any revolution that failed to change the thoughts and desires of the human heart would fall short of God's glorious ideal for society.

Can you think of revolutions or attempts to change society in the past that have failed? In these cases, what can you point to as the reason for failure?

"All have sinned. All fall short of God's glorious ideal" (Romans 3:23, TLB).

This is where all other revolutions have failed. The problem of selfishness at the core of the human heart stands in opposition to perfect love. Revolutions can change governments, policies, economics and territorial boundaries, but without the work of God's Spirit changing the human personality from the inside out, there is little difference ultimately.

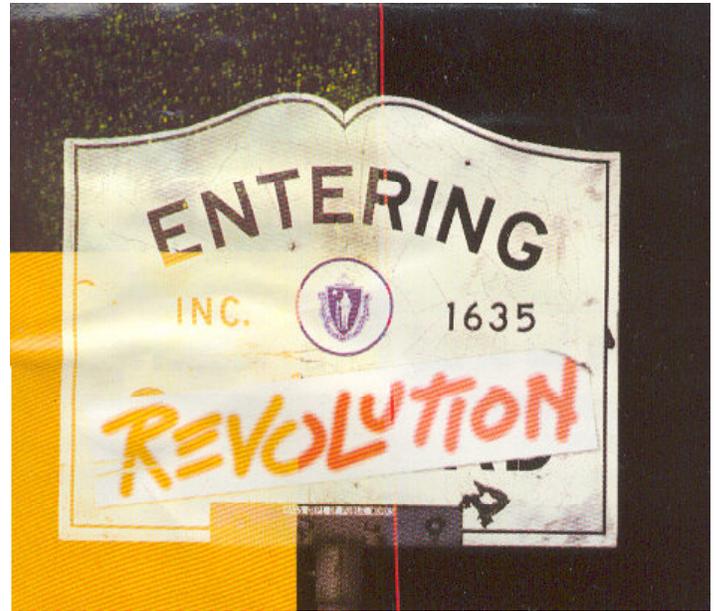
When we repent and believe (switch from living our own way, trust God to forgive us on the basis of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, and submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as the leader of our life), God's Spirit brings God's nature of love into our lives. A Christian is one who has God's Spirit living in them (Romans 8:9).

"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5b).

His Spirit brings a revolution of love to society as one by one, people surrender their lives to Christ and walk in the Spirit.

God's plan is that His people collectively, the church, act as His revolutionary agent in His plan for world redemption. We are His co-laborers (1 Corinthians 3:9); His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) entrusted with His message and agenda for spiritual, social, cultural and personal transformation. Throughout history be-

lievers have been known as "...those who have turned the world upside down..." (Acts 17:6, NKJV).



LET THE REVOLUTION CONTINUE!

This kind of world-shaking discipleship should be a normative expression of the Christian life.

David Watson, an Anglican minister who served at St. Michael le Belfrey's Church in York, England, during the 1970s and 80s, wrote these words in his book, "*Called and Committed*":

"Discipleship sums up Christ's plan for the world. Yet for all its brilliant simplicity, it is the one approach that most western churches have neglected. Instead we have reports, commissions, conferences, seminars, missions, crusades, reunion schemes, liturgical forms- the lot. But very little attention has been given to the meaning of discipleship...The vast majority of western Christians are church-members, pew-fillers, hymn-singers, sermon-tasters, Bible-readers, even born-again believers or Spirit-filled charismatics- but not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually to become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed, and the resultant impact on society would be staggering."

Once the Lord Jesus gets a hold of our lives, the effect IS staggering. A revolution is taking place and... the kingdom of God is advanced with each act of obedience to Christ Jesus, the Lord.

This is what discipleship is about—advancing the kingdom of God through every act of obedience. The purpose of partnering with other followers of Christ is to encourage acts of obedience that will further the kingdom.

Being inspired by life-changing stories of how others have followed Christ whole-heartedly is important to our Christian experience. There are many who have given us examples of how to be a disciple, and I would like to recommend a few books, which have encouraged and inspired me in my walk with Christ.

The Life and Diary of David Brainard
Mere Christianity by C S Lewis

Peace Child by Don Richardson
CT Studd by Norman Grubb
Heavenly Man by Brother Yun
Anointed For Burial by Todd and DeAnn Burke
Chasing the Dragon by Jackie Pullinger
The Cross and the Switchblade by David Wilkerson
The Happiest People on Earth by Demos Shakarian
Like a Mighty Wind by Mel Tari
Through Gates of Splendor by Elizabeth Elliot

Prayer: Father, Thank you for the example of men and women who have committed themselves to you and laid down their lives in complete surrender to your will. Help us to also live in such a way that is pleasing to You. Amen.

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