

10. Discipleship (2Q 2009—Walking the Walk: The Christian Life)

Biblical material: Exod. 18:13–27, Matt. 4:19, 9:9, Mark 3:13–19, 8:31–38, Rom. 8:18.

Quotes

- Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is getting to be what he is. *Juan Carlos Ortiz*
- The form that discipleship takes is conditioned by the historic times in which one lives, as well as by the context of an individual's life, but the underlying principle remains the same: each of us is called by love to love; called out of our narrow individualism and our small private world, to allow ourselves to be “turned around” by the allurements of God, and to live for him, as Jesus did. *Thelma Hall*
- It's hard to remember that Jesus did not come to make us safe, but rather to make us disciples, citizens of God's new age, a kingdom of surprise. *Stanley Hauerwas*
- Discipleship is the grooming of friends who can be trusted. *Larry Neville*
- Jesus promised His disciples three things: that they would be entirely fearless, absurdly happy, and that they would get into trouble. *W. Russell Maltby*
- Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death. The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life. *Lao Tsu*
- To become a disciple means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbor. What follows from there is a journey which ... never ends in this life, a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbor. *David J. Bosch*

Questions

Why is discipleship important in the Christian life? How do we understand what this really means? How do we demonstrate discipleship? Is discipleship just a question of following, or is all about understanding, accepting, and acting? How did Jesus describe his disciples? What is God really looking for from us—and from all his created children?

Bible discussion

In Ex. 18:13-27 Moses delegates responsibilities—what does this tell us about the way we should operate? Jesus calls his disciples (Matt. 4:19, 9:9), and says he will teach them. Why isn't mindless obedience enough? They are taught and given authority (Mark 3:13-19), yet are told they have to pick up their individual crosses (Mark 8:31–38). However, “Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.” (Rom. 8:18 NLT)

Comment

Jesus did not want disciples in the sense of servants. Rather he spoke about his disciples as friends—because they would operate not at a level of unquestioning obedience, but thoughtful acceptance of all things true and right.

In all his actions, and in his invitation for us to follow, Jesus never laid out a “disciples' manual.” It is not about following a course, or achieving a pass in the discipleship exam. It's about knowing the person, and identifying with his thoughts and convictions, his beliefs and goals. It's ironic that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach

them to pray, and he gave them thoughtful insights with which to begin, we the disciples took such guidelines and turned them into a chant to be recited! Vain repetitions of prayers gain nothing, said Jesus: “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Mt. 6:7, 8 NIV). The problem, said Jesus, quoting Isaiah, is with disciples who don’t think, who believe they just have to do what they’re told: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” (Mt. 15:8, 9 NIV).

Jesus repeatedly stressed this point in his teaching. His desire is not for followers who will just go along with things. He is not looking for numbers to prove popularity. He knows that the ones shouting hosanna one day will be shouting crucify the next. He wants honest disciples who will think and question, not look to their own self-righteousness and pride, but who are teachable and open to God. In fact disciples who are filled with a sense of their own importance are a liability to God. It’s not about rule-based obedience, but a heartfelt need of God in our human hopelessness, placing ourselves in the hands of the only Being in the universe who can heal the damage of sin and restore us into His image once again. Jesus put it strongly:

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.” (Luke 18:9-14 NIV.)

True discipleship means understanding the real basis of our relationship with God!

Ellen White Comments

To know God is the most wonderful knowledge that men can have... 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. {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. {RH, November 1, 1892}

The disciples were to encounter many and great temptations to unbelief. To them the prophecies had made it clear beyond all controversy that Jesus was the Messiah. They looked for the religious leaders to receive Him with confidence even greater than their own. They declared among the people the wonderful works of Christ and their own confidence in His mission, but they were amazed and bitterly disappointed by the unbelief, the deep-seated prejudice, and the enmity to Jesus, displayed by the priests and rabbis. The Saviour’s early miracles strengthened the disciples to stand against this opposition. {DA 147}

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