

FOLLOWING JESUS

If any man serve me, let him follow me... (Jn 12:26)

Lesson 3 Basic Discipleship

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In this third lesson of our Following Jesus course in Disciplo-stewardship, we are studying Basic Discipleship, a lesson that teaches the very practical or hands-on nature of discipleship. In Part 1 we started looking at the Disciplines of Discipleship, which are three: Learning, Submission, and Passion. In Part 2, we pick up with the second Discipline: Submission and finished Roman numeral I. We will finish Lesson three here in Part 3 asking “Why is Discipleship Necessary?” and exploring “The Goal of Discipleship”.

PART 3

II. Why is discipleship necessary?

A. Because Jesus disciplined! He is our Example! — Let’s look at the hallmarks of Jesus’ brand of discipleship.

- First, we know that Jesus prayed (a lot) with His disciples — We are to pray! Prayer obeys Jesus’ command to ASK and it demonstrates our total dependence upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, prayer is communion.
- Second, we know that Jesus taught His men to care about people! — Because of His deep and intense compassion Jesus healed the sick, the lame, and the deformed. On three occasions He resurrected dead people (Jairus’ daughter, the son of the Widow of Nain, and Lazarus, brother of

Mary and Martha). Jesus drove out oppressive demons from others. On two occasions he miraculously fed multitudes of people. Disciples are to CARE about people, and especially spiritually!

- Third, the Master did a lot of general public teaching.
- But fourth, there was one other very, very important ministry that Jesus performed that we might overlook because it was not sensational. **Jesus also taught privately; He disciplined, specific, chosen men!** Remember II Tim 2:2! Paul wrote, *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

What would have happened if Jesus had not trained others to carry His message into the world? If Jesus had not trained (i.e., disciplined) men to continue in His absence, then His influence and wisdom would have left with Him! Consider two examples of leadership philosophy.

- The Pastor-centric leadership philosophy, i.e., the Pastor does it all. In this system, there are few others, if any, trained for leadership. And so when that Pastor leaves, usually there is a great depression and lull in the ministry of the church until a new pastor can be called.
- Then there is the Bible-taught method of discipling those in the body so that they might help the Pastor carry the load, so that they might also be teachers, witnesses, and leaders. Then when the Pastor is called to a new work or is promoted to glory, the body can continue to minister, teach, disciple, and worship until a new under-shepherd is called.

B. Because discipleship is a natural requirement for any job!

Think about it! Even degreed people, trained people, tradesmen, and craftsmen, often and usually have to go through a training period on any new job. This is because they have to be shown how to put their knowledge to work in that particular job application.

In like manner, we might have copious Bible knowledge, but we need to learn how to put that knowledge to practical use in that particular job. THAT is the goal of discipleship!

1. But why just 12?

a. It WAS NOT because some people can't qualify!

- We all can't be United States Marines, because they only take "the few" and "the proud"! [This is said with a bit of HUMOR.]
- We all can't be members of the Country Club because we don't have sufficient income. [This is said with RELIEF!]
- We all can't be linemen for the city utility service because some of us can't do the physical work required. [This is said with THANKFULNESS!]
- We all can't teach advanced math in college because we don't have that knowledge or the ability. [This is said with PRAISE!]
- And so, the world WILL logically, understandably and correctly judge between people and say, "You are qualified and/or able... but you are not!" Not everyone can or should do any particular job. We understand that. It's simply the facts of life!
- But unlike the World, Jesus wants every born-again believer in a discipleship role, and He will use us ALL, if we are willing! Jesus' discipleship training is perfectly designed for every believer, regardless of his or her innate mental or physical abilities, and regardless of his/her experience level. Not everyone can do the same job, but everyone can train for a job!

My point is that discipleship is not some exclusive "Christian club" for only a chosen few close buddies of the pastor, or for the "spiritually elite" (whatever that means!).

b. It WAS NOT because these 12 were the most apt, or intelligent or management-capable.

- The World WILL profile us and pigeon-hole us. That's just reality; and we have to get over it! Furthermore, pigeonholing it is often a logical necessity. Not everyone will be invited to become a member of some of the most prestigious sororities and fraternities because not everyone has the grade point average needed! Not everyone will qualify for the US Olympic team because we are not fit enough and talented enough in a specific athletic event. Not everyone can become a great writer because they don't have the gifts of language and imagination.
- But Jesus has room for every level of talent in His discipleship program because He gives everyone natural abilities and talents, and He gives all believers have at least one spiritual gift (enablement). And Jesus will match the candidate with the right job; He has a position or job in His Kingdom for everyone! And His Spirit will empower us to perform that job. No one is unqualified to learn about and serve Jesus!

So why then did Jesus limit his personal teaching to just twelve? Why wasn't every one of those 5000+, whom he fed on that hillside, instantly enrolled in the "Master's School of Discipleship"?

c. It WAS because, there are very practical delimiters for discipleship.

- The first obvious delimiter is salvation. You can't disciple a "spiritually dead" person! According to the Great Commission we are to teach ONLY **born-again** and **baptized** saints.
 - Disciples must be **born again** because the Word of God is *spiritually discerned* (I Cor 2:14). You have to have the Holy Spirit resident within before you can hope to receive the things of God. [NOTE: Yes, Jesus purposefully chose Judas, knowing that he was lost (Jn 6:70). But this was for God's purpose and plan. Judas was a Divine exception for the purpose of betrayal!]
 - Disciples must be **baptized** because baptism is the first act of submissive obedience to the Master. You can't start to be a genuine disciple of Jesus if you aren't even submissive and obedient to His first command for the newly-saved! Furthermore, discipleship is the work of a local church and performed under the auspices of a local church and a new convert is added to that local church by baptism! So we don't disciple people who are not even a part of our local body.
- The second critical delimiter is our personal choice. We have to WANT to be a disciple. Yes, Jesus intends for all believers to become disciples but He will not force anyone to serve. The cold hard facts are these: the vast majority of those 5000+ whom He fed on that lake shore were following only for the food, or to be healed, or to see the miracles, or for all three reasons. There was absolutely no intent to give up their lives and livelihoods in perpetual service to this Master Teacher.
- And a third important delimiter is motive!

In John 6:28-66 we read that some of Jesus followers asked about signing up for discipleship: *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? (v 6:28).* After Jesus answered, many said, *This is an hard saying; who can hear it? (v 6:60)* and they turned and left! Verse 6:66 reads, *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* Let me as a simple question: Why? The answers are also very simple.

- **First, their motives were shallow and carnal.** Jesus said that many were following only to be fed, to be healed or to see His miracles. They were riding the wave of carnival-like excitement as everyone buzzed about this miracle worker and if he could possibility be Israel's Messiah! It is likely that most of these early followers were like Judas Iscariot. They were interested in The Kingdom only for what it could give them physically—position, power, health and wealth and... NO Romans! Most were likely not even saved; Jesus said point-blank in v 6:64, *But there are some of you that believe not.*
- **Second, their dedication was non-existent.** Discipleship requires singular focus and dedication; the World and its charms must take a very low priority in the life of a disciple.

Remember that Jesus DID choose these 12, i.e., His choice was not random. Jesus knew the hearts of men (Mat 9:4; Lu 5:22; Jn 2:24). He knew in whom He could entrust the deep things of God (yes, He even knew that Judas Iscariot was an impostor from the very beginning).

d. It WAS because discipleship is very personal.

- So again I ask, “Why just 12?” The answer is because discipleship IS personal! It is one-on-one, it is intimate, and it is face-to-face. Discipleship is not easily accomplished in a classroom of 300 or 5000! Consider these transfers of leadership: Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and Paul to Timothy. They were all one-on-one.

Again, this is in contrast to the fact that at times His followers numbered in the thousands! Remember that on two occasions he miraculously fed 5000 and 4000 respectively, and that was likely just the count of men in those crowds. And it is likely that the Sermon on the Mount was preached to hundreds if not thousands.

If any of you went to a large High School or to college you will have probably experienced being in a very large class in contrast to being in a very small class. When I attended college I fortunately took my Organic Chemistry training at Junior College, and our class consisted of about 5 people! We essentially had a personal tutor and he was a very good teacher! I learned so MUCH in that class because of the ability of the teacher to focus upon each class member’s individual needs and questions. I had other acquaintances who went directly to a large University and their Chemistry or Biochemistry class was huge (200-300 people!) with no personal attention from the teacher, no ability to ask questions, and oh how they struggled to learn and to pass!

- And so from that huge initial following Jesus picked out twelve men... just twelve, all baptized disciples of John the Baptizer, and into these twelve He poured His very life. The twelve literally followed Jesus every day, and every hour of the day. Just think about it! They were tutored by God Incarnate! They heard and saw the miracles of God, and unto them were given special privileges and advantages and special tasks and special abilities!
- And then, from among those twelve, it seems that Jesus developed an even closer teacher-disciple relationship with three: James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Simon Peter. These three became Jesus’ close inner circle.
 - These three were invited into the death chamber of Jairus’ daughter and they witnessed the resurrection of this 12 year-old girl from the dead (Lu 8:40-42)!
 - These three were invited to climb to the top of a mountain with Jesus and consequently they saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes! They also got to meet Moses and Elijah (Mat 17)!
 - And when Jesus went into the garden to pray on the night of His arrest He invited these three to accompany Him further into the garden (Mat 26:36, 37).
- And then, from these three, it seems that perhaps one disciple, John, was the closest of all. In several places in John’s Gospel we read John referring to himself as that disciple whom Jesus loved (e.g., Jn 13:23; 20:2, 21:7, 20). It was John who sat closest to Jesus during their last Passover supper and it was John who leaned upon Jesus’ chest (Jn 21:20). And it was John to whom Jesus gave charge of his mother.

Now, Jesus wasn’t playing favorites! God doesn’t play favorites; He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). And it wasn’t that Jesus did not love the others, for indeed Jesus loves all mankind with the deepest love that only God can generate.

And so, distilled from all of this discussion, are two great spiritual principles:

First, those who are more devoted WILL receive greater blessings and privileges, simply because God blesses properly motivated obedience!

Second, those who use God’s blessings for God’s Kingdom will be given more blessings to use!

This is the principle taught in the parables of the talents and pounds. Remember that the slothful steward who took his master's talent and hid it in the ground was removed from stewardship and his talent was taken and given to the most industrious steward. Why? The Lord of the Harvest will not have His resources wasted! He wants His resources to be properly invested and to bear dividends.

And so in review, "Why just 12?". Well, it was NOT because some people can't qualify! It was NOT because these 12 were the most apt, or intelligent or management-capable. It WAS because, there are very practical delimiters for discipleship. And it WAS because discipleship is a very personal process.

Now let's consider the second thought under point "B. Because discipleship is a natural requirement for any job!"

2. Taking advantage of training requires commitment!

- Discipleship WILL separate the saved from the lost!

- Years ago I was told a real-life story of a husband and wife who signed up for a discipleship class in a Baptist church. The husband was committed, but there was some concern about the wife. As the instructor got into the lesson on salvation, one of the assignments was to write out a personal testimony of salvation. When the task was assigned, the wife looked at the instructor, literally horrified, and asked, "Who will see this?" That was the last time the lady was in class, and if I recall correctly, just about the last time that she attended church at all!

No one can see into a heart, but in my judgment, this woman's true spiritual condition was revealed when she was faced with a commitment to either follow Jesus, or to continue in her charade. In all likelihood this lady was unsaved.

- Discipleship WILL separate the committed from the uncommitted

- You know, we live in a seeker-sensitive society, where everyone is a winner and no child is left behind (this is said with great sarcasm!). The problem with all of this socio-speak is that it is bogus! It does not fit with REALITY! In this life's race everyone is not a winner! By DEFINITION, not everyone can be a winner! There is only one winner; everyone else comes in behind.

- But in the Christian's life-race (Hebrews 12:1, 2) we ALL CAN BE WINNERS! The delimiter is COMMITMENT! Do we want to be in Jesus' inner circle, like Peter, James, and John? Or are we content to just be among the 12? Or are we content to just get a free meal once in a while, like the 5000? Discipleship separates and segregates... not in the sense of worth, but in the sense of practical usability.

And being committed, disciplined, and motivated doesn't mean that Jesus loves you more. But it does mean that He will probably be able to use you more and bless you more!

- Any training regiment separates

- A rigorous training regiment separates the dedicated from un-dedicated. Military boot camp is a good example. Not every recruit that enters boot camp is able to graduate. Some wash out. Now, I understand that some just may not have the physical means to endure the rigor, but others are not willing to sacrifice and to do the work (and eliminate all distractions from their lives so that they can concentrate on their work).

The Lord's discipleship program separates those who are willing to give up the World from those who are not willing to give up the World! It did in His day on the Earth and it still does today. I don't want to sound elitist, but here is the stark truth: God can't and won't use lazy, undisciplined, and distracted would-be disciples.

- And, although it is not today politically correct, some ARE left behind! I think of the man in the Gospels whom we label "the rich young ruler" (Mat 19:16-22 and Lu 18:18-23). It seems this man came hoping that Jesus would agree with his self-assessment. He believed himself to be a

good or righteous man, worthy of eternal life. But Jesus taught him that his covetousness and his love for mammon was barring his door to Heaven!

And so Jesus invited him to find out what a real life of discipleship was all about. Mat 19:21 reads, *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* Matthew and Luke tell us that when He heard Jesus' prescription, *...he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions* (Mat 19:22; also Lu18:23).

And I want you to note a very significant point: Jesus didn't run after him. He was left behind! But only because He chose to be left behind. Jesus knew his heart! He knew that there first had to be a heart change.

- And so, in summary, discipleship IS a natural requirement for ANY job. Training is applied selectively and personally. Training also separates those who are serious from those who just want to play the game (as it were). Jesus taught the multitudes, yes... but He discipled only those who were committed to BE disciples. When Jesus called, Peter, James, and John they left their fishing business and followed! When called, Matthew walked away from his cushy job in the Roman IRS and followed Jesus.

This is why, when we visit with a potential enrollee in the class, we stress commitment. It is going to get long and probably a bit old! Devoting a year or more to a course of study is significant. And so we don't twist arms. But when people say "Yes, let's do it!", we explain that Jesus expects the disciple to commit to complete the lifelong training. And our local church leadership expects you to commit because JESUS expects all of us to commit! It's what discipleship IS!

And now our third point answering the question, "II. Why is discipleship necessary?" is...

C. Because Jesus commanded discipleship

- After His resurrection Jesus met with His followers on several occasions over a 40-day period. During those meetings Jesus gave them a commission, and it is recorded in several locations in the New Testament. The most famous recording of the commissions is found in Mat 28:18-20.

18 *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*

19 *Go ye therefore, and **teach** (make disciples of) **all nations,***

***baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

20 ***Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:** and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

The word translated *teach* in the v 19 phrase "*teach all nations*" is from *math-ayt-yoo'-o*, and it means "to disciple". The noun "disciple" in the Greek is *math-ay-tes*. But, you can't disciple a lost man or woman. So the first command in the commission by default, deals with evangelization. WE MUST TEACH THE GOSPEL! After a person is saved, we then need to indoctrinate them in at least the rudiments of the faith.

After salvation a new disciple is to be baptized. This is the watershed event in the life of any believer. It is really where the new believer publicly commits; it is the swearing-in ceremony. He or she puts on the uniform and launches out in service.

The second instance of "teach" (*teaching*) in v 20 is from a different word: *did-as'-ko*, meaning "to give instruction" (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). This is that life-long indoctrination and learning to which any true disciple makes him/herself available. It consists of both personal devotion/study and sitting under corporate preaching/worship.

So, the three parts of the Great Commission are...

- EVANGELIZATION (teaching the Gospel with basic discipleship training)
- BAPTIZING (publicly putting on the uniform)
- DISCIPLESHIP (lifelong discipleship indoctrination, learning, applying and serving)

- Think about it... there CAN be evangelism without discipleship.

Two examples are when Philip was sent to preach the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way back home after worshipping in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26-40) and when Jesus saved the Demoniac of Gadara. Isn't it interesting that Jesus did not, indeed time would not permit Him, to disciple every person whom He personally saved during His ministry.

But there can never be discipleship without evangelization! You can't disciple a lost person!

D. Because of the magnitude of the task

- Let me ask you a question: "What is long enough to pass around the world 2 1/2 times and grows by 5 miles each day?" The sobering answer is, "The line of people lost without Christ, and on their way to an eternal Lake of Fire".

Indeed as Jesus testified, the fields are already white unto harvest. And sadly, the facts of life are that most of the World's population will refuse the free gift of salvation. Jesus Himself testified to this solemn fact in Mat 7:13, 14: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, **and many there be which go in thereat:** 14 **Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, **and few there be that find it.*****

- However in God's wisdom and foreknowledge He places DISCIPLES strategically in this world to intersect the paths of those whom He knows will be open to the gospel. Seekers WILL BE FOUND, e.g., the Ethiopian Treasurer, Cornelius the Centurion and Lydia the merchant-woman. And when they are found they will discover that they HAVE BEEN THE SOUGHT ONES all along! This is not Calvinistic predestination but the sovereign love of God seeking out those who will be open to the Gospel. Disciples are called to be witnesses of His love. We are called to warn the World of God's impending judgment upon sin and sinners. Disciples preach to all... and the Holy Spirit woos all.
- But one man cannot accomplish this task. Subsequently, Jesus explained that His disciples would do greater works than He himself did.

- **Jn 14:12** *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

Of course we understand "greater" to mean greater in scope. Because of our increased numbers and our dispersed locations, we will be able to come into contact with more people than Jesus did during his short tenure on Earth because He was restricted only to a 3.5 year ministry in Israel and her coasts.

- Consider how evangelism PLUS discipleship is far superior to just evangelism alone. Evangelism is additive in nature but adding reproductive discipleship to evangelism (when you make every believer an evangelist!) it makes for geometric expansion! Discipleship does not just add... it multiplies. Do you think that just maybe Jesus knew exactly what He was doing?

And now our fourth point answering the question, "II. Why is discipleship necessary?" is...

E. Because genuine disciples of Christ reproduce themselves effectively.

- What is meant by this statement? Here is the thought... Some born-again believers have little impact in the Kingdom of Christ. Other saved people have great impacts in the Kingdom of Christ. What makes the difference? The difference is usually discipleship!
- When people are discipled (whether through a class, or one-on-one, or by individual dedicated effort) they usually do "catch the vision". They realize that our mission in life is no longer just to live and play and eat and sleep! No, our mission in life as born-again disciples of Jesus Christ is to glorify God through worship, to spread the good news, to live a God-honoring lifestyle, to warn of God's impending judgment, and to disciple those who repent and believe. Our goal is to reproduce ourselves spiritually.
- What effect did trained and Holy Spirit empowered men have on the World in the days immediately

after Jesus' ascension? From the mouths of unbelievers we discover that they had turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). They were having an impact because they knew HOW to make an impact. They were disciplined by Jesus Christ, the greatest Teacher of all time.

III. The goal of discipleship? — Very simply and succinctly, the goals of discipleship are...

- **To equip ourselves!** Paul commanded Timothy, *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. Combatants have little chance to defeat an enemy, let alone SURVIVE the war, without dedication to training. Life is hard and Satan is deadly. He doesn't just want you out of the fight, he wants you destroyed! Without a hardened commitment to Christ, we won't make it in this Christian life.
- **To train others.** We are out to reproduce ourselves spiritually and then grow new converts up in the Lord (i.e., disciple them). Paul details this process in II Tim 2:2. How many spiritual generations can we find in this one verse?

- **II Tim 2:2** *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

There is the "me"; that is Paul. That's one. Timothy is the "thou". That makes two. Then there are Timothy's disciples called "faithful men". That's three. And finally there are the "others" who those faithful men will disciple. That's four. In this one command we see Paul impacting at least four spiritual generations.

- But there is of course a difference between teaching and training. Teaching is what a Teaching Assistant does in Basic Chem 101 in a 300-plus-sized Freshman class. Training is what a Drill Instructor does with a class of recruits. Training is what Jesus did with just twelve men! Jesus tutored them, He invested in them with hands-on instruction, and he entrusted them with the most important task in the World, which is to evangelize and then disciple!

In that same way, Jesus is investing in YOU, and ME so we can in turn, invest in others!

- As we conclude this lesson I want you to hear the question that Jesus is asking every born-again believer, "Will YOU be my disciple?" This is a significant question because many followed Him, but few became disciples!

*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit;
so shall ye be my disciples - John 15:8*

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Assignments for our next Lesson:

- **Memorization:** Memorize II Tim 2:2 and Matthew 28:18-20.
- **Reading:** Read John 1 each day this coming week. This will help us prepare for our next lesson.
- **Meditate:** Study and **meditate** through Lesson 2, The Three Keys of True Discipleship. Visit it once each week through our entire discipleship course.