

Discipleship

Patterns of Discipleship

Lesson #13 for March 29, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 6:12,13; 16:19-31; 17:4,5; 18:9-14; Colossians 1:14-20; 1 Timothy 5:16.

1. During this quarter we have discussed issues in “discipleship.” This final lesson focuses on ways we can reach out to those who may feel disenfranchised, marginalized, or perhaps just not a part of the “in crowd.” We will observe how Jesus related to the rich, the poor, lepers, the blind, Pharisees, and publicans (tax collectors). Is our church and our Sabbath School socially-conscious, ethnically-sensitive, and disciple-producing?
2. Repeatedly, we see words in the Gospels such as Jesus “pitied” or “He had compassion” on individuals or even crowds. Jesus did not embarrass even those who deserved it! Think of the story of Simon and Mary Magdalene! (Luke 7:36-50) The woman taken in adultery and those who brought her to Jesus! (John 8:1-11) And what about Peter? (Matt 26:57,58,68-75; Mark 14:53,54,66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:12-18,25-27; John 21:15-19)
3. What is the relationship between forgiveness and salvation? Is there a relationship? A relationship is assumed by many Christians. Jesus forgave the paralytic who was lowered on a stretcher into His presence before he said anything. (Mark 2:1-12) Jesus also forgave those who were crucifying Him, (Luke 23:34) and they did not ask either. To many Christians, forgiveness is the key to salvation. To many, if we can just have all our sins forgiven and the “slate wiped clean,” then we are “safe to save.” Is that really true? Does God need to be “pleaded with” in order to forgive? Jesus forgave before He was asked!
4. Read Luke 17:3-5; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; 4:32; Colossians 1:14-20. In these verses we can see that God’s forgiveness is unlimited. It is based on His giving His Son who in turn gave His life for us. That forgiveness and the “cross experience” “sets us free” and brings the entire universe together. **What does forgiveness do for the beings in the rest of the universe who have never sinned? How does forgiveness help them?** Or does it?
5. Read Mark 1:40-45. Very early in Jesus’ Galilean ministry, He healed a leper. Remember that lepers were not supposed to get near other human beings. Everywhere they went, they were supposed to cry, “Unclean.” They were not supposed to touch another human being, and no other human being was supposed to touch them. But Jesus touched that leper and made him clean. That leper was so excited about what Jesus had done that he went everywhere and told everyone. As disciples, are we prepared to “move among” and touch the “undesirables” of the world?
6. Why do you think Jesus told the two demon-possessed men from Gadara to tell everyone what Jesus had done for them, but He told the leper not to tell anyone?
7. Read Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Often, we do not recognize how startling that story was to the people who heard it first. To a Jew of Jesus’ day, being rich was proof that one was blessed by God because when God blessed people, they were rich. So, in their view the rich man was a “saint” while Lazarus—a beggar whose wounds were licked by the dogs—was among “the worst of sinners.” How could he possibly be saved and taken to the “bosom of Abraham” while the rich man was lost? In their view, that was totally wrong!
8. Read Luke 18:9-14. Once again, Jesus compared two people who were on opposite ends of the “saint” scale! Pharisees were “saints” and tax collectors were “scum”! How could the tax collector be blessed and forgiven while the Pharisee was not? Did the Pharisee even need

forgiveness? Are there people in your church or your community that everyone considers to be “saints” that might not do so well in the coming judgment? What about those who are considered to be “sinners”?

9. How would you score your church or yourself on compassion and forgiveness, reaching out to the marginalized and ostracized, encouraging diversity and acceptance, or participating in the work of ministry and prayer?
10. Why do you think so many cultural groups are ethnocentric? Do you know any cultural groups that are not ethnocentric? Is it possible for church groups to get beyond bigotry and selfishness and to honestly reach out to others not of their own group?
11. Often we think of the ancient Israelites as descendants from a single man—Abraham—and remaining a relatively pure people down through the generations. But, Joseph married an Egyptian; Moses married a Midianite; all of the sons of Jacob married Canaanites, as far as we know; Salmon married Rahab, a Canaanite; and Boaz married Ruth, a Moabite. Because we tend to trace the lineage through the male side and those males were descendants of one man, we sort of automatically assume that it was a pure line. Anything but!
12. At the end of time, there will only be two classes that really matter—the saved and the lost! If we are among the saved, then we need to be doing our best to woo those who are lost.
13. Mahatma Gandhi, although not a Christian, once said to some Christian missionaries:

It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you... it is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words.

What do you think about his advice? What reasons can you think of to agree with him? Are there some reasons why you would disagree with this statement?

14. How well does your “living example” speak for the church and for Christ?
15. Read Matthew 24:14. We are called upon to spread the good news to the entire world. If every Christian did just what you are doing for Christ in your life today, how quickly would the gospel be spread?
16. We certainly recognize that not all Christians are the same. How does God deal with people of different talents and different skills within the church? Read Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12:14-22; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:17-20. Paul made it very clear that God needs different kinds of people. He also made it very clear that each of us must not remain as a little child. Instead, we should grow up and mature, learning how to spread the gospel, the good news, of “the cross” to every nation and kindred.
17. Remember that our little world is the “theater of the universe.” (1 Corinthians 4:9) We cannot, we must not, allow the pastor to do all the disciple-making. Every church member must become involved, using the skills which he or she has to draw people to Christ. None of us can claim that we have less training than the two formerly demon-possessed men at Gadara. (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5.1-20; Luke 8.26-39) And they attracted thousands to Jesus when He came back to their territory the next time. (Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8.1-10)
18. What are you doing as an individual church member to reach out particularly to those who may feel left out or marginalized in your society? Are you personally reaching out to them? Are you praying for their salvation? Jesus was God, but whenever He had something important to do, He

thought it was necessary to spend hours in prayer and in communion with His Father in preparation. (Luke 5:15;16; 6:12,13; 9:28-31) Do we do that?

19. Are we actively praying for the latter rain? Are we “wrestling” with the Holy Spirit, requesting Him to assist us and guide us in reaching out to others?
20. As we look back over this series of lessons, we hope that you remember the challenge with which we started: to better understand the “Larger View.” If you missed that introduction, please go to our website—www.theox.org—and review the handouts posted on the Sabbath School page for 1st Quarter 2008. Under the heading, The “Larger View” - A “Picture” of God, are the handouts, “Introduction: A New Direction” and “What Kind of Person Is God?”
21. ***So what have we learned so far?***
22. Each of us has a set of beliefs. We try to fit our beliefs together into a logical whole known as a “paradigm.” Most of us have a very difficult time dealing with data or bits of evidence which do not seem to fit into our paradigm of ideas. (Luke 18:34) Before jumping up and following an “itinerant” preacher/teacher, what kind of evidence would you want to have?
23. Can you think of a person—a teacher, pastor, or friend—in your past who has had an enormous influence on your life and your beliefs? What was it about that person that influenced you?
24. Try to imagine what kind of “picture” of God was worshiped by Abraham, Job, Moses, and the disciples whom Jesus called. Compare your own picture of God. Is it the same?
25. What does it mean to you that Jesus “died for you”? The disciples had no idea whatsoever that Jesus would be dead less than a couple years after He called them. In the beginning, what were they looking forward to as followers of Jesus?
26. We believe that the core idea of the great controversy—and the core idea of Christianity—is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be. If we really get to know Him, we will see that to “know Him is life eternal.” (John 17:3) We cannot imagine anything more exciting! But Satan has done everything he can possibly do for the entire history of our planet to misrepresent God and to distort our views of His character and government, and thus, to get us to fear Him, dread Him, or even hate Him.
27. God is love. To become like Him, we need to learn to love. God created us male and female so that we could learn to love and appreciate beings that are different from ourselves. *Viva la difference!*
28. God created marriage and the Sabbath as twin institutions to teach us about love and intimacy. In marriage and in our homes, we learn love and intimacy on a human level (“horizontal”); through the Sabbath, we are supposed to learn love and intimacy with God (“vertical”).
29. If we cannot learn to love and appreciate beings that are different from ourselves, we have not yet understood the most basic principle of Christianity.
30. Many people believe that the basic principle of Christianity is a legal one. They explain that Christ died “to pay the price” for my sin. Through “justification” God declares me “right” through a legal process. I then have the “legal right” to a place in heaven. This approach is ultimately very selfish. One scholar who criticized Seventh-day Adventists for their theology put it this way: “When I get to heaven, if even God asks me how I got there, I will show Him my legal right to be there!”
31. God’s goal is to “love us into the kingdom”—not to provide some basis on which we can selfishly demand our right to be there!

No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the

influence of an unselfish life. **The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.** {MH 470.1}

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. **This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan.**

This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. {DA 22.1}

32. It is very difficult for selfish human beings to reach out to individuals who are basically different from themselves and truly love them. But, that is the only context given us in the human setting in which to really learn love. Jesus apparently treated all human beings alike. He did not display any obvious bias or prejudice. Can we learn to be like that? Is it possible in our day for human beings to really love other human beings? Even their spouses? If we had better marriage relationships, could we serve better as witnesses for God?
33. What would happen if those of us with the "Larger View" had the most loving, caring, and committed marriages in the world? What if we had no bias or prejudice against any other human being? Would people notice? Would we be correct witnesses for the "truth" about love—the very essence of Christianity (1 Corinthians 13) and God (1 John 4:8,18)?
34. Those of us who adhere to the broader, larger, "great controversy" perspective of the plan of salvation as we see it presented in Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White are only a small group of people by the world's standards. What would we do if Jesus walked into our Sabbath School class and said, "I'm looking for a group of 21st-century disciples! Are you ready to give up everything and follow Me?" What attracts us to that view?
35. Historically, our church has been unusually successful at winning new converts. But, we have not done nearly as well at keeping them in the church. Why do you think that is?
36. The God of the entire universe wants to be our Friend. More than that, He wants us to tell others of the advantages of that friendship. We are to go into the world to make "disciples," to baptize them, and to teach them. (Matthew 28:18-20) Are we proud to be representatives of Jesus?
37. A real Christian is not just someone who agrees to a certain set of doctrines. Those doctrines are to teach us about the Person who is our best Friend. They describe the kind of world we will live in eventually! Are we prepared to tell others what Jesus has done for us?
38. These are just a few of the issues that we have looked at in this series. Do we understand God better? Are we closer to being His friend?

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Last modified: February 10, 2008

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