

## *Discipleship*

# **Experiencing Discipleship**

Lesson #8 for February 23, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 17:1-13; 18:1-4; 24; Mark 8:27-30; John 6:43-58.

1. In this lesson we will discuss some of the highs and lows of the challenging experiences that the disciples went through. By looking to Jesus and how He dealt with His human disciples, we also may be changed—even transformed—by “beholding” Him.
2. In this lesson we will discover how difficult it is even for God to convince human beings to move beyond the normal, selfish human paradigm to a God-like, loving paradigm.
3. For the best illustration of how difficult it was for Jesus to try to convince His disciples of the true nature of His kingdom, we should turn to Acts 1:6 (*GNB*): “When the disciples met together with Jesus, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time give the kingdom back to Israel?’” Even after the crucifixion and resurrection, they still found it very difficult to think beyond their selfish goals.
4. How often do we do things out of pure love? How difficult is it for us to do something which is not basically selfish?
5. What does it mean to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus? (See Mark 8:34)
6. We live in a world where almost everything people do and say is motivated by selfishness, personal ambition, or pride. Selfishness seems to be the natural human condition. How can we as Christians get beyond that and experience real love? Clearly, it does not happen by accident or even by knowing certain facts or believing in certain doctrines.
7. Read John 6. Jesus had been working in Galilee for about one year. He had healed, preached, and performed many miracles. The excitement over His ministry had reached such a level that He could no longer go inside a synagogue or a building because it would not hold the huge crowd. Even when He tried to escape from the crowds, they would follow Him in massive numbers. After speaking to them and healing them for a whole day, He miraculously fed nearly 20,000 of them. (See Mark 6:30-44) But the next morning, back in Capernaum when Jesus tried to get them to look beyond their purely physical needs to the spiritual nature of His kingdom, they rejected Him.
8. What does it mean to “eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus”? Jesus was telling us that no selfish, typical human behavior will get us into the kingdom of God. We must “immerse” ourselves in experiencing Christianity. We must see in the life, experience, and death of Jesus what it means to be truly “loving.” We must study each of the experiences in the life of Christ until we understand it and try to practice it, as applicable in our day, in our lives.
9. Just as food enters our bodies, is digested, and becomes a part of our physical body, so the good news about Jesus and the Father must permeate every aspect of our thinking until our behavior becomes like Theirs. That is what it means to be a “true” disciple.
10. In our competitive, dog-eat-dog, modern world, it may seem impossible to actually practice Christian love without being destroyed by selfish people around us. Can we do it?
11. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.-- Ellen

G. White, *the Desire of Ages*, page 389.

12. Because Jesus would not meet their expectations and do what they believed the Messiah was supposed to do, most of the Jewish people rejected Him. They could not get beyond their selfish motivations. We look back on that experience and are inclined to think, "How foolish of them!"
13. Very soon after the feeding of the "5000," Jesus traveled with His disciples to Caesarea Philippi where He began to ask them what people really thought of Him. Then He turned to the disciples themselves and asked, "Who do you think I am?" Apparently, Peter had begun to get a glimpse of the truth about Christ and stated, "You are the Christ, (the Messiah) the Son of the living God." It looked like Jesus was accomplishing what He came to do. They had actually acknowledged Him as the Messiah. So, why did He tell them not to tell anyone? (Matthew 16:20) Even the disciples had such a distorted view of what the Messiah was supposed to do, and such a selfish attitude about how they would be members of His kingly court, that, if Jesus had allowed them to tell people that He was the Messiah, they would have given the wrong message and the people would have understood it incorrectly.
14. Then Jesus turned immediately to speak about what He really had come to do—to answer the questions in the great controversy, to suffer and die, to defeat Satan, and once again to make the universe a safe place in which to live. The disciples were completely taken aback by that message. They could not accept it. (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-9:1; Luke 9:22-27) What did the disciples understand when Jesus said, "You must take up your cross"? Remember that the cross was an instrument of Roman torture.
15. What does it mean to "take up the cross"? Does it mean that we must give up everything that we enjoy? Does it mean that Christians are never to have any fun? Does it mean that our life is supposed to be a terrible struggle—even to the point of persecution? Does it mean that all those around us will despise us? What is Jesus actually calling us to be?
16. If we truly experience "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus," that is, beholding Him and thinking about Him until we are actually transformed to become more like Him, do we in turn become potential "bread" for others?
17. Jesus said that we should become like children. (Matthew 18:1-4) What characteristic of children is most important? What characteristic of children is it that Jesus was condoning? Notice this quote from the lesson for Monday, February 18: "We must have the conversion that Jesus talked about, and conversion involves becoming like children, believing in what we do not fully understand. Plus, if we fully understood, then where would be the role of faith?"
18. Was Jesus asking us to take a leap of faith? What do we mean when we talk about a "leap of faith"? When we move forward in the Christian life based on faith, is the important fact that we are leaping, or that our faith is based on all the evidence that we can accumulate at that point in time? If faith is a word we use to describe a relationship with God and we truly want to know Him more and more, is that a leap of faith? Or is just a superficial knowledge enough so long as we are willing to "leap"?
19. One of the great appeals that Christian evangelists have used for many years is the idea that Christ died *for me*. Does that sound selfish? Does God have to make appeals to our selfishness, at least in the initial phases of our relationship, because those are the only motives that we can understand? Is it important for us to understand that Christ died primarily to answer the questions that Satan raised in the great controversy and to clarify the truth about the character of God? That does not leave out our salvation! It is what makes our salvation possible! If we never come to understand the truth about God and reach the place where we seek to become like Him, then we have not yet fully understood the plan of salvation.

20. Salvation goes far beyond “just some legal act” which God carries out and, somehow, miraculously makes us savable. Salvation means that we come to have such a relationship with Jesus Christ that we want more than anything else to become like Him, to live with Him forever, and we believe fully and completely the truth about God as He represented it in His life and death.
21. If we have that kind of relationship, then we, in turn, will bear fruit to His glory. (Matthew 5:16)
22. Read Matthew 17:1-13. Why did God choose to invite three of His disciples to experience the transfiguration? What were they to learn from the transfiguration? What are we supposed to learn from it? Were the disciples at that time still not sure that Jesus was the Son of God? Approximately 6 months later on crucifixion weekend, did Peter, James, and John think back to the transfiguration? On that desperate Sabbath, did they think that all was lost? What did they think was the purpose of the transfiguration? On Thursday evening they had all run away. Jesus had repeatedly tried to warn them that such events were coming, but they could not understand it! (See Luke 18:34) What further evidence could God possibly have given them?
23. What further evidence do we need to convince us that Jesus is the most important thing in our lives?
24. Jesus performed incredible miracles before their eyes. If you had seen Jesus walk on water, feed thousands of people miraculously, calm the storm with a word or wave of His hand, and be transformed into a Glorious Being of Light, could you honestly ask for any more evidence?
25. Jesus sought desperately to get His disciples to understand that not only would He go through a terrible crisis and face the toughest test that any human being has ever faced, but also that His followers would also face very tough times in the future. (See Matthew 24)
26. In fact, the tough times would be particularly difficult at the end of this world's history. Do we see false christs and false prophets around us in the world today? What type of manifestation would you expect to see from such false persons? Are you ready to stand up, unshaken, for the one you love despite being hated, even arrested, and watching many of your fellow Christians lose their faith? Are you ready to look the Devil in the face and say unequivocally that you know the truth and that he is not the true Christ, not the true Messiah? Do you have a faith that will keep you from being deceived or misled? What does it take to develop such a faith?
27. The only way to clearly identify what is false is to have a very clear understanding of what is true.
28. Read John 21:3-12. Once again, Jesus demonstrated that He had control over nature. What do we need to learn from that? In our day could we place our trust in Jesus and move forward without fear of losing our job or our support? Are we afraid to witness for Christ because of what other people might think of us?
29. Christians have repeatedly suggested that if the Holy Spirit would descend upon them, the work could be finished quickly. Why doesn't He do that? We have already suggested that the disciples had a completely distorted picture of what the Messiah was supposed to do and be—and that was why they were told not to tell anyone about Jesus. Is our vision of Christianity still so distorted that God cannot bless us as we are telling it to others? How well have we done in telling the world the truth about Jesus and the Father?

© 2007 Kenneth Hart, M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.***  
[Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last modified: January 8, 2008

C:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Discipleship\SS-Disciple-8-2008-02-23.wpd