

## 8. Experiencing Discipleship

**Biblical material:** Matt. 17:1-13; 18:1-4, 24; Mark 8:27-30; John 6:43-58.

### Quotes

- It has to do with being a committed follower of Christ. I feel as though I am in transition from admirer to disciple. *Jim Cole*
- One can believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and feel no personal loyalty to Him at all—indeed, pay no attention whatever to His commandments and His will for one’s life. *Catherine Marshall*
- Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but it screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition. *Richard Foster*
- It is a man’s own mind, not his enemy or foe, that lures him to evil ways. *Buddha*
- A disciple is a person who learns to live the life his teacher lives. *Juan Carlos Ortiz*

### Questions

How do we “deny” ourselves? What is this for? How is discipleship an experience? How would we react if Jesus asked us who he was? Would we be offended if we as disciples were compared to little children? Imagine what it would have been like to see the transfiguration of Jesus—and then ask ‘why’? How do we avoid problems of power in discipleship?

### Discussion

“What has been your own experience in eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus?” (Sunday’s lesson). a) How would you react to the question, and b) how would you explain this to someone who thought you were expressing cannibalistic desires? How do we use this imagery to explain the truth about discipleship?

The concepts come from Jesus’ own words recorded in John 6:43-58. He was trying to have people understand the closest intimacy he wanted, so as to become part of what we are made of. Yet these words have been much misunderstood. Since we associate eating and drinking with life itself, Jesus is expressing how vital it is to know him and understand him as he truly is. This is the true bread of life—life in all its divine abundance that will continue through eternity. That’s the reason to “feed on him,” to absorb the life-giving spiritual nutrients so that we can truly live. But we will not be attracted to this food if we have warped concepts as to his character. In the same way we want to enjoy and savor our food, we need to “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Only in this way do we truly experience God.

Matthew 17 records the experience of Jesus’ transfiguration. Imagine what it must have been like to see Jesus in this marvelous way on the mountain-top. But then we should ask if this is the basis for belief. Did the disciples who experienced this have a better perception of God as a result, and if so, why didn’t Jesus take all the disciples with him, or do this before a crowd of thousands? The private nature of this experience says much about the kind of God revealed by Jesus, and his methods of operation.

Matthew 18 reveals the truth about the experience of discipleship. It is not a question of worldly power, or of social position, or of human respect. It’s all about acting with the beauty, kindness, and transparency of little children. Jesus’ concept of discipleship is based on his own

nature—one of humility. His clearest revelation of this to his disciples was when he washed their feet (see below).

### **Comment**

“Now we have God here in Person. Do we have answers to all our questions in the Old Testament? Did the disciples bring the questions? They read the same Old Testament that we do. When they had a chance to sit with Him on so many occasions, did they bring them up? How about the “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth?” “Why did You say, ‘Kill the women and babies’ after being victorious on the battlefield? And why did You order the stoning of Achan?” And so forth and so on. Did they ever ask Him? “Why did you say that illegitimate children should be banished from the camp for ten generations? We love the way You treated the woman taken in adultery, but why did You send she-bears to tear those irreverent youths? And kill Uzzah when he tried to keep the ark from falling? Why did You do this? Why did You turn Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt? And why did You scare everybody at Mt. Sinai? Why did You do all those things?” They never asked Him.

“The question they did ask Him was, “What positions will we hold in the Kingdom?” Things like that. Do you remember? Two of them even brought their mother along, thinking that would help. In fact, that’s an old idea, isn’t it, that Mother might be influential? Isn’t that true, even in the Christian church at the present time?

“Well, now that God is here, in Person, so humbly in human form, veiling the dazzling splendor of His divinity, that human beings might come to know Him without being consumed, for is this not the God that said to Moses, “No man can see My face and live?” And yet the reflected glory was so bright that he wore a veil out of consideration for the people. So He came humbly in human form. And of course when He got tired, and He got hungry, some thought, “That cannot be God.” And when He was on His knees washing a dozen pairs of dirty feet, Judas decided this definitely could not be God, for his “God” would not so humiliate himself. And yet to others of us, that is one of the most wonderful things God ever did.

“Well, it says in 1:11 that He came to the right place to answer the questions. “He came to His own,” the *King James* says, “but His own received Him not.” A. Graham Maxwell, tape “John.”

### **Ellen White Comments**

The work of Christ’s disciples is to shine as lights, making manifest to the world the character of God. They are to catch the increasing rays of light from the word of God, and reflect them to men enshrouded in the darkness of misapprehension of God. The servants of Christ must rightly represent the character of God and Christ to men. Says the apostle, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” {RH, March 5, 1889}

Christ came to reveal to the world the knowledge of the character of God, of which the world was destitute. This knowledge was the chief treasure which he committed to his disciples to be communicated to men. The truth of God had been hidden beneath a mass of tradition and error. The sacrificial offerings which had been instituted to teach men concerning the vicarious atonement of Christ, to teach them that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, had become to them a stumbling-block. {RH, November 1, 1892}