

## ***The Christian Life*** ***Discipleship***

Lesson #10 for June 6, 2009

Scriptures: Exodus 18:13-27; Matthew 4:19; 9:9; Mark 3:13-19; 8:31-38; Romans 8:18.

1. This lesson focuses on what it means to be a disciple. What is a disciple? It comes from the Greek word *mathatas* which comes from a related verb meaning “to learn” and means “a learner,” “a pupil,” “an adherent.” *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 280.
2. Christians are supposed to be “lifelong learners.” (This is a class on continuing education in Christianity.) But to be a disciple means more than just to be a learner. A disciple is a committed follower of the ways of Jesus Christ. There are many suggestions in the New Testament that “following Jesus” will involve “giving up self,” suffering, hardship, even possible torture and death. Looked at superficially, this might seem like a very unrewarding thing to do here on planet earth. But, viewed in the larger context of the great controversy, it is the most rewarding thing we could possibly do! So, are we ready to be disciples?
3. Paul suffered incredibly. Read 2 Corinthians 11:21-29. Paul was comparing himself with those so-called Jewish Christians who were trying to “overturn” much of Paul’s work shortly before that. Does God expect each one of us to go through the kind of trials that Paul did?
4. In New Testament times, the well-known twelve disciples left their work and left everything behind to follow Jesus. Is Jesus asking us to be “full-time” disciples today? Or, is “part-time” good enough? Do we need to leave our other lines of work? Or, does God expect us to do both at the same time?
5. Read Matthew 4:19; 9:9; Mark 8:34. Think of the situations from which Jesus called His disciples. Often, they were engaged in work. Matthew was a tax collector. Several of the others were fishermen. He called them in the middle of their daily activities to leave everything and follow Him. They all just dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus. Today, is God asking us to leave everything and follow Him? What would happen if we did? Jesus had told His disciples that they should embrace suffering! They should forget themselves and “take up their crosses.” (Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23) What did the disciples think when Jesus mentioned crosses? Is Jesus asking us to forget all our earthly responsibilities to family, to work, etc.; or is He primarily asking us to put our selfishness aside? How different would our lives be if we set aside our self-interest?
6. How much is included in the idea that we should leave the old life behind? Would God miraculously provide us with housing, food, and clothing if we spent 100% of our time witnessing for Him? There are incredible stories about people who have left everything and have “taken up” the work that God called them to. Consider the story of George Müller who dropped everything and started an orphanage in England. God supported him in fantastic ways. If you could ask your guardian angel right now whether or not you are truly following Jesus as His disciple, what do you think he would say?
7. We do not have to look very far to realize that some people are more cut out to be leaders than are others. Others are much more content to be followers. On one occasion, Moses was extremely overworked by all the problems being brought to him. His father-in-law suggested that he needed to share responsibilities. (Exodus 18:13-27) Are we prepared to take up our responsibilities for the gospel? Is God asking us to share His responsibilities?

8. Have you noticed that in some societies today, there seems to be a strong trend to avoid anyone who claims to be a leader. Do we all want to be leaders? Or, are we all trying to avoid being followers?
9. For a teacher to have disciples was fairly common in the times of the New Testament. Besides Jesus' disciples, we have read about John's disciples, and even the disciples of the Pharisees. (Mark 3:13-19; Mark 2:18)
10. Why do you think "the Twelve" first decided to follow Jesus? Does Acts 1:6 give us a hint? Were they hoping to be governmental "ministers" in the new kingdom that would be set up? Would you have followed Jesus? What about the women? (Luke 8:1-3) Women supported Jesus in His work! What do you think the Pharisees had to say about that? We need to remember that each one of those disciples and other followers was already somewhat familiar with the work of Jesus. Several of the disciples had known Jesus for several years. James and John may have been His cousins. There is a fair chance that the nobleman's son healed in John 4:43-54 may have been Joanna's son.
11. From what you know about the twelve disciples individually, do you think you would have chosen any of them to be your disciple?

**Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable,—men whom He could educate for His work. In the common walks of life there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world's most honored men.** The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His collaborators; and He gave them the advantage of association with Himself. **Never had the world's great men such a teacher. When the disciples came forth from the Saviour's training, they were no longer ignorant and uncultured. They had become like Him in mind and character, and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.** [Acts 4:13] {DA 250.1; CT 511.2; CC 282.3}

12. Read John 15:8. Does this verse suggest that we must be skilled at witnessing to others before we can become disciples ourselves?
13. Apparently, all but one of the original disciples died with violent deaths as martyrs. Fishermen must learn how to work in unison with others. Does God call us to be prepared, if necessary, to be martyrs in our day? Is that what discipleship is supposed to mean? Think of all the different things that the disciples did while they followed after and worked for Jesus. How much does discipleship include?
14. How does that fit with John's words in John 10:10 that we will have life and have it "more abundantly"? Paul seemed to think that the love of God is all that we really need. (Romans 8:28-39) John and Paul also suggested that as disciples, we have an unshakable peace. (John 14:27; Philippians 4:7) How could we go wrong with such promises? Are the promises by Jesus to send the Holy Spirit still valid in our day? (See John 14-16) What evidence can you show in your life of the work of the Holy Spirit?

15. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide His disciples. Is that promise still valid? If you think you are being guided by the Holy Spirit, what evidence can you show?
16. Romans 8:17,18 suggests that disciples may face some tough times and some easy times.
17. Most of us have the concept of heaven that it is a place of comfort, joy, peace, harmony, and fellowship with our heavenly Father. What does suffering, hardship, torture, self-denial, and self-sacrifice have to do with preparing for such a place?
18. What was it about Jesus that attracted followers? Was it that He spoke with authority? (Luke 4:32) He had no money. He had no political position. He could not claim to have had a great education at some university. When Jesus spoke it was clear even in the minds of the humblest listeners that what He said was true. He used simple illustrations with which the people were familiar. He did not waste His time quoting rabbis from the past—with their contradictory statements—as the Pharisees did. Ever after, when seeing items or events in the surrounding territory, the people remembered the lessons Jesus taught.
19. The people wanted to crown Him king. They wanted Him to help conquer the Romans, and they were sure that He could do it. But, when He refused to do what they wanted Him to do, they rejected Him. When hundreds—even thousands—of people were turning away from Jesus because they chose to misinterpret the message He was giving them, what did the disciples say when Jesus asked if they were going to leave also? (John 6:60-70) Peter, at least, recognized that Jesus had a message and access to the truth which was not found anywhere else.
20. What are the hindrances to setting self aside and making discipleship our “number one” priority? Would people make fun of us? Would they accuse us? Would they try to embarrass us? Would they sneer at us? The time is coming when they will determine to kill us if we truly follow Jesus.
21. Some Christian groups teach that Christ “took our place” and did everything required for salvation on our behalf. They say that all we have to do is say yes. Most of the explanations of the plan of salvation that have been presented down through the years are very “selfish.” They are all about how God is going to save “me”—and you too, of course. It is easy to see why people are concerned about their own salvation. How many times have you heard sermons suggesting that the plan of salvation is primarily about God and His character? (See <https://www.theox.org/index.cfm/pageid/756/index.html>) Does that suggest that we do not really have to do anything? Read Matthew 5:16. What would it take for people to look at us and say, “I would like to get to know your God”? How could that be compatible with the idea that we should “take up our cross”? Could we be disciples without taking up our crosses? What does God mean when He says, “Take up your cross”? What kind of “cross” are we supposed to carry today?
22. Our world is full of people seeking celebrity status. Some who recognize that they will probably never be a celebrity themselves just want to be near someone who is a celebrity. They want to say that they have seen, known, talked to, or even shaken hands with very important people. Does that give them some kind of status? Does it give them “bragging rights”? Should a Christian be seeking bragging rights? Is a disciple someone who brags about his master?
23. Read Mark 8:31-38; Luke 18:31-34. These two sections seem to be contradictory. Did the disciples have any idea what was going to happen to Jesus, or didn't they? The Gospel of

Mark seems to suggest that the disciples understood what Jesus was calling them to. They did not want to think that their Master would be accused, beaten, and crucified. But Luke seems to suggest that they could not comprehend what He was talking about. How are those two views compatible? The disciples were so determined to make things turn out the way they wanted them to be that they could not allow themselves to even think of the possibility that Jesus would be killed. Can you pick out many prophecies from the Old Testament suggesting that the Messiah was to suffer and die? Even Jesus, divine Teacher that He was, could not seem to get it through their heads that He was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer and be crucified! Jesus told them that everything the prophets had written was to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44) The disciples were sure that they knew what the prophets had written and what the prophets meant! What does Scripture mean when it says that the words were “hidden” from them? Is it possible that God Himself sometimes fails to communicate effectively? The Jews had taken the passages from the Old Testament that we now recognize as applying to the second coming and they had applied them to the first coming. They were excited about a “king” who was going to come in all His glory! So, was God partly at fault for “allowing” those misunderstandings? There is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest that there would be more than one coming. Could we be wrong in some of our interpretations of the Bible and the second coming?

24. What has it “cost” you to follow Jesus? Have you “paid” a big price? How does all this talk about sacrifice and “setting self aside” fit with the promise by Jesus that we will receive 100-fold in this life? (Mark 10:30)
25. If someone were to ask you what it means to be a disciple of Christ, could you give a clear answer? Would you emphasize the sacrifice and the suffering? Or, would you emphasize the benefits of the relationship?

Read Matthew 28:19,20. Do you think these words apply to you in 2009? Jesus specifically challenged His followers—including us—to make disciples of all people. There does not seem to be any limitation placed on His call. Is that command of Jesus as binding as the Ten Commandments? Are we in our lives each day seeking to make disciples of the people with whom we associate?

26. Read Galatians 2:20. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “Christ lives in me”? Jesus was crucified, and Paul suffered in many ways including many beatings. Have we suffered in any way? Compare Matthew 5:16. When the world looks at us, do they glorify God?
27. What are the true marks of discipleship? Read Luke 9:23.
  - 1) Christ must be our first priority. Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21, *NKJV*)
  - 2) We must learn to abide in Christ. (John 8:31,32) What does that mean in terms of living now?
  - 3) Read John 13:34,35. What is different about the kind of loving that the followers of Jesus did and do? How does that love set them apart from all others? Is it unusual to love as Jesus did? Do people around us know that we have that kind of love?
  - 4) Are we “bearing fruit” for Christ? Or, are we afraid to witness for Him? Jesus died for us! Are we afraid to tell people that?

28. Read Acts 11:19-26. What is described in those verses was a “revolution” in the Christian

church. Why did this group of mostly unnamed Christians suddenly believe that they were called to witness—even to Gentiles? They created a new “family” including both Jews and Gentiles. Why were they called “Christians”? Was that originally a term of respect? Or, was it a term of derision?

29. The great teachers of the New Testament—including Jesus, Paul, and those closely associated with them—were generally dependent upon their friends for housing, food, and sustenance. (Luke 8:1-3) Jesus said, “I have no place to lay my head”! (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58) So, why would anyone want to follow such a person? In the early days, were the disciples really convinced that Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom? When did they get past that “dream”? (Acts 1:6)
30. Why does following the King of kings involve “taking up a cross”? Did Paul help us to get the answer in Romans 8:18? In the New Testament, Jesus is called Master (Teacher), Lord, God, Son of God, the Messiah, the Shepherd, the gate, the way, the truth, and the life, even the Son of Man. What do those titles tell us about our relationship with Him? Many early Christians took the title “Lord” very seriously. They refused to use that term for the Roman Emperor. They “paid” with their lives. Is Jesus the Lord of our lives? If He is not, where will we stand when He comes back to judge the world? (Matthew 7:22,23)
31. What would happen if we—as individuals, as a Sabbath school class, or as a church—were all truly disciples of Christ? What would happen if we really took seriously the commission to go out and make disciples of all men?
32. We may think it costs a lot to be disciples. Compared to Jesus, how much do we actually give up?
33. Are we ready to be true disciples? Do we find the Christian life attractive? Are we making it attractive to others? To “live” the Christian life requires a serious commitment. The hardest part is to give up “self.” Are we “earning our way” to heaven by going through all of these trials? In winning the great controversy, God must allow sin to “go to seed” so that everyone can see what terrible consequences result so that there will never be anyone tempted to rebel again.
34. Why does God require that of us? What does it say to us about Him that He requires it? To be like God, do we have to “give up self”? Will there be any selfish people in heaven? Will we have time to pursue selfish interests when we get to heaven? Or, will heaven be a place of ongoing, loving service to those around us? What kind of service might be required in heaven?
35. Is discipleship a “test” that God requires before He rewards us with heaven? Or, is it a way to begin sharing our lives with Christ and God and becoming more like Them? Is God really inviting us to be His partners in this work? Are we ready to share our “burdens” with Him? (Matthew 11:28-30) Discipleship may begin here, but it will continue in heaven. There, we will continue in or loving service to God.

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