

2. Answering the Call to Discipleship

Becoming a Disciple Series

The Call to Commitment

In the late 1800s, Ernest Shackleton, the famous explorer, was about to set out on an expedition to the South Pole. He put an ad in the London Times: 'Men wanted for a 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.'

How many people do you think responded to the ad? (The answer can be seen by scrolling further down). Today's advertising companies would sack the team working on that campaign to inspire delegates to join Shackleton's exploration. But Ernest Shackleton was honest about the cost, just as Jesus was honest about what it would cost to follow Him. We tend in the Western Church of Jesus Christ to want to make it easier for people. We're afraid that the Gospel message and the Lord's call to commitment will put some people off. We put coffee cup holders at the back of the seats and only brew premium coffee (Don't get me wrong, I like the coffee in our church). 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. Our Western culture has permeated our church culture, and as a result, we have a marketing mentality to grow the church. When we think of Shackleton's advertisement, why would this draw anyone? When calling for a commitment, Ernest Shackleton told them this would not be easy, and only those ready to give up their lives for the cause should apply. He wrote, "Safe return doubtful." Exploring Antarctica would be a trip of great hardship, with a small wage, bitter cold, and long months of darkness. What would move anyone, we would think, to desire to go with him? In speaking of it afterward, he said that the response to his appeal was so overwhelming that it seemed as though all the men of Great Britain were determined to accompany him. Shackleton had over 5,000 replies to his ad.¹

[What would draw someone to a hazardous journey like this? Why do you think so many men responded to such an advertisement?](#)

Many are looking for something worthwhile to occupy their life that would live on after their deaths. People are looking for a challenge, something that will stretch them. They want their lives to count and be remembered for something. Even though there was a possibility of death, the response was overwhelming and surprising. However, out of those 5,000 people, Shackleton only chose 27 for the trip. Advertisements for young people to join the Marines play on this desire for challenge, commitment, hardship, honor, and recognition. If we could have questioned the 5,000 responders, their main motive would have been the same as those who joined the Marines: the challenge, glory, hardship, and the desire to be part of something that will make a difference. The most inspiring thing you can ever say to somebody is that they have made a difference through their actions. For those with no eternity in mind, the future seems hopeless when they look out at the world around them, and there is an emptiness in many hearts. Even among believers, there is increasing pressure to compromise their faith and values.

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

Without a deep commitment to the cause of Christ and love for Him, we can compromise our faith in Christ and obedience to His Word. Jesus beckons us 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 may indicate whether you are a believer or a disciple. Many have never taken steps toward actually following Christ on the discipleship path. 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. You likely knew very little about Christ when you committed to following Him. You became a Christian and were born again (John 3:3) or born spiritually from above when you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus. If you have earnestly and sincerely believed in the substitutionary work of Christ on the Cross, something happened deep in your soul. Your eyes were opened to what Christ accomplished for you in becoming your substitute, taking the wrath of God that you and I deserved as the just consequences of our sin. You grew aware of these truths, embraced them, and began a journey.

Some people become disciples as soon as they believe. They seem to hit the ground running when they turn from sin and accept the good news. Similar to the stages of growth of a vegetable in the plant kingdom, the last and mature stage is for the plant to die to itself to produce seeds that will multiply. In the same way, there are stages of life that people grow through. As people grow in their love for Christ, they move on to become disciples by disowning themselves 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 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 located 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. Someone was once talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, "So and so tells me 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

[What things do you see happening that are pressuring Christians to compromise their faith?](#)

The familiar concepts of a 'disciple' are found in Jesus' expectations of those He called to be His followers.

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

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 said "follow me" to the disciples?

In the above Scripture, the Lord called them first to Himself: “*Come, follow me, and I will make you.*” Christ didn't say go and make disciples at this point—they were first to build a relationship with Him, to come to Him and follow Him. In the process of following Him, He would work in their lives to transform and make them into 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 are a carpenter, you would be making tables or chairs. All of us are making something with our lives—I am creating words into sentences to make stronger Christians who grow in their relationship with Christ. What are *you building* with your life? The passage above is about what Christ is building. If men follow Him—He is making transformed, empowered disciples. A disciple is a learner who has abandoned their old life to follow Christ and submit to Him and His kingdom's purposes. To be powerfully transformed into the image of Christ is to come to Jesus and follow Him and His teaching. He will make us become all that we are meant to be. His teaching will empower you to be transformed from the inside out.

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 taught His disciples through on-the-job training while He lived on earth. They watched while Jesus did the work and modeled the behavior. He did not pick His disciples from the local seminary/yeshiva but chose His disciples by seeking the Father through prayer. The Lord didn't choose super saints. He chose regular people like you and me. His training of the twelve made them into men of God. All they had was the raw material of a willing heart and a teachable attitude. They learned to be men of God by watching and learning from the Master. It is no different for us today. The Holy Spirit reveals the character of Christ in the Scriptures so 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 to follow Christ from seeing the model 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 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 must apply ourselves to living out what we are learning from Christ. We must ensure that the blindness of our previous life outside of Christ is at an end. Only when we can see the way ahead of ourselves can we lead others. There is accountability for what we are learning. People will follow us, so we had better ensure we are not leading them into a pit. We are to become like our teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word apprentice comes from a Latin word meaning to apprehend. We must hold on to the teachings of Christ with a secure grip, carefully applying them to our lives. Our life is connected to others in the body of Christ, and we affect them by the example we give 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 indeed seen and experienced the love of Christ, we will have a hard time keeping it to ourselves. Imagine 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 he has found—it is just too valuable to keep to himself. You may not feel that you have a gift to communicate the gospel of Christ with words, 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 empty hearts, those longing for real life. The Lord says that He will be with us in the endeavor and that it is not dependent on our resources. The Lord will supply our needs if we 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).

Now for a fun question: Who is your favorite actor or actress? Think of talent when you answer this question, not just for their looks.

A good actor or actress brings a character to life. They can immerse themselves in a character's life to the point where they appear to "become" that person. They take on their character's examples of how they lived their life, their mannerisms, speech, and actions. They behave in such a way to make the viewer believe they are watching a genuine character. The person becomes real to the viewer, whether the character is fictitious or factual. Spencer Tracey has been nominated the most

times ever for the award of the best actor (9) and has won the Oscar for best actor twice. Every believer in Christ should earn the best actor nomination to play the role of the Lord Jesus, for we 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. With us, though, it is not merely an act; we are to "tell His story" and live it out in our lives. We have been given the most powerful message and excellent story ever told. Let us live up to the challenge of taking Christ's example of daily living for God rather than living to ourselves and sharing His Word and His life with all. Live with passion and conviction so that others will want to follow. In seeing the powerful example of Christ in our lives, others will also want to be like Him. Unlike a Hollywood actor or actress, we have the advantage of the person of Christ living in us. We don't need any other "method" to exemplify the life of Christ; the Spirit of Christ lives in us and through us.

Listen to the words of the Lord:

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

²⁴I 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. ²⁵The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever 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. As disciples of Jesus, we are to live for Christ and His kingdom's purposes. This kind of living is not easy, for in our being we gravitate to pursuing our rights, what we want, and what is good for us. But a disciple has given up his rights and his life into the hands of Christ and laid his life down as a living sacrifice upon the altar (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, 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

Listen to the words of two of the great disciples of Jesus from History:

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

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

“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 began a renewed society, but this revolution would not be a political or military movement. Christ did not seek political office, nor did He outline a political manifesto, nor trust in military might. Jesus rejected all initiatives of force and violence, knowing that all utopian visions were doomed if they failed to recognize the truth about God and the truth about humankind.

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:

²⁴But 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 ²⁵He 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 doing 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-sacrificial 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 through us.

¹⁸...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and 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. There have been many attempts in History to change society by man-made means; many of these have resulted in violence and wars because they don’t look at the core problem of the heart:

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

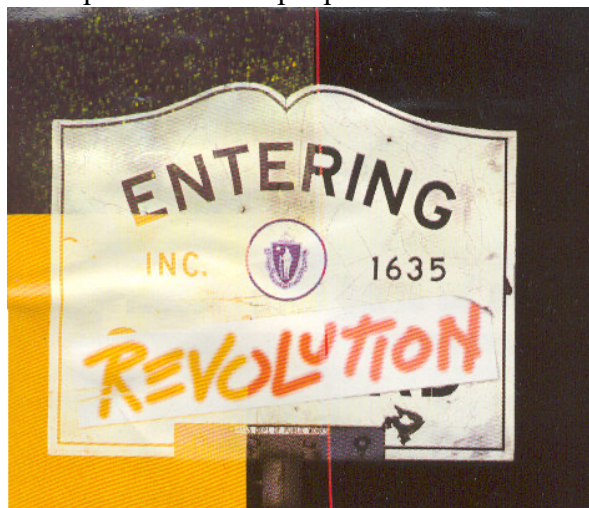
The problem of selfishness at the core of the human heart stands in opposition to perfect love. Revolutions can change governments, policies, economics, and territorial boundaries, but without the work of God's Spirit changing the human personality from the inside out, there is little difference ultimately.

When we repent and believe (switch from living our way) to trusting God to forgive us based on 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 has God's Spirit living in them (Romans 8:8-9).

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 people surrender their lives to Christ and walk in the Spirit.

God's plan is for His people to act as revolutionary agents for world redemption. We are His co-laborers (1 Corinthians 3:9), His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) entrusted with His message and plan for spiritual, social, cultural, and personal transformation. Historically, believers 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. 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. However, very little attention has been given to the meaning of discipleship. Most Western Christians are church members, pew-fillers, hymn singers, sermon-tasters, Bible readers, and 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 become disciples, the Church in the West would be transformed, and the resultant impact on society would be staggering."

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

The Good news about this life of Discipleship is that the Lord Himself walks with us and lives in us to bring change to our character. Remember His call; "Come follow me, and I will MAKE You fishers of men. Are you glad to hear that? If you are feeling weak, He is your strength. If you don't know if you have what it takes to be a disciple, your willing heart and a teachable spirit are the only elements He needs to make you His disciple. He asks us to take His yoke and learn from Him, walk with Him, and in step with Him.

Being inspired by life-changing stories of how others have followed Christ wholeheartedly is essential to our Christian experience. Many have given us examples of how to be a disciple, and I recommend a few books that have encouraged and inspired me in my walk with Christ.

Through Gates of Splendor by Elizabeth Elliot
Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor.
Peace Child by Don Richardson
Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis
CT Studd by Norman Grubb
The Life and Diary of David Brainard
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
Like a Mighty Wind by Mel Tari

Prayer: Father, thank you for the example of men and women who have committed 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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