

Mission:

Possible

~~Impossible~~

By Kent McClain

Illustrated by: Ricki Stroud



"Should you decide to accept this mission
remember..." *Matthew 10:22*

"Should you decide to accept this mission, remember..."
Matthew 10:22

Copyright 1992 by K.M Publishing company, Sylmar, California
Kristan Moratta edited the first publication (1982)
Myrna McClain revised it in 2022



Mission: Possible

“Good morning, Mr. Phelps”

Over the last decade of television drama, one show stood out as a twentieth and twenty-first-century example of Christ’s call to discipleship, and that was a series called “Mission Impossible.”

It was an exciting show that proved what a small group of well-trained men and women could do against all odds as they worked undercover for the United States government. Each week the series began with the famous words, “Good Morning, Mr. Phelps.” Then, a new mission was introduced, and the groups promptly pit their extraordinary skills together in a unifying way to accomplish their mission.

In principle, it can be said that Jesus’ disciples were like this small group of men and women. They worked together and were well trained for their mission. In the end, they accomplished their mission, which was to affect millions of people’s faith throughout the centuries.

Unlike this small group led by Mr. Phelps, the disciples were not highly intelligent, nor were they abundant in worldly skills. They were fairly average men, even when it came to religious knowledge or demonstrated faith. What made these disciples of Christ the greatest group of men ever to live was not what they could offer; instead, it was what Christ gave them during a three and one-half year period. Because of what Jesus accomplished with these men, the whole world could receive his message

of life. The conclusion of their lives here on earth can read, “An impossible mission, made possible.”

Discipleship Made Simple

The qualifications for discipleship are not all that complex. To be a discipler, one must have received Christ as Lord and be willing to share Christ’s message with others. On the other hand, to be a disciple, one must be a keen learner of Christ and his message. The term in Greek for discipleship is simply transliterated *mathetes*, which means learner.¹

Some believe and advocate that formal Bible training from a Bible school, institute, or seminary is necessary to disciple others. This may help but is certainly not modeled by Jesus. In fact, the Bible training today, by its very methods and approach, hardly resembles how Jesus trained his disciples, who changed the world.

Today, Bible training follows the Greek education model, including formalized classrooms, curriculum, testing, and evaluation. Essential reading of just one of the Gospels shows that Jesus never followed such an approach with his disciples. His classroom was never stationary. He took the disciples with him from one ministry opportunity to another, and as he went, Jesus inter-mixed the practical experience with teachings on prayer, evangelism, missions, etc. In light of Scriptural accounts, discipleship was never meant to be a class under the Bible curriculum at an established Bible school or institution. Simply put, discipleship in Bible training in the field of life’s daily experiences and circumstances.

It is impressive that with Jesus’ model of training others in righteousness by making them disciples, we as twentieth-century Christians don’t try to follow this method when we seek to accomplish the great commission Christ gave us, as stated in Matthew 28:19-20, “.... To make disciples of the whole world.”

Instead, we have gone our own way by giving the role of discipleship to credentialed teachers, pastors, and Bible experts. Even the disciples themselves never set up a bible school in the fashion that we have created to accomplish this great commission. They disciplined others in the way they were disciplined; there was no need for improvement.

In Jesus’ discipleship, if we would follow it, he took the complicated and made it easy so that all men could understand the truth. His parables were meant to simplify the truth for all men. Yet, in our so-called discipleship today, we take that truth and make it complicated so that no one can understand it without a complete curriculum of study, which usually has a price tag. Is it any wonder that many are being lost today when we issue a call to discipleship?

The Scope of the Book

The scope of this book was initially meant to cover a day-by-day account of Jesus as he disciplined his men. I wanted to observe simply how he disciplined his men. I felt that if I could see what he was doing and try to emulate it, my discipleship of others would be much more fruitful. I am sorry to say that I could not fit all that I observed into this one book; there was too much about which to write. Consequently, this book only covers the first year and a half of Jesus’ walk with the disciples. At the end of this time, the “12” were able to go out in pairs to accomplish their first ministry without Jesus.

The discipleship efforts in the last part of this century must be re-evaluated. They must align themselves more with the way Jesus accomplished his mission of discipleship. Discipleship cannot be done in bits and pieces, according to formalized practices.

His Race Has Ended, Our Race Begun

When Jesus left his disciples with the responsibility to disciple the world for the kingdom's sake, he gave them the tools to accomplish this ministry. He passed on the baton of discipleship responsibility to them when he left this earth. They ran a great leg of the relay race but passed it on to others, and now it is our turn to run. MY prayer is that we will all run well and be able to give it to the next generation in this same manner. It would be a sad commentary for this generation of believers if we did not do our part in the race by our ignorance of discipleship.

“Noon time darkness,
 Who Blocks the sun?
 His race ended,
 Our race begun.
 Anguished cry,
 The veil is rent,
 It is finished,
 His life’s blood spent.
 Down it trickles,
 That precious flow,
 Giving life
 To those below
 Then cut down a tomb lay.
 Resting silent,
 For one more day.
 Brining spices,
 That new day’s done,
 They came to Him,
 But He has gone.
 Freeing us all,
 From Satan’s prison,
 Hallelujah!
 He is risen!
 Reigning with God,
 His rightful place.
 O soon we’ll see,
 His precious face.”

By: Bob Gray

Footnotes

1. WE. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testaments Word, page 316



Chapter 1

The Call to Discipleship

“The church is looking for better methods; the Lord is looking for better disciples.”

Matthew 28:18-20 is regarded as the great discipleship message. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus sets down his plan for his disciples at the end of his earthly ministry. He imparted all the truth to a troubled world almost two thousand years ago and handed over the twelve men he chose to carry that message after only three and a half years of discipleship training. This was an incredible accomplishment.

Jesus poured his life and energy into these men. He taught them the peace for which men search. He met their physical and spiritual needs. He gave them a foundation to base their lives, including them in His earthly ministry.

Before Jesus called them to be disciples, they could not handle their own problems, much less those around them. Yet after three and a half years with Christ, they were ready to embark upon a mission to make disciples of all nations. They were able to teach all the principles of truth Jesus had taught them and begin a spiritual change in the world that is still being felt today. Most of all, they were able to claim the truth for themselves and, as a result, live in peace regardless of their circumstances.

“And Jesus spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

**Command:
“To Make Disciples”**

The first instruction that Jesus gives his men is to “make disciples of all nations.” This was his goal for them and is still His goal for all Christians today. As discussed earlier, a disciple is a learner, a follower of the teaching of Christ. Therefore, it can be deduced that a desired point of maturity for the disciples is able to conduct their lives in such a way that the anxious and troubled people surrounding them would want to learn about Christ and what he had to say.

This should be the goal for any Christian. The Great Commission was not given just to the disciples but to all who would receive the message of Christ. Unfortunately, some Christians have not realized that responsibility and thus missed out on the great joy of working with other Christians. Joy and fulfillment elude them, much like when the disciples abandoned their opportunity for ministry in the latter days of their final training time with Jesus. When Peter denied Jesus in front of many witnesses, he lost an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his faith. In the same way, when we choose silence in sharing Christ with others, our silence is not golden but yellow. In other words, we are chicken to share Christ with others.

The words that precede “Make disciples of all nations” in Matthew 28:19, “GO, therefore...” are essential to understanding how the message moves from our lips into the hearts of potential disciples. “While you are going, make disciples...” is the literal rendering of the original text. Pores, the transliterated word, means to go, to pass from one place to another. It assumes that you are passing from one place to another.¹ As you continue upon the life journey that God has given you, make disciples, just as the “Twelve” made disciples as they traveled. In the original text, “Make disciples” is one word. You disciple, or as we read it in American English, you make disciples. It was an active command in the Greek text. The “Twelve” were commanded to disciple others, and so are all Christians today regardless of Spiritual gift, personality, or circumstances.

When we hear the word “command,” we usually retreat in fear or rebel in anger. We associate commands with someone who is often unjust or overbearing. But in looking at the way Jesus led his men, he was not a harsh commander making unrealistic demands or one who tried to scare his followers into allegiance. The command “Make disciples” was said after He had given his life for the disciples. In Jesus’ great hour of need, when he was being tried by an unjust court and crucified by a pagan government, the disciples fled and deserted him. Yet, he forgave and restored them after his miraculous resurrection.

All of us fail at times like the disciples, but if we are to learn anything from their training with Jesus, it is that we are all forgiven and not cast out of his plans to redeem this world because of our failures. Like the disciples, we are quickly restored in his sight, and as Romans 8:28 indicates, he will work all things together for good, even those regarded as failures.

Baptize Believers

Second, Jesus instructed the disciples to baptize those who believed in him as Lord. This ministry was not new to the disciples; they had already assisted Jesus in baptizing others. Baptism is an important outward sign of an inward spiritual change. The washing of water in the ceremony represents the washing away of a man's sins. The cleansing process, which can only result from one's belief in Christ, brings a person back into fellowship with God. Baptism states publicly that this person has been reconciled with God. It testifies of what had already occurred.

In performing a baptism, the phrase "Baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is significant. This Trinity, as the Godhead is often called, is a model of love and unity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all equal, yet their tasks and ministries often differ as they accomplish their perfect will for this world. There was never a sign or intimation of jealousy between them. Just as the cleansing water in baptism reminds us of our cleansed condition with God, so the love and unity of the Trinity remind us of man's commitment to love and unify with others believers.

Teaching the Messages of Christ

The third part of the commission is probably the most overlooked part of this entire message. "teaching them to observe all that I command you" Too often, Matthew 28:19-20 is used as a charge for evangelists to lead others to Christ. The emphasis is on the command to make disciples of all nations and subsequent baptism. Teaching them the Christian life as presented in the Gospels is hardly mentioned. This neglect is the exact opposite of our example. Jesus spent three and a half years with his men, answering their questions, teaching them to apply the truth in various life situations, and giving them ministry opportunities. Jesus lived the truth as an example for them. He worked through their failures. He encouraged them in their short-lived spurts of spiritual growth. His example is a far cry from leading someone to the Lordship of Christ and then abandoning them.

Years ago, as I witnessed the birth of my own two children, I felt a sense of awe concerning the God of creation. It amazed me that these two babies would finally come forth in such a unique and miraculous way.

Yet what would you think of my wife and I if we had left our babies in the delivery room, never to return to them again? What would you think if we abandoned our responsibility of caring for their needs, never teaching them how to walk, talk, and feed themselves? What would you think if we had refused to teach them how to think or handle their own emotions and immaturity? Yet as Christians, we too often adopt this application of the great commission. We preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christians, they respond, and we leave them in the hospital.

Jesus commands in these verses of Matthew that while you are going, introduce people to Christ and if they accept, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then proceed to teach them everything you have learned in the Christian life and in the Word. Teach them so that you will know and love each other like a brother or sister.

Jesus Promised Presence in Discipling Others

The fourth part of the great commission of discipleship is the promise Jesus gave his disciples. "...and lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age." Jesus left this comforting and underlying comment with his disciples as he concluded the discipleship process with them. It is a promise all Christians can depend on as they take on the command to disciple others. Jesus is always with us. He promised never to abandon us, regardless of the circumstances. He is our discipler, and he will never make a mistake as he brings us to maturity. We may fail in our discipleship of others, or we may be failed by others who are discipling us, but he is always there to comfort us and to work things out according to his wisdom and will. You will never be abandoned by Christ once you ask forgiveness of your sins and receive him as the Lord of your life.

Key to Understanding the Great Commission

The key to Matthew 28:19-20 is to introduce people to the Lordship of Christ and then to spend a significant amount of time with them, helping them learn the Christian life.

We must realize, though, that we are still learners. We began learning the day we received Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives, and we will continue learning until we meet him in heaven. Some learners have more experience and maturity. It is their responsibility to share their maturity and wisdom with younger disciples. In John 10, Jesus called us all sheep and yet all shepherds. (John 10:1-11) Every Christian has the potential and call to help shepherd the flock, regardless of spiritual gift or ability. Just as older shepherds help the younger shepherds, we are all to make disciples. We are all to share in the responsibility of shepherding God's flock of Christian people. At the same time, we are all being disciplined no matter what age or status.

My wife and I, as mentioned before, have two children, Brodie and Shannon. At this stage, we can give them wisdom concerning the next few years of their young lives. We can look back and work with them accordingly, having been their age. As we grow older, we should be able to impart to them the lessons we learned from our mistakes. Eventually, our relationship with our children will change because they will grow into maturity as young men and women in Christ. Along with being our children, they will also become brothers and sisters in Christ.

Application of Teaching

Today, Christians who God has called to live their lives in this troubled twentieth century need to look at the commission of discipleship more than ever before. Then, it was a troubled turbulent world in which Jesus chose to present his message and train his men. Even though the call to make learners of Christ as we go about our daily duties applies to all generations of Christians, it takes on added meaning for the present generations since we too live in a troubled and turbulent world.

Our potential ministry includes the families God has given us, the associations we have at work, and the neighborhoods in which we live. These people are the ministry we are to think and pray about. Therefore, we must make ourselves vulnerable and available to them so that they might hear the words of Christ from our lips, see his life in our actions, and be assured of being trained and taught his message.

Application of Jesus' Discipleship Training

Jesus spent over three years pouring out his life into the disciples and teaching them the foundation for life. There is no quick course in the process of genuine discipleship. Just as Jesus has an eternal commitment to each of us, we enter into a responsibility to teach one another the Christian life as presented in the Gospels. God, the chief shepherd, will move us on to one place or another, but while we are together with Christians and non-Christians, we are to learn all we can and teach all we know.

Application of Jesus' Model

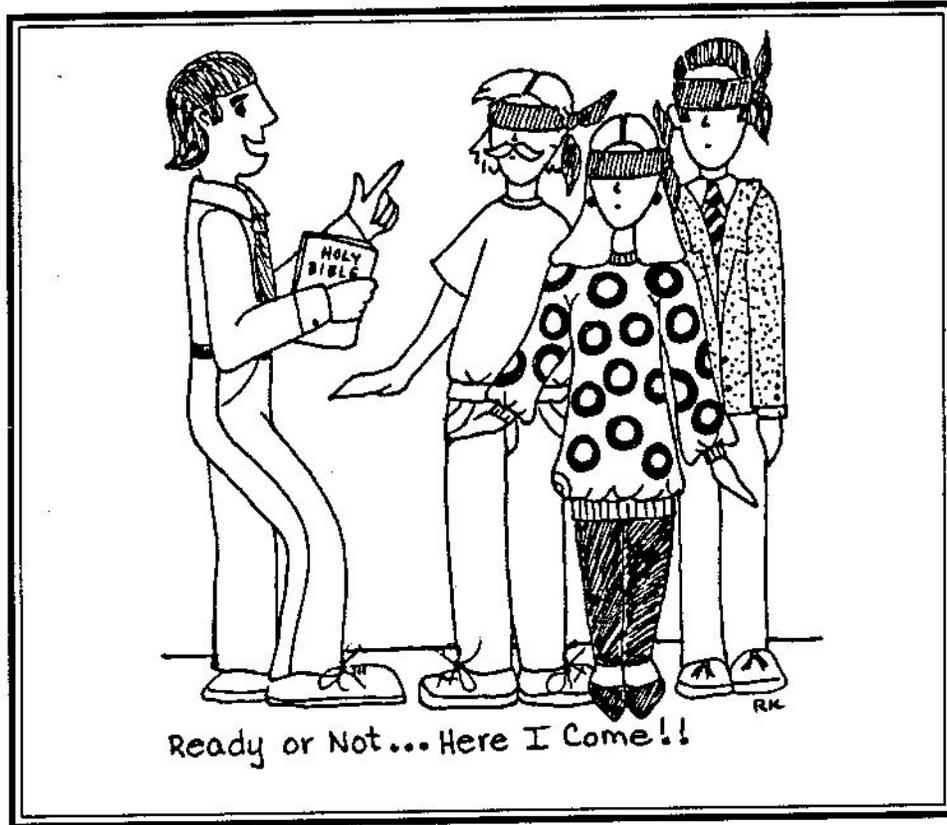
Jesus modeled a life of consistency and commitment. Just as he stayed with his men through good and yet difficult times, through their spiritual successes and visible failures, so we must remain consistent and committed to those whom God gives us to disciple.

Suggestions for Study and Discipleship Training

1. It would help to find fellow Christians who would like to be discipled.
2. When you have come together as a group, begin to pray for one another. Don't be afraid to be open with another in your prayers.
3. As a group of disciples, commit to meet regularly.
4. As a group, study each of the passages discussed in this book. Take your time because Jesus took his time with the disciples.
5. If unsure about your ability to interpret the Scripture, get a good book on Bible study methods. Read the study book together and use those methods as you interpret Scripture.
6. In this chapter, you should study Matthew 28:19-20, John 10:1-18, Matthew 23:7-10, and Matthew 12:46-49.
7. All of you should attempt to help each other discover who God has put in your life's path to accomplish discipleship. First, list those family members, work associates, school friends, and neighbors who might qualify. You should then start by praying for each of these people, asking God to help you in your beginning discipleship with them.

Footnotes

1. Vine, page 156



Chapter 2

When Are You Ready to Disciple?

“Ready or not, here I come.”

In college, I was part of Campus Crusade for Christ. The goal of this organization was to present the message of Christ to college students on various campuses across America. It was exciting to be involved with a group presenting the saving words of Christ in a bold, organized manner. The church atmosphere I had grown up with was somewhat introverted about sharing its faith. Campus Crusade was a welcome shift for myself and other Christians who wanted to make our experience with Christ’s message more open and available to the world in which we lived.

I will never forget the “beach blitzes” that hundreds of us participated in at Newport Beach, California, each year. Newport was the so-called “hot spot” for many of the young people in California. It was especially famous for its week-long party atmosphere during Easter week.

Campus Crusade trained hundreds of college students to present the Gospel through the four spiritual laws. It was a short explanation of God’s plan for man, Jesus’ role in that plan, our possible response, and the resulting benefits if we accept Jesus and his message.

We lined up like an army at that Newport Beach, perhaps five to six hundred in one group. Then, at a signal from a designated leader, we would charge out onto the beach, sharing the message of Christ through the tool of the four spiritual laws. We called it a “beach blitz”

because it looked like a well-organized army attacking an enemy with all its troops. In a sense, we were an army; we were soldiers of Christ, bringing news that would not inflict physical casualties, but would bring spiritual peace with God and hope to all who received it.

After they accepted this message, we trained these newborn Christians to share their faith. They were taught the four spiritual laws and other Christian doctrine booklets. I do not doubt that we accomplished some great things related to discipleship.

However, in retrospect, I wonder if these beach blitzes would have been more productive with more in-depth follow-up, as demonstrated by Christ's own model of discipleship. Our response to new Christians at that time was to train them in using the four spiritual laws and get them involved in evangelizing others as soon as possible. A question that we briefly pondered was whether one must reach a point of maturity before taking on this evangelistic responsibility.

The Disciples' Training

The training of the twelve can be regarded as the most thorough, perfect job of discipleship recorded in history. The benefits of each disciple experienced with Jesus as his discipler are unparalleled. If the disciples did not realize it at the time, he made it plain to them in the middle of his ministry with them.

“For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

(Matthew 13:17)

The disciples were instructed repeatedly in several vital areas. First, they learned the meaning and nature of repentance, the source of eternal life, and the nature of the devil. Second, Jesus explained issues of faith, prayer, fasting, love, marriage, lust, adultery, forgiveness, and humility. Finally, they received instruction on ministering to others before and after the salvation experience.

During this training, the disciples learned a great deal about the nature and purpose of Jesus Christ. They saw him as the light and life of men, the bread of life, the living water, the new wine, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Lamb of God, and the foretold Messiah. In the latter days of his teaching, Jesus showed the disciples the coming mystery of the church and the nature and role of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to this teaching, the disciples could observe Jesus' own life and ministry firsthand. They witnessed his bold rebuke of the religious leaders of the day. In contrast, they also saw His appearance before God the Father, Elijah, and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. They partook of the miraculous bread and fish, which fed over 4000 on one occasion and then 5000 on another. They saw Jesus turn water into wine, cleanse lepers, heal paralyzed men, give blind men their sight and resurrect the dead. Yet all of these experiences could not compare with what they finally saw when Jesus conquered death. The resurrection proved Jesus to be the Son of God and authenticated everything he had taught them about himself and about life itself.

The depth of teaching the disciples received in such a short time might be what many of us hope for in a lifetime. Yet, if the disciple's training was the model for all discipleship, how can we qualify today? Even as a 20th and 21st-century Christian filled with the Holy Spirit, how

can I hope to duplicate what the disciples had? How can I possibly carry out the challenge of Matthew 28:19-20 adequately?

The Gerasene's Demoniac's Call to Discipleship

Before these questions can be answered, looking at another example of a man Jesus disciplined 2000 years ago is vital. The man appeared in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5. It was an account of two demon-possessed men. However, the focus of this passage was only on the one who received freedom from his demon slavery and was willing to serve Christ as a disciple. He was not one of the original "12", but he was a true disciple like many others who trusted Christ during that time.

If there were a tendency to be overwhelmed by the disciples' preparation, there would be a tendency to question the necessity of training at all after studying the encounter with the revived Gerasene demoniac.

In the book of Mark, chapter 5 records a man living in a Galilean graveyard. Often beyond control, this man terrorized the region northeast of Jerusalem. When Jesus approached him, voices recognized Jesus as the Son of the Most High. These voices desperately entreated Jesus for mercy. They seemed to sense an abrupt end to their dominance of the Gerasene man. As the Scripture identified them, the voices or demons appealed for refuge in a herd of swine that Jesus granted. For the first time in many years, this driven, afflicted man had peace and control of his spirit. The Galileans who witnessed this act of power and compassion were amazed at the transformation in the man who had caused them so much fear.

The Gerasene man was indeed grateful. He wanted to follow Jesus as a disciple in response to this healing. Unfortunately, the other demon-possessed man in the Matthew account seemed to have no follow-up feelings toward Christ. Amazingly, Jesus' response to this new believer was a "No" for the answer. Instead, Jesus commissioned him immediately to spread the news of his newfound faith throughout the Decapolis.

Despite his desire for discipleship, the Gerasene man was sent out to share his faith without training. Whether this man later joined the large group of disciples that followed Jesus is not recorded. He could have been part of the seventy disciples Jesus worked with in Luke 10 or the group of about five hundred, as indicated in I Corinthians chapter 15. It is likely that the Gerasene man eventually joined one of these groups for further training. Still, his ministry began immediately when Jesus commissioned him to testify to the people of his home region.

Both the twelve disciples and the Gerasene man went about making disciples and teaching what they had learned and observed. The difference was in the quality of what they knew. The disciples were able to teach much more due to their three and a half years with Christ. The Gerasene man could share only what Jesus had done for him.

When Are We Ready To Disciple Others?

A Christian need not wait for years of organized, selected teaching to meet the responsibility of discipleship. As John 10 illustrates, we are all Jesus' sheep, yet all shepherds. No one is above being disciplined, and no one is exempt from disciplining others.

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."
(John 10:11)

“But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.” (John 10:2)

“Jesus, therefore, said to them; ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep’” (John 10:7)

The training periods involved with the disciples and the Gerasene man are two extremes. While Christians have argued over the validity of sending new Christians to the spiritual battlefield without adequate training, a case can be made against believers who are so caught up in their preparation they hardly ever enter the fray. The walls of comfort they have built in their academic environment keep them secure in their realm of Christian friends and associates.

Is there an example that Christians can look to that incorporates the immediate ministry the Gerasene man was commissioned to perform and also the training the disciples received from Jesus? Is there a point in the disciples’ training period before the conclusion of their ministry with Jesus that qualified them to do a ministry?

The Disciples’ Early Training

Matthew 9:36 through 11:1 records Jesus’ last words of preparation before sending his men on their first ministry without him. Jesus evidently felt that the disciples were ready. So, two by two, they went out to accomplish a ministry beyond that of the Gerasene man, yet short of what they would achieve later in their lives. Perhaps the knowledge and training given to the disciples up to this point can be the guideline for Christians today in deciding whether they are able to disciple others. The teaching Jesus gave his men prepared them for active ministry and served as a foundation he would build on later. The difference between the mission the disciples were to accomplish at this point, and the one which occurred after the death and resurrection of Jesus was the depth of their learning experience.

During the last couple of years, I studied to be a sports official. The knowledge I gained by studying the rules, observing games, and working with veteran referees was a vital part of my training. There was a dramatic change in my ability to do a good job, though, when I had to do games by myself. Without a veteran at my side to help me, I struggled just to survive each game. This deepened my resolve to mature as an official. No longer did I come to clinics in a routine obligatory fashion. Instead, I came asking question after question, knowing that I would be on my own from now on.

In the same way, the disciples’ view of what Jesus was teaching them deepened as a result of being on the battlefield without him. The mission of the twelve disciples, as recorded in Matthew 10, can be considered the end of the disciples’ first training period. It was at this point that Jesus gave them their first ministry. Jesus prepared his men well before his first encounter. A summary of Jesus’ ministry to the disciples in preparation for this first mission follows.

Christ’s Teachings

The role, identity, and purpose of Jesus (12 teachings)

The inheritance and reward of a believer (7 teachings)

Man’s need for repentance (7 teachings)

How to seek out potential Christians (6 teachings)

The Old Covenant and religious self-righteousness (6 teachings)

The Holy Spirit in a Christian’s life (6 teachings)

How to react to rejection when presenting the Gospel (4 teachings)
 The coming of the new church age (4 teachings)
 How to make disciples (3 teachings)
 Reasons for rejection (3 teachings)
 Prophecy concerning the Messiah (3 teachings)
 How to do God's will (3 teachings)
 How to forgive others (2 teachings)
 The procedures involved in prayer and fasting (2 teachings)
 How to work with anger (1 teaching)
 The importance of honesty (1 teaching)
 Sexual relationships between men and women (1 teaching)

Christ's Model (Example)

Jesus' style of teaching (14 examples)
 Jesus' demonstration method of healing and his faith (13 examples)
 Jesus' process of choosing disciples (8 examples)
 Jesus' model of boldness (7 examples)
 Jesus' model of humility (5 examples)
 Jesus' acceptance of others (5 examples)
 Jesus' model of including his men in his ministry (5 examples)
 Jesus' one-on-one discipleship and small group attention (4 examples)
 Jesus' demonstrated method of casting out demons (4 examples)
 Jesus' training by testing his men (4 examples)
 Jesus' model of how to work with personal rejection (1 example)
 Jesus' locating productive ministry situations (1 example)

Application of Discipleship Training and the Model

The most immediate purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was not only to reveal his message of salvation to mankind, but also to pour his life and teaching into a few men so that they could spread the news. As we consider our life's priorities, teaching the message of Christ should be high on the list. We should start with a few people, including our family, friends, neighbors, and those at work. Through these people, we can best carry out the plan of discipleship.

Suggestions for Discipleship

1. Read and discuss the accounts of the Gerasene demoniacs (Mark 5:1-20, Matthew 8:28-34, Luke 8:26-39)
2. Compare the call to the Gerasene demoniac with the four disciples in Luke 5:1-11.
3. Have your disciples share their spiritual birth experiences in front of others in the group.

4. Have your disciples evaluate their own spiritual maturity. Afterward, have them write a paper that includes all their experiences in the Christian faith. Ask them how they have succeeded or failed in their Christian Experience.
5. Spend time in prayer, and do not be afraid to expose your hurts and faults to one another.



Chapter 3

Modeling the Truth with Your Disciples

“What you speak so loudly, I can’t hear what you are saying”

Sports officiating, whether baseball, football, or basketball, can be one of the most character-producing and humiliating professions. Unfortunately, a good game is rarely recognized by either players or fans, and often the only encouraging comment comes from a fellow referee or the biased, winning team. A closely contested game often brings a rash of insults from spectators, coaches, and players. No matter how accurate a call or how obvious a violation is, the rooter or penalized team will do its most to sway the decision by subtle or overt intimidation.

As a Christian, I have found this part-time profession challenging and discouraging. One night while officiating a closely fought city-league game, my fellow referee made a controversial call. The team that eventually lost exploded with several verbal comments and criticisms. The referee to whom these “evaluations” were made walked over to the scorer’s table, picked up his coat, yelled a few expletives, and left the gym by the closest door.

There I was with two hostile teams, an explosive situation, and only the Lord and I to finish the game. Yet, amazingly, the contest ended without any further altercation. The upset players gave me some extra courtesy for merely staying until the game ended.

Though this contest was filled with frustration and potential violence, it helped me learn to maintain control of a hostile game. I regard difficult games as a challenge and a positive factor in maturing me as a sports official. On the other hand, I have been discouraged by the lost testimony I've witnessed in contests where Christian schools and churches were involved. In many baseball and basketball association meetings, Christian teams were the brunt of sarcasm, not because of their pre-game prayer but their poor sportsmanship in competition.

Even non-Christians know in their hearts what is right and wrong. Paul brings out this truth in Romans 2. He suggests that the Gentiles instinctively know the demands of the Law because it has been written upon their hearts. Similarly, the umpires and referees know instinctively how Christians should conduct themselves in these games.

In the games I've officiated where Christian teams were involved, I was personally embarrassed by their spiritual hypocrisy. Often their conduct was no different than any half-drunk, out-of-control city league team. The example they set ruined opportunities for me to present the message of Christ to those who observed them. Although I have had many rich times of fellowship with other referees, not many are even remotely interested in the hope available through the message of Christ because of the conduct of many Christian-represented teams.

There are three parts to discipling others: 1) teaching the message of Christ, 2) training others to do a ministry, and 3) serving as a model of Jesus' teachings. Understanding and teaching others to do a ministry is vital, but modeling the truth is crucial. Therefore, this chapter will emphasize the tremendous importance of being an example in discipling others.

The Model

How we live before the world is vital to our changed life in Christ. Throughout Jesus' teaching, he promised eternal life and a changed character. Two significant results of a changed life are self-control and a humble attitude toward others. As Christians and disciplers, we are responsible for reflecting this change in our lives, whether at home, at work, or in the final seconds of a basketball game.

Christians are not perfect and like everyone else, have egos and pet sins to deal with and conquer. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is not only the promise of eternal life and the indwelling Spirit of God but the reality of a transformed life.

How we handle competition or crises at work or home reflects the depth of our transformed lives. Spiritual maturity is not tested in nicely controlled situations like church or prayer meetings but in pressured circumstances.

Jesus Speaks Out Against a Poor Example

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), he criticized those preaching truth but not living it out in life circumstances. In Jesus' view, their self-proclaimed standing before God was only a self-deceived fantasy. Their observance of God's Law was a sham because their hearts

were self-centered and competitive. In Jesus' sermon, he used many examples to prove his point. One example was their practice of giving to the needy.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven... Therefore, you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you; they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees will repay you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

Jesus was highly critical of this type of religious behavior. He began this sermon by stating that the Pharisee's faith was not consistent with God's truth, and they were living a lie. Jesus had a great deal of exposure to these leaders; their jealousy followed him everywhere, trying to destroy his popularity. As Jesus healed many Jews and Gentiles of their various diseases, the Pharisees picked apart each event with religious interpretation and petty technicalities.

An example of their behavior was recorded by Luke just before Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

“And it came about on another Sabbath that He entered the synagogue and was teaching, and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the Scribes and the Pharisees were watching him closely to see if He had healed on the Sabbath so that they might find reasons to accuse him. But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Arise and come forward.’ And he arose and came forward. And Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it?’ And after looking around at them all, He said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were filled with rage and discussed what they might do to Jesus together.” (Luke 6:6-11)

Christ's message was more than what he taught. It was also what he was as an example. In his discipleship, he never taught anything that he was not an example of himself. If we hope to disciple, we must realize that our example with non-Christians is influential to their acceptance of the truth, and our example before believers is influential to their spiritual maturity.

Jesus Trained By Example

Most of Jesus' brief ministry on earth was spent training a few committed believers. His message and miracles brought him popularity and acclaim, but Jesus did not cater to it. Often he fled the demands of the crowds. Although it was heard and appreciated by thousands at the time, his message had its most significant impact on the disciples. Their intense involvement qualified them to do the very ministry Jesus performed in their presence. Interestingly, out of all the

methods God could have chosen to reveal truth and salvation to man, he selected his son to pour himself into a small group of disciples.

Jesus began his ministry with the disciples during the last three and a half years of his life on earth. Why he did not start earlier is not known. However, the time spent was enough since the disciples went on to spread his message throughout the world successfully.

An example of Jesus' training is recorded in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. This passage deals with a demon-possessed man. Instead of a formal teaching concerning demons or Satan, Jesus gave a simple yet effective command that freed the afflicted man from his possession. Jesus' actions in this healing event and three other similar cases gave the disciples the training necessary to deal with this problem. Formal training was not essential because the actual event was teaching within itself.

Matthew 10 outlines the disciples' first ministry experience without Christ's presence. One of their major ministries was dealing with demon possession. Everything that Jesus asked them to do in this account, he had already demonstrated. An example was often the primary way that Jesus chose to train his men. He did not depend heavily on great orations but simply did the ministry in their presence. He taught them how to heal others by healing and taught them how to present the kingdom message by presenting it in their presence.

In order to make discipleship training a vital part of the Christian's life, one must be willing to demonstrate it as the disciples did in response to Christ. Therefore, the training process should never be limited to a classroom setting alone.

In my training as a sports official, I attended weekly lectures and tests on rules and regulations. In addition, I studied booklets, saw films, and had the opportunity to ask for an understanding of hypothetical problems and court situations. These learning experiences were valuable, but I did not learn how to officiate a game in this classroom setting. My actual training came when an older official worked alongside me. My work with him in a real game taught me more than any classroom lecture.

As Christians, we all have the call to disciple others. It is our responsibility to teach the truth and be examples of Christ's teachings. We must be willing to be actively engaged in doing the ministry with our fellow disciples. In so doing, we should not limit our discipleship to just what we do best. We are poor disciplers if we only train our people in what we find comfortable. Discipleship is hard, and it requires a lot of self-sacrifices, as demonstrated by Jesus.

Application of Teaching

As Christ's disciples, we must guard ourselves through prayer from becoming like the Pharisees who ruined their position before God by seeking the honor and admiration of men. Whether or not we are recognized for their ministry efforts, a disciple of Christ should never seek any title for one's work. Instead of being called pastor, deacon, deaconess, or elder, just be called a discipler. God knows who you are, and man may never recognize it.

Application of Jesus' Discipleship Training

The most effective way to impart the message of Christ to fellow disciples is to perform the ministry in their presence. If your ministry is evangelism, take your disciples along and let them observe you present the Gospel. You should try and spend time with these disciples; be patient with their questions and fears. Make sure that you don't demand too much from them too

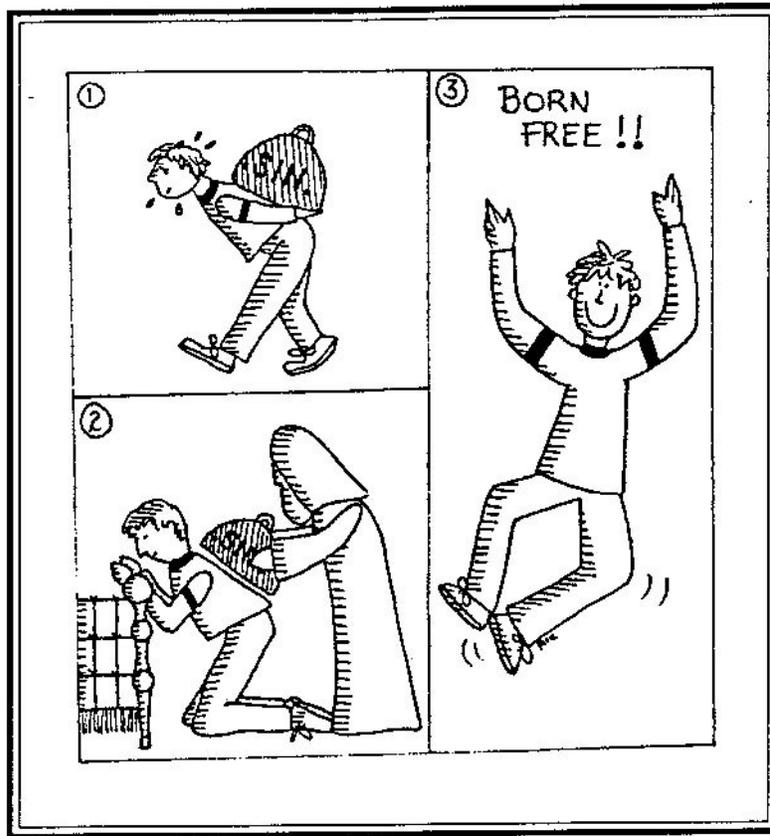
soon. Don't be disappointed if only a few are willing to participate. Only a few participated with Jesus, yet they changed the whole world. Never ask them to do something you are unwilling to do. Proceed to each ministry with a great deal of prayer and humble dependence on the Lord.

Application of Jesus' Model

The example we show before others, whether they are non-Christians or fellow disciples, is critical to the message we teach. If we cheat our neighbor by not returning borrowed goods or reject his fellowship because his morals are not to our liking, we become a stumbling block to his salvation and to our fellow disciples who look to us as an example. As a result, the message Jesus preached to the Pharisees in Luke 5 about having fellowship with sinners becomes an indictment against us rather than proof of our life with Christ.

Suggestions for Further Study

1. Read and interpret Luke 4:16-30 and Luke 5: 7-32.
2. Discuss-If the church is the instrument of God's truth, in what ways has it faltered in modeling this truth?
3. Discuss- As individual members of the body of Christ are instruments of truth, how have we faltered in modeling the truth in this world?
4. Discuss- How can we affect a change in the church today so that the church can become the model of truth it was intended to be?
- 5 Pray-After studying these passages and discussing faltering models, pray for one another regarding being better models of truth.



Chapter 4

Christ's Kingdom message

"Born Free"

If you do not know where to start in the discipleship process, then begin with the kingdom message as presented in the third chapter of John, chapter 3. This message given to Nicodemus provided a foundation that helped the disciples understand the deep roots of the kingdom message. The rhetorical art of discussion was vital in communicating this kingdom message to Nicodemus. Through this dialogue of question and answer, he really was able to understand what Jesus was saying.

Background Setting

At this point in Jesus' ministry, the disciples had not been formally chosen. However, Scripture indicates that most of the disciples had been in Jesus' presence since John the Baptist declared Jesus the longed-for Messiah of the Jews.

Jesus began his ministry in Galilee after his baptism by John and his forty days of fasting in the wilderness northeast of Jerusalem. As many people started following Jesus, listening to his teachings, and observing his signs and wonders, so did the disciples. Andrew and John began to

follow Jesus upon John the Baptist's advice. As they made their way to Galilee, Nathaniel, Phillip, and Peter joined as potential disciples on the advice of these brothers and friends.

The disciples were present at the miracles of Cana, in Galilee, where Jesus turned the water into wine. (John 2) Afterward, he journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover. While there, Jesus preached the kingdom message, demonstrated many signs and wonders, and confronted the religious leaders with their hypocrisy concerning temple worship. Jesus boldly chased the money-changers out of the temple who were making it a place of profit.

When they asked him to perform a sign establishing him as religious authority, it prompted Jesus to disclose his death and resurrection openly. He compared his body to a temple and prophesied its destruction and three-day resurrection. No one really understood what Jesus was teaching, but as a result of his time there, many believed and followed, including some of the disciples.

Afterward, he was followed by Nicodemus, who was either genuinely interested in Jesus or was sent secretly by his fellow Pharisees to gather incriminating information. Regardless of Nicodemus' motivation, Jesus unveiled who he was and God's plan of salvation for men. Nicodemus was affected by the message as John later recorded him as an ardent believer in Christ.

The Kingdom message (John 3:1-21)

Jesus used many key terms in this message that were understood by all. Throughout the centuries and the world in which Jesus lived, the monarchy was the standard form of government and was used to describe his relationship with his followers.

The ideal king would bear responsibility for his people. He would care for their total welfare and provide for all their needs. His commitment was to protect them from their enemies, give them justice, and punish them when they acted selfishly against one another.

The king's subjects were to be obedient, loyal, and dependent upon their ruler. The king was their figure of dependence and security. They could entrust their lives to him regardless of the dilemma. Unfortunately, this system of government failed more than it succeeded. Kings abused and used the people for their own selfish purposes, and the people's loyalty and obedience were performed out of fear.

The Jews, for the most part, were hoping for a political Messiah to defeat the Roman government and establish the Jews as the ruling people of the world. Jesus' kingdom message was not meant to restore the physical boundaries of Palestine to the Jews but to restore man to God. Jesus explained this fact to Nicodemus when he told him that he must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Jesus' kingdom would be made up of every believer who had declared Jesus the Lord of his life.

There were five different areas of the kingdom message in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus

1. Man's spiritual condition, the reality of a spiritual existence
2. Jesus' point of origin
3. God's purpose regarding Jesus
4. The dynamics and result of belief and unbelief
5. The rejection of the message

Each of these themes is repeated in other accounts, but for the most part, these are the first installments of these teachings. John the Baptist was the only individual who had taught previously on Christ's origin and purpose. He called Jesus the "Lamb of God," "the Baptizer of the Holy Spirit," and the "Son of God."

1. Man's Spiritual Condition

Nicodemus approached Jesus during the darkness of night, which was a good plan if he wanted his interest in Jesus unnoticed by his fellow Pharisees. It was also a good strategy if the Pharisees had sent him since they would like to downplay any real interest in Jesus due to his rising popularity.

It is hard to believe that Nicodemus considered Jesus a fellow rabbi, but that is how he addressed him. Nicodemus didn't question Jesus concerning his authority but simply stated a confusing dilemma.

"Now there was a man of Pharisees named Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews. This man came to him by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we do not know if you have come from God as a teacher, but no one can do these things that you do unless God is with him.'" (John 3:1-2)

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' statement was not direct nor did it immediately clear up the confusion. Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, Truly I say to you unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

As expected, Nicodemus had no clue as to what Jesus meant. Nicodemus, probably advanced in years, wanted to know how a person could go to the point of birth again. Furthermore, he posed the impossibility of entering the womb a second time. Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again, can he?" (John 3:4)

Jesus answered his question by identifying two parts of man: one representing his physical existence and the other representing his spiritual existence. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

The term water could refer to the water which accompanies birth. This interpretation fits with Jesus' concluding statement: "What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6) If the water meant something other than man's physical birth, he would have made a different interpretive statement.

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was talking about, even though he was one of Israel's spiritual leaders. Without knowing it, he was a man purely of the flesh and could not see or understand God's kingdom as the king explained it to him.

"Do not marvel that I say to you; you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:7-8)

Nicodemus' blindness came out in his response. Jesus seemed a little startled by Nicodemus' ignorance of the spiritual part of man, which was the basis of Judaism. He went on to rebuke Nicodemus for his disbelief, comparing him to those who had already born witness of Jesus' identity and the impact of his message.

"Nicodemus answered and asked, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I said to you we speak to that which we have seen, and you do not receive our witness.'" (John 3:9-10)

Recognizing that man greatly needs spiritual rebirth is the first step Jesus would title "earthly things" in verse 12. It is futile to explain spiritual truths unless the basics are first understood. Jesus was trying to tell Nicodemus that his confusion could only truly be resolved when his spiritual part was born. Until then, all the truth Jesus could share would never be accepted. "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how should you believe if I told you heavenly things?" (John 3:9-10)

The best way I can relate this passage to my life is when my daughter Shannon was a baby girl. Every day she learned more and more about existence here on earth. The only thing that made the beginning process of life possible was successful birth on the operating table. If Shannon had not survived the birth experience, maturity and development would have been impossible. In the same way, Jesus established a fundamental truth for Nicodemus and all non-believers. Unless you come into spiritual existence, you will never be able to understand God's plan for man truly.

Jesus recognized the mystery behind spiritual rebirth because it is tangible. The Spirit of God that enters a believer cannot be seen or scientifically analyzed. Even with Nicodemus, a spiritual leader of Israel, it was necessary to explain the nature of God's Spirit. It is like the wind, as indicated in John's third chapter. It blows where it wishes, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going. (John 3:8)

There is no doubt about the existence of the wind, and as Jesus was trying to impress upon Nicodemus, there is no doubt about the reality and presence of the Spirit in a believer's life. It is real and opens the door of man's heart to understand the mind and plan of God.

2. **Jesus' Point of Origin**

Jesus answered the original dilemma over the fact that no one can do the signs and wonders unless he is from God. Perhaps the reason behind this question was deceptive. If Nicodemus was sent to gather blasphemous information, anything Jesus said would be held against him, as with many previous men who tried to claim Messiahship. If Nicodemus was genuinely interested in who Jesus was, his quest was answered directly. "And no one has ascended unto heaven but he who descended from heaven, seen the Son of Man." (John 3:13)

Jesus pointed to himself with the Messianic title, the Son of Man. This is one of the many terms Jesus used when describing himself and his mission. Jesus often claimed this title in the Gospels since it best represented his earthly work, sufferings, and eventual crucifixion.

Jesus descended from heaven when he entered the human race through the Virgin Mary. His final destination after completing his work was heaven. He fulfilled this when he ascended to heaven before many of his followers after his death and resurrection.

3. **God's Purpose in Regards to Jesus**

As Jesus continued his message with Nicodemus, he used an Old Testament scripture as support. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”(John 3:14)

The passage refers to Numbers 21:9, where the Israelites who had been freed from slavery to the Egyptians were contending with their leader, Moses. Despite all God had delivered them from and the provisions He made for them, they again began to speak against God and Moses.

In order to bring the people into a dependent relationship, God had to show them their pride. So he sent fiery serpents among the people. The hard-hearted Israelites began to die, and finally, after much agony, they recognized their sin and began to plead with God for mercy. The Lord commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and to set it on a standard. The Lord then told Moses that everyone who was bitten could look upon this bronze serpent. Those Israelites who looked to God’s provision were healed, and those who did not, died.

Jesus used this illustration to show Nicodemus another aspect of his role and purpose on earth. Jesus was the provision that men were to look to for life. Rejecting Jesus would result in spiritual death, while acceptance of Him would bring eternal life with God.

4. The Dynamics and Result of Belief and Unbelief

As Jesus continued his discourse, he told Nicodemus next how to be born again and be reunited with God. The key is to believe in Jesus, recognizing that he is the Son of God who came to save the world, not from physical death but spiritual death. As the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent that Moses raised in the wilderness, so all men are to look to Jesus for spiritual birth and salvation. “...that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:15)

In being born-again, one is not only free from bondage to sin but also is given eternal life with God. As Jesus explained the plan for salvation, it was because of God’s love for man and his desire to see a man live eternally that God sent His son to rescue man from the coming judgment. Yet judgment was not the convincing proof Jesus used with Nicodemus; instead he used a message based on a saving love.

“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the only Son.”(John 3:17-18)

5. Why Men Reject The Kingdom message

Jesus concluded his conversation with why men reject him as God’s provision for their sins. In essence, men who are content to act selfishly, committing deeds of evil whether large or small, hate Jesus and his teachings because their deeds are no longer safely hidden in darkness but exposed for all to see and observe.

“And this is judgment, that the light has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil, hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be

exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”(John 3:19-21)

Jesus revealed the evil deeds of the Pharisees in the temple when he ran out all of the money-changers. The religious leaders had cleverly cornered the market on the sacrifices accepted for the Passover feast. The Israelites were almost forced to buy animals from the temple to be assured of an acceptable sacrifice. The Pharisees were profiting from their authority over the rituals of worship. Unless they accepted Jesus’ message, they would hate Jesus for exposing them.

In conclusion, Nicodemus did respond to Christ’s message. Although it was not immediately indicated in this passage. John 7:50-52 and John 19:38-40 are strong passages that prove that Nicodemus stood up for Christ and participated with other disciples of Jesus.

Application of the Message

The most vital part of presenting the Gospel of the kingdom is the personal testimony that each believer experiences. I have found that no matter how logical a Christian may be in sharing the message of Christ's message, his own transforming experience and the power of the Spirit ultimately tip the scales for the unbeliever.

When I was in college, I presented the Gospel to students on one of California’s beaches. One day as I was ending one of my better Gospel presentations to a fellow college student, I could see little response from him. Finally, in desperation, I simply told him how Christ had changed my life. At that point, he began to be receptive to the message. As we ended our conversation, he said to me that my own experience is what most drew him to the Lord.

In looking back, a clear presentation of the Gospel can be helpful, as Jesus demonstrated with Nicodemus, but the personal conveying of the experience is also vital. If, as a Christian, you desire greatly to present the Gospel, but you are unsure what to say, share the points in this message that Jesus gave to Nicodemus (man’s position with God, who Jesus was, God’s plan for man, how man enters the kingdom and the results of belief and unbelief). Then follow up the message with the most significant proof of all, your own experience. Pray for those you share this message with, and don’t be discouraged if they show no response. Each person is different and comes to God in their own time.

Application of Discipleship Training

The way Jesus presented the Gospel to Nicodemus was the essential lesson given to the disciples from this encounter. They looked on with curiosity at the discussion Jesus had with this religious leader.

Another important lesson is Jesus’ acceptance of Nicodemus. Jesus had just rebuked the Pharisees and religious leaders by throwing all the money-changers out of the temple. Yet he did not hesitate to spend time with Nicodemus. The disciples were taught to speak out against religious hypocrisy yet to open their arms to those seeking God’s kingdom.

As Christians, we must stand boldly against unrighteousness, especially as it exists in the church. But unfortunately, we have church members and leaders today who, like the Pharisees, have established a hierarchy of prideful authority and, as a result, have buried their respective

churches with un-needed traditions. These leaders need to be approached as Jesus did with Nicodemus. In Nicodemus' case, he turned from his ways and later became a great man of God.

As Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, he delayed answers and gave vivid illustrations from the Old Testament. Nicodemus had hoped to discover what authority Jesus acted upon. Instead of simply stating his authority, Jesus taught Nicodemus about spiritual life and death. After this foundation was laid, he answered Nicodemus' question. The strategy was not deceptive, but the answer required this background.

Jesus also used examples from daily life to explain conceptual truth. For example, he used physical birth to describe the need for spiritual birth, the wind to explain the presence of God's spirit, and light and darkness to illustrate man's general response to his message.

Practical examples can be tremendously effective in teaching truth. Jesus used them over and over again throughout his teaching ministry. The drawback for the 20th century Christian is ensuring that the illustrations suit the truth being taught. A safeguard is to discipline oneself to use Jesus's illustrations as an example's foundation.

Additionally, Jesus quoted the Old Testament. Scripture was one of the primary tools Jesus employed in presenting the truth. The disciples would use it extensively as they quoted Jesus, which should therefore remain the fundamental tool for Christians today in establishing correct doctrine and interpretations.

Jesus' example also taught the disciples to spend time explaining the Gospel message. Jesus was not too busy or annoyed by Nicodemus' questions. He spent time laying a foundation that would bring greater meaning to his answer.

As Christians today, we must not hurriedly give quick answers to questions about Christ. We should be patient, laying a good foundation for our message. It is not deceptive to delay an answer if you intend to lay the groundwork necessary for an intelligent response.

Applications of Jesus' Model

Jesus demonstrated great boldness previous to this encounter with Nicodemus. The disciples learned early to be bold, even with their spiritual leaders. Some also saw great humility in John the Baptist. At least two of Jesus' disciples were first committed to John, but as Jesus came to the forefront, they were encouraged to follow him. The Baptist, popular among the people, relinquished his role to Jesus without hesitation. His humility and the boldness of Christ greatly impacted Jesus' disciples.

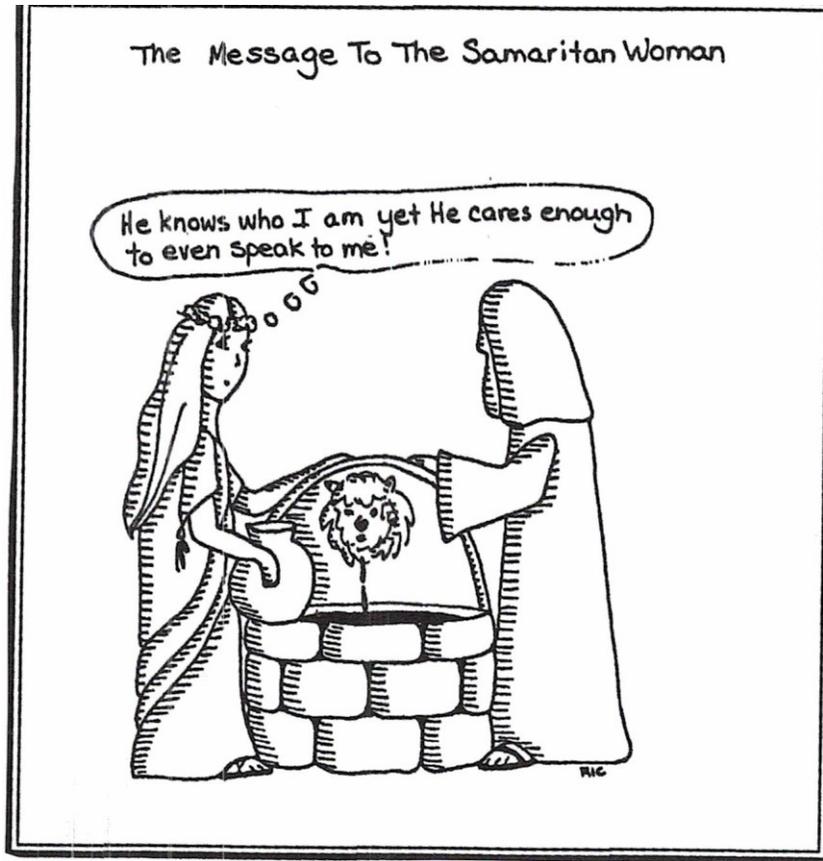
In my first youth ministry, with many high school students, I set out to share the Gospel in a rough part of town. I spent time teaching them the Gospel message and establishing a strategy that could equip all of us to accomplish this ministry. I went with them on this adventure, but what if I hadn't? What if I had stayed home, content with my role as teacher, not participator? If I had hidden behind my own fears, perhaps we would have had our first and last mission in presenting the Gospel. A discipler must be bold and willing to participate in whatever ministry his discipleship group decides to accomplish.

He must also be humble like John the Baptist, stepping aside to let others fulfill their ministries. As I was being discipled years ago by a man name Bill Counts, he demonstrated to me this humility. Bill spent about one year teaching me an in-depth view of the Scriptures, especially about God's grace. As part of my training, Bill took me around California, introducing me to other men who had also demonstrated great faith. I asked him one night as we were flying back from Palo Alto, California, why he was doing this since, in my mind, he was purposefully

lessening his importance in my life. His simple answer never left my memory. He said, “Other men out there know more than me, and I want you to gain experience from them so that you may be complete in Christ.”

Suggestions for Discipleship

1. Read and discuss John 3:1-21.
2. Ask your fellow disciples how they would present the Gospel message to the Nicodemus individuals of this world.
3. Identify those who represent Nicodemus in your own personal relationships, and pray for them by name.
4. Begin study of a book on Bible study methods. Apply a new method each week as you discuss a passage of Scripture.



Chapter 5

The Message of Living Water

He who is too big to help the individual is too small to serve the multitude

Christ delivered a message of living water (John 4) to the Samaritan woman shortly after the Nicodemus discourse. This teaching further developed the kingdom message which Jesus had preached throughout Judea. It focused on the abundant life Christ promised to all who believed. When the Samaritan woman received this message, it positively impacted the entire community she lived. Through her response to the kingdom message, many other Samaritans believed in Christ as the Son of God. Her sins had been obvious to all in her community, and as a result, her new life change became immediately obvious to all.

During the Berkeley riots of 1970 in California, I met a girl who reminded me of this Samaritan woman. I met her at a Bible study, and as I later learned, she had once walked the Berkeley streets as a young prostitute. She sold her body to men to maintain her drug habit. When I met her, I could see nothing but the radiant beauty of an indwelling Christ. Though some of her scars remained because of the sexual and drug abuse, she demonstrated a really remarkable purity. The kingdom message that reached a Samaritan woman 2000 years ago also reached a Berkeley girl in the 20th century.

Background

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman, he was en route to Galilee, where he would spend a great deal of time and effort preaching the Gospel of the kingdom and discipling his men. The disciples had not received a formal call from Jesus, but they continued to follow him as learners and believers. Before they arrived in Samaria, Jesus spent time alone with the “12,” which allowed them to ask questions and participate in the ministry.

Traveling through Samaria was the most direct route from the Jordan to Galilee but not the most popular because Judeans and Galileans held the Samaritans in contempt. The bitter rivalry between Jew and Samaritan began before the Babylonian captivity. Both people were considered Israelites but divided when the Samaritans (descendants of the northern tribes of Israel) claimed Mount Gerazim instead of Jerusalem as God’s place of worship and the rightful place of the temple. There were other theological differences, but the crux of the hatred grew because of this one issue. Thus the Samaritans were quite hostile toward neighboring Judeans and Galileans.

A Message of Living Water to the Samaritan Woman John 4:1-42

After leaving the Jordan River, Jesus and the disciples arrived near Sychar, Samaria, close to noon. The disciples were sent into Sychar to obtain provisions for their journey. Jesus, who tried form the trip, rested near Jacob’s well. As He waited, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from that well. The fact that there was tremendous prejudicial hatred between the Jews and Samaritans did not stop Jesus from asking the woman for a drink. Surprised by Jesus’ request, the Samaritan woman questioned his awareness of the prejudicial barrier.

“The Samaritan woman, therefore, said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9)

Like his dealings with Nicodemus, Jesus did not answer her question directly but instead pointed her to a more important issue: spiritual life.

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, ‘Give me a drink;’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

Although Jesus was tired and thirsty, he did not hesitate to offer this woman a message that would quench her spiritual thirst forever. She responded casually at first but not apathetically. As the woman reminded Jesus he had nothing to draw water with, she asked him where this living water could be obtained and how he could offer something greater than Jacob, who gave them the well.

Perhaps the time was right for Jesus to declare his Messiahship, but instead, he laid a foundation of truth for the woman as he did with Nicodemus. As great as Jacob’s well was in quenching daily thirst, there is a greater well of water that also daily satisfies one’s thirst, water that satisfies one’s spiritual thirst.

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’”(John 4:13-14)

Like many other Samaritans, the woman faced everyday pressures, depression, fears, guilt, and anxieties. For example, her prostitution destroyed the joy and fulfillment of sex, marriage security, self-esteem, and respect in her community. Her fellow Samaritans fared no better in their struggles, as they were constantly taxed and mistreated by the Romans and ridiculed by their neighboring Judeans and Galileans.

Jesus’ message to this woman was the answer to life for her and the fellow Samaritans she lived and grew up with. This new life was a spiritual awakening for them both and could be drawn on daily amid life’s pressures. It would also gain them all eternal life with God.

The Samaritan Woman’s Response

The Samaritan woman’s response was positive, yet she appeared confused. “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw again.” (John 4:15)

Though her answer was a deciding “Yes,” she did not understand that the living water was the Lordship of Christ in her life. Therefore, she would have to abandon her former efforts to reign over her own life and let Jesus be her Lord. That was the basis of Jesus’ Gospel of the kingdom to Nicodemus and is vital to birth into the kingdom of God. She would also later have to recognize her own immorality and turn from it in this process of making Jesus the Lord of her life. Jesus defined it as repentance, which meant turning toward God and away from sin.

Jesus did not coldly accuse the woman of being immoral; that was not his approach. Instead, he carefully exposed her conduct by asking a penetrating question. “He said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’”(John 4:16)

The woman did not cover up her sin by lying but admitted that she had no husband. As a result, Jesus commended her for telling the truth and then let her know he was aware of her five previous affairs with men and the one in which she was presently involved.

Surprised at Jesus’ knowledge of her past, the Samaritan woman recognized him as a prophet; a prophet who was preaching a message of peace she had never heard before; a prophet who had openly talked with a spirit of love and acceptance; a prophet who also was a hated Jew.

The issue of worship vehemently argued between Jews and Samaritans was her last question before entering the kingdom of God. Jesus supported Jerusalem as the site for worship but also contended that it was of little importance in view of worshipping God in Spirit and truth. “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father.’”(John 4:21)

The temple at Mount Gerazin had already been destroyed, and the Roman soldiers would level the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., thirty years after this declaration by Jesus. The day would come when there would be no temple to offer worship for both Jew and Samaritans. True faith would be carried in a man's heart and not within a temple's walls. Given this, Jesus told the woman that God is Spirit, and a man can adore God in spirit. The living water was the Spirit of God dwelling in a believer’s life.

Before the return of the disciples, the Samaritan woman made one last inquiry previous to her accepting Jesus’ kingdom message. Though she did not put in question form, the Samaritan

woman wanted to hear from Jesus' lips that he was the predicted Messiah. "The woman said to Him, I know the Messiah is coming; (He who is called Christ); when the One comes, He will declare all things to us. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am He." (John 4:25-26)

Reaping the Samaritan Harvest (John 4:27-43)

When the disciples returned from Sychar with provisions, the Samaritan woman promptly left with a new zeal and purpose in life. Her spreading the word about Christ to her fellow Samaritans indicated that she had entered the kingdom of God.

Before the Samaritans arrived at Jacob's well, Jesus taught the disciples about God's will. He began this teaching by refusing the food they brought him, saying that he had food to eat, which they were unaware of. Jesus was not referring to food that maintained physical life but, more critically, food that was necessary for spiritual life.

"The disciples, therefore, were saying to one another, no one brought Him anything to eat, did He? Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.'" (John 4:33-34)

Jesus' timing of this message may have caused him a few extra hunger pangs, but it was necessary to explain to the disciples the immediate will and work of God that they were about to witness with the Samaritans.

As the Samaritan woman spread the news that the Messiah was outside town, many came to see for themselves. They were like a field of wheat, ready to believe and be harvested into the kingdom of God.

"Do not say, there are four months, and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already He who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. In this case, the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." (John 4:35-38)

The reaping the disciples were about to do included a harvest of Samaritans who believed in the coming Christ. The disciples had not sowed the message, but still, they were part of the harvest. The disciples learned that the sower and the reaper rejoice together, and both receive the wages, trusting God with their individual roles and responsibilities.

Jesus stayed in Sychar another two days at the request of the Samaritans. Upon leaving, the disciples had more provisions than they needed to continue their journey. In addition, for perhaps the first time in their lives, they had a love for the Samaritan people and a clear picture of the character and work of Christ.

Application of the Teaching

The message that Jesus imparted in this passage has four lessons: 1) possession of Christ the living water, 2) the role of repentance, 3) the practice of true worship, and 4) the work of

Christ in the believer. It is essential to clearly understand that believers have a foundation of living water in the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit. As we teach our fellow disciples about the new birth we received when accepting Christ as Lord, we should stress that Christ can meet our day-to-day problems. His Spirit will not only bring us into eternal life but will be a spring of spiritually fresh water throughout the remainder of our lives.

Jesus gently directed the woman to review her past sins before finishing his Gospel presentation. Repentance is a necessary part of the salvation message. Recognizing that Jesus is the Christ is a significant step for anyone considering Christ as Lord. The key is repentance, turning away from sin, and turning toward Christ. We must never treat the need for repentance lightly as we train others in presenting the message of Christ.

Jesus told the woman of the coming end of the temple as a place of worship and explained the true nature of worship in the process.

We should likewise teach others that a church building can only symbolize worship or be a place conducive to worship. True adoration and worship are only accomplished by a believer who has the presence of God's Spirit, as explained by Jesus.

Our Disciples should learn that they are each a temple of God. If they, as a temple, gather with other believers who are temples, then they can worship anywhere.

As Jesus did the foundational work in presenting the Gospel to the Samaritans, so it may be with our disciples when they lead others to Christ for salvation. Our disciples may not be the ones to have done all the work to accomplish the result, but they will reap the reward, as the disciples were with the Samaritans.

I have served with various evangelistic organizations over the years and it was sad to see fellow Christians attach significance and honor to those who happened to lead someone to Christ. There was no such admiration for the one who had laid the foundation, patiently answered difficult questions, or demonstrated a Christ-like life. Thus, many Christians I knew felt inadequate because they were not the reapers.

We must never let our disciples feel more spiritual or mature because God has allowed them to reap the harvest of a new believer. Instead, they must share their joy with all those who previously sowed the seed, watered, and nurtured it.

Application of Jesus' Discipleship Training

Before Jesus presented the Gospel of the kingdom to the Samaritans, he was at the Jordan where the disciples baptized many who had believed his message. The disciples were hardly mature in the faith, yet Jesus did not hesitate to let them baptize other believers.

We should learn from Christ's example and let even our youngest member in Christ be a part of our ministry. The disciples had not even been officially called, yet they had already shared the responsibility of baptizing others. It does not take an ordained minister or a priest to baptize another. This ministry belongs even to the youngest of Christians.

Jesus also spent time alone with his disciples before arriving in Samaria. The Scripture does not elaborate on the content of this time, but since the disciples had seen Jesus do and say a lot in Jerusalem, perhaps they had questioned him about those past events.

Young Christians today need time alone with other believers to ask questions concerning their life in Christ. As disciples, we must not be too busy to provide this time for them.

My discipleship ministry has involved a weekly meeting with each I am discipling. Sometimes this will include a lunch, breakfast, or any convenient time. Together we discuss

personal matters, such as current problems or unanswered questions. Jesus seemed to afford this kind of time with his men, and we must likewise include it in our discipleship schedule. Group meetings with our disciples are vital, but individual attention is even more essential to successful discipleship.

Jesus' message to the woman was more direct than his discussion with Nicodemus. He immediately turned a well of water into a spiritual concept for the Samaritan woman. Jesus did not know the woman previously but did not hesitate to share the Gospel of the kingdom with her. He used vivid illustrations in his presentation, like living water, eating, and sowing and reaping.

We must also demonstrate and teach flexibility in preaching the Gospel at any time to anyone. Although it is more natural to build a relationship first, we must always be available to share the Gospel with anyone.

Jesus' method of teaching used practical illustrations. It is our job to explain those illustrations so that they apply to the 21st-century man and woman. We should think of examples of our own as we share the truth. The parables we use should always reflect the truth and never replace it.

The woman's response to Jesus' message represented the good ground as taught by Jesus in the Matthew 13 parables.

“And the one whom seed was sown on the good ground, this is the man who hears the word and understands it.”(Matthew 13:23)

She did not hesitate to ask questions and was honest about her sins. In response to Jesus' message, she did not hesitate to spread the news about him as the Messiah. The Samaritan woman was a great example of “good ground” and a “born-again” believer, as explained in the account with Nicodemus.

Jesus could have traveled through Persia rather than Samaria, but he wanted his disciples to see that the Gospel of the kingdom was available to all, not just the Jews alone. As the disciples witnessed the tremendous response from the hated Samaritans, it deepened their understanding that the Gospel comes from those we least expect. The disciples probably just wanted to get through Samaria with the least trouble. They arrived in Galilee not only unharmed but with new brothers and sisters in the faith.

I had the opportunity once to teach seminars in Nigeria with some fellow pastors. I traveled throughout Nigeria and was amazed at the tremendous response to the Gospel. Churches were packed with new believers every Sunday.

On the journey home, we spent a good deal of time in Switzerland, the birth place of the reformer, John Calvin. The difference between the two countries was striking. Nigeria was struggling in many ways, while Switzerland, a beautiful place to live, could not compare to the extraordinary zeal for the Gospel that the Nigerians demonstrated.

We should be aware that the reception of the Gospel often may not come from where we think it might, but sometimes from the least likely source.

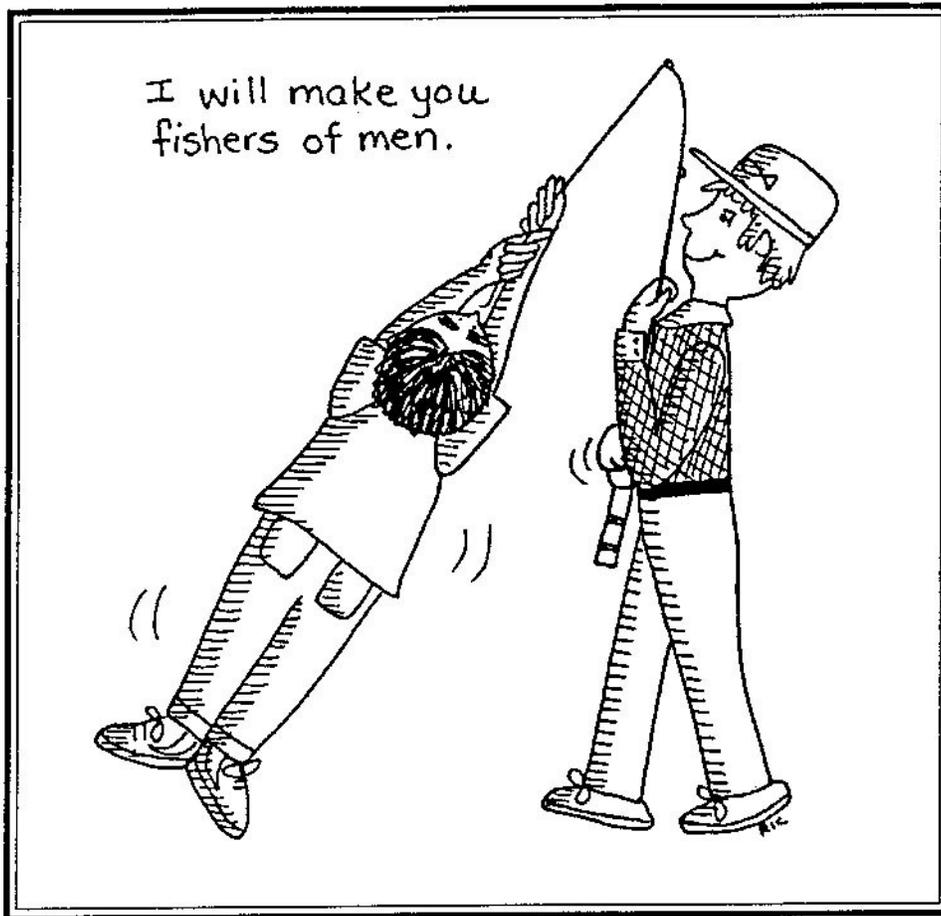
Application of Jesus' Model

Jesus demonstrated compassion and acceptance as he shared the Gospel with the Samaritan woman. Within only a few days, the disciples saw Jesus open his arms to Nicodemus, a strict religious leader and then a Samaritan woman whose morals were definitely in question.

As disciplers, we must never limit our ministry to one social group. Our Bible studies or the churches we serve should see us as compassionate and accepting believers willing to open our houses to men and women with all types of backgrounds. Our example will significantly hamper our teaching if we do not love and accept those represented by Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman.

Suggestions for Study

1. Discuss amongst your discipleship group the varying backgrounds of each person present.
2. Are you well represented? Does your group come from different backgrounds?
3. Discuss how those represented by Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman can be reached and included.
4. Pray for each other, thanking God for your differences. Look to see why God brought you together the way He did. How would you have done it?



Chapter 6

The Goal of Discipleship

“Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men”

There are many references to discipleship throughout the Gospels. Still, none defines a disciple’s goal better than the charge Jesus gave four men at Lake Gennesaret during the first year of his official ministry.

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”(Mark 1:17)

Today, churches and Christian organizations are returning to this vital message. More than ever, there seems to be a concerted effort by Christian leaders to train laypeople to do the work of the ministry. As a result of the great success of trained laypeople, church leaders no longer carry the total burden of responsibility in their church, spending countless hours away from home and family. The men and women they have trained through discipleship have in turn freed them of responsibilities they were never intended to carry.

Instead of being the perfect Christian, pastors and leaders can better serve the congregation as teachers and disciplers. Congregations are responding and giving their church leaders more respect because of it. All this change has resulted from returning the ministry to the layman via the discipleship process.

The goal of discipleship, and the focus of this chapter, is to teach people how to minister to and catch others for the kingdom, as Jesus taught his disciples in Luke 5:1-11.

Background Leading to Lake Gennesaret

After leaving the Samaritans at Sychar, Jesus and his disciples traveled to Cana, where Jesus had turned the water into wine for friends at a wedding celebration. While at Cana, a royal official traveled from Capernaum to implore Jesus to heal his son. Seeing the man's suffering, Jesus sent him on his way with a promise. When the official returned to Capernaum, his faith journey was met with a healthy son.

He then left his hometown of Nazareth, a few miles south of Cana. In his home synagogue, he taught four lessons concerning himself and the future of the Jewish people. In his first teaching, he pointed to himself as God's anointed evangelist. In his second, he exposed the Jew's anger and shared his own preference to do miracles in Capernaum rather than in his hometown of Nazareth. His third teaching revealed that God would abandon the Jews as His sole instrument of revelation. Finally, in his last teaching, he stated that a prophet, referring to himself, is never welcome in his hometown. As a result of these teachings, his fellow Nazarenes escorted Jesus and his disciples out of town on the so-called "rail." He was quickly greeted with open arms in Capernaum, where he had previously healed the synagogue's official's son.

In Capernaum, Jesus resumed his teaching in the synagogue. He also healed many of their diseases in Capernaum, including Simon Peter's mother, on one Sabbath day. Afterward, he went on to spread the Gospel throughout Galilee. (Luke 4:31-41)

Message to Disciples at Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11)

As Jesus traveled through Galilee, many began to follow him and his disciples. When he arrived at Lake Gennesaret, his popularity had grown so much that he had trouble finding room to teach. The crowds pushed him to the edge of the lake, trying to get closer. So he got into Simon's boat and taught the Gospel from there.

After finishing his sermon, he asked Simon to put out into the deep to fish. Simon explained they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Simon knew the best time to fish was in the latter part of the night, not the middle of the day, as Jesus suggested. Without much hesitation, though, he let the net down, for Jesus' sake. Before any skepticism could come from Peter, so many fish were caught that the nets attached to the boats began breaking. As a result, Simon and Andrew began to wave to their fishing partners, James and John, for help.

As the men hauled in the fish, their boats began to sink from the overload of caught fish. Peter had accompanied Jesus on most of his journeys and had seen him do many amazing things. Yet, somehow, this experience, more than all the others, inspired Peter to repent and commit himself to Jesus. Had Peter been a believer up to this point is not fully known, but he was afterward.

“But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell at Jesus’ feet saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’ And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.’”(Luke 5: 8 &10)

After arriving at the shore with a tremendous load of fish, Peter, James, John, and Andrew put aside their fishing boats, left everything behind, and followed Christ. Their observation period had ended; they not only believed who Jesus was but had made him the Lord of their lives openly before others.

Application of the Message

Jesus taught some critical messages to his disciples upon arriving in Galilee. At Nazareth, he indirectly claimed Messiahship, warned the disciples what response a prophet can expect from his hometown, and predicted the exit of the Jews as God’s instruments of truth. He repeated his message of the kingdom throughout Galilee as presented to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

As we disciple others, we must discuss, as Jesus did at Nazareth, the possible negative response they might find at home. Their new life in Christ may not be shared by family and friends who knew them before they accepted Christ as Lord as Savior.

A young girl in one of my youth groups met Christ, but her new life was not accepted at home. As a result, she was restricted from attending any Bible studies we had for our youth groups at church. As a youth director, I remember presenting this passage when she was able to come to the youth group one Wednesday night. By seeing Jesus’ own problem with his hometown, she began to grab hold of a new confidence that this home rejection would pass one day. As she trusted in Christ, eventually, her parents lifted the restriction because of her loving and patient attitude toward them in this problem. She now serves full-time in a Christian organization with the full support of her family.

Jesus unhesitatingly claimed he was the predicted Messiah, and we should study carefully how he fulfilled all the Messianic expectations. Likewise, our fellow disciplers should be well-informed about how Christ fulfilled prophesy. This fulfillment is excellent evidence of his authenticity as God’s Savior and Son.

Jesus also preached to the Jews at Nazareth about their coming exit as God’s vehicles of truth. This responsibility now belongs to believers. We should learn how the Jews succeeded and failed as God’s instruments of truth. So, likewise, Christians are God’s vehicles of truth today and will either benefit from being dependable or suffer from failing to accomplish His will.

The Gospel Jesus taught in Galilee was probably the message he gave to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. We must continually go over these points with our disciples, so they clearly understand the message Jesus presented to the world.

The message that Jesus imparted to his disciples at Lake Gennesaret, to make them fishers of men, is a message we really should emphasize. A discipler intends to train men and women to understand the Gospel and disciple others. Unfortunately, church history has proved that very few ever consistently accept this challenge. Most Christians usually do not repent of their inconsistent commitment to Christ and are content to let others bear the full responsibility to win the world to Christ. And that is too bad!

One of the discipleship groups I started with began with 14 men and women. As the training and teaching progressed, I one day had to make it clear that this would not just be

another Bible study. Christians need to be free to come and go in a Bible study. They need to use the Word to help bolster their spiritual foundations. But on the other hand, as I explained to them, discipleship would take time, commitment, and consistency. This is what Jesus modeled with his disciples and should be the basis for all discipleship groups. As a result, the group of 14 I started with was trimmed to just five individuals after two months. I met with these Christians for four years, and it was undoubtedly one of the most productive things I've ever done as a minister. Though Jesus collected many followers in his travels, perhaps just wanting teaching here or a miracle there, only a few really wanted to be equipped for the kingdom's sake. That was enough, for the disciples did go on and begin the whole church movement that succeeded in winning millions of believers over the centuries.

Application of Discipleship Principles

During Jesus' time in Galilee, the disciples were able to watch his approach to people and problems. Without knowing it, the disciples were being trained by Jesus as they watched him heal, cast out demons, and preach the Gospel to the Galileans. He was modeling for them a pattern of ministry that would later enable them to complete their own ministries.

The essential factor the disciples could learn through all these events was the character and method Jesus employed. Jesus was compassionate and extremely sensitive to the needs of others. There were no lengthy sessions of laying on hands or pre-arranged healing rallies. For the most part, healing was a simple, unannounced event predicated on the faith of the one being healed and the power and desire of Jesus to heal. The disciples were later called on to continue this vital ministry in the manner Jesus demonstrated in their presence.

We must teach our disciples the simplicity of a healing ministry. The same ministry the disciples appropriated is still available to us, but not as a faith-healing circus event. Instead, as disciples, we must study these healing events and gather our disciples for a time of prayer and healing if the need arises. Years ago, I had a close friend contract what the doctors thought was cancer. The medical experts in this situation felt frustrated and powerless to offer any remedy other than the usual cancer treatments that rarely worked. The prognosis of my friend was not encouraging, as you can assume. When I heard about this, I flew to Seattle, where my friend Gary made his home. I gathered several of his Christian friends for prayer and a simple laying on of hands, much like what Jesus did with Simon's mother. I asked them all in this meeting to offer a reason to God why Gary should be spared. I posed to them that perhaps God had a greater need for Gary in heaven. What right had we to demand that he stay on earth if it was better that he be with God in heaven? We all prayed in response to this question, and each believer made their case to God. As a sign of love to Gary, we all prayed and laid hands on him at the end of our time together.

Early the next week, the doctors told Gary that his recent tests showed complete cancer remission. However, they also said they were unsure how to account for such a turnaround. Gary, in his point-blank manner, said, "Put God down as the cure; He did what you could not do!"

We must not forsake the healing ministry because many circus-faith healers have ruined it. A weekly healing meeting was not Jesus' pattern or that of the disciples. They simply prayed for those needing to be healed and laid hands on them. The illnesses were usually severe, so it would be improper to have a healing service for a cold, stomach upset, etc. It may also be God's desire not to spare someone we pray for or lay hands on. Even though it seems impossible, we

must rejoice in God's will if he takes one of His own to heaven. We must remember that God has a kingdom far beyond this world, and His purpose for all of us continues.

A healing event is a serious time for believers, and it brings them into a deep level of prayer that calls upon God to change things miraculously. If He does heal in response to our prayers, then we must never forget that the power to heal was His and that all credit and glory goes to Him. This does not mean we can't be excited about such a miracle, but let God give you what is due for your faithfulness. By no means announce to others your role in the miracle or bring attention to your own act of faith in the matter. To do so would ruin the one good thing you did because your desire to be recognized in the event superseded what God did.

Jesus also exposed his disciples to his prayer life. Jesus went alone to a lonely place to pray at the end of his ministry in Capernaum. As a result, he announced his plans to spread the news to other cities throughout Galilee.

Prayer, as the disciples learned later, is essential to knowing and doing the will of God. Prayer is the spoken communication link between God and us. In many of my discipleship sessions, prayer usually preceded everything we tried to accomplish within a night, whether it was a study of the Bible or planning for a ministry project. Prayer helped us sense the will of God. When we discarded it as a nuisance or a routine, we had difficulty understanding the Bible and the plans we made to accomplish our ministry. Through prayer, we gain the understanding to do what God wants us to do. It may demand that we leave a very secure and successful ministry as it did with Jesus. We as disciples must constantly pray to feel free to move on when God calls us to leave for new ministries.

Jesus stressed revisiting past ministries and repeating the Gospel to his disciples. For example, he had visited Cana and Capernaum previous to this trip, and he repeatedly taught the Gospel message all over Galilee, so many would know the way to the kingdom of God, and the disciples would learn how to preach the message.

When training other Christians, repetitions are vital. We should never expect our fellow disciples to go out and preach the Gospel after hearing it a few times. Instead, they must be allowed the opportunity to listen to many Gospel teachings before sharing it with others.

Returning to old places of residence, schools, or churches can also be a continuing ministry. Jesus saw great value in returning to Capernaum. There is no place that God has put you that a ministry cannot be continued.

Each place God sends me, I try to collect the addresses of people I meet and minister to. They will each receive at least one letter a year from me, and I always answer the letters I receive. As a result, God has continued my ministry with people wherever I have gone. In some cases, I have returned and been able to carry on where I left off. Jesus' method and approach to teaching through Galilee usually began within the synagogue but gradually moved to the countryside. His style of teaching changed according to the situation. In the synagogue at Nazareth, he read Scripture and commented on it in a traditional way and setting. At Lake Gennesaret, he taught the Gospel from a boat. In the synagogue, they were outraged; at Lake Gennesaret, they were thrilled. If we learn anything from Jesus' teaching style, it is that variety was key.

Application of Jesus' Model

The apparent characteristics of this Galilean ministry were Jesus' boldness and compassion. He told his hometown that he was the anointed evangelist, and they would no

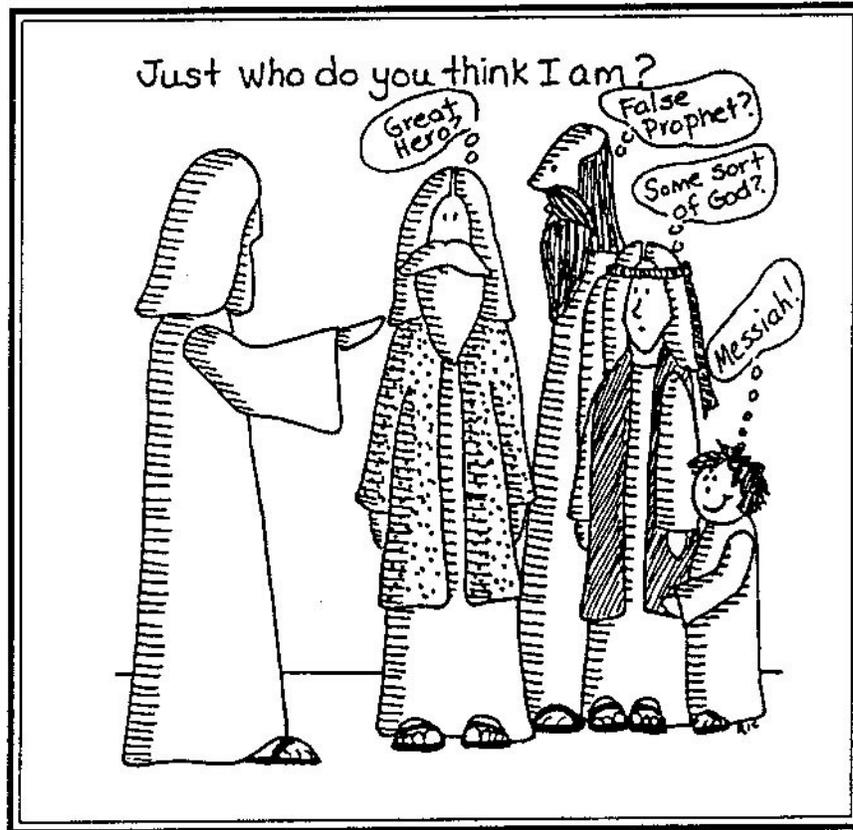
longer be God's vehicles of Nazareth. Jesus healed those in need, whether Jew, Greek, Galilean, or Roman. His compassion had no boundaries, and his love was for all men.

Disciplers must be willing to proclaim the truth even if it has unpredictable consequences. Those we disciple will need to boldly speak the truth, even if it jeopardizes a job, a standing in a neighborhood, a relationship in a family, or a coveted friendship. In the midst of this, we must be assured that God never fails to reward those who boldly speak the truth.

United with that boldness is a compassionate heart, sincerely seeking the needed healing in others. Our boldness must be outspoken but also sensitive and laced with love, as described in I Corinthians 13.

Suggestions for Further Study

1. Study the healing ministries of Jesus: John 4:46-54, Luke 4:31-41, Matthew 8:1-4
2. Discuss how a healing ministry could be appropriated in your discipleship group.
3. Discuss how boldness and compassion can be blended in the Christian life.
4. Study Luke 5:1-11 and discuss the readiness of the group to enter the "fishers of men" goal Jesus announced to his disciples.
5. Make a list of people with whom you might start a letter-writing ministry.



Chapter 7

More than Just a Discipler

“Just Who Do You Think I Am”

Throughout the last two centuries, the nature of Christ has been controversial. The relationship between his deity and humanity has sparked many debates between religious groups and fostered many cults. Was Jesus, the Son of God, able to forgive sinful men? On the other hand, was he just a religious leader who demonstrated a life of love and goodwill but perished like the rest of mankind?

Cults today vary greatly, but one thing they have in common is a distorted view of the person of Jesus Christ. Some cults portray him as a great religious hero and nothing more. Others present him as a god in a polytheistic realm of divine leadership. The Pharisees regarded Jesus as a false prophet and false Messiah. In their confrontations with him, they tried to make Jesus everything but the Son of God, Messiah, or one holy enough to forgive others' sins. The apparent compassion that Jesus had for the people did not sway their constant criticism of him. From the beginning of his public ministry, they engineered a plan to destroy him despite the great miracles of healing that Jesus so lovingly demonstrated.

This criticism by the Pharisees did not deter Jesus from speaking the truth about his own identity. In John 5, Jesus explained to his disciples and those in the temple his relationship with God and his purpose on earth. He told this message to a group of angry Pharisees, upset because

he openly claimed equality with God. Jesus had previously refrained from proclaiming his own Messiahship. In this situation, though, he completely exposed himself as the Son of God, adding fury to the argument of his enemies. This was needed because his eye was not on the Pharisees but the 12 disciples. The disciples needed a teaching foundation to complete their first ministry not many days hence. That foundation was the teaching that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. That was the basis of the first message they presented on their first evangelistic tour.

Chronological Background Leading to John 5

The discourse Jesus delivered to the Pharisees took place in Jerusalem after a very successful Galilean ministry. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded this ministry through four significant events: 1) the healing of the leper, 2) the healing of the person with paralysis, 3) the call of Matthew, and 4) a message on fasting. These events fueled the hatred of the Pharisees who awaited him at Jerusalem, but they were also crucial in the disciples' training.

The leper's healing in Matthew 8 occurred immediately after leaving Lake Gennesaret. After healing the leper, Jesus had him report to the priest for an offering of cleansing. Jesus then returned to a home he had in Capernaum and healed a paralytic. He forgave the paralytic's sins before healing his physical condition. The Pharisees, as expected, questioned his authority to forgive sins. In response, Jesus asked them: "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you or to say 'Rise and walk?'" (Luke 5:23)

Jesus wanted his disciples and all those following him to know that he could and would forgive sin. Healing the diseased was done out of compassion, but it was also done to authenticate him as the Messiah.

Jesus then left Capernaum to teach at the Sea of Galilee. Upon returning, he asked Matthew, a much-hated tax gatherer, to be a disciple. Without hesitation, Matthew left everything he owned and followed Jesus. In his joy, Matthew gave a banquet for Jesus and his disciples, but not without the Pharisee's criticism. Jesus used this occasion to explain a very important part of his ministry.

“...It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to come to call the righteous, but the sinner.”(Mark 2:17)

His answer exposed the Pharisee's tremendous blindness toward bringing sinners into the kingdom of God. God's plan for Israel was that they be His witnesses of truth to the sinful world. As Jesus answered, he was not concentrating on those who were righteous, as the Pharisees claimed to be, but on those who were sinners, those who truly knew their own spiritual condition and had repentant hearts.

Jesus' first ministry in Galilee ended as some of John the Baptist's disciples questioned him about why Jesus and his disciples had forsaken the practice of fasting. Jesus pointed out that fasting was for solemn occasions, and there should be joy and celebration while he was on earth. Fasting would be more appropriate when he left because his physical presence would be sorely and sadly missed.

Jesus also shared two parables with John's disciples regarding the new life necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wineskins burst and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined, but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”(Matthew 9:16-17)

In these illustrations, Jesus was the new wine. The old garment and old wineskin were the unredeemed lives of not only the Pharisees but all those who did not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus did not intend to blend in his beliefs and give salvation to someone unwilling to abandon his old life, or as he put in this illustration, his old wineskin. As Jesus told Nicodemus, he must be born again; so a new wineskin, a new beginning, is necessary for being filled by Christ, the new wine, and thus entering the kingdom of God. The old life, the old wineskin, is discarded through the act of repentance.

A message at the Pool (John 5)

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem with his disciples and followers shortly before Passover. Jews all over Palestine journeyed to Jerusalem yearly for the Passover celebration. During Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem for the previous Passover, he preached the message of the kingdom of God and cast out the money changers. He returned boldly to the temple a year later to preach the kingdom message. Upon entering the temple, Jesus met a sick and disabled man who had suffered for 38 years, unable to live life without pain or inconvenience. According to tradition and some manuscripts, sick and diseased Jews would wait by the Bethesda pool in the temple for the waters to move. An angel of the Lord stirred up the pool's water at certain seasons. Then the first one to enter the pool during the stirring of the water would be healed of any disease or affliction.¹

The afflicted man told Jesus he had no one to help him get into the pool at the right time. Jesus could have helped the man into the pool, but instead, he healed the man by a simple command.

“Arise, take up your pallet and walk.” And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk.(John 5:8-9)

Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, which brought a swift reaction from many Jews who saw the man carrying his pallet. Because the Sabbath was to be kept holy, the religious leaders thought that no burden should be carried on this day. The man, caught in this apparent trespass, explained that the man who healed him told him to do so.²

Later the man and Jesus met again in the temple, and Jesus told him not to continue to sin, lest someday worse things befall him. The man began to spread the word that Jesus was his healer. The angry Jews were then able to confront Jesus concerning the healing on the Sabbath, which they deemed inappropriate. Jesus defended himself by asserting his authority as the Son of God and identifying healing on the Sabbath as nothing more than an extension of God's work.

This confrontation led Jesus to explain his exact role with God and his purpose on earth. He did not leave the scene as he had done with the man who had been sick for 38 years but began to lay point-by-point teaching, which benefited his disciples greatly, but fueled the fire of hatred from the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus taught four points to his listeners at the temple. He described these points: 1) his dependent relationship with God, 2) his independent relationship with God, 3) the proof of his authority, and 4) the reason for Jewish unbelief and rejection.

1. Jesus' Dependent Relation on God

Jesus openly expressed a dependent relationship with the Father. He claimed he could do nothing unless the Father was doing it. Nevertheless, the relationship between Jesus and the Father was undergirded by love, and their identity with one another as illustrated in their like manner in accomplishing the work of the ministry.

“Jesus therefore answered and was saying to Him, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’”
(John 5:19)

Another example of this relationship was in his approach to judgment.

“I can do nothing on My own initiative, as I hear, I judge and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”(John 5:30)

In both statements, Jesus claimed that the works he performed on earth were accomplished by his voluntary dependence upon God the Father.

2. Jesus' Independent Relationship With God

Jesus was also given an independent function. Through him, spiritual life would be given to man and judgment executed, so man would understand who Jesus was and honor him as they would the Father.

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.”(John 5:22-23)

The key to the spiritual life Jesus came to offer and the judgment that could be spared was to believe in him. Faith was the central point of the kingdom message preached across Galilee and repeated in Jerusalem.

3. The Proof of Jesus' Authority

The proof of Jesus' testimony was not dependent upon him alone. John the Baptist, greatly respected and revered among the Jews, supported Jesus as the Son of God. Long before this Passover feast, John spoke out boldly for Jesus.

“The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...And I have seen, and borne witness that this is the Son of God.’”(John 1:29-34)

4. The Reason for Jewish Unbelief and Rejection

Although Jesus used John’s testimony, miracles, and wonders to prove his Messiahship, the rejection and opposition he received from many Jews did not result from failing to accept John’s testimony and Jesus’ miraculous works but rather from the absence of God’s presence.

“And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom he sent. So you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is these that bear witness of Me.”(John 5:38-39)

Self-honor was another symptom Jesus pointed to in describing the spiritual state of the unbelieving Jews. Even though they were godly men, they delighted greatly in paying one another religious honor and glory. Their religious appearance hid the reality of who they were; sinners separated from the kingdom of God.

“But I know you, that you do not have a love of God in yourselves...How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”(John 5:42-44)

Application of the Message

Four major teachings chronologically preceded Jesus’ entrance into the temple at Jerusalem: 1) Jesus’ authority to forgive man’s sins, 2) the background of potential disciples, 3) fasting, and 4) the necessity for a new life.

1. Jesus’ Authority to Forgive Man’s Sins

In healing the paralytic, Jesus demonstrated his authority to forgive sins. As we study this with our disciples, we must remember that Jesus came to cure men of their sins, not their afflictions. Healing simply authenticated Jesus as the Messiah. The man healed at the Bethesda Pool illustrates the greater importance of salvation versus physical health. Jesus returned and told the man about his actual sickness, which was sin.

The healing ministry is increasing today, probably because of its miraculous nature and dramatic appeal. In the midst of this, we must not be reluctant to pray for a man’s healing, but we must teach our fellow Christians that Jesus healed out of compassion and as a witness of his authenticity. In other words, the dramatic setting for healing may be tainted, but we must not deny that God can and will heal in the 21st century. But all the healing in the world does not compare to when a man is cured of his sins forever. It is this healing experience that Jesus was after, even when a man or woman was healed of a physical affliction.

2. The Background of Potential Disciples

When Jesus chose Matthew as a disciple, the Pharisees heavily criticized his background. Matthew, a tax-gatherer, was hated by all of his fellow Jews. Yet Jesus saw him more than once in attendance at many of his teaching sessions. Finally, he invited Matthew to become a disciple, and like Peter, James, John, and Andrew, Matthew left his former life behind to follow Jesus.

Disciplers must never exclude anyone as a possible disciple because of their background. Instead, we must teach this passage hoping to lay a foundation of truth that would include anyone interested in the Gospel. Criticism may follow this kind of openness within our church community, but we must never desert our call to the Matthews of this world. As the Pharisees criticized Jesus' association with Matthew, Pharisaism in the church today may continue as we associate with the so-called "undesirables."

While in college, I was criticized for befriending campus rowdies and rebels. I never participated in the sin these students had engaged in, but I spent considerable time playing basketball, studying, and regularly discussing vital issues with them.

My efforts to reach them damaged my own reputation at the Christian college I was attending, but at least one of them accepted Christ and that made it worth it for me. This one new convert went on to spread the Gospel throughout Southeast Asia and Europe. Today, along with some other men, he has helped launch a campaign for Christ in Switzerland.

3. Fasting

Fasting was not necessary while Jesus was on earth. Jesus made this point clear to John the Baptist's disciples. Fasting is an intensification of the prayer life, often practiced, especially after sad events, like death or affliction. But, as Jesus pointed out, his arrival was quite the opposite. When Jesus left, having saved mankind from sin, fasting would be needed because the advantage of having the Son of God physically present would be passed.

Fasting is an essential part of the prayer life. It should never be used habitually, but only in troublesome circumstances. Though prayer should be consistent and daily, fasting should be reserved for tough times requiring us to know the plan and purpose of God intimately. When we go without food, we are telling God His plan is so important to us that we are willing to suffer hunger to understand and be a part of it. Fasting does not just catch God's attention; it helps us focus more clearly on what He is doing in our lives.

Fasting should always have a specific goal in mind. In the past, when I fasted, there was usually a great need for God to act in a situation immediately. For example, sickness or job dilemma was often the circumstance that brought on the practice of fasting for me.

A fellow pastor of mine was once in deep distress one night. His wife was in her third pregnancy, having lost two previous babies to a blood disorder. The two babies never lived beyond 21 days, and the doctors were not encouraged about the third child. I told my friend that I would fast for him when it came to the birth. Months passed, and I must admit, I forgot my promise for a while.

One morning God reminded me of this commitment through my morning prayers. I prayed and fasted for my friend and his new baby throughout the day. I did not know then that his wife had gone into labor that very day and was in the process of giving birth to the new child. The delivery was a complete success, and there were no signs of blood disease. I really felt that my fasting helped the situation. Whether God's will depended upon my fasting day is doubtful because many others were praying for a healthy birth. But at least I knew I was contributing to

this miracle through my fasting and many others. God allowed all of us together to be a part of His will in this great event.

4. The Necessity for New Life

Jesus concluded his message to John's disciples with the parables of the "new wine" and "patched garment." The Christian life is not a blend of good ethics or religious systems but a commitment to Jesus Christ, who indwells every believer, making him a new person. Our disciples must understand this in their presentation of the Gospel. As new wineskins were necessary for the new wine, commitment is essential for every potential believer who considers accepting Christ as Savior. Upon his decision, he abandons his former life for a new wineskin.

The reason for rejection, in this case, is not unbelief but rather the desire to cling to the old way of life. Therefore, in studying with fellow Christians, we must look at these parables carefully as they describe in another way what happens when a person is born again and why some people reject the Lordship of Christ.

We must remember to stress with our disciples the clear-cut decision that every man has made and will make. In presenting the kingdom message, no one wavers back and forth between the kingdom. As Jesus pointed out if you believe, judgment is over; if you reject, judgment will be executed.

I had a neighbor who once claimed to be on the fence about a decision regarding Christ. He said he did not have enough evidence to prove Christ was genuine and his offer was valid. We should always spend time talking with our neighbors, working through their doubts and reservations with them, but we should never lead them to believe that fence-sitting is a safe position. They are on their road to judgment just as fast as the one who openly rejects Jesus' offer and lives a life of immorality.

"Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."(John 5:24)

As with the Jews 2,000 years ago and today, men love to be honored and adored. Every athlete wants to be the hero in that final championship game. Politicians dream of the honor and recognition they will receive if they gain that sought-after position in government. People in business devise financial schemes to make them rich and honored in the financial community. Religious leaders and pastors dream of being their community's most significant and respected spiritual figures. Churches also greatly desire to be called the best church in the city. All these groups and individuals have one thing in common, self-glory. Submitting oneself to God is hard because it shifts one's desire for glory to God.

Jesus declared self-glory the nemesis to man's acceptance of the Gospel. Our disciples must learn that man struggles with this when faced with the Gospel. It is difficult for a man to give up the love and glory he wants to reserve for himself. Our disciples must also remember that this same perversion of glory haunts the Christian ranks because the world and its values still influence them.

Application of Discipleship Principles

Jesus gave the disciples three lessons on administering healing before arriving at the temple in Jerusalem. They were the leper, the paralytic, and the man at Bethesda. While in Galilee, a leper approached Jesus and asked him to be healed. Jesus' reply was quick, "I am willing, be cleansed."(Matthew 8:3)

The leper put himself in the presence of Jesus, humbled himself, and called Jesus "Lord." No matter what circumstances we face, as disciples, we should approach it by putting ourselves in the presence of Jesus through prayer. In our prayers, we should recognize that he is the power behind us, which is the best application of true humility. We should recognize him also as the Lord and the Lord of all miracles. As we step out into the tasks ahead, this acknowledged fact is a tremendous strength. As Jesus stretches his hand to the leper, he will also stretch out his hand to us in our time of need. Jesus will never fail to provide for us; he knows what we all need.

In 1970, I had the opportunity to preach the Gospel to a public high school in Los Angeles. The school was known for its loose morals and liberal attitudes toward drugs, alcohol, astrology, and pagan religions.

The class I was invited to speak at was studying the Bible as literature. There were only two Christians in the class, and they had arranged for me to present the Sermon on the Mount from a literary standpoint.

Even though my master's thesis was on this subject, I found little time to prepare adequately for this class. The two Christian girls did not tell me until an hour before class how long I was expected to speak. I had prepared for about a twenty-minute presentation, but to my surprise, I was slated for a two-hour session.

The principles of faith, as illustrated in the story of the leper, were quickly appropriated. As I prayed in a spirit of humility, God gave me the desire to follow through with my commitment. I sensed his hand stretching out to me, giving me the power to speak beyond what I knew I could.

When I finished my twenty-minute presentation in about fifteen minutes, I ended with a statement that included "my personal relationship with God." Many students in the classroom began to flood me with questions about this "personal relationship with God" statement. In the next hour and a half, I explained it repeatedly as many spiritually hungry students wanted to hear more. As God provided for the leper in his time of need, God also repeated his promise to see me through this difficult circumstance.

The disciples we teach must also see this healing experience from Jesus' viewpoint. He did not fear touching the contagious leper. If God calls us into a situation that might bring calamity, we must do it by faith, trusting God to protect us. There was no publicity about this cleansing miracle. Jesus healed the man without any fanfare or public recognition. We should never make a big production out of a healing event; it is a compassionate ministry reflecting God's power. The man performing such a miracle should remain in a thankful spirit behind the scenes. His satisfaction should only be that he was God's instrument in the event.

The healing of the paralytic carried the same principles of faith, but the critical difference was Jesus' emphasis on his forgiveness of sin. Our disciples must realize that a physically healed person may not enter the kingdom of God just because of his faith in Jesus as a miracle worker. Jesus was sent to earth to cure men of their rebellion against God, their actual disease. As Jesus concluded his time with the paralytic, he also forgave him of his sins. Today that paralytic is in heaven, enjoying an eternal relationship with Christ.

The man at the Bethesda pool did not even know who Jesus was after he was healed, much less his need for salvation. All Jesus asked was, "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus found

the man later and told him the whole story so that he could be completely healed both in body and spirit.

In two of these three healing principles, the principles of faith were illustrated. Our disciples today should understand that bringing oneself into the presence of God, humbling oneself, and recognizing the Lordship of Christ is essential to every faith experience, whether it be healing or preparing for a sermon. The ministry of healing should always carry the message of man's underlying condition, sin so that the healed person will also be healed of his sin. It is possible that a man can be healed miraculously by the hand of God and never obtain eternal life with God. Like the man at the Bethesda pool, he could walk away a healthy man, not ever knowing who really healed him.

On the other hand, he may be like the leper or the paralytic who illustrated all the principles of faith. All of us must approach each healing opportunity with the flexibility to let God do what He wants to do. We should always stress the importance of being healed of sin and remember we might need to follow healing with the message of salvation as Jesus did with the Bethesda man. Jesus' prayer life was evident to his disciples after the leper's healing.

“But the news about Him was spreading even further, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sickness. But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”(John 5:16)

Prayer was the essential ingredient that Jesus demonstrated for his disciples. Prayer should be part of our preparation before we embark on anything. After a great deal of ministry had been accomplished, Jesus went away to pray. Prayer is essential, not only preceding an event but afterward. In our discipleship groups, we must allow time for individual prayer. Group prayer is necessary, but so is personal time with God.

Also, prayer should be offered after a completed ministry. Jesus prayed earnestly alone after many miracles were achieved. We must remember to pray and teach our disciples to pray, both before and after an activity, so that each may understand God's perspective and plan for us tomorrow.

The Pharisees were one of Satan's key instruments to thwart Jesus' ministry. Although some Pharisees like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea believed in Jesus, many hated and despised him. As a result, they repeatedly attempted to prove him wrong. Failing to do so, they tried to undermine his disciples.

“And the Pharisees and their Scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying ‘Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?’”(Luke 5:30)

The issue arose from Matthew's call to be a disciple and a banquet Jesus attended that was given by a grateful Matthew. Jesus did not allow the Pharisees to finish their undermining; he immediately answered their questions.

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance.’”(Luke 5:31-32)

As we disciple other young Christians, Satan will try to undermine their new life with Christ. We should be well aware of these attacks. Our responsibility is to teach the truth and protect our disciples as Jesus did. We should know where our disciples are easily swayed. We should be close enough to them to enter the battle when they are unfairly challenged. Until they are ready to fly spiritually by themselves, we must help them against Satan's confrontations.

In answering John the Baptist's disciple's question about fasting, Jesus used everyday examples of clothing and wine. Although patched clothing and old wine jugs do not have the same cultural message today, these two illustrations can be easily explained when we present the Gospel. We should review these parables and use them if possible, or else make up similar parables more easily understandable in our culture. Jesus gave mankind a practical example to explain the kingdom's message through these parables.

The teaching Jesus presented here was conversational, though not all his sermons followed this style. For example, rather than introducing the subject of "my dependence on God," points one through four, he instead talked freely about his relationship with God the Father.

As we train our disciples, we must let them develop their own teaching styles. We should emphasize that Jesus' presentation changed with the situation. We should never be committed to one teaching style, but only to the teaching itself.

Application of His Model

As noted previously, Jesus accepted all kinds of people and was bold with the opposition. These characteristics, patience, and courage can be added to his model of a Godly man.

Touching the leper was compassionate as well as courageous. Jesus boldly and openly rebuked the Pharisees for their rejection of Matthew and Jesus's own authority to forgive sins. He instructed them to reread the Scriptures, challenging their religious intellect.

At the same time, Jesus seemed very patient and understanding with the disciples of John the Baptist, who came accusing his disciples of neglecting prayer and fasting. Jesus accepted them for their accusation but patiently explained the truth concerning their questions.

In the same way, we, as disciplers must model boldness and acceptance. False doctrines are being preached by many uninformed Christians and non-Christians alike. We cannot be silent about the truth. How can we expect our disciples to speak out when their time comes if we do not speak out? No one was excluded from the presence of Jesus. The leper, paralytic, and tax gatherer examples prove that point. In response, we must always be open to anyone God would have us minister.

In one of my discipleship groups, I had a man who was mentally disabled but who really had a heart for the Lord and desired greatly to work with us. The group consisted of young adults and college students who helped me in my ministry with some high school students. We accepted him into our group as an equal and included him in all our planning. It was a frustrating experience for the most part, but I believe that we all learned a great deal by having him with us. A great deal of wisdom and maturity can be gained in accepting whoever God sends to you.

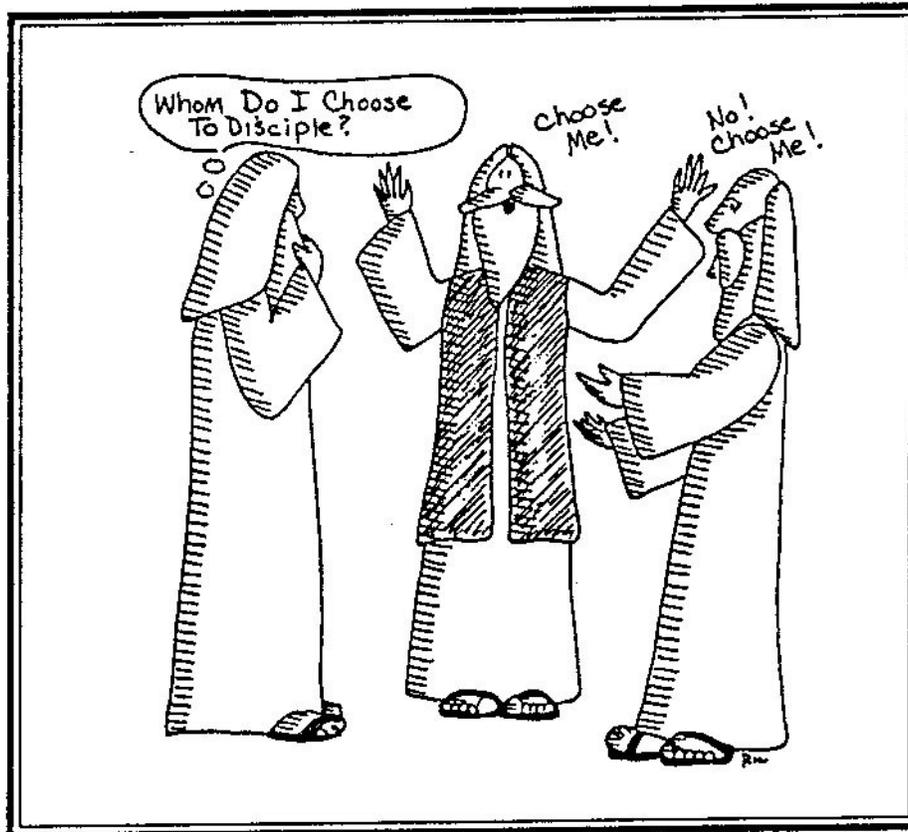
Suggestions for Further Study

1. Discuss how your group should approach someone who needs healing.
2. Discuss how the principles of faith can be used in other experiences.

3. Assign each group member a teaching assignment. Have him make up a parable that illustrates one of these truths.
4. List specifically those you know who have been rejected by society. What can your group do for them?
5. Discuss the false doctrines floating around your church and community. Discuss ways to combat these untruths.

Footnotes

1. Edersheim, volume 1, page 462
2. Edersheim, volume 1 pages 464-465.



Chapter 8

Choosing a Disciple

“Count off by 12’s”

Matthew 28:19-20 commissions believers to go into the world and make disciples. The question arises then, who qualifies? In Jesus’ day, the Scribes and Pharisees seemed to have been the likeliest candidates. They had the influence to affect change, so why didn’t Jesus choose them? If he had, the answer would be simple: pick men with wealth, political position, or charisma. In the 21st century, members of Congress, the social elite, and great athletes would lead the top of the list.

It is a sad commentary that today some Christian organizations and churches have learned little from Jesus’ example in choosing the right men to be their leaders. They still follow the path of the world in picking their leaders. These Christian groups cater to high-profile people like student body presidents, athletes, prosperous business people, community leaders, etc. The thinking is logical; the masses of people would better relate to and listen to respected peers rather than those without an achieved reputation. Without realizing it, they put many Christians who do not have a high profile on the back burner regarding Christian leadership and responsibility. The eventual result is a real hardship for the Christian movement because the leadership ends up weak and immature. Some high-profile leaders eventually abandoned their commitments and suffered years of failure and confusion. It is fortunate that God does not forsake them but works

out circumstances where one day they can return and mature according to God's plan and not man's.

Jesus did not choose famous nor significant men for his disciples. The disciples did not have wealth, political advantage, or a famous image. They were men of humble birth at best.

Background Leading to the Choosing of the Twelve (Luke 6:1-19)

After Jesus finished his discourse with the religious leaders in Jerusalem (John 5), he returned to Galilee, where he formally chose twelve men to be his disciples. Of course, all of Jesus' followers were called disciples because they were all his students. Twelve men were picked to be more intimately exposed to his character, ministry, and life-changing message.

On the journey home before the choosing, his disciples transgressed a Sabbath law when they picked and ate wheat from a grain field. (Matthew 12) Eating grain from another man's field was acceptable under certain conditions, but not on the Sabbath. The Pharisees immediately noticed this activity and accused the disciples of breaking the Law, not stealing, but rather laboring on the Sabbath.

“But He (Jesus) said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions. How he entered the house of God and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but the priests alone. But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, I desire compassion, and not sacrifice; you would not have condemned the innocent.’”(Matthew 12:3-7)

Jesus' point is that the priests in David's era saw that feeding men were more important than keeping a ceremonial rite in God's eyes. When the two conflicted, providing for man's needs took precedence over an interpretation or practice of a law.

The Pharisees lacked compassion, as Jesus pointed out by quoting this Hosea 6:6 passage. Their security and main argument were measured in religious rites and ceremonies. In their zeal to be God's leaders, they had lost the character and presence of God. As a result, they continued to harass Jesus, regardless of the people he healed and helped before their very own eyes.

The disciples learned much about Jesus when he confronted these spiritual leaders. They learned about their real enemies, who Jesus was, and the power he had. As Jesus stated, “Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.”(Mark 2:28)

Another Sabbath confrontation with the Pharisees preceded his calling of the twelve, as indicated in Matthew 12. This time Jesus confronted the Pharisees on a spiritual issue. Jesus was preaching in a synagogue and a man with a withered hand among his listeners. Jesus called the man forward to be healed; at the same time, he grieved over the hardness of the hearts of the Pharisees. It was more important that a man is healed and that the disciples view his boldness rather than bend to the selfish will of unrighteous religious leaders.

“And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ so that they might accuse Him. And

He said to them, ‘what man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal like the other.”(Matthew 12:12-16)

The Choosing of the Twelve (Luke 6:12-16)

Jesus’ fame spread across Palestine and brought him, numerous disciples and followers. At this point, perhaps at the height of his popularity, Jesus chose twelve men to be his disciples, which he later called his apostles. The term “apostle” means “to send out.”¹ Jesus intended for these 12 men not only to learn more deeply about the kingdom but ultimately to be his representatives. They were chosen for the following four reasons:

1. They were to serve him and be his close friends. They would eat, travel, and talk with Jesus throughout the remainder of his earthly ministry.
2. They were called so that Jesus could prepare them better to teach the Gospel of the kingdom. Through his daily walk with the disciples, he could clarify his message. In addition, he would have the opportunity to answer their questions and elaborate on different issues.
3. They also were to have the authority to cast out demons, which was probably the most public display of Satan’s power over man. Demon possession was quite rampant among the Jews. The disciples who were not mature enough to battle Satan on these terms were given this authority to help Jesus with the ministry.
4. Healing was another responsibility given to the twelve disciples. Many Jews and Gentiles came to Jesus daily from all over Israel to be healed. The disciples could greatly help Jesus with this demanding ministry.

The selection of the disciples was two-fold: it was a lengthy observation on one part and prayer on another. Jesus spent a year observing most of his men before selecting them. Some, like Peter and Andrew, were with him from the beginning of his ministry. They saw most of his miracles and heard most of his teachings. Jesus spent a lot of personal time with them.

The disciples were not gathered all at once but were gradually picked as Jesus preached from one city to the next. This gave Jesus time to see them in a natural and personal setting. Their response to the kingdom's message was a critical factor. John’s Gospel records that they believed in him as early as the miracle of the wine at Cana. They all seemed willing to set aside their material possessions to follow him, which was essential to being Jesus’ disciple.

The disciples were also able to observe Jesus and his message. He told them openly that he was the Son of God and authenticated it by his many miracles during his first year of ministry. The disciples observed Jesus’ victories over the demon-possessed in many Galilean cities. In synagogues throughout Galilee, they listened to his teaching concerning peace with God and eternal life and watched his confrontation with the Pharisees grow. His teachings and increasing popularity caused the Pharisees to organize schemes to discredit him. They had no intention of forfeiting their religious positions. Although the disciples saw Jesus performs many great things

and had heard his life-giving message, they also had to consider the potential danger of the Pharisees.

Despite this danger, the disciples were convinced Jesus was the Messiah and accepted his call to be his committed disciples. The only exception was Judas Iscariot, who was intrigued by Jesus and willing to follow him only to a point.

Jesus' invitation to discipleship was simple: "Follow Me and I will teach you to catch men." (Luke 5:10). Evidently, their exposure to him was enough for them to understand the meaning of this call and acceptable to all, even to Judas Iscariot. Jesus' observation method was an essential step in choosing the twelve disciples. It, however, was accomplished by an even more critical factor; prayer. Jesus spent the entire night praying before deciding who would be included in the "12". The information he gathered about these men was not enough to choose them. The ten to twelve hours of prayer was the key to the final decision. Consulting with the Father, in essence, was the most crucial resource he depended upon before making his final choice, including Judas.

The twelve chosen the following day were: Simon (whom he called Peter), James (the son of Zebedee), John (the brother of James, to whom he gave the name of Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew (Peter's brother), Phillip, Bartholomew (or Nathaniel), Matthew (the tax-gatherer), Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus Judas (son of James), Simon (the Cananaean), and Judas Iscariot (who betrayed him). (Matthew 10)

Jesus changed some of the disciples' names and gave others nicknames. Six of the disciples had the same names. There were Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot, James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus, and Judas Iscariot and Judas Thaddeus.

To lessen the confusion, they used second names or expressed their full name. This allowed Jesus to attach a name like Peter to the disciple he saw great potential. The name Peter meant rock.² James and John were called Boanerges, describing them as men with fiery temperaments and testimonies. Judas (not Iscariot) was called by his second name, Thaddeus, so as not to confuse him with Judas Iscariot, the traitor. Simon (not Peter) was called the Zealot because of his past as a Jewish militant. Bartholomew was sometimes known as Nathaniel for no apparent reason.

The only significance of the disciples' names was that they sometimes identified their background and personality. The changing of the names was simply a logical way to avoid confusion. In addition, the nicknames showed the group's intimacy and informality.

Most of the disciples already knew or knew one another before they met Jesus. Some were in business together, and others were brothers or friends. They all seemed to live in the same region except Judas Iscariot, who came from Judea.

Some of the disciples were of the same family. For example, Jesus himself was a cousin to John the Baptist, who set the stage for Jesus' earthly ministry. It can also be assumed that even the "70" disciples, Jesus referred to in other passages, were inter-related family members and friends.

The associations of the disciples perhaps made Jesus' selection more accessible, but the personality differences did not encourage a harmonious situation. As can be attested later in Jesus' ministry, there were arguments between them. Jesus often corrected the competitive battles that arose between the disciples. Mark 9 recorded one of those events.

"And they came to Capernaum, and when He was in the house, He began to question them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent,

for, on the way, they had discussed which of them was the greatest with one another.”(Mark 9: 33- 34)

Even though these men had been called disciples, they still needed a daily cleansing from their old sinful habits. The most visible and outspoken disciples were Peter, James, and John. They responded quickly to Jesus and seemingly without hesitation. They acted spontaneously and displayed their faith and failures openly. For example, Peter walked by faith on the water with Christ and sank when he noticed an approaching storm. James and John preached the Gospel throughout Galilee but wanted Jesus to destroy some Samaritans who refused to house them on their way to Jerusalem.

Simon, Thomas, Matthew, and Judas Iscariot were less visible but had their own strengths and weaknesses. For example, Simon (not Peter) must have been a courageous, misdirected man. He had previously been a member of the Zealots, who wanted to bring peace to Israel by destroying all the Roman legions. Thomas was a pessimistic person but then willing to die for Christ when Jesus wanted to return to Bethany to save Lazareth in the John 11 account. Matthew loved money and did not fear reprisals from his people when he took on the job as an official tax-gatherer. Yet he quickly laid it all aside when he heard the message of Jesus. Judas was said to be intelligent but was willing to turn Christ over to the Pharisees so that his powers would be used to establish himself and his disciples as rulers of the world.

Phillip, Andrew, Thaddeus, James (the son of Alphaeus), and Bartholomew were the last visible but perhaps the most steady and supportive. Their quietness could provide the calm atmosphere needed as the more outspoken personalities battled one another; yet they could also be cowardly due to their fears of confrontation.

The potential for division was great, but all these men, except Judas Iscariot, believed in Jesus and were becoming more Godly, unselfish individuals. The inner struggle was probably greatest among Peter, James, John, Thomas, Simon, Judas Iscariot, and Matthew. Each was a leader in his own right, and the temptation to grab the reigns of leadership was always present.

It should be noted that Jesus included a traitor in the twelve. So why did Jesus choose Judas Iscariot to be a disciple? Jesus spent an entire night of prayer with his heavenly Father discussing each man. The conclusion was a unanimous decision in the Godhead to call Judas Iscariot a disciple.

Was Judas needed to point the religious leaders to Jesus at a crucial prophetic moment during the Passover feast? Couldn't that have been accomplished without sacrificing a disciple? It does not seem logical for Judas to be added to the disciples for that one purpose alone.

Like the other disciples, Judas must have been willing to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Even though there is no indication he made Jesus Lord of his life, he must have at least been attracted to the Gospel message and willing to learn. Yet Judas was not born into the kingdom of God, even though he walked with Jesus and participated in his ministry. Yet, each Gospel writer paints him as a traitor whenever they mention his name.³

Jesus and God the Father had other reasons to include Judas Iscariot as a disciple. Having Judas among them must have taught the other eleven something. Jesus had planned every experience for the disciples to mature them to be his representatives to the world, including Judas' presence. Scripture does not clarify Judas's specific role with the other disciples except that he was in charge of the finances. Evidently, Jesus did not put a high priority on the ministry connected with finances.

Even though Judas' betrayal brought temporary embarrassment to the cause, his testimony did not weaken the Gospel message or the creditableness of Jesus and the other disciples.

Application of the Messages

Grain Plucking

The message to the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath is still appropriate today. The Pharisees tended to burden every aspect of human behavior with their interpretation of the Law. For example, they denounced plucking grain on the Sabbath as an act of labor and thus a violation of the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath Day holy.

Some church leaders and denominations today put greater weight on interpretations and applications than the actual simple truth taught in the Bible. For example, the church I grew up in condemned going to movies of all kinds, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, swimming in the presence of the opposite sex, and playing card games. While these activities can lead to sin, some more than others, they are at best only debatable applications of truth and not Biblical mandates.

Many of my fellow Christians fell into the trap of rules and regulations and, as a result, hardened their hearts against reaching unbelievers. They rejected non-Christians because they were a stumbling block to their keeping of the rules. They saw social contact with a non-Christian as a sign of falling away from one's faith. Their in-depth discussion mainly centered on the "Do's" and "Don'ts" of the Christian life. It made for destructive gossip and, in essence, a very sinful representation of Christ. Application of the Scripture should never become greater than the Scripture itself.

"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch' (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These matters which have to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and sever treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."(Colossians 2:20-23)

Withered Man's Hand

Our fellow disciples must grasp two lessons demonstrated to the man with the withered hand. First, helping others must prioritize a well-planned Sunday service or ministry situation. The Jewish Sabbath observance was a weekly high priority. Yet Jesus did not hesitate in upsetting the pattern of worship in the Synagogue so that a man could be healed.

We must teach our disciples to be sensitive to the moment. Each week I spend several hours studying the bible, praying, and discussing ministry with different groups of men and women. It is structured to some extent so that we can progress in our studies each week. Sometimes, though, one of us is deeply troubled and in need of counsel. Consequently, we put aside our plans for the evening and meet that person's needs. Flexibility is something that we all need more of. Our best-laid plans may not be God's plans at all.

Application of Discipleship Principles in Regards to Teaching

Jesus used three important teaching principles when facing the Pharisees on the Sabbaths. He used the Old Testament as a point of reference when defending his position concerning the validity of his disciples' eating the unplucked grain. With the man's withered hand, he asked them a question and followed up with a logical illustration of the caught sheep.

We must prepare our disciples for the day they will encounter men like the Pharisees who have perverted Scripture with their interpretations. We must teach our disciples to rely first on the written Scripture as their proof text. As Jesus proved his point with the Scripture, they must likewise depend on it.

Asking the opponent a pointed question as Jesus did helps expose his view and depth of knowledge and character.

“And He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?’ But they kept silent.”(Mark 3:4)

The Pharisee's silence proved their hardened hearts, which greatly grieved Jesus. Had they been bold enough to answer, all would have been able to see just what these men really believed and advocated.

It is essential then that men and women who advocated false doctrine be exposed. Jesus' form of questioning was an excellent method of exposing these false teachers. Likewise, cults today can only be uncovered by Christians willing to ask challenging questions, much like Jesus did in the synagogue.

Choosing Disciples

If we sincerely desire to form a discipleship group, we should look for men and women who might want to be discipled. Jesus was teaching the kingdom message long before he chose any disciples. Similarly, we must teach and share the message of Christ wherever God puts us. This may be a Sunday school class or a Bible discussion group at work. It can begin with our family and extend throughout our neighborhood. It is essential, though, to be active in our example as Christians before we can hope to disciple others.

I planned trips, retreats, and socials in my first youth ministry led Bible studies, formed prayer groups, and counseled students. An essential part of all these spiritual activities came when a small group of those being ministered to wanted to share in the responsibility of the ministry. This was the meaning and joy of discipleship for me, training those committed believers in the ministry.

How Long Before Choosing?

It took a year before Jesus chose his 12 men, so there should be no rush for us to choose our disciples. Perhaps a year, even longer if necessary.

Where Do Disciples Come From?

Jesus chose men from the same community. Nazareth, for example, was not far from Bethsaida, where Peter, Andrew, and Phillip grew up. There is no need to scour the city for potential disciples. They can be found in our own backyards. They may be our brothers, sisters, cousins, wives, husbands, neighbors, children, or business acquaintances. They may attend the same church, or they may not. In my discipling efforts, I never had to look beyond the location God put me in. My neighborhood, church, or place of employment held enough people to draw from. In Jesus' choosing, he picked those around his home area, and many of them were connected through friendships or family.

What Kind of Person Do I Look For?

The men and women we spend with will hopefully have a variety of personalities. Jesus' disciples included extroverts, introverts, and active and passive personalities. No matter what personalities we like or dislike, we should be open to anyone.

One of my first discipleship groups in Seattle, Washington, included the gamut of personality. Although arguments arose in the group at times, each one's strength rubbed off on the other and in the end, everyone developed a more significant spiritual walk with Christ.

The most important part of the observation is choosing those who seem to be faithful, available, and teachable. This may include an athlete, mechanic, businessman, intellectual, or disabled individual.

Questions that might be considered would be: Do these people show a thirst for the Word of God? Do they desire to be more effective Christians? Are they willing to put their spiritual lives above other priorities? Will they be servants of one another? As we build friendships with different people, Christian or not, we will be able to see their hearts and intentions after an extended period. Then, when the day comes to form a discipleship group, we will know better who God wants us to include.

Including Potential Disciples in the Ministry

Long before the apostles were chosen, they were called disciples along with the other followers of Jesus. They traveled with him and helped him with his ministry. They helped him baptize new believers at the Jordan River and gathered food provisions for him in their many journeys.

We do not wait until after we have chosen our group to include potential disciples in our ministries. Sharing our ministry can help us discover who is committed and willing to be discipled.

When I first started disciplining young Christians, I usually observed three types. Group #1 was not interested in being trained or sharing the ministry. They just wanted a passing grade. Even though some were superior in talent and intellect, my efforts to woo them were a waste of time. Group #2 was very interested in becoming involved and was quite vocal and pronounced in its response. However, as I included them in the ministry, they became inconsistent and eventually faded out of the picture. They were usually the first on the scene, the most impressive, and the first to abandon their commitment. Even though their personalities were attractive and infectious, keeping them motivated proved frustrating for the entire group and me. Group #3 was very interested and sometimes reluctant to participate in a discipleship commitment. In general, they were not concerned with making impressions but rather careful in their response and

commitment. In the end, most of this group became faithful disciples who helped me carry on the ministry. They, as a group, attract me the most when I look for men and women to disciple.

Making a Mistake in Our Choosing

As long as we observe potential disciples with patience and a great deal of prayer, we should have no regrets or second thoughts. It was his will to include Judas in his group; God may do that with us. Positive and negative experiences in life can help anyone grow.

Family background experiences may or may not help in seeing a potential disciple. I have known friends and relatives who had good homes and positive reinforcement growing up. The Godly atmosphere in their home helped them build a strong faith. All this helped in their growth as young disciples. On the other hand, others grew up with a divorce or acute family conflicts where God was seemingly not evident. Yet their negative experiences made them depend on God; consequently, they also developed a strong faith and became good disciples.

Judas was a negative influence on the disciples. He cheated with the money bag and betrayed Jesus for his advantage's sake. However, these actions showed the other disciples the negative potential in each of them. When Jesus pointed out at the last supper that one of them was a traitor, they all admitted that they were probably the one. Judas' defection put a reverential fear in all the disciples. If they ever became over-confident in their future role as apostles, they would have a vivid reminder in Judas of where pride and self-dependence can lead.

Judas' pride led him to turn Jesus over to the Pharisees. He wanted to stand with a winner, and in his view, Jesus' talk of his upcoming persecution and death made him a loser. So Judas took things into his own hands, never really seeing the plan of God; he finally committed suicide.

Last Step in Choosing Disciples

Jesus prayed an entire night before making his final choice of the twelve. Prayer should not only be our last step before inviting men and women to be discipled but should continue throughout the observation period. Prayer is the spoken communication between God and us. We offer our requests to him, and in return, he says to us through the quietness of our spirits.

Prayer is a mystery to the unbeliever. He sees it as a psychological trip with no scientific substance. He cannot understand how a Christian can receive wisdom from an invisible God who does not utter audible words.

Prayer is not a mystery for the believer because he has been given the Spirit of God so that he might understand. A spiritual awareness directs him in all of his decisions. He is like a phone receiver hooked up and ready to receive messages from God. On the other hand, the unbeliever is like a phone receiver, unplugged and unable to understand messages from God.

As we choose disciples, God will give us peace about whom to choose. He will provide us with a sense of harmony about the decision as long as we pray and are open to his guidance. Our last prayer time before making our final choices should not be simply like a dinner prayer, short and to the point. It should be a prayer, as Jesus modeled.

What about the Disciples Who Are Not Chosen?

Jesus did not lose the rest of his following when he chose the twelve. In fact, he kept many of them close at hand and even sent 70 out to present the Gospel message, as he did with the “12”.

He chose the twelve to be more specifically trained in the ministries they would share with him. If God had extended Jesus’ ministry on earth to 30 years, then it seems likely that Jesus would have kept discipling groups of twelve throughout his ministry. When we finally decide on a group, we should never teach them that their commitment to the group puts them on a level above other Christians or that it will last indefinitely. It may be their time to be trained, but on the horizon are other Christians who will also beckon the call of discipleship. We as disciplers must also watch that we never exclude from our lives other Christians and our responsibility to them.

My most significant fault in discipleship has been precisely this problem. As I work with a new group, relationships deepen; soon, this is the only group I want to teach or be with. As a result, I eventually lost contact with other Christians, and my discipleship group developed into a Christian clique.

Our disciples will repeat this mistake when their time comes to form a discipleship group. We don’t want Christian cliques to result from our ministry but healthy discipleship groups.

What Do We Do In Our Discipleship Groups?

Jesus’ pattern of discipleship with his newly chosen disciples included teaching them the Gospel message, allowing them to minister, and openly living his life in their presence. They could learn from their own teaching experiences by teaching them the message. Including them in his ministry allowed the disciples to understand the ministry by doing. Jesus’ life helped them see how his teachings applied in real-life situations.

I decided once to be my own car mechanic. However, as I attempted to fix carburetors, alternators, and exhaust systems, I found my car in worse shape than ever before. Eventually, I was forced to get help from some mechanically-oriented friends so that my car would run. I even entered an auto mechanics class so I would understand the principles behind all my car problems.

Trying to minister to people may be valiant, but without much knowledge or help from other Christians, it can be disastrous. Attending a bible class can be helpful, but our understanding is soon forgotten if we don’t know how to apply what is learned.

I honestly cannot remember much about my auto mechanics class. It was only when my friends came over and helped me with a broken-down carburetor that I really learned about car mechanics. Therefore, the best kind of discipleship integrates the teaching of the Word while at the same time learning from others more mature than us as to how to apply it to those we are working with.

In my own experiences as a discipler, I often took along fellow disciples during ministry opportunities so they could observe how I handled a situation. For example, once a man from the Jehovah’s Witnesses cult was challenging one of my younger believer’s faith with some very confusing and detrimental theology. Rather than deal with this man alone, I took along some young people I had been discipling so that they could observe my approach to this man.

We should always try to include our men and women in as many ministry situations as possible. They need to see our lives as we use the Scripture. These young Christians have probably forgotten the Scriptures I used with this Jehovah’s Witness, but hopefully, they have not forgotten how I dealt with him during this confrontation.

Our Christian example and life are the most significant proof of our maturity, yet there will be defeats. There will be times when our model or example will not reflect Christ. Those will be discouraging moments for us and the men and women we disciple, yet don't be too disappointed when this happens, for; it also happened to the original 12 disciples.

As long as we give credit to Christ for our changed life and good model, we will not be pressed to hide our mistakes. "Please forgive me" are three words my grandmother always taught me and the three words I have said thousands of times to other Christians. If you cannot admit your faults to other Christians, you rob your disciples of an essential part of their training, the art of forgiving and being forgiven.

Jesus modeled grief and, once again, the attribute of boldness. He was greatly grieved over the Pharisee's grudging hearts, but he did not flinch from healing the man's withered hand despite the presence of the Pharisees.

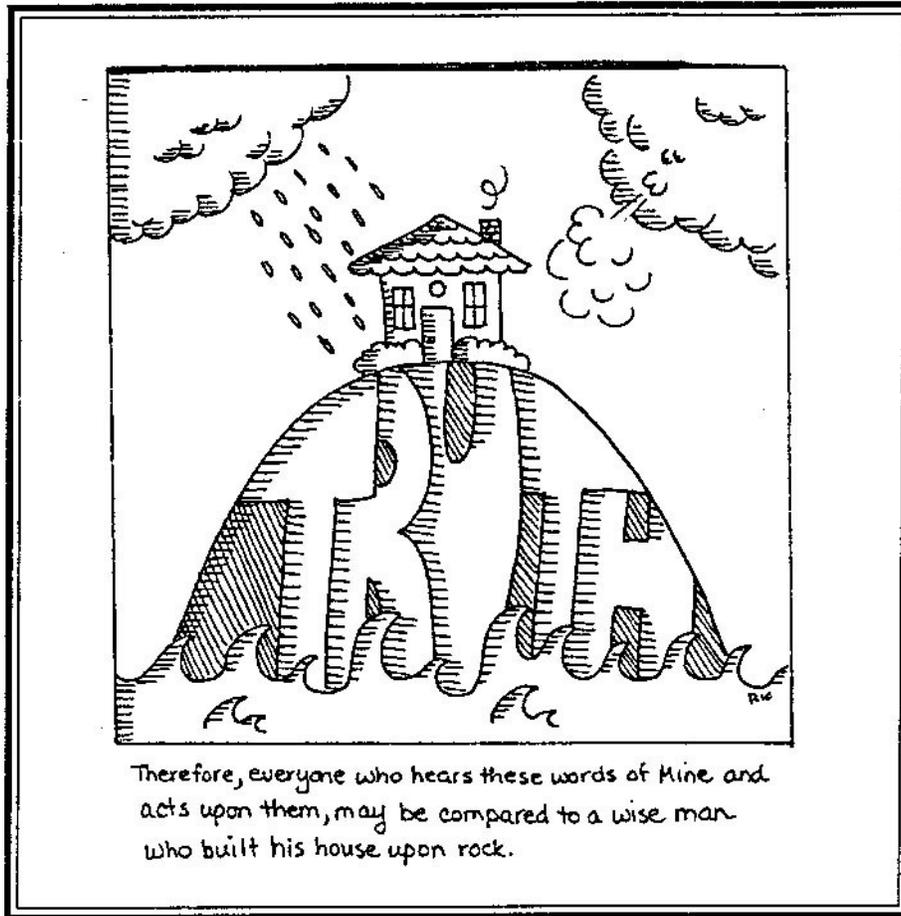
As is demonstrated in almost every miraculous event thus far, Jesus continues to be bold, yet this time with a sense of grief for his opposition. We must teach our disciples and demonstrate for them a life that will boldly proclaim the truth regardless of the opposition, yet never lose our love for those who oppose us. We must be sure that our bold actions have grief rather than revenge as their basis.

Suggestions for Discipleship

1. Write down the names of potential disciples.
2. Begin developing personal relationships with them.
3. Include them in the ministry you are presently involved.
4. If you feel that you are at the point of forming a group, then pick out a consistent time to meet with them as a group.
5. Begin studying a book in the Bible together or explore the life of Christ as presented in this book or other books.
6. Discuss ministries that you are in where they can be present.

Footnotes

1. Vines, page 63
2. Vines, page 302
3. Edersheim, Volume II, page 36



Chapter 9

The Sermon on the Mount

“Rock-A-My-Soul”

Many dedicated and committed Christians today have accepted the call of discipleship. They have sought others for the kingdom of God. They have presented quite adequately the salvation plan and have received a harvest of believers through their examples at home and work and through their words. However, this is only half of the great commission because the second half includes training new disciples to carry on this ministry.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20)

I learned this important lesson at the University of Wyoming, where I helped start a ministry based on the first half of the great commission, presenting the Gospel to fellow students. Even though I was fulfilled to some extent when others became Christians for the first time, God would not give me complete peace until I began accepting the responsibility of teaching these

new Christians the basics of the Christian walk. This is the rock foundation that Jesus was referring to at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Background Leading to the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the most compact and fundamental teaching Jesus ever imparted to his disciples and others in one setting. It served as the first instruction to the disciples following their official call by Jesus. The mountain he delivered this great sermon was near Capernaum, in Galilee. Before this address, Jesus had spent an entire night in prayer concerning the twelve men he would choose as his disciples.

In the morning, he called the twelve he had chosen. As they descended the mountain top, they were met by a crowd of other disciples and people who had traveled from all over Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon to hear him, see his miracles, and be cured from their unclean spirits.

Before the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spent almost one and a half years traveling from Galilee to Judea, ministering in word and deed. His authority over the demon-possessed, his power to heal the afflicted, and his great kingdom message had made Jesus the most central figure in Palestine during that time.

Unlike his other sermons, which explained the need and means of salvation, this sermon would cover life's major issues. There would be no miracles of healing on this mountain nor casting out of demons, but instead in-depth teaching concerning man's relationship with God.

Jesus sat down before presenting his teaching. The surroundings facilitated him to be heard without extensively raising his voice. The atmosphere was relaxed, and seemed receptive to his teaching. If the Pharisees were present, they remained quiet, for there was no confrontation.

The disciples probably had front-row seats, and his other followers were not far off. They had been waiting through the night to see who would be selected as the "12."

Throughout the multitude were various groups of onlookers. First, there were Zealots, who were the Jewish militants of the day.¹ They wanted to militarily defeat the Romans and return their government to Jewish rule. They came to observe Jesus because of his widespread influence over the people. Perhaps they desired to recruit Jesus as their leader, so the crowd of Jews who followed him would join their cause, but not all Jews shared their approach to the problem of Roman occupation.

The Essenes were another group that would be intently interested in the message of Jesus. They were the devout, reclusive, and separatist group of Jews.² Unlike the Zealots, they formed communes far away from the cities. They studied the Scripture and discussed biblical issues daily. They were divorced from society and its problems. They were passive and non-resistant to the domination of the Romans. They came to hear Jesus because they were interested in his biblical concepts. His teachings provided new topics for intellectual discussion.

The Pharisees and Scribes were in attendance at the sermon; they were the religious leaders that opposed Jesus. They intended to trap Jesus in an incorrect interpretation of an unlawful act so that he might be discredited and eventually rebuked by the people.

Galilee was on the edge of the Greek Empire. Some highly educated Greeks likely attended this sermon. Some renegade Samaritans probably traveled also to hear Jesus. His earlier impact at Sychar with the Samaritan woman opened the door of learning for these people.

There is little doubt that some Romans attended. Jesus had become a potentially powerful figure among the multitudes. Therefore, it was to their interest to monitor his activities.

Finally, most people were ordinary Jews who came to hear Jesus out of need. They had been defeated and persecuted by the Romans. Their religious leaders blamed them partly for the Roman occupation because this was God's judgment for their life of sin. The pressure they received from the Zealots challenged them to a course of action that could destroy them as a people.

They were in the middle of the aspirations and goals of all these groups. They were a people in great need of a Savior. They came to hear Jesus not because they merely wanted to see him perform a miracle but because they had few answers to life's questions.

Reward and Evidence of a Believer (Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:21)

Jesus taught his sermon to the disciples and many of his followers by beginning with a series of promised blessings. These blessings, known as the beatitudes, described a believing disciple's present and future hope. This series of exalted promises also sketched the character present in a believing disciple.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”(Matthew 5:3-10)

Jesus promised the disciples the kingdom of heaven, spiritual comfort, an inheritance on earth, spiritual satisfaction, mercy, and a relationship where they could be in the presence of God.

A true believer is poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, persecuted, and weepily sincere.

The beatitudes were not “do attitudes,” that is, a disciple could not work himself into the promises of God. Instead, the beatitudes were given to new believers by God as a part of their new nature at the point of their salvation.

For example, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”The kingdom of heaven was promised to the poor in spirit because they realized the poverty of their spiritual condition. Matthew was an excellent example of this kind of person because he forsook this world's riches and received the Lordship of Christ. He realized that his spiritual life was in the “red.” He filed for spiritual bankruptcy when he turned to Christ, becoming a spiritually rich man.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

The comfort promised by Jesus' disciples resulted from their repented sorrow for sin. The act of mourning was applicable not only in the death of a loved one but also to those who were sorrowful over their own sins. The mournful were repentant believers.

Luke's Gospel added another perspective in a beatitude that closely resembles the one recorded in Matthew. "Those who weep shall laugh." (Luke 6:21). The inequities of an unrepentant society brought acts of cruelty and tears of disappointment. Yet the joy of life could come into the life of anyone who repented his sins. The Samaritan woman, as an example, mourned her past sins; she repented and received Christ as Lord. Her tears of a disappointing existence turned to laughter as she received the everlasting comfort of the Lord.

"Blessed are the gentle; they shall receive mercy."

The reward of the gentle or meek was not only a place in the kingdom of heaven but an inheritance on earth. The meek in Christ were those who put their confidence in him rather than the world's approval. As prophesy teaches, all his believers would return at the end of time and rule the world. Andrew typified a man who served Christ in a spirit of gentleness. Unlike his brother, Peter, Andrew played a second-fiddle role without complaint or regret. His confidence was in the Lord, not the adoration or recognition of the world or even the realm of his fellow Christians.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Those believers who had hungered and thirsted after a complete and right relationship were satisfied. Men like the disciple John heard the teachings of Christ's cousin and forerunner, John the Baptist. John's message of repentance was the beginning for John of Zebedee and many who desired to be righteous men. God's zeal for those men and women led them to Christ, His son, who taught them the foundation of righteousness. They became saved men whose appetites for God were eternally filled.

"Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

Mercy was a rare attribute in any man during this era of Roman domination. Yet the men and women of Christ would be beacons of mercy and receive mercy from God. Jesus was a great example of mercy. He healed the afflicted, accepted the rejected, and forfeited his life on the cross so that man could return to God. The disciples had not yet proved to be men of mercy, but they were in the process of learning mercy from Christ.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall be satisfied."

The pure in heart were promised to see God, something no man had ever done. Those who repented their sins and believed in Christ as Lord were pure in heart. Their holy appearance or righteous behavior didn't make them pure; only the forgiveness of their sins did. Peter, for example, was made pure upon belief, which qualified him to see God upon entering heaven. Yet, in his purity, he continued to fail from time to time, as shown when he denied Christ three times during his trials.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."

In the beatitude about the peacemakers, Jesus explained to his disciples that the characteristic of a Christian establishes peace with the world and with God. A disciple would become a peacemaker because he would carry the Gospel into a turbulent world. The world these disciples lived in was a place of hatred, racism, and war. The life-giving message of Jesus was a message of peace because it fills a man with God-given love. It was a message of reconciliation to God and a basis for all men to be brothers.

A peacemaker was a man of action, intent on making peace. Jesus' disciples inherited the call to make peace with all men regardless of persecution, ridicule, or resistance. Passive resistance was not even a possibility with God's peacemakers. Little did they know that one day they would be brothers with redeemed Romans, Samaritans, Gentiles, tax-gatherers, and forgiven prostitutes.

No more remarkable example of a peacemaker in action was Jesus when he offered the Gospel message to the Samaritan prostitute. He not only broke the religious barrier that separated Jews from Samaritans but also opened the door for anyone to come into the kingdom of heaven, even a prostitute.

The "12," as well as all of Jesus' disciples, were to be peacemakers. They were to be called the sons of God. This is how God regards all who trust Jesus as a part of his family. A father's love and intimacy for his son is how God sees his relationship with all who believe. They were not sons of God regarding the Messianic title belonging to Jesus, but they were his children, sons, and daughters. All who embraced Jesus as Lord were peacemakers and God's sons.

The beatitude concerning those persecuted perhaps brought dismay to the disciples; no one wants to be rejected or harmed because of their commitments or beliefs. Even though there would be persecution for those who committed themselves to Christ, they would receive a place in the kingdom of heaven as one of their rewards. In this decision, they abandoned their past master, Satan, for their new master Christ. No longer were they a part of Satan's realm of unbelievers, but instead were now in opposition to him. They were dangerous men, as were all the disciples of Christ.

Nevertheless, they had become instruments of righteousness. In summary, they had become soldiers in Christ's army. They were joined together to win other men and women to Christ as if a battle were being fought.

Satan responded to their newly founded commitment with persecution. The persecution they encountered was not limited to the Romans but included their deceived religious leaders. Jesus had faced religious leaders many times. They were Satan's instruments, influenced to discredit Christ's life and testimony. Their hatred of Christ grew so that they eventually resorted to deceit and lies to get him crucified. The very commandments they revered were broken to accomplish their purpose.

All of Jesus' disciples would encounter this treatment, but in the end, there would be a victory for each of them. Just as Jesus rendered his death a stinging blow to the persecuting tactics of Satan, so the disciples won spiritual victories on earth and a place in the kingdom of heaven.

Light and Salt of the World

Jesus continues his sermon to his disciples by expanding on what kind of men they should be. The rewards mentioned in the beatitudes were promises they could depend on upon

belief. Along with being meek, pure in heart, peacemakers, and repentant men, they were to be the salt and light of the world.

“You are the salt of the earth, but the salt has become tasteless; how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck measure, but on the lampstand; it gives light to all in the house. Let your light shine before men so they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven.”(Matthew 5:13-16)

The disciples were to be like salt in their testimony concerning Christ. Salt was used as a preservative in that era. It kept food from spoiling. It was also used to accentuate the taste of food today.³

The disciples were to preach the Gospel to preserve the teachings of Christ. By their testimony, they were to cause mankind to thirst for the kingdom of God as salt did when used in food.

Light was used to illuminate the dark streets of a city at night. Without light, man could not find his way from one house to another. Even in his own home, finding his way without light would be difficult. The disciples were to be bold and visible in their support and testimony for Jesus and the Gospel. They were to present the truth as light exposes the darkness. Jesus, in his testimony to Nicodemus, ends his sermon by referring to himself as the light of the world. Now he calls the disciples the lights of the world because they have received him as Lord. They were not to hide their message but expose it to all who would hear. This was so that all men could see and be drawn to God.

Jesus' View and Application of the Law

After explaining their role as his spokesman to the disciples, he begins detailed teaching concerning the Law and its true intention. The issue of the spiritual life of the religious leaders was paramount with Jesus.

“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:20)

Their example was to be rejected if a man sought to be right with God. Jesus boldly discredits their righteous standing by telling the disciples that what they were doing in the religious realm was falling short of the kingdom of God. Though Jesus rejected the life and example of the Pharisees, he did not intend to abolish the true meaning and application of the Law in men's daily lives.

“Do not think I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments,

and so teaches others shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever keeps and teaches them shall be great in heaven.”(Matthew 5:17-19)

According to Jesus, the Law was not being fulfilled by the religious leaders. Attaching more minor amendments to the major commandments was not God’s plan of keeping the Law. For example, the Pharisees had attached over 800 amendments to the commandment to “Keep the Sabbath day holy.” It was a well-contrived, detailed system to keep a commandment. As a result, this law and all of God’s other laws were not kept because man used his sinful heart as the interpreter. As Jesus continues his teaching about the Law to the disciples, he mentions two laws that were specific failures in their application.

“You have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not commit murder, and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court; but I say to you that everyone angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, *raca*, shall be guilty before the Supreme Court. And whoever shall say ‘you fool’ shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire. If, therefore, you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first to be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way; in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officers, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you; you shall not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall not commit adultery,’ but I say that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you, for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perishes than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you, for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perishes than for your whole body to go into hell. And it was said, ‘whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal;’ but I say to you that except for the cause of unchastity makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”(Matthew 5:21-32)

Jesus exposed to the disciples the Pharisees’ misinterpretation of the commandment against murder. Not committing murder did not accomplish the Law. To fulfill the commandment, a man must be rid of all anger in his heart toward all men. A forgiving and repentant heart was the key to keeping the Law. As Jesus illustrated, an act of a truly righteous man who was fulfilling the Law would go and make things right with an offended brother before offering a holy sacrifice in the temple. He would be a man who would be willing to make friends with opponents.

Looking at a woman with lust was equated with breaking the Law against adultery. A righteous man would not be content with the pride of being morally upright in his outward conduct. He would be instead a man who realized sexual temptation and sought to remove it as one would a degenerated limb or infected eye. He would be a man that would not be content with outward holiness but inward holiness.

The outward holiness the Pharisees demonstrated did not accomplish the Law of God. It led instead to a rise in the divorce rate so that the Law could be outwardly observed. Divorce

freed a man to pursue, legally, other marriage partners. The Law was kept, and the desires of the flesh were fulfilled.

A man could only fulfill the Law by employing a changed life. When the disciples received Jesus as Lord, they could keep the Law because the Spirit of God lived within them. The Spirit gave them new desires and a faith that would lead them to be repentant men, willing to say “I’m sorry” to an offended brother or a willingness to remove whatever caused them to lust after other women.

As Jesus told Nicodemus, judgment was over for the believer, and all sins were forgiven. The Law would not be held against any believing disciple in Christ. Their new lives would help them accomplish the Law, but even if they failed to trust Christ with the Law, it would not be held against them. John, a disciple, reflected upon this promise in one of his letters to the early churches.

“My children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.”(1John 2:1-2)

Jesus Speaks Out Against Lying and Revenge

Jesus finishes his teaching concerning the application of the Law by illustrating two incorrect attitudes in regard to keeping one’s word and treatment of one’s enemy.

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not make false vows but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. But I say to you, make no oath at all; either by Heaven, for it is the throne of God; or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘yes, yes’ or ‘no, no,’ and anything beyond that is evil. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends the rain of the righteous and the unrighteous for if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”(Matthew 5:33-48)

Jesus attacked the practice of making oaths to outwardly prove a man’s word. Vows and oaths were unnecessary with Godly regenerated men. His life was to be a model of truth, and his

word could be taken at face value. When he said yes, he meant yes. When he said no, that meant no. As the disciples were to learn, a righteous man played no manipulative games.

The disciples also learned that their enemies should be treated with love, not hatred. But unfortunately, the Jewish leaders seemed to demonstrate contempt for everyone. They hated the Romans who ruled Judea. They hated the Samaritans, considered hybrids in the true faith at best. They hated the Gentiles, who they considered unclean human beings. They even hated each other at times. An example of this came when they strived to replace one another in the competitive religious society they had created.

Jesus pointed out that a man who truly was accomplishing the Law would not model a vengeful spirit as these men did. A man with the Spirit of God would turn the other cheek when slapped. He would not enter into court if a man selfishly desired his belongings. Instead, he would realize that God is the one who provides for his needs. He can depend on God to replace the loss if there is loss.

A disciple who truly believed would not fear being taken advantage of. For example, the Romans often forced Jews to carry their burdens across the hot wilderness. Jesus said that a truly righteous man would not resist the task but instead offer more than was asked.

Money was not to be selfishly guarded. On the contrary, a true disciple would freely and wisely give to those in need, knowing the Lord would always, in turn, be faithful to him. Loving and serving friends and neighbors did not test a man's faith; even the Gentiles were able to fulfill this goal. Loving one's enemies was the key though to a changed life. This proved the difference between a man trying to keep the Law of God by his own efforts and a man letting God live his life and the Law through him.

Luke's account mentions two practical ways the disciples could daily have victory in this new approach to the Law. First, they were to pray for those who mistreated them. This would either change the hearts and actions of their enemies, or it would fill them with the same love God has for all men. Second, they were to treat others how they wanted to be treated. (Luke 6:31-32)

Wrong Applications of the Law

Jesus continues his attack on false interpretation and application of the Law. He mentions three critical areas of Jewish life that were abused because men depended on themselves rather than God for their righteousness. These areas were giving, praying, and fasting.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. Therefore, when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you; they have their reward in full. But as you alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be seen by men. Truly I say to you; they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use

meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”(Matthew 6:1-6)

“And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you; they have their reward in full. But you when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face, you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”(Matthew 6:16-18)

Many Jews, including the Pharisees, gave alms to the poor. This was regarded as one of the most important ministries. The travesty of this benevolent ministry was giving for selfish reasons. Many religious leaders used giving as an opportunity to demonstrate their righteousness. Acts of mercy became a competition to see who was the most spiritual man. Jesus points out that a disciple, whose life is controlled by God, would give alms secretly, not wishing to draw attention to himself. He would be unconcerned with any personal attention but instead has the poor in the forefront of his thoughts. He would be willing to give without any return.

Praying, another key to Jewish life was also misused by many Jews who desired to impress others with their piety. Conversation with God should be a private affair, but the religious leaders stood in synagogues and on street corners, praying loudly so that all men would notice them. This is another sign that they did not live a life of faith but were more concerned with man’s opinion than God’s. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that a righteous man would have only one thing on his mind when he prayed, and that would be God. If the disciples followed the Pharisee’s example in their previous life, they should not be surprised to see a new orientation in their life. Vain repetition and the observance of their fellow Jews would cease to be necessary to their faith.

Fasting for the Jew accentuated the prayer process. Denying oneself food for a day or three days, as was common among the Jews, was an appeal to God on vital problems and issues. Since food was the daily substance that maintained life, fasting showed God a man’s willingness to do without the daily necessity of food to concentrate on God’s will and purpose. Fasting was often practiced during personal crises such as a family death or persecution.

The Jewish leaders had turned fasting into a weekly practice and would neglect their appearance so that their fellow Jews would notice their fasting. According to Jesus, a disciple did not have to carry on this practice; it was not a part of the righteousness he received when believing in him. Fasting was important, but like prayer, it was not a proof of one’s spiritual walk but rather an appeal to God for his will and purpose on an issue.

The Foundation of a Disciple’s Prayer

It was Jesus’ intention up to this point in his sermon to rock the foundation of the religious leader’s basis for righteousness. At the very beginning of his address, he criticized these leaders for their misapplication of the Law. Then he denounced their practices of giving, fasting, and prayer. As he continued his criticism, Jesus did not leave his disciples without a course of correction.

In this course correction, Jesus taught the disciples a prayer that included a priority of requests that would cover most of a believer’s basic needs and problems. It is called the Lord’s Prayer, which consists of six petitions and an interpretation at the end about one of these

petitions, which was about forgiveness. Jesus intended that the disciples use this prayer to model their lives when conversing with God.

“Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray this way: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen. Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive men for their transgressions. But if you do not forgive men, your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”(Matthew 6:8-15)

In looking at the six petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, the first three petitions center around God. They recognize who He is and the will He has for man. The last three deal with man, his needs, his relationship with other men, and his battle with Satan.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.”

This first petition speaks of our relationship with God; He is our Father. It mentions His place of origin, heaven, and it tells us how to respond to Him in prayer, that is, to hallow His name. “Hallow” means to regard as holy or separated unto holiness.⁴ Even though God was in a father-son relationship with all believing disciples, He was distinctly different because, unlike his followers, He was without sin. The disciples in this first petition were to recognize God as a holy God, much different from them in regards to holiness, yet they were to embrace Him as they would a loving and wise earthly father.

“Thy kingdom come.”

The kingdom of God presented Christ as the king of the kingdom. As a king was Lord over his people, God was the Lord of every man who received him as the Savior. The kingdom was made up of all God’s people. This included those in past, present, and future generations. This petition helped the disciples recognize and agree with God’s plan for all people to be reached with the salvation message. As later mentioned, the message was not only to make God king but also His only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

This third petition was a prayer of submission. Jesus offered the prayer himself when he said at Gethsemane, “not my will but Thine”(Luke 22:42). The disciples had their desires and goals for their lives. This petition made them realize that God’s will on earth and heaven was paramount to their plans. This petition was more than a general prayer that fatalistically agreed with the intent of God. It was an act of submission that would place each disciple in the center of God’s will. In their submission, they would then understand what to do and how to do it.

“Give us our daily bread.”

Jesus directed the prayer life of the disciples toward God in the first three petitions. If the disciples' needs were summarized and prioritized, their greatest need was their relationship with God. Jesus put this as a priority in this disciple's prayer, but not to the exclusion of their own physical needs.

Daily bread was one of the main foods Jews depended on to sustain life. The word "bread" was used by many Greek economists to gauge the standard of living. Bread was like the dollar bill; it represented the standard of living.⁵

The disciples were encouraged in this fourth petition to pray for their daily bread or the standard of living necessary to sustain everyday life. This was an essential request for the disciples who had given up their means of providing to follow Jesus. The inclusion of the petition of daily bread was a sign to the disciples that God had their physical needs in his plan for their lives. There was nothing that Jesus had the disciples pray for that was not in the plan or purpose of God.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors, for if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men for their transgressions, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Jesus stressed in this petition the importance of an honest and repentant heart before God. This petition also pointed the disciples toward their relationship with other men. Finally, as believers, they were forgiven men in the presence of Christ. The Spirit of God was promised to them, and later the Spirit would be a permanent part of their lives.

Even though they were forgiven, they were still sinful and needed to be forgiven for their daily transgressions. This part of their prayer helped them see their lives as God saw them, as forgiven sinners needing to be sanctified daily from their past life of sin and selfishness. This petition went beyond the personal plan for God's daily forgiveness for the disciples' transgressions. There was outward evidence that a disciple was in harmony with God. He was a man who, without hesitation, could forgive even the most offensive person. A disciple walking rightly with God was an instrument of forgiveness himself. Jesus explained the nature of their petition for forgiveness more thoroughly than the other petitions because it dealt directly with the disciples' testimony.

God's forgiveness and the disciples' forgiveness of other men were interchangeable, as he explained further in verses 14 and 15. When God forgave a disciple's transgression as a result of prayer, it crushed the selfishness that could keep him from forgiving another a transgression. Forgiving other men was evidence that God had truly forgiven a disciple. This petition of forgiveness paved the way for a disciple's testimony to the world; it was a vital part of the disciple's prayer.

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

In this final petition, Jesus directed the disciples to include the temptations they would encounter. The Greek word for "temptation" has a two-fold meaning. In one sense, it means a test that will strengthen a man. Jesus allowed the disciples to go through trials and temptations, forcing them to draw on the spiritual resources of prayer and faith. In the other sense, it has a negative connotation because it implies a man's potential for failure.⁶ It was Satan's goal to see the disciples fail in their Christian lives through every temptation.

Jesus tells the disciples to abandon any thought of inviting temptation into their lives so that they might show themselves to be strong men. Asking God to lead them away from temptation was an important step toward humility, the key to a strong faith. But if God were to allow a disciple to go through a test that had the potential for victory and defeat, he should request God's deliverance. "Deliver us from evil" can be the disciples' greatest tool toward victory over temptation.

The Disciples' New View Toward Material Values

One of the most challenging dilemmas that each disciple experienced when he decided to follow Christ was the personal loss of any financial resources or security. Matthew had left a lucrative tax profession, and Peter gave up a fishing profession. The temptation to regret such a decision perhaps dominated their thoughts at first, especially when Jesus' preaching met with rejection. Jesus gives them his perspective on the matter in this next portion of his sermon.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The body's lamp is the eye; if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and dispose of the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."(Matthew 6:19-24)

Jesus pointed out to his disciples the temporary nature of material possessions. The ships they sailed and the possessions they collected were eventually doomed to dust. The hours they worked and the clever ways they gained possessions would also be counted as worthless if done for their own sake.

The treasure of a man's hours would be easily identified. If he were a fisher of possessions, his treasure would be possessions. If he were a fisher of men's souls, he would be blessed with a brotherhood of saved disciples. Jesus clarified that the disciples could not fish for both; one desire had to die. If not, the vision for God's will would be blurred, even abandoned. Judas Iscariot was a good example of an unrepentant disciple whose eye was bad, clouded by his love for the rewards of this life rather than the life in the kingdom of heaven. The author of the love for material possessions was Satan. A disciple could not maintain two opposite relationships, a love for Satan's offer of material security and God's offer of spiritual life.

God's Spiritual Treasure (Matthew 6:25-34)

The offer of Satan's bill of goods was obvious; money, prestige, and power were the benefits of following him. These could be gained by his methods of cheating, lying, compromising, stealing, hoarding, or just being selfish with his possessions. Jesus, on the other hand, promised the disciples a treasure beyond all their expectations: peace with God and enough materials necessary to sustain life. They would not have to abandon him or sacrifice their character to be taken care of.

“For this reason, I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air that do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you can add a single cubit to his life’s span by being anxious? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat or drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek His kingdom and righteousness first, and all these shall be added unto you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”(Matthew 6:25-34)

All that God had created for men, such as the flowers and the birds, have been taken care of. Jesus rebukes his disciples for having little faith given God’s perfect creation. Clothing, eating, and drinking are in God’s control. The disciples who were transitioning from being self-dependent to God-dependent though, still worried about their futures.

Jesus settled their hearts by giving them a simple but hard concept to follow: seek God first, and all your needs will be taken care of. An anxious spirit is part of the world, not God’s kingdom. There was no need, according to Jesus, for any of the disciples to be worried again. The peril of death or the danger of losing material possessions were troubles the disciples no longer had to be concerned with. Their dedication to Christ and his kingdom was all that was necessary. The rest of their lives would be taken care of.

God’s View of Judging Other Men

Another significant problem that Jesus addressed to his disciples was the spirit of condemnation they had been taught in their own Jewish culture. Condemning or judging other nations and religions was widespread among Jews. The Old Testament Scripture outlined a two-fold purpose for the Jews. They were to separate themselves from the sinful practices of their idol-worshipful neighbors, and they were to be a witness of God’s truth to them.

Unfortunately, as biblical history records, they carried out only the separation God demanded. As a result, they became proud and not only condemned others but also condemned one another for violating their religious conduct. The disciples were victims of the practice, so Jesus taught them his perspective of judging others.

“Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye but not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log

out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”(Matthew 7:1-5)

Jesus' main point to the disciples is simple: do not condemn other men. A disciple who trusts God will not have a condemning spirit or desire to judge other men. How a disciple treats other men is probably how he, in turn, will be treated. The nature of man is to respond in like manner to how he has been treated.

What right did any of the disciples have to judge others when their lives were filled with sin? The presence of sin, or the log in the disciple's eye, resulted in the sin of condemning other men's state of salvation with God.

Jesus calls all who do this a hypocrite. They are men who play an outwardly pious role, while inwardly, they are selfish and self-serving. The answer to condemnation is repentance, which is turning away from one's sin, or the "log" in one's eye, and turning toward God. When this is accomplished, the disciples, along with all believers, will be able to see other men from God's perspective. They would be men of love and compassion rather than men of condemning nature.

Preaching the Gospel and the Goal of Discipleship (Luke 6:39-40 and Matthew 7:6)

Jesus gives the disciples the first lesson on preaching the truth, which he will complete later for them in a series of teachings called the "kingdom parables" in Matthew 13. He also shares with the disciples another goal he has in mind for their training.

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls for swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”(Matthew 7:6)

“And He also spoke a parable to them. ‘A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they, not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.’”(Luke 6:39-40)

Jesus chose his men, except Judas, because they were willing to receive his kingdom message. They should remember this regarding when, one day when they would disciple others. Jesus rejected the Pharisees and only answered their questions with the truth for his disciples to learn. The Pharisees, as well as many other non-believers, trampled his message under their unbelieving feet. Jesus wanted the disciples to concentrate on those on "good ground," not those like the swine. The pearls were God's truths, as Jesus presented in this sermon.

Jesus had stated earlier his goal of discipleship. He told them he would train them to catch other men for the kingdom of heaven. He re-emphasizes that by promising they will be like him after they have been trained. They will have a foundation of truth and experience that will sustain them in their commission to preach the Gospel message. They will not fall into the pit of failure and eternal condemnation, as would those who followed the teachings of blind men like the Pharisees. The disciples would not rise above Jesus, for he was the Son of God, but they were promised to be like him at the end of their discipleship training.

The Nature and Result of Confident Prayer (Matthew 7:7-12)

The sinful goal of judging others was obvious among its greatest proponents, the Pharisees. They desired to be known as God's highest and most respected leaders. They elevated their position every time they successfully brought another spiritual leader down. There was security in their system of religion, both in the honor they received and in the coveted financial stability they could depend upon.

Jesus wanted his disciples to abandon this method to gain God's favor and financial security. Their life was characterized by a confident dependence on God for all things, both spiritual and financial. Their prayer life should be in accord with the previous principle he introduced to them of seeking God's kingdom first. For this reason, Jesus taught them another foundation stone of prayer.

“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you do so for them, for this is the Law of the Prophets.”(Matthew 7:7-12)

The disciples were not only to regard the petitions of the Lord's Prayer as vital in their prayers but were encouraged to expand on the issues they were most concerned about. For example, if they were worried about their daily bread, they were to pray to God as someone would continually knock on a friend's house door. It was not a breach of faith to seek God's will and do it in terms of finding something temporarily hidden. This type of asking was an approach that Jesus wanted the disciples to adopt in their prayer lives. It demonstrated their dependence on God rather than the sin of self-dependence.

If the answer did not come immediately, they were not to lose faith or fail to continue asking. They, instead, were to remember in their asking that God was a God who would provide adequately for all their needs. He was a God who would give them the good gifts of their requests, not the stones or snakes of unanswered needs. This was a prayer for God's delayed response.

The Lord's delays would build their faith, establish a habit of effectual prayer, and change their requests to his desires. Such prayer would give them God's perspective: to look at the needs of other men before their own needs. The productive results of their prayer would stun the selfish world they lived in because they would begin to treat men not with revenge but with the way they desired to be treated by others.

The Narrow Gate for Believers (Matthew 7:13-23)

Repentance brought each believer the Lordship of Christ. In this act, the control of man's spiritual leadership was relinquished to God. The narrow gate was Jesus; it was through him that man entered the kingdom of heaven. The wide gate which led to destruction was man's many devised ways to present himself as acceptable to God. There would be many false teachers, who would appear to be advocates of the narrow gate, but eventually, their acts would expose their selfish ambitions, just as Christ's life of love and sacrifice would expose him as the one true Son of God.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will not know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor does a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruit. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”(Matthew 7:13-23)

Jesus intended for the disciples to be aware of the prophets of destruction, men who would counterfeit the truth. The disciples were to understand that many would be lost because of the testimony of these men. The disciples were not to be blamed for the successful deceit of these men, for they would ultimately be responsible before God. Both good fruit (those who received the message of Christ) and the bad fruit (those who received the false message of Satan) would exist together. The disciples would be the bearers of good fruit, and God would judge the bad fruit.

A Disciple with a Foundation (Matthew 7:24-27)

Not all of Jesus' disciples received his gift of salvation. Judas, for example, was willing to follow Christ but not ready to turn over the reins of his own life to him. Many of Jesus' other disciples, outside the “12,” believed in him as their Lord. Some did not and later abandoned him when the opposition became too strong. A disciple was a learner, not necessarily a believer. Those disciples who listened and received Jesus' message of salvation were like a house built on rocks. The foundation of their lives was secure because they acted upon Christ's invitation to the kingdom of heaven.

Some who followed Jesus initially ended up not acting upon his words, and they, like many who opposed him, had a foundation built on sand. Sadly, because of this, their lives would be destroyed by the first rains of trial or temptation.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, yet it did not fall for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and burst against that house; it fell, and great was its fall.”(Matthew 7:24-27)

Application of Message

The Sermon on the Mount's tenets should be the priority in teaching our disciples. The problems Jesus addressed in this sermon can easily be applied to all Christians today. The beatitudes described a repentant man and the rewards he inherited upon belief. The disciples are to be “light” or “salt” in the world they live. Each of our men should see themselves as God’s representatives in the neighborhoods, jobs, or communities for which they serve. The Law should not be the core method applied in living the Christian life, but it should be lived by faith. Paul the Apostle expressed this in one of his letters to the Galatians.

“But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”(Galatians 3:23-25)

The results of living by faith should be a character of love, not revenge; forgiveness, not anger; truth, not lies; service, not selfishness. Our prayers and fasting should not have men in mind but only God. We should never be concerned with how men observe our prayer lives in our practice of giving. Our prayers should include all our needs, but our relationship with God is foremost.

We must realize that we will continue to be tempted by Satan’s greatest tool: money. But, through our prayers and faith, all the funds necessary to sustain life will come from putting God first.

Judging others and being overly concerned about our place among other Christians is not a righteous practice. That by which we judge others will only come back to haunt or bless us.

We should not fear to pursue God on unanswered requests. It is not a breach of faith to continue to seek His will or knock on His door again and again. Instead, we should be confident that one day he will provide for us, for He is a God who only knows how to give gifts to his children.

False teachers will come and will win many over. So Christians must keep teaching the truth and demonstrate our lives before the world. Eventually, the fruit of the false teacher will become evident to all, just as the infamous Jim Jones of the Guyana massacre was exposed to the world.

Application of Discipleship Principles

In the first year of Jesus' ministry, he preached the Gospel, healed the diseased, cast demons out of the afflicted, and got to know his disciples. Up to this point, the disciples had received the basic message of the Gospel; that is, Jesus was the means to salvation.

After Jesus formally chose the "12" to be his intimate disciples, he proceeded to give them more knowledge of the Christian life. The Sermon on the Mount was the beginning teaching that would provide the disciples with the necessary foundation to carry on their discipleship.

There comes the point for all of us who desire to disciple others when we must teach the meat of the Scripture. Introducing men and women to the kingdom's message is vital for the continuance of the Gospel. Teaching the basics of the kingdom message, which brought them salvation, is the beginning of the discipleship process. However, as disciplers, we must eventually share with them the whole revelation of God as presented throughout Scripture.

I served with an organization years ago that was particularly sharp in discipling men and women toward knowing and presenting the basic Gospel message, but that is as far as they went with their training. That is not enough; the discipleship process only begins with teaching men the Gospel message. Paul writes of this urgency to move on in the discipleship process in the book of Hebrews.

“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.”(Hebrews 6:1)

Jesus Method of Teaching

Jesus' teaching was centered on the disciples. In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, it was the disciples whom Jesus was gazing at when he presented the Sermon on the Mount. There was also the surrounding multitude and many of his other disciples present. His teaching was very subject-oriented, underlying that God's righteousness was not man's righteousness.

Jesus presented this teaching as a lawyer would present his case before a jury. Each subject was a study on this misapplication of the Law and life in general. Jesus depended upon Scripture to substantiate his main points.

A case in point was his instruction concerning the Lord's Prayer. First, he pointed out the false practice of prayer demonstrated by the Pharisees. Citing a passage in Isaiah, he revealed their prayer's weakness and perversion and then taught his disciples the right way to pray.

As we teach our disciples the faith, a logical point-by-point message can be helpful to their understanding. The use of Scripture is our teaching foundation and will hold us accountable to the truth. A dependency on the Scripture guards against misunderstanding and error in interpretation and application.

Jesus Lays the Foundation for the Disciples' Future Ministry

A multitude of people gathered to hear Jesus. They eventually would return to their homes, either accepting Jesus as the Son of God or rejecting him and continuing as they had always done. Jesus' teaching in this gathering, as well as many others, established for his disciple's future ministry of visitation. When he would later ask his men to go two-by-two

through the villages in Galilee to preach the Gospel, these people would serve as their point of first contact.

Jesus not only taught the disciples the meat of the faith in the Sermon on the Mount, but he also laid the foundation for their future ministries. The responsibility we have today as disciplers is more than just teaching the basics of the Gospel message or even teaching them the meat of the Gospel. We must help lay a foundation of ministry for them.

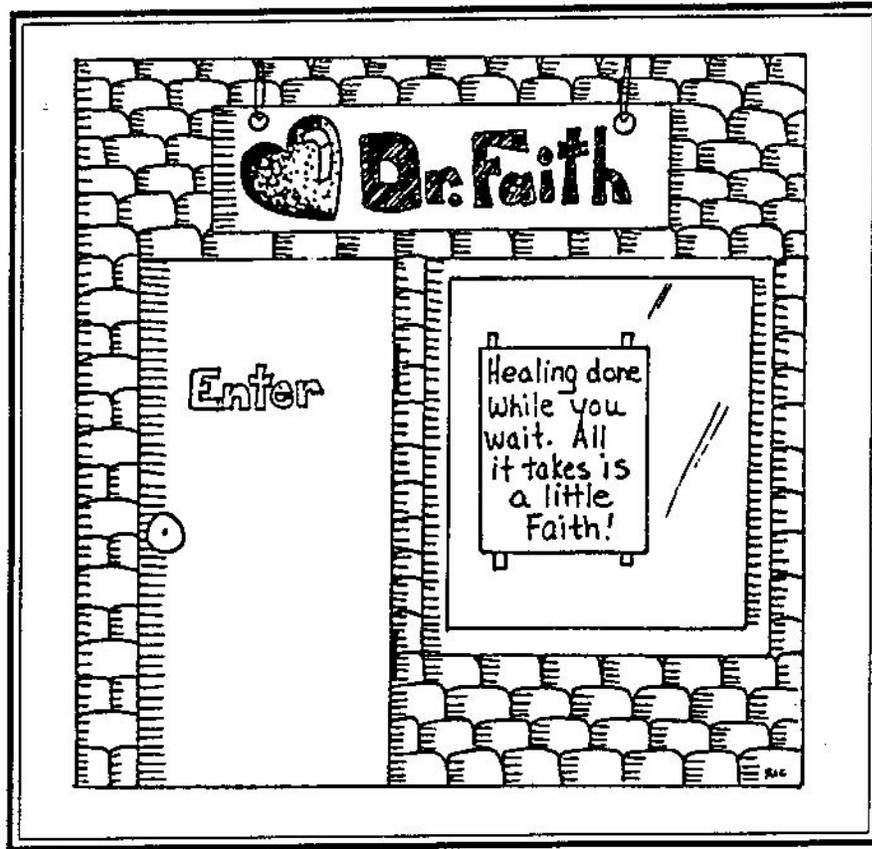
The most fruitful ministry I have ever had is when I was able to teach others the faith and help them get involved in discipling others. As a teacher, my exposure to others is often very visible, but I can never meet all of their needs, nor am I called to do so. This has provided an excellent opportunity for the men and women I am discipling to pick up a ministry with these people. God intends that we all become shepherds of the flock. We must remember this when discipling others.

Suggestions of Discipleship

1. After choosing a group of men to disciple, establish a weekly meeting with them.
2. Begin an in-depth study on the Sermon on the Mount.
3. Have them outline the Sermon.
4. Split the Sermon on the Mount into subject areas and study one area per week.
5. You are responsible for providing the historical and chronological data for each study. You can do this by reading some commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and by using a book that harmonizes the Gospels.
6. In your sessions, don't teach the entire hour, instead, give an introduction and ask them questions about the passage. An example of this is as follows:
 - A. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - B. How does it relate to what Jesus has taught thus far?
 - C. Who is the teaching directed toward?
 - D. How does Jesus support his teaching?
 - E. Are there any words that need defining?
 - F. To whom does this passage relate?
 - G. What application can be made today for each of your men or women?
7. Encourage your disciples to try and apply this teaching in their everyday life.
8. In what ways can it apply?

Footnotes

1. Ernst Thomson, The Sermon on the Mount and Its Meaning for Today (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1961) page, 10.
2. Thomson, page 11.
3. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973), page 282.
4. Vines, page 190.
5. Vines, page 146
6. Vines, page 117.



Chapter 10

A Tough Young Soldier

**“The Greatest Faith I’ve ever Seen!”
(Jesus Christ)**

Many Christians today have questioned their own commitments to Christ. Once they were excited about their new-found belief, the excitement waned, like a marriage with great romantic beginnings but later slipped into a dull coexistence. However, some Christians have not lost their zeal for God. Instead, they are living testimonies that continue to attract others to Christ.

What is the difference between these two groups of believers? Why is one group caught in neutral and the other group moving along at 80 miles an hour? Is it their church that determines the difference? Is it the knowledge they have behind their faith? Is it the pastor or Bible teacher that made the difference?

These factors can be the difference between dedicated Christians and those plodding along in neutral, although there is evidence to the contrary. Some of the most vital, alive Christians come from less ideal churches. Some have received lifeless preaching from their pastors, and some have only a basic knowledge of Scripture, yet they allow God to use them daily to accomplish his purpose. What is the key, then? Faith, like the Roman centurion’s, a tough young soldier, is really what makes Christians alive today.

Background teaching to the Centurion's Faith

It is recorded that Jesus made four visits to Capernaum, the headquarters of his Galilean ministry. His rejection at his home in Nazareth and the zealous adulation he received at Capernaum must have influenced him to settle there. In addition, the disciples Peter, Andrew, James, John, and many other believers lived in Capernaum.

His first trip to Capernaum was after the wedding at Cana, where he miraculously turned the water into wine. Here at Cana, a royal official came to ask Jesus to heal his dying son in Capernaum. Jesus granted the man's request saying, "Go your way, your son lives." (John 4:50)

On Jesus' second trip to Capernaum, he went first with his brothers, sisters, mother, and disciples to Jerusalem for Passover. Following the Passover, Jesus returned to Capernaum and was well received by the people there, perhaps because of the testimony of the royal official. This miracle must have heightened the response to Jesus' return. During this second trip, Jesus preached the Gospel, healed people, including Peter's mother, and cast demons out of many others. He then traveled to Lake Gennesaret, where he preached and miraculously provided a multitude of fish for Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

His third trip to Capernaum came shortly after this brief travel. His ministry in Capernaum this time included further teaching, the healing of the paralytic, and the call of a tax-gatherer, Matthew. Jesus then proceeded to Jerusalem, where he continued his preaching and healing ministry. Next, he returned briefly to Galilee to preach the Gospel at the Sermon on the Mount and then made his fourth visit to Capernaum, where he met the centurion.

A centurion in the Roman army was a junior officer in charge of 100 men. He was a non-commissioned officer, committed to 25 years of service to obtain Roman citizenship.¹ This centurion likely knew and worked with the royal official who met Jesus in Cana. This centurion also knew Matthew, the tax-gatherer, since Matthew was responsible for collecting the tribute due to Rome. He commanded the Roman garrison, which protected Matthew.

Though Scripture does not indicate the relationship between these men, it is possible they were friends. The miracle of the royal official's son and the change in Matthew's life must have influenced the Roman centurion. Likewise, the miracles he saw in Capernaum, his possible presence at the Sermon on the Mount, and the teaching he heard from Jesus' lips must also have greatly affected him.

The Faith of the Centurion

"And a certain centurion's slave, who he highly regarded, was sick and about to die. And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking him to come and save the life of his slave. And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated him, saying, 'He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built our synagogue.'" (Luke 7:2-5)

It was unusual for a Roman soldier to have even minimal respect for a slave because a slave in Roman society ranked below a good animal.² This centurion was different in regards to his views of slaves. He was not only deeply concerned by his servants' torment but also had an excellent relationship with the Jewish elders.

Jews and Romans generally hated each other. The conquering Romans could not infiltrate Jewish culture with their society and religion. In fact, the Jews scorned Roman citizenship, despite it being a coveted honor amongst most people at that time. Jews regarded the Romans as nothing more than ignorant heathens.³

This centurion, though, had embraced the God of the Jews. He loved their nation and consequently rebuilt their synagogue. He had either accepted the message of Christ or was in the process of accepting it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus identified the resultant character of new believers. The Roman soldier was an example of both the “gentle in spirit” and the “merciful” in that sermon.

The Jews not only regarded the Romans as heathens but also treated their conquerors as Gentiles. Therefore, a Jew would not by practice, enter the home of a Gentile; it was a defiling act. Knowing this prejudice, the centurion did not want to put Jesus in a difficult position. He did not want to discredit Jesus’ reputation and ministry by disobeying a common Jewish practice. In response, he sent friends to Jesus, thus eliminating himself from direct contact with him. In Matthew’s account, much of this detail is not mentioned for brevity. Instead, Luke records this event more comprehensively.

“Now Jesus started on his way with them; and when he was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, ‘Lord do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not fit for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For indeed, I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”(Luke 7:6-8)

As one can see in the progression of this account, the centurion called Jesus “Lord” and expressed his faith by recognizing Jesus’ authority. The centurion knew Jesus could heal his servant because he had the authority. He believed Jesus could heal his servant by a word, much like what Jesus did with his friend, the royal official’s son. Upon this evidence, the centurion trusted Jesus to act accordingly.

Jesus’ response perhaps caught everyone by surprise. He spoke to the multitude so that they would understand what faith involved. He not only healed the man’s servant but praised the centurion’s faith.

“And when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude following Him, ‘I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such a great faith.’ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.”(Luke 7:9-10)

This act reveals the nature of faith. To help a lowly servant, the centurion risked his own military career by humbling himself before Jesus. He could have ordered Jesus to heal his servant, but he refused to use his authority. Instead, he attributed absolute authority and power to Jesus.

The centurion crossed more barriers than anyone in Jesus’ ministry. Thus Jesus recognized his faith as the greatest. In Greek, the word “great” in this passage means such a

significant quantity.⁴ The centurion's faith was a great quantity of faith that risked a great deal, a faith that made him the "salt" of the earth.

Jesus Teaches on the Coming of the Church (Matthew 8:11-12)

Jesus introduced the concept of the church to his disciples during this incident with the centurion. As explained later, especially in Paul's writings, the coming church would be God's instrument of revelation and truth. Moreover, God's vehicle of truth would no longer be exclusively the nation of Israel but all believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

"And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12)

East and west represented the entire world. When Jesus said many shall recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this was a promise that all who believed would join these faithful servants in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus used the dinner table often in his teaching to explain the peaceful reward for all believers in judgment.

"And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, He said him, 'Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 14:15)

John the Baptist had warned the Jews that their heritage as God's people was not enough to get them into heaven. As God's own people, many of them would end up in hell. This is what Jesus meant when he said to his disciples that "the sons of the kingdom shall be cast into the outer darkness." (Matthew 8:12)

Believing in Jesus as the Christ, as the centurion did, is the narrow gate to Heaven. Whether Jew, Roman, Greek, or Samaritan, belief and reception of Christ as Lord is the only means to the table of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Application of the Message

The centurion was sure Jesus could heal his servant and was willing to risk all due to this conviction. We must demonstrate this faith in our lives and repeatedly impart that message to our fellow Christians.

Risk is often a prerequisite of faith. The centurion did not keep his belief silent but openly demonstrated it before those in Capernaum. In the same way, we must believe Christ's promises to provide and acknowledge openly before the world in which we live. We may have similar experiences like the centurion and his stricken slave. Physical afflictions can be a testimony for Christians if they can demonstrate the same faith before others. The world is often more drawn to Christ by how Christians respond to affliction than how eloquent they are with the Scripture.

The key to faith is humility, as demonstrated by the centurion. We must humble ourselves before God, putting all our troubles on him. We should not be ashamed to do this openly. Pride was void in the centurion and must likewise be void in our Christian walk.

The world does not need to see self-sufficient Christians but rather dependent men and women, putting their confidence in a strong and loving God. The object of the centurion's faith was the person of Christ. We must not get caught up with anything more than the object of that faith, which is Christ.

The centurion demonstrated this open humility when he recognized Jesus as Lord, and then he waited on him to act. All these things are essential ingredients in great faith. Humility, recognition of Jesus' authority, and waiting are principles we can apply in each request we make of Christ. The reason for great faith, though, is the object of that faith which was Christ. The power of faith is not some Biblical formula but Christ himself.

The inauguration of the church age, which is recorded in the book of Acts, comes into view in this incident with the centurion. The Jews had developed a self-righteous attitude, but now the truth of God's revelation belongs to all believers. Therefore, when teaching this passage, we must illustrate our great responsibility as God's present-day spokesman but not copy the self-righteousness demonstrated by the Jewish leaders.

Our position with God should motivate us to preach the Gospel to the whole world. We should never fall into the trap the Jews fell into, turning their hearts cold against all non-Jews. As Jesus loved the world and reached out to the centurion, we must also love non-Christians.

Application of the Discipleship Process

Jesus gave the disciples a good balance in this training. He spent a year and a half teaching the Gospel to them. They could see his power and authority over disease and demon possession. Then, after they were finally selected as his "12" disciples, they received a lengthy teaching on many spiritual issues in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' discipleship was not just a series of weekly Bible studies; he mixed his teaching with the practical application of experience.

The experience with the centurion was a great visual aid to what Jesus taught the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus characterized the believer as a merciful servant and peacemaker among men. He demonstrated mercy by healing the centurion's servant. Jesus broke the hatred between Romans and Jews by responding to the centurion's request. He risked a great deal by accepting people like the centurion, the Samaritan woman, or Matthew, the tax-gatherer, but that made him the greatest peacemaker of all time.

Jesus taught the disciples to be the "salt" and "light" of the world. He was the "salt" of the earth with this centurion; he preserved the love and salvation of God for him as well as all Gentiles. He was the "light" of the world, unafraid to let all those in Capernaum notice his testimony of acceptance.

As disciplers, we must mix our teaching with experience. If our disciples do not see us respond to life's challenges or experience themselves, their training will be constipation of knowledge. They will know the Scriptures but be unable to meet life's demands.

The many incidents of healing gave the disciples background for accomplishing this in their first mission. Jesus spent a significant amount of time preparing his men for the ministry. He taught them the truth and showed them repeatedly how to do a ministry. Eventually, they would have to step out and test their experience.

Most of the disciples had already seen Jesus heal many diseased in Capernaum. For example, he healed Peter's mother, rebuking her fever with a word. Also, he laid hands on her in the process of healing, as he did with many others in Capernaum.

The nobleman's son was healed according to Jesus' word. On the other hand, the leper recovered by the touch of Christ. Like Peter's mother, the paralytic was told to rise and walk. The man with the withered hand was told to stretch out his hand. The man at Bethesda was asked if he wanted to be healed. The faith of his Roman master healed the centurion's servant.

There was a great deal of guidance for the disciples in these acts of healing. If all these incidents were summarized, there would be no particular formula for a healing ministry. Sometimes faith was the underlying foundation for healing, as was valid with the leper and centurion, but sometimes Jesus healed to bring about faith, as was true with the royal official.

Sometimes there was no faith, as with the man at the Bethesda pool. He was healed without any evidence of belief; in fact, he was later approached by Jesus and told the way to salvation. But, unfortunately, there is no recorded response on his behalf.

In all cases, healing miracles are only tools God uses to bring about or mature a faith. The disciples had to trust Jesus for each healing experience, as they trusted him in all their ministries. As disciplers, we must apply this same principle of faith in potential healing ministries.

The laying on of hands may or may not be part of the healing process. There is no such thing as a man with healing hands. Each believer, though, has faith, and through faith in God, people are healed.

Healing is still a ministry in which all believers can participate. We should never teach our fellow disciples that God has left all healing in the hands of physicians or faith healers. Whether we pray for our affliction or others, God still wants us to be part of his healing ministry.

Our disciples should realize that a healing ministry can encourage one's belief and lead others to Christ. There is no more significant impact on an unbeliever than to have Christians praying for him and then find his affliction healed.

Jesus once again modeled courage and compassion. He did not fear the rejection of those who hated the Romans. The faith of the Roman and the great need of his servant was his only concern. As the Roman soldier risked his reputation, so the disciples would later take the same risk.

As Christians today in America, we do not suffer the same persecution that the disciples faced. Nevertheless, we must continue teaching others to be bold in their testimony and compassionate in their mercy for others. This may include sticking up for someone at work who is unpopular or rejected. The principles illustrated in Jesus' character still apply to all believers in all places.

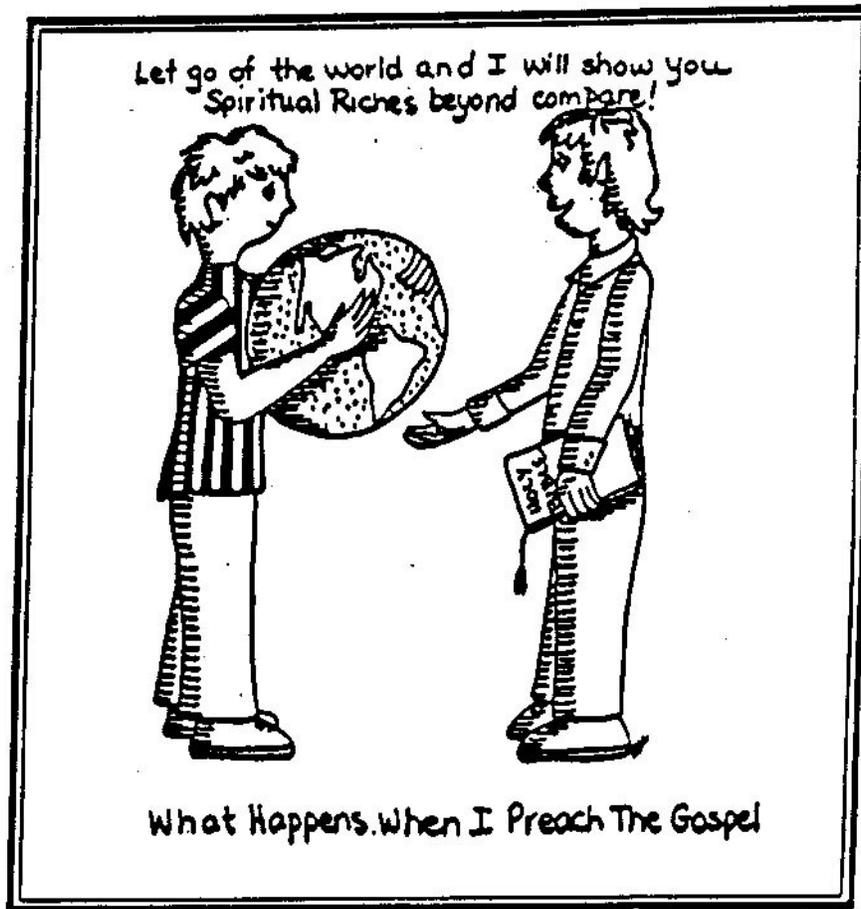
Suggestions for Discipleship

1. Discuss ministry opportunities in the lives of your disciples where there is a need for physical healing.
2. Choose a ministry your group can participate in together, perhaps a healing ministry of prayer for the afflicted.
3. Discuss the ingredients of great faith.
4. Visit clinics where the afflictions of others are apparent: paralyzed, diseased, maimed, etc. Get an idea of afflicted people.
5. Pose the question of what risks does it take to make faith great?

6. What situations do we all flee from that present too much risk to share our faith?

Footnotes

1. Hendrikson, (Matthew), pages 392-394.
2. Hendrikson, (Matthew), page 394.
3. Edersheim, (Volume I), page 548.
4. Vines, page 174.



Chapter 11

The Seashore Parables

“What happens when I try and preach the Gospel?”

The teachings in chapter 13 of Matthew perhaps take the fear out of evangelism more than any other group of teachings that Jesus preached to his disciples. These teachings instructed the disciples on what to expect from their efforts to evangelize the world.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus explained the disciple’s role in presenting the Gospel, God’s role in this effort, and the results that could be expected. Jesus also modeled a teaching for the disciples that would help them teach the truth to uninterested non-believers and those who desired the kingdom of God. All these teachings are vital for us all who wish to mature in our faith and become good witnesses for him.

The command to evangelize can scare more Christians than any other directive given in Scripture. Yet we must all face up to this command sooner or later. Understanding our role and God’s role in this responsibility can smooth the way for our participation in evangelism.

Jesus spent a lot of time preparing his men with a foundation of truth before asking them to present the Gospel to others. As he was patient with them, so he is with us. Eventually,

though, we must carry out this command as the disciples did, or we stand in rebellion against God himself.

Background Leading to Parables by the Sea (Luke 7:11-8:1-3)

After the centurion's slave was healed in Capernaum, Jesus took a short journey to the surrounding villages, where he continued his healing ministry and preaching the Gospel. He would eventually return to Capernaum, preaching the famous kingdom parables on a nearby seashore.

His journey started in Nain, a town near Nazareth, and about one day's journey from Capernaum. Jesus arrived in Nain during a funeral procession for a young widow's son. His disciples were with a multitude of other believers and onlookers. Jesus, sensing the woman's profound loss, told her not to weep and raised her son from the dead. The crowd was shocked into belief. They began glorifying Jesus and called him a prophet.

Jesus left Nain to continue his ministry through Galilee and was approached on his journey by two disciples of John the Baptist. John's imprisonment prompted him to decide what role his cousin Jesus played. He had already proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, but John's impending death perhaps was caused by anxiety, so he, like all men, would have wanted to hear Jesus' direct claim to Messiahship.

Jesus' answer was not defensive but demonstrated action. While John's disciples awaited his answer, Jesus healed many people of their diseases and evil spirits and granted sight to the blind. Then he told John's disciples to go and report what they had seen. The significance of what they witnessed would settle John's doubts.

When they left this location, Jesus preached about John and the importance of humility in the kingdom of God. The message was directed toward all the people, but its focus of attack was against the Pharisees. Jesus told his disciples and the crowd present that there was no greater man than John, except for any man that saw himself as the least in the kingdom of God. A man with this level of humility was the greatest. In his parable of the marketplace, Jesus called the Pharisees spoiled children.

“...It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to the other children, and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance, we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John, the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners...’”(Matthew 11:16-19)

Jesus' point was simple: men of pride, like the Pharisees, would resort to any tactic to discredit both John and Jesus. Each though was part of God's revelation to man. John was the forerunner of Christ. He would not accept the convenient lifestyle of the Pharisees, so he was called a demon. Jesus accepted men like Matthew or the Roman soldier; he, in turn, was called a gluttonous man after the likeness of the Gentiles.

After Jesus exposed the blindness of the Pharisees to his disciples and the people, he accepted an invitation for dinner at a Pharisee's home. Evidently, the Pharisee, Simon, was impressed with Jesus. Their dinner, though, was not without conflict. While they were reclining

at the table together, a prostitute entered with a perfume vial. Her desire for repentance put her at the feet of Jesus. She wiped Jesus' feet clean with these repentant tears.

Simon, who perhaps had begun to recognize Jesus as a prophet, began withdrawing his support. He could not understand how a prophet like Jesus could not see the sinning lifestyle of this woman. Jesus answered Simon's question by giving him a parable on the nature of a forgiving heart, a heart which all men of God were to have if they were truly born again into the kingdom of heaven.

“...Simon, I have something to say to you. And he replied, ‘Say it, teacher.’ A certain moneylender had two debtors: the one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them, therefore, will love him more?”(Luke 7:40-42)

Simon's answer to Jesus' questioning parable was correct. The one who owed 500 denarii would love the money lender most. However, as Jesus continued to finish his teaching, the one who owed 500 denarii was the repentant woman. Her sins were many, but they were all forgiven by her act of faith. Therefore, her response to Jesus at Simon's house was appropriate, just as the joy would have been for the man who was forgiven of his 500 denarii debt. Jesus intended this incident to model the forgiving attitude that all Jews should have toward sinners and forgive this woman of her sins.

After performing many miracles and preaching the Gospel in many villages throughout Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum with the 12 disciples and many other followers. Among his followers were women such as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and others. They also were considered Jesus' disciples even though they were not part of the “12.” They helped in many ways, often providing financial support for Jesus and his men.

A Discipleship Look at the Seashore Parables (Matthew 13)

Using farming language, Jesus taught the disciples in this seashore to address a critical perspective concerning the multitude's response to the kingdom message. Some would believe, but many, for various reasons, would not. The seed sown in this passage was the word of God or the kingdom message. The sower would be any disciple that would preach the kingdom message.

“On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes gathered about Him so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude stood on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, ‘Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and devoured them. And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; they withered away because they had no root. And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.’”(Matthew 13:1-8)

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word immediately falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good ground is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty.”(Matthew 13:18-23)

There were four significant responses to the kingdom message. Jesus described the first response as a seed that fell beside the road. The birds quickly ate this seed. The disciples would have to realize that as they preached the word of God, some of their listeners would not understand the message for one reason or another, and their impact would quickly be forgotten. Satan, in these cases, would be able to snatch away the truth as he did with Judas Iscariot. Jesus warned of this reality in the Sermon on the Mount when he told the disciples about false prophets who appeared in sheep’s clothing, like the Pharisees, but inwardly were ravenous wolves.

“When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.’”(John 13:21)

“...That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel’...He took and gave it to Judas...and after the morsel, Satan entered Him”(John 13:26-27)

The second response is the seed that would fall on rocky places. This seed would not spawn any growth because of the lack of soil. The scorching rays of the sun would quickly wither away any potential growth. Jews and gentiles alike would respond quickly and positively to the person and message of Christ. However, their response would soon flutter away when affliction or persecution arose.

Some followers of Jesus would joyously usher him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday but later demand his execution. They were not men and women described in the beatitudes who would withstand persecution for their beliefs. Instead, they opted for Barabbas, who would not lead them into the kingdom of heaven.

“But you have a custom, that I should release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the king of the Jews? Therefore they cried out again, saying, ‘Not this man, but Barrabbas...’”(John 18:39-40)

The third response to Jesus' message was the seed that fell among the thorns. In this instance, hearing the word of God would be well received by some people but would eventually be damaged by their continuing love for the world’s wealth. So Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount disciples that man could not serve God and Mammon. He, instead, was to seek only the kingdom of God.

The disciples would encounter many followers of Jesus who could not let go of their love for the world. The rich young ruler, for example, seemingly received the message of Christ but could not abandon his love for worldly riches. Others would find it difficult to leave a comfortable but sinful lifestyle. These men and women, according to Jesus, would have unfruitful and unhappy existences in the kingdom of God. Perhaps some of these followers were saved; others were not. They were the “Lady Clairol” believers; only God knew for sure.

The fourth response to the Gospel was the seed that fell on good ground. The good ground were all those disciples of Christ who repented of their sins and followed him. They were the fishers of men, like the disciples who let the light of Christ shine in their lives to a darkened world of unbelief.

Good ground included people like the Samaritan woman, who shared the new life with the people in her home town of Sychar. Nicodemus abandoned his peer group of Pharisees and believed in Jesus as Savior. The Roman centurion risked his reputation and honor to embrace Christ as Lord.

Good ground included the disciples themselves, except Judas. Because of their willingness to be made disciples of the kingdom, they would later be honored with the opportunity to spread the Gospel to the whole world.

“Good ground” people would be found everywhere. In some towns and villages, there would only be a few. In other cities, like Capernaum, there would be a great response. As the crops of the farmer’s fields differed some 30, 60, or 100-fold, so would the response to the preached word of God.

Reason for Speaking in Parables (Matthew 13:10-12)

After listening to Jesus teach parables to the multitudes at the seashore near Capernaum, the disciples and other followers of Jesus desired to know why Jesus spoke in parables and their meanings. Jesus did not interpret his stories until his disciples requested them. First of all, he explained his purpose in hiding the meaning from the multitude.

Many listened to Christ’s words without responding. Their resistance to the truth blinded them from understanding the Gospel message. They came to see signs, wonders, and miracles and to be healed physically, but not spiritually. As Jesus expressed earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, he would not throw his pearls of truth before swine but reserve them for his followers who were open to the truth and its life-changing promises.

“And in their case, the prophesy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull.’” (Matthew 13:14-15)

Parable of Tares and Fish (Matthew 13:24-30 & 47-50)

Next, Jesus began teaching his followers other parables to encourage them in their future discipleship ministries. For example, the parable of the tares concerned a farmer who sowed good seed in the ground, but while he was sleeping, the enemy came along and sowed worthless

counterfeit tares among the wheat. His servants were ready together up the entire crop which had been planted. But the wise owner instructed the servants to wait until harvest time when the tares would be easier to identify. Waiting for the harvest would also prevent any wheat from being damaged.

In the parable of the tares, there was more than a judgment picture. Jesus did not want his disciples to uproot a ministry that might have some counterfeit followers prematurely. He wanted them to wait and let God bring harvest the true believers. Time would tell who was of God and who was not. Acting quickly, without enough time or evidence, could mistakenly damage many valid believers. Jesus had already established this somewhat in the Sermon on the Mount when he told the disciples not to judge others, lest they be judged similarly. Waiting on God to reveal the truth of a ministry was crucial to the maturity of the disciples.

Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

Jesus encouraged his disciples with a parable that described the outcome of their preaching. The kingdom of heaven was like a mustard seed. Though smaller than all the other seeds, fully grown, it was larger than all the other trees, big enough for the birds of the air to nest in it. The disciples' message and ministry would initially seem small and insignificant, much like the mustard seed. But, after a time of growth and maturity, the kingdom's message would become the most dominant spiritual force in the history of man. The whole world, if it chose, could rest securely in the message of Christ, much like the birds did in the mustard tree.

The disciples were to rest in the security of the kingdom message. Jesus was behind the message. It could speak for itself in the hearts of men. The message would grow because God was causing it to grow in men, not because the disciples were capable communicators or ministers.

“And He was saying, ‘The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the ground; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows, how, he himself does not know.’”(Mark 4:26-28)

Parable of the Leavened Bread (Matthew 13:33)

Jesus reinforced the mustard seed's parable with the leavened bread's parable. For bread to rise and grow, leaven was put into the bread at the right time. Growth and expansion resulted from leaven being put into the bread. Like the parable of the mustard seed, the disciples' message would have inevitable growth. Regardless of their own failures or lack of faith, the message they carried would change the world.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value (Matthew 13:44-46)

Jesus described for the disciples in these two parables the heart of a man who was the “good soil” in the parable of the sower. A man who was ripe for the kingdom of heaven was like a man who went after a treasure or a great pearl. When he found it, he would rejoice and sell all

he had to purchase it. The treasure was the Lordship of Christ. The selling transaction was repenting his sins and abandoning his former life of self-dependence and self-lordship.

Peter left everything behind when he accepted Christ. The disciple's Peter and his companions would be looking for someday would also not hesitate to pay the price for the pearl of Christ.

The Good Soil of the Scribes (Matthew 13:51-52)

The religious leaders of the day were vehemently opposed to Christ's message and ministry, but there was some hope for the Scribes.

“And He said to them, ‘Therefore every Scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of treasure things new and old.’”(Matthew 13:52)

The Scribes knew the Old Testament in detail. A redeemed religious leader could see clearly God's progressive revelation for man from Adam to Christ. He would be capable of putting the treasure of the Old Testament with the treasure of Christ's words and teaching. He would be a man of great wisdom and resource.

The disciples were to be sensitive to the redemption of Scribes and other religious leaders as well. As examples, other religious leaders like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus proved to be great disciples of Christ, especially in those last days before he was taken to the cross. Later, Paul, a Pharisee, and persecutor of the early Church, would claim Christ as Lord. Again, his wisdom in the Old Testament Scriptures would assist him greatly in preaching the message of grace to the Gentile world.

Application of the Messages

Rebuke to Pharisees (Luke 7:32-34)

All Christians will face criticism because of their belief. We must prepare our people for the many attacks ahead. Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of his critics when he taught his disciples the parable in the marketplace. We must share the hypocrisy that will tear into their faith with our men and women. As Pharisees condemned John the Baptist for his self-proclaimed poverty and then called Jesus a gluttonous man, so will these attacks reach each of our disciples. This illustration that Jesus shared with his men should remind our disciples when they are attacked hypocritically by many different people.

In my own life, I have been called a religious prude at times by non-Christians one day and then the next day a compromiser by my fellow Christians. These are attacks perpetrated by our enemy, Satan. He will use all kinds of resources to throw us off the track.

A message at Simon's House (Luke 7:40-48)

We must teach our disciples the importance of an accepting and forgiving attitude toward all people. For example, Jesus loved and forgave the prostitute who came to Simon's home. He forgave her and her sin due to the strong faith and humility she exhibited there.

The church can sometimes develop an atmosphere typical of Simon's home, which excludes the sinner by its very nature. Our disciples must be taught never to slip into Simon's cold, rejective attitude toward sinners. Instead, this illustration should inspire all our disciples to open their homes to all sinners and churches without reservation.

In Seattle, some years ago, I purchased a three-story mansion near the University of Washington. This was right before real estate went through the roof in America. My purpose was to turn this house into a multi-Christian residence where students and young people could live and be disciplined.

Before we could move into the house and start this ministry, we first had a ministry with those who were occupying the house under the old ownership. They were quite a group of residents. Two girls were noticeably immoral and probably prostitutes. A student activist was also living with his girlfriend in the back of the house—the rest of those who lived in the house exemplified the same scenario.

At first, I just wanted to evict everyone and fill the place with Christians, so we could quickly carry out the purpose of the house. However, others joining me in this ministry counseled against it because God convicted us to minister to these non-Christians. Eventually, they moved out, and we were able to establish the house the way we had wanted it to be; but not before we had an opportunity to share the Gospel and to model his love and acceptance for these people. As a result, our house was always open to non-Christians, even though Christians dominated it. This passage of Scripture can be a foundation for us all regarding the atmosphere we desire to have in our homes and churches.

Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9; 14-20)

The parable of the sower was an excellent illustration for disciples regarding their own expectations in preaching the Gospel. It is also quite relevant to our own discipleship groups today. All our men and women, no matter their personality or spiritual gift, will be responsible for preaching the Gospel message of salvation to their community. However, they should be aware that their message will be quickly rejected due to a lack of understanding or receptivity.

Satan has given some men and women another view of life in which they have put their security, and they will not willingly abandon it for the Gospel. The end for them is destruction, but there is nothing our disciples can do but keep preaching the Gospel and modeling the Christian life of love. Perhaps circumstances will turn on them one day, and they will become good soil for the Gospel.

Our disciples should also prepare for those who at first will be very positive, as was true with the seed that fell on rocky ground, but when trial or testing comes, these people will fall away quickly. Our disciples should not fall into a spirit of defeat if this happens. There was nothing wrong with their presentation or their example. These people emotionally responded to the message, which was a tremendous outward observance. They did not accept Jesus as Lord; therefore, they had no foundation for a test or temptation.

I have seen many men and women who have accepted Christ openly before others. There was great excitement in their apparent conversion. Many Christians surrounded them and encouraged them to their newly found faith. Unfortunately, as time passed and the attention lessened, these people fell away, never to return. Disciples can become confused when this

happens, and fear can erupt into thinking salvation can be lost. This illustration of the rocky ground counterfeits should help us when this happens in our ministries.

Our discipleship groups should also understand that their testimonies will reach people who receive Christ as Savior or appear to receive Christ but cannot let go of their sinful past. These people will be unable to produce much fruit because they have not repented of their sins. Whether they are actual believers or not can be debated, but one thing is clear: they will be stumbling blocks to other young Christians who are earnestly striving to mature in their faith.

I have worked alongside fellow Christians who have preached the Gospel in one instant and turned around to celebrate their efforts with an old habit of sin. They nullified their testimony with the example of their life. As believers, they have choked their fruit with unrepentant sin.

Still other men and women I have been associated with in the Church give lip service to belief and even give tithes to the Church but have never evidenced any fruits of the Spirit, like love, joy, or peace. They see the Church as a social or business operation. They like to be associated with the Church if it is successful or does not interfere with their private lives. Their lust is for the world. We should all pray for men and women like this; they often can destroy a church.

The greatest joy our disciples will encounter in their preaching of the Gospel will be through those men and women who receive Christ as Lord and desire to grow in the Christian life. They are the good ground, which should always be the foundation of every church.

This group will desire discipleship and later want to disciple others into the kingdom. They will sometimes look like the other soils because the Christian life gradually changes the character of the new Christian. They will not always put God first or react to a spiritual challenge. They may even stray into false doctrines. Regardless, they have accepted Jesus and hopefully will be guided back into the path of righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes as Christians, we fantasize about the way things used to be, and we wish to return for a while. In my own life, I have at times returned to my past sinful ways of living. In each case, though, I have walked away from this departure only with guilt and discouragement. The life Christ gave me was far superior to the past. His Spirit always convicted me, and I was back in His forgiving arms before long, enjoying an abundant life. Likewise, the good soil in our discipleship groups will not be without sin, but they will always return to the fold because the Spirit of God never leaves them.

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”(John 14:16-17)

Jesus used parables to hide the truth from those who were not interested in the deep meaning of his teaching. In the same way, we must teach our men and women how to present the truth to an unbelieving audience and those who sincerely desire to know Christ as Lord. We must not spill out all the great tenets of the faith to those who are only mildly interested. The in-depth truth should be reserved for those who desire to know God.

I once had the opportunity to present the Gospel to a school class in a private high school that allowed a religious influence in their curriculum. As I shared the deep meaning of the

parable of the children in the marketplace recorded in Luke 7:31-32, I could see that it was being ill-received. Most of the students were in class because it was a requirement or an easy grade. They could have cared less as to the deep meaning of the truth. A few, though, were interested in the interpretation. They were, in my view, the good soil in the parable of the sower. They should have received the interpretation of the parable, and they alone. If I had it to do over, I would have simply mentioned the parable and presented its surface truth; then, I would have announced another session for those who desired to know the true meaning of the parable.

We must always be in a position to present the truth. We should be careful and wise, though, in our presentations. The committed non-believer does not want to hear anything more than surface meaning, so it is a waste of time to try and teach him anything more. It will be obvious who is interested. They will seek us out and open the door for us to share all we know about the truth.

Parables of Tares and Fish (Matthew 13:24-30 & 47-50)

There should never be any undue fear if counterfeit Christians infiltrate our churches. We should teach our disciples patience and the art of waiting on God to reveal who is good soil or not. Significant damage can be done when an actual believer is cast out of a church or unduly rebuked as a non-Christian when the evidence is not all in.

In the parable of the Tares, Jesus told his disciples to wait for the harvest; the “beside-the-road” and “rocky ground” people eventually show themselves. The harvest in this parable was the end of the age. That does not mean that the tares of our churches will not show themselves before the end of time, but we should wait until it is apparent who they are. Then loving discipline would be in order, as Jesus later teaches his disciples in Matthew 18.

God will render the final outcome in the judgment. He will separate the good fish from the bad for all eternity. There have been times in my own ministry when I have judged someone too quickly, treated them as an unbeliever, and denied them at times the respect they were due. My only reconciliation came when I could go and apologize for my short-sighted judgment.

We should teach our disciples not to judge, as Christians often do with each other. Instead, we must be more patient with one another, supporting each other as co-workers in the same ministry.

Counterfeit Christians will expose themselves, as Judas did in his hour of testing. However, he did not damage the message of Christ by his betrayal, nor will the counterfeit Christians hurt the progress of your message.

These two parables should encourage our disciples, especially after they have worked hard to win others to Christ. Their efforts may seem minor initially, perhaps only winning one or two people to Christ. The Lord said that our ministries will start small but will significantly impact the community in which we live.

Growth is as inevitable as leaven in bread, and it may take time, as the mustard seed did when it was planted. But, in the end, each of our ministries will grow because God is behind them, which is his desire.

A youth ministry I was involved with years ago continues to grow. The kids I worked with are married and have won many of their families to Christ and friends. As their children are trained in the lord's ways, the ministry started in that little youth room tears ago will mushroom

until one day all the people they live around will be affected by that one mustard seed of faith ministry.

We should teach our disciples to be patient and wait for the Lord to bring growth. We should not be anxious when change does not appear immediately. It would be destructive to the mustard seed to keep digging it up to see if there is any evidence of growth. In the same way, it is damaging if we put undue goals or expectations on our ministries.

We should look with a concerned eye when a Christian movement develops too quickly. This is not consistent with the parable of the mustard seed but more consistent with the response of “rocky ground” people to an exciting movement. Our significance should never be in the size of our ministry but only in the Lord, who will gradually build it with strength and maturity.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Great Pearl (Matthew 13:44-46)

The mark of a person who is the good soil in the sower parable is his desire to abandon the Lordship of his own life for Christ’s. Therefore, our disciples should always stress in their Gospel presentation the sins forgiven on the cross by Jesus and the necessity of repentance. A repentant man gladly turns from his past life toward Jesus as Lord.

This is the best evidence of good soil and was illustrated in the parable of the hidden treasure and pearl. Repentant men will sell everything they have, the lordship of their lives, and embrace a pearl of greater value, which is Jesus Christ.

In many churches today, there is a fear of presenting the Gospel too strongly because it might drive away potential Christians. Many fundamental, shouting evangelists have done this very thing. We cannot, though, abandon making a clear presentation of the Gospel. Repentance is necessary to the Gospel message and cannot be put on the back burner for fear of losing people. It can be spoken in love, and perhaps should be, with the educated generation in which we live.

The Scribes Who Believe (Matthew 13:52-53)

Another position of the good soil that we should all rejoice over is the intellectuals and scholars who come to know Christ as Savior. So many of them are lost to the kingdom because pride in their knowledge keeps them from accepting the simple message of Christ. When such a man, as a Scribe, comes to salvation through Christ, he can then use his intelligence to unravel the mysteries of the Bible.

The credibility of the Bible has been attacked over the centuries. God has raised up men like these to combat this attack. They also have become God’s ambassadors to their own group of intellectuals.

Our disciples should rejoice when an intellectual abandon the lordship of his life for Christ. This man will help us understand how the Old Testament blends with the New testament and give us the supporting evidence we need in the battle to teach the truth.

Application of Discipleship Principles (Matthew 13 & Luke 31-31)

Teaching with Parables

Jesus taught the truth through a series of stories called parables. Teaching in parables can be one of the best ways to illustrate the truth. We must encourage our fellow Christians to use Christ's parables of truth and develop modern, parabolic illustrations that capture the interest of 21st-century man. Nothing is more boring than the dry presentation of theology, but we have achieved a captive audience when we put a story with it that demands application. Many people were drawn to Jesus' teaching because he made life's difficult questions easy to understand. Jesus quoted an Old Testament passage to prove his point about the lack of interest in the Gospel that was present within the multitude. Therefore, the use of Scripture, whether from the Old or New Testament, should always be our primary resource. Personal experience can be an entertaining crowd-pleaser, but it should be based on Scriptural truth. If we fail to use it, our personal experiences may become the foundation of truth for the Christians we disciple; they would depend on us as their major resources for truth, and that would be here.

Effecting Miracles (Luke 7:11-17)

During their first mission, the disciples were not called to raise anyone from the dead. This ministry stayed with Christ, with no exceptions. As we participate in miracles of our day, our disciples need always to remember that this kind of ministry is done out of compassion so that the doubtful will believe in Jesus as Lord.

There was no sign of faith with the widow at Nain. Jesus felt compassion for her. He touched the coffin of her dead son and told him to arise. God may use us to effect healing miracles, and we should remember, as in this case, sometimes it will be done out of compassion, not out of evidence of revealed faith. The recipient may be grateful but may still spend eternity separated from God. The consequences of such an act may push other borderline believers into the kingdom of heaven.

Defending a Ministry (Luke 7:18-25)

When confronted by John's disciples, Jesus' defense of his ministry was his works and the evidence of preaching the Gospel. He did not answer with a lengthy treatise of theological arguments; only his works would defend his Messiahship.

Our disciples must be swayed away from the pride they might develop with their new knowledge of the Bible. Their tendency may be to defend their positions with that knowledge in defense of their spiritual immaturity. Their works and their accomplishment of preaching the Gospel, especially to the poor, is enough of a defense for any Christian.

Lesson on Faith (Luke 7:36-48)

Faith must always be clothed with humility. We must teach our disciples that everything comes from God. Even our faith comes from Him. Whether we prepare for a teaching, a prayer meeting, or an opportunity that would allow us to present the Gospel to unbelievers, we must all depend on God to give us the faith necessary to accomplish the venture.

The presence of the women at Simon's house was an example of true humility and faith. She was willing to risk persecution and ridicule to serve Jesus. Jesus' final comment to Simon concerning this woman was regarding her faith; for this reason he forgave her sins.

Application of Jesus Model

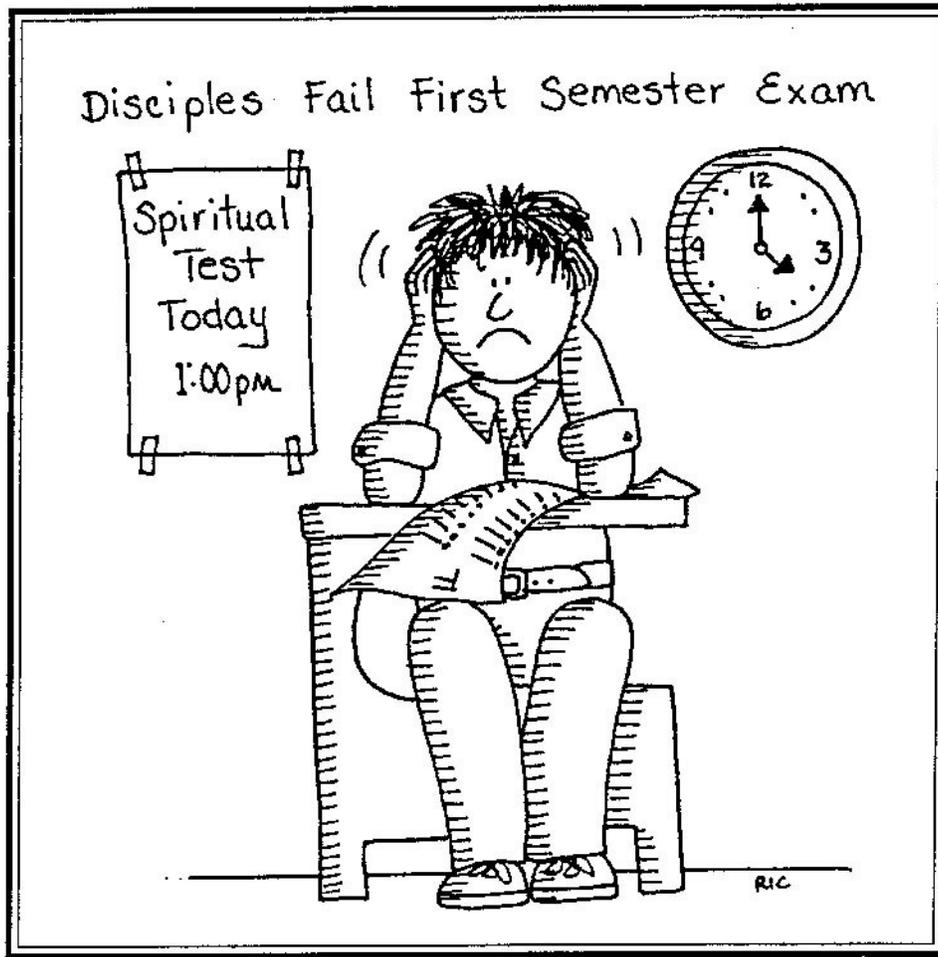
Jesus seemed always to be available to those in need. His home was in Capernaum, but he did not hesitate to venture out and minister to all those in need throughout Galilee. We must be available to go wherever God might lead us. We must teach our disciples this flexible attitude because the tendency will be for them to find their security within the group. There is great joy in a closely-knit discipleship group. It can lead, though, to an unhealthy fear of stepping out to minister to others. We all need a home base, as Jesus had in Capernaum, but we must move out from time to time to accomplish God's mission for all of us to disciple the world.

Jesus was a model of compassion. He demonstrated it to the widow at Nain and the prostitute at Simon's house. As a result, the widow received her son back, and the prostitute received salvation. Whether we see evidence of faith, we must teach our disciples always to be ambassadors of compassion and love. So often, we are only compassionate toward the faithful in Christ, but Jesus demonstrated his heart for all people.

Jesus was a model of true boldness. He touched the coffin of the widow's son at Nain. This was a very bold confrontation Jesus exhibited with the known Law. Touching the casket or body of the widow's son made Jesus ceremonially unclean. It was a direct violation of Jewish law. Yet Jesus did not let the Law stand in the way of his compassion for the widow. Of course, no argument was presented when the son arose from the dead. He was no longer dead; therefore, no law had been broken. We must also teach our disciples to be bold, even if we must violate religious edicts or man-made laws that violate our faith.

Suggestions for Discipleship Groups

1. Plan a time where your discipleship group will present the Gospel to a group of non-Christians. You can do it as a group or in pairs. Afterward, discuss the parables in Matthew 13 and relate them to your experience.
2. Give your disciples the assignment of writing 21st-century parables that illustrate the truths in the Matthew 13 parables or other passages of truth you have studied.
3. Discuss with the group where they can demonstrate more compassion and boldness in their relationship with others.
4. Discuss with them their desire to be available to others outside the group. Have they become too secure with each other? Have them answer this individually in front of one another.



Chapter 12

The Stilling of the Storm

“A ship is safe in port, but that is not what a ship is made for”

Christians have all encountered various trials and temptations, yet we never seem to view them as part of God’s intended plan in discipling us. Instead, we often blame ourselves for our failures and feel we have departed from his plan. These feelings may seem real, but they really shouldn’t be if we investigate the words of Christ and those in the Bible. Jesus allowed his disciples to face many trials, much like this first one on the Sea of Galilee. They had not departed from his will. They were actually in the middle of his plan of discipleship. Despite failing this first spiritual exam, they continued to be his disciples.

The disciples had been under the Lord’s protective care for nearly a year, but Jesus let them be tested and readied for the great ministry ahead of them. The storm they were thrust out in was more than rough weather. It was a storm that would challenge and increase their faith.

Their skill as sailors, developed by years of challenge on rough waters, was about to be rechallenged. But this time, their faith skills would be tested, not their skills as a fisherman.

Background Leading to the Disciples' First Test (Luke 8:19-21)

Scripture teaches that Jesus' brothers did not initially believe in him as the Son of God. They, like the multitude, were not with him when he imparted the parable mysteries to the faithful. The kingdom's mysteries were kept from them just like the uninterested multitude.

After Jesus explained the seashore parables to these followers, his mother and brothers wanted to speak with him. It is not clear why they wanted to interrupt Jesus as he taught, but wishing to see him, they sent word through the crowd to make their presence known to their brother. Jesus did not respond immediately. He did not remove himself from the seashore nor cease teaching his disciples. Instead, he used their request to illustrate the family-like tie each believer inherited upon believing in him as Savior.

“And His mother came to Him and His brothers also, and they could not get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see you.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.’”(Luke 8:19-21)

The Jewish family was a solid social unit, committed to each other for a life time. Through this example, Jesus impressed upon all his disciples their commitment to one another. But, additionally, they had a new priority that surpassed that of the family: their individual commitment to Christ and doing God's will. In a conflict of interests then, the family which God placed them in was to take a back seat to their commitment to him. Jesus later emphasized this priority when he told them they might have to leave their families to follow him.

The Storm (Luke 8:22-25)

A couple of days after teaching the parables, Jesus sailed with his disciples to the other side of the Galilean Sea. Some other followers joined him in their boats on this short journey. The small lake was known for storms that came without warning. Many of the disciples who had been fishermen had encountered these sudden storms and perhaps many life-threatening situations on the lake.

Jesus was, most likely, exhausted from his ongoing ministry of the last few days in Capernaum. The needy constantly approached him and asked new questions about the kingdom. So this was meant to be a quiet trip away from the crowds and a time of rest for Jesus; instead, it proved to be the first test of his disciples' faith.

As Jesus lay asleep in the stern of the boat, a fierce gale descended on the lake. The tumult did not awaken Jesus, or if it did, he did not let the disciples know of it. The disciples used all their know-how to deal with the impending calamity, but their efforts were in vain. Their boat began to fill with water, as did the boats that accompanied them. Unless something changed, they would perish, and the trip would end in disaster. In a panic, they woke Jesus, their master. They were frustrated and amazed that he would let them perish.

“...Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38)

The harmonizing of Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicates that Jesus rebuked their lack of faith before he rebuked the storm and then questioned them again about their faith when the dilemma was over.

“And He said to them, ‘Why are you timid, you men of little faith?’ Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.”
(Matthew 8:26)

“And being aroused, He rebuked the wind...And He said to them,’ ‘Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?’” (Mark 4:39-40)

“...He rebuked the wind...And He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?...’”
(Luke 8:24-25)

Afterward, the disciples were fearful and amazed. Being saved miraculously was spectacular for them, but the master they had chosen to follow was even more so. Their master not only cured the diseased, raised people from the dead, and cast demons out of the afflicted, but he also altered the course of physical nature.

Application of the Message

“Who are my Mothers and Brothers?” (Matthew 12:48)

When we accept Jesus Christ as Lord, we not only inherit eternal life and the Spirit of God, but we also enter God’s family. God sees us as members of his family. We must teach our fellow disciples this critical concept because their newfound belief may cause great conflict at home. They may be heavily criticized for their new allegiance to an invisible God. It may seem like they are abandoning the family that cared for them throughout their lives.

These reactions can be expected as long as our adversary; the devil, is alive and well. But, our new allegiance is to God. We have new relationships with brothers and sisters and will surpass the depth of relationships we had with our physical family unless they also enter God’s family.

Jesus taught the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about loving one’s enemies and serving them with the utmost humility. With this background, he can tell them that their first priority must be God, even if it causes enemies on the home front for a time. Family rejection need not be forever. Our prayers and consistent love can win them over. Meanwhile, we must honor God as the priority in our lives and develop our new relationships with other new Christians.

Mastered by the Storm (Luke 8:22-25)

The storm's disciples were mastered by the storm, as evidenced by their failure to use the resources that would have led to faith. For example, Jesus taught them how to pray in the

Sermon on the Mount. They could have used that as their foundation rather than their natural skills as a fisherman.

“Thy will be done,” “Deliver us from evil,” and “Ask, and it shall be given unto you” were requests taught in the Lord’s Prayer that could have been used in this brief moment of terror. (Matthew 6)

We must emphasize in our discipleship sessions the importance of depending on our spiritual resources rather than our natural ones. This does not do away with God’s option to use our skills. Perhaps if the disciples had applied faith, they would have brought the ship safely to shore despite the storm. Unfortunately, we all have that sinful tendency to do it our way, and when it fails, we come screaming to Christ in panic and frustration.

Their frustrating questions revealed the disciples’ lack of faith in Jesus: “Do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38) We all come to these frustrating points when storms crumble our secure world. If this should happen, let us all learn that our frustration with Jesus results not from the storm but from returning to the flesh to handle the storm. This leads to defeat and failure; thus, we cannot see God’s purpose because we are too concerned with the present circumstance. We are mastered by the storm of circumstance, not by Christ.

Jesus Fell Asleep on the Disciples (Luke 8:22-25)

Jesus fell asleep from exhaustion while on the boat with the disciples. He was the Son of God, but he chose to be a man with all of its limitations. Seemingly this brought concern to the disciples during the storm, yet they did not drown. Our disciples must also remember that God will never let us drown. We may be hit with trials, and Satan may seem to have a heyday with us, but God will never abandon us. He will never fall asleep, as the Psalmist states.

“He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber.”
(Psalm 121:3)

There is also another principle in this passage that should be grasped concerning Jesus’ sleep. The disciples were seemingly left alone to work out the storm. Jesus did not awaken to help them, yet he remained on the boat.

Jesus, without lifting a hand, will allow all of us to face storms. We must either use our spiritual resources of prayer and faith or return to the flesh. Regardless of our decisions, he remains with us as he did in the boat. This should be our greatest comfort, no matter how we handle the storm.

“...for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6)

The Benefit of the Storm for the Disciples

The storm was the first test of the disciples’ faith. It showed them their weakness in applying the learning they had received from Jesus. All of us, whether we are discipling others or being disciplined, will be tested by God. He also knows who we are and wants us to know it.

Adversity is like a thermometer in that it takes our spiritual temperature and tells us how weak or how strong we are. It also can show us where we are spiritually. It can be an instrument to make us well and increase our faith. As our parents used spanking to get our attention about unacceptable behavior, God uses trials to sanctify us from old sinful habits. Even though trials are not joyful, they can be if we understand their purpose.

“It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children, not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not joyful but sorrowful; yet to those trained by it, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness afterward. Therefore, strengthen the weak hands and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”(Hebrews 12:7-13)

Application of Discipleship Principles

Teaching

Jesus used unpredictable moments to illustrate an essential truth about the family of God. Spontaneous teaching can only come by the Spirit of God. We cannot train our disciples in this teaching method. We can only make them aware that the Spirit of God might spontaneously give them an illustration that would best fit their teaching situation. They should credit God for the experience, not their creative genius.

Resting From Ministry

Jesus took a break from his ministry when he set out on the boat to cross the lake. We should encourage our disciples to take time off from their normal duties and get away. This does not necessitate a weekend of prayer in the mountains. Sometimes Jesus’ greatest need was sleep as was true in this case. Sleep, prayer, or even recreation can be a good rest from life’s pressures.

Testing the Disciples’ Knowledge

The surest test of a disciple’s knowledge of the Scripture is not a multiple-choice test, term paper, or verbal presentation, but a practical situation that will demand applying the truth. For example, Jesus tested the disciples by letting them experience a horrible storm at sea. They flunked this test, but the exam helped prepare them for future tests.

We cannot manufacture trials for our disciples. That is entirely in God’s hands. We can, though, take on ministries that can serve not only as a barometer as to where we are but continue the call we all have: to present Christ to the world.

As a youth minister, I was involved in many retreats and trips for several years. As I matured, I involved fellow disciples in planning these short-term outings rather than carrying the burden myself. As a result, we had some great trips together, but not without problems and conflicts. Together, though, we saw many young people's lives change toward God. All the troubles, concerns, and conflicts are hardly remembered, yet these challenges put our knowledge to the test.

Evaluation of the Disciples' Faith

Interestingly, Jesus evaluates only the disciples' faith in his ministry. He does not judge their teaching ability or spiritual gifts. He only judges their demonstrated faith. The rebuke Jesus gave them on the Sea of Galilee provides insight into his approach.

Jesus spent a year with most of them before mentioning their spiritual condition. He awaited a trial to reveal his feeling about their progress. Finally, he told them their faith was weak, and he asked them three rhetorical, incriminating questions: 1) "Where is your faith?" (Luke 8), 2) "How is it you have no faith?" (Mark 4), and 3) "Why are you timid...?" (Matthew 8).

Rebuking another Christian's faith is a delicate matter. As disciplers, we are called to teach all that is in Scripture, and rebuking one another is part of the Christian Scripture. Unfortunately, two extremes are usually practiced: 1) rebuking too harshly, without love or sensitivity, or 2) ignoring the responsibility because it does not lead to being accepted by others. We must be cognizant, though, as disciplers, that we have a responsibility to evaluate our fellow disciples.

Jesus' model in this circumstance can help us. First, we must develop a long-standing relationship with someone before we evaluate their faith. Only after a relationship of love has been built are we free to offer a rebuke. Time will also give us a better perspective on our fellow Christian's backgrounds and history.

Jesus mentioned the failure of the disciples' faith during the storm and then repeated it. Repeating a fault is okay as long as it has a stopping place. Jesus never mentions their lack of faith in the storm again. It was not his habit to keep reviewing past failures. He did not hold their moment of cowardice against them but proceeded to teach them and take them with him into the next place of ministry.

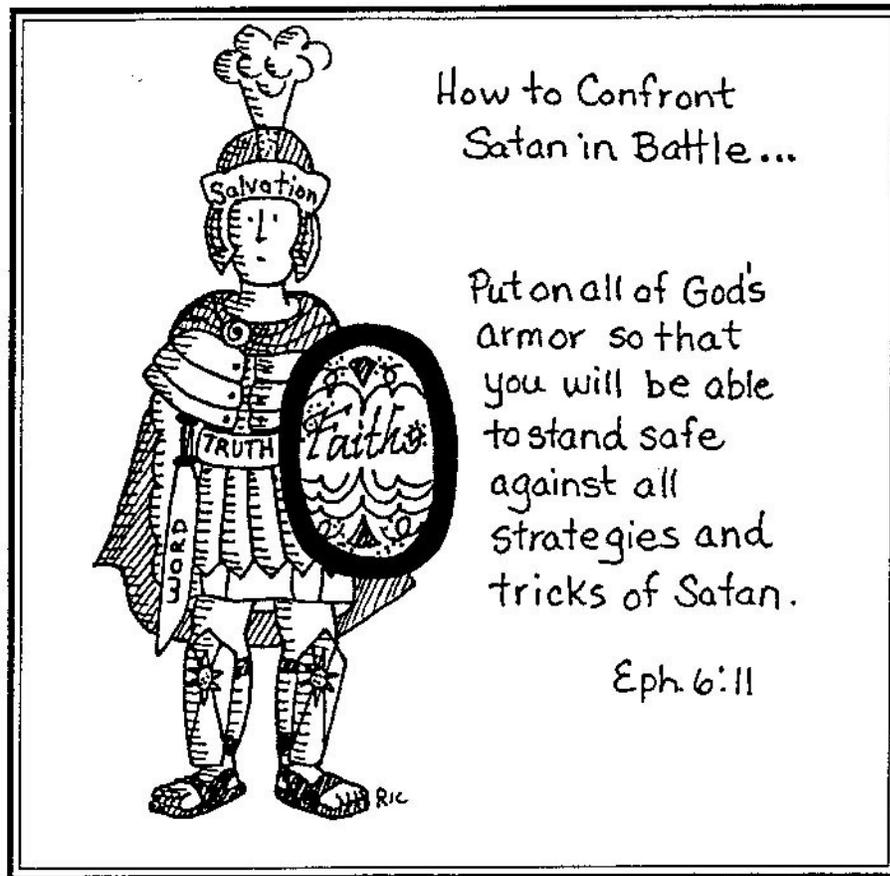
We must remember this because our tendency may be to bring up the past again and again to a fellow Christian. If we do, we are at fault and need to be rebuked. However, whatever failure we notify a fellow disciple of, we are not to hold that against him or eliminate him from his place with us. Instead, we should continue the discipleship process, knowing that we may one day ask his forgiveness for our failures.

Jesus used the rhetorical question to get his point of rebuke across. This is a good method for approaching someone's failure. It makes them evaluate for themselves what they have done. They will be limited to their actions rather than our interpretation of the failure. In a gentle yet loving way, we must let them know that, from our view, they have been lacking in their faith. We should not make them guess our feelings on that matter.

"He whose ear listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise." (Proverbs 15:31)
 "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed"(Proverbs 27:5)

Suggestions for Discipleship Groups

1. Have them share any “stilling of the storm” experiences already witnessed in their Christian walk.”
2. Ask your discipleship group how they deal with the failures of others and themselves.
3. Have your discipleship group write a paper on a process they intend to apply when a failure occurs.



Chapter 13

How to Confront Satan

“Begone” (Matthew 8:32)

A few years ago, I saw a picture of a woman holding a knife to her baby’s neck in a newspaper. Fortunately, the woman’s boyfriend wrestled the baby from her before she committed the attempted murder. She believed her infant was a demon and a vampire. Psychologists would attribute her behavior to a mental disorder, but another alternative exists. The Bible teaches that many suffered from demon possession, and possibly the very demon this woman saw in her six-week-old infant was actually possessing her.

Close similarities exist between the mentally ill and the demon-possessed. The Scriptural accounts discussed in this chapter help identify common characteristics of demon possession and how to deal with it.

Demon possession today seems to be on the rise in our society, especially where sin is highly tolerated. San Francisco and Hollywood are the most noted for their satanic cults and

demon worship. Their reputations for sinful behavior are rivaled only by ancient Corinth, Sodom, and Gomorrah.

Twenty years ago, a ministry to the demon-possessed was not practiced or heavily considered in the Christian community. More and more, though, there is a need to be aware of this human affliction that was so common in Israel over 2,000 years ago.

The ministry Jesus performed with the two Gerasene demoniacs is the next step Jesus took in preparing the “12.” They were to learn how to recognize demon possession, how to deal with it, and how God can use a redeemed demoniac in an evangelistic ministry. This Scriptural account is vital to our discipleship groups because it brings to our attention the reality of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged daily.

The Background Leading to the Healing of the Two Demoniacs

After Jesus taught several parables concerning the kingdom of God in Capernaum, he went to the land of the Gerasenes, which was on the opposite side of the lake from Galilee. Crossing the lake, the disciples had their faith tested when a storm caught them by surprise. After Jesus calmed the storm, they arrived on shore and were met by two vicious men possessed by demons. Jesus’ first act was to free the two Gerasene demoniacs from their possession, just as he had with many others afflicted with this terrible bondage.

Demon possession, a common affliction among the people who lived in this part of the world, was not regarded lightly or misunderstood. A person with this affliction was dominated by the presence of Satan’s evil spirits and angels, called demons. This battle for man’s spirit and soul seemed to have many victims, as indicated in Jesus’ earlier ministry. Jesus knew the power and influence that Satan had over man. He had battled Satan during the forty days and nights he spent praying and fasting in the wilderness.

The newfound freedom of the two Gerasene demoniacs not only gave them rest from a bitter existence but also paved the way for the Gospel of the kingdom to be preached throughout the Decapolis.

The Healing of the Two Demoniacs (Mark 5:1:1-20)

Mark and Luke mention only one man who benefited from Jesus’ healing of demon possession. Matthew records two men with this affliction. Probably only one of them genuinely benefited from Jesus’ compassionate healing. Jesus healed many people of diseases and afflictions, but not all received him as Lord, which was their actual need. Sadly, they received healing that made their lives more comfortable on earth but did not gain them entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Luke and Mark’s accounts seemed to concentrate on one of the men who was not only released from Satan’s demons but also received Christ as Lord.

Matthew described these two men as the rage of the community. They dwelt among the tombs in a wild-like, uncontrolled manner. They were a threat to all who passed by, and many futile efforts had been made to shackle these men in chains. They cried out day and night in torment, gashing their flesh with stones.

Upon seeing Jesus land on shore, they immediately ran up to him and bowed down before him. Their voices were exceedingly loud and each of the men, in a third voice, immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of the Most High. They implored him not to torment them.

Jesus had already begun to order the demons to leave the men; in a sense, the demons were making their last plea. However, before Jesus ordered them out, he asked for their identity. There were many demons in possession of these two men. They asked permission to enter a herd of swine. Jesus granted this request and then made his final authoritative statement to them to vacate the men, as recorded in the book of Matthew.

“And He said to them, ‘Begone!’ And they came out, and went into the swine,...”
(Matthew 8:32)

In response to Jesus' command, the swine rushed over the cliff, out of control. The herdsman of the swine was shocked and angry at the loss of their potential income. Regardless, an immediate calm entered the two afflicted men, and the crowds that came were amazed at the apparent transformation in the men.

One of the men, as Mark and Luke recorded, desired to be Jesus' disciple. His transformation was complete; not only was he freed from his bondage to demons, but from sin. Jesus refused to take him immediately but sent him on a mission throughout the Decapolis. His transforming testimony laid the foundation for further preaching in that region.

The Gerasene people reacted to this event with contradiction. They were frightened by this change in the two men, but at the same time, they were angry over the cost they had to pay for such a miracle. The loss of 2,000 pigs was devastating to them, even if the problem of the two demon-possessed men had been solved. Regardless of their short-sighted view of the events, many were affected and became open to Christ and the preaching of the kingdom's message.

Application of the Message

Struggling For Nothing

The Gerasene demoniac that Mark and Luke concentrated on in their accounts was a man of the “good soil.” He desired to follow Jesus and serve him as a disciple. The other Gerasene demoniac disappeared after being freed from his demon possession. If he had any response, it was short-lived and not worth recording.

So many people today have afflictions and struggles that are equal to the dilemma of these two men. Yet, all men in the heat of their trials seem to renew their commitment to God. But, unfortunately, when the trial ends, the majority forget their promises and return to their past lifestyle of sin.

Christians get caught in the same trap. We plead with God to change our difficult circumstances. When He does, our commitment wanes and disappears like the unfruitful demoniac.

We must be like the Gerasene demoniac who humbled himself before the Lord after his trial. The reward of his humility and serving heart advanced him into the kingdom of God. Instead of slipping back into an old lifestyle that would invite demon possession again, he became an ambassador for Christ in the Decapolis. We must remember these two responses when our trials end. Our struggle could be wasted if we follow the Gerasene man who did not humble himself. We can either become vulnerable like him or become ambassadors for Christ like the other man.

One Step of Faith Can Open Many Doors

Jesus did not panic when he met these two violent men on the Gerasene seashore. These men frightened the entire community, but Jesus confronted and healed them. His bold approach not only freed them from their afflictions but opened the door for preaching to the whole of Decapolis. So many were amazed by the transformation of the one Gerasene demoniac that they were willing to listen avidly to his testimony.

As Christians, we will be faced with men and women who perhaps are not demon-possessed but may cause the same fears in our 21st-century community. They are the violent outcasts that frequent our prison system or blatantly disregard the community in which we live. During the late 1960's I had the opportunity to work alongside many "redeemed Gerasene demoniacs." They had been gang leaders, thieves, rapists, and drug dealers. Each of them, though, had a new life in Christ. Somewhere along the line, a willing and serving Christian refused to abandon them.

We as Christians must remember Christ's ministry to the violent. If we can overcome our fear with faith, we, too, will benefit from the fruit of such a ministry. One step of love toward the violent outcasts can open a door for the Gospel, much like the Gerasene man who became the John the Baptist of the Decapolis.

Material Temptations

The Gerasene townspeople were grateful for the challenge of the two demoniacs. Their home was more peaceful and secure because of the miracle. Yet they angrily asked Jesus to leave because he had destroyed 2,000 of their pigs. So many people today want peace but do not want to sacrifice anything to achieve it. Perhaps Jesus destroyed their pigs because this got their attention more than the two transformed men.

It is a sad commentary on the church today that many Christians slip into this worldly frame of mind. We desire our churches to grow but not at our expense. We would like to see many violent sinners won to the Lord as long as it does not inconvenience us. Perhaps in response, it would only be right for God to take away from us the material goods we have accumulated since we act similarly.

Application of Discipleship Principles

How to Recognize Demon Possession

Soon after this event, Jesus asked the disciples to go out under his authority and cast out demons from the possessed. They had seen him accomplish this ministry many times, but this Scriptural passage describes how Jesus performed the task. Ten characteristics were attached to these two men in their possession:

1. The two men spoke in the third person, almost excluding their personalities.
2. They feared being sent to hell, which, according to other Scripture, was the demon's final and eternal destination.
3. The two men associated with the dead living in the town's graveyard.
4. They were supernaturally strong, able to break the strongest chains.

5. They were out of control, restless, and frustrated. They cried out day and night and gashed themselves with stones.
6. They knew immediately who Jesus was without any introduction or teaching.
7. They feared Jesus' power to the point of submitting themselves before him.
8. They were exceedingly violent and loud. They terrorized the community and screamed out almost every word or sentence.
9. The third person who spoke in their place desired to possess some living thing, as illustrated by request to indwell the pigs.
10. The third person was powerless against the command and will of Jesus and disappeared when ordered to vacate the men.

How to Cast Out Demons?

Jesus did not teach his men a lengthy procedure for casting out demons. It was not a ceremony but an act of faith and compassion. Many times before, for example, by the demon-possessed woman in Capernaum, he simply issued a command for the demons to leave. There was more dialogue and repetition in this situation, but like the other incidents, it was a brief encounter without hoopla or commotion.

There were four basic steps with Jesus' approach when dealing with these two men who were demon-possessed in this passage.

1. He ordered the demons to leave the men. The word in transliterated Greek is "Paragalain."¹ It means to announce or to give the word. So Jesus gave the word that the demons were to vacate the lives of these men.
2. The demons were tormented by the presence of Jesus and their loss of a dwelling place. Jesus asked them to identify themselves as legion. The word "legion" was a Roman term ascribed to the number of men they had in an army. A Roman legion could consist of almost 6,000 soldiers.²
3. Jesus granted the demons their request to indwell a herd of swine.
4. The command to leave was repeated by Jesus, except with a different team, the transliterated Greek term of "Upagete."³ This means to withdraw without any further noise of notice.

Our discipleship groups may unlikely run across blatant possession today in America. Satan has seemingly chosen a different method to sway Americans from the kingdom of God. The great lust for materialism, escapism, and seeking personal significance has accomplished this purpose. Yet we might encounter the demon-possessed. The guidelines in Mark 5 can help us identify such people. If God calls us to accomplish this ministry, we must be careful in our approach.

We should never let our younger disciples accomplish this ministry by themselves. The power of Satan is too great and must be met with prayer, faith, and a team approach. We must also be sure that God is leading us to such a ministry. Casting out demons is a direct battle with Satan. He will not be idle in that confrontation, nor alone.

There should be no prolonged dialogue that is not necessary. We do not need to find the individual names of the demons present. We only need to represent Christ and give the command to leave in Christ's name and authority.

If we are unsuccessful, we should not be discouraged or try anything else. It is up to Jesus to cast the demons out. If we are successful, we should praise his name and begin teaching the freed victim the Gospel. Even though the demons may have made their exit, this man or woman needs to be filled with the Spirit of God. Salvation is more important than the expulsion of demons.

Evidence of a Successful Expulsion

The transformation of the Gerasene demoniac was evident to all because he was no longer out of control. Four characteristic changes took place as proof of his healing:

1. He regained self-control. He sat down calmly and put his clothes on as any normal person would.
2. The demonstration of the third voice, which identified the indwelling demons, was no longer present.
3. His impulse toward outbursts of anger was gone.
4. His desire to follow Jesus and subsequent willingness to tell others about his change was the last and most explicit evidence of his demon expulsion.

What can new Christians do?

Jesus refused to take the Gerasene man with him; instead, he sent him immediately on a mission to the Decapolis. This man's testimony laid the groundwork for the Gospel in that region. Nothing more is reported concerning the Gerasene man, but Jesus never turned anyone away from being a disciple.

Jesus had many disciples outside the "12." There were "70" who, like the "12," preached the Gospel throughout Galilee. The Gerasene man could have joined them or the others who followed and believed Jesus as Savior.

As we disciple our fellow Christians today, the most common question is, "What do we do with new believers?" The answer lies in the very charge Jesus gave his men at the end of his earthly ministry: "Go and make disciples and teach them all that you have observed." (Matthew 28:19-20) Teaching new believers the truths of the Gospels can be an essential step, but first, let them share their newfound faith openly with their families and friends. Encourage them to do this, just as Jesus commissioned the Gerasene man to share his testimony with the Decapolis.

The mistake made by many Christian organizations and churches has been to give too much publicity and responsibility to new Christians. Whether a newborn Christian is a student-body president of his school or a ball monitor in gym class, he is not ready to take on the responsibility other than to share his new faith openly. Still, it is up to the older Christians to teach him a foundation of truth so that one day he might be able to lead and teach others.

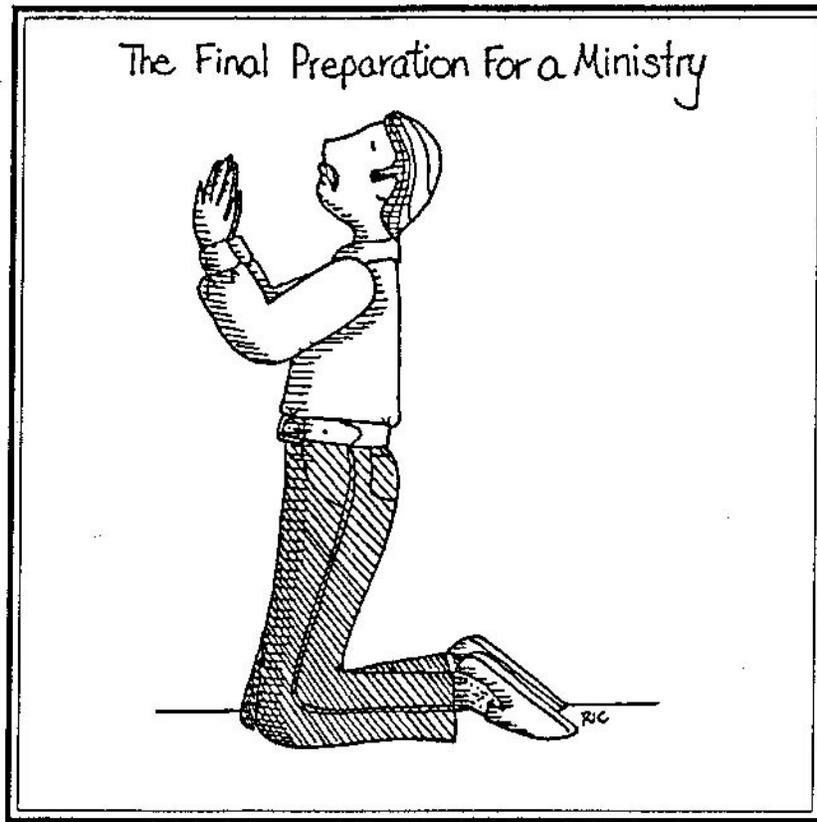
Suggestions for Discipleship Groups

1. Teach your disciples the thought of seeking out demon-possessed victims. If God wants you to be instrumental in such a ministry, he will bring these people to you.
2. Introduce your disciples to some good books on the subject. *Satan's Alive and Well* by Hal Lindsey is an excellent example of one of these books.

3. Discuss the differences between the mentally ill and the demon-possessed symptoms as presented in Mark 5.
4. Encourage your group to openly share their testimony at your next meeting if they had not been encouraged to do so when they first believed. What did God do to convince them?

Footnotes

1. Vines, page 209
2. Vines, page 329
3. Vines, page 223



Chapter 14

Final Preparation for a Ministry

Eventually, a disciple of Christ must put his faith into action, whether he lived 2,000 years ago or today. When Jesus commanded the disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel to all nations, their training period ended, and they were to practice what they had learned.

The job market today in America is highly competitive. As a result, only the trained or experienced have a chance to land essential jobs. For example, a computer scientist must undergo rigorous training to run a computer. Of course, the training is necessary, but its real value comes when the person is actually on the job developing programs and solving computer problems.

Likewise, Christians in discipleship are only preparing for the job they will do later; that is, disciples others in the kingdom of God. The time comes when they, like all of us, must put their knowledge on the line. Otherwise, they would resemble a well-trained computer scientist who sits idly qualified but never works. Eventually, due to the inactivity, he would forget what he had learned, and his training would no longer be helpful. This can happen to disciples who, through fear and unbelief, will not step out and minister to others.

The following events recorded in Matthew 10 were vital to the disciples' training. Without it, the disciples could go no further with Jesus. Essentially, Jesus wanted the disciples to

know the experience of ministering to others. They needed to share the knowledge they had been storing as disciples of Jesus. It was also essential that the challenge of a ministry try their faith. Preaching the Gospel, healing the diseased, and casting out demons throughout Galilee was the first ministry.

This was the final step Jesus gave the “12” during the first phase of their training. This should also serve as a guideline for their next workout phase without fellow disciples. Jesus’ disciples needed to get their feet wet in their ministry, and our fellow disciples must do the same. We should patiently delay any further teaching of our men and women until they have put their faith on the line with the ministry God has given them.

A study in this chapter includes a close look at the last training session Jesus had with his disciples before he sent them out on their first mission.

Background Leading to the First Mission of the Twelve

After Jesus and his disciples completed their ministry with the Gerasene demoniacs, they sailed back across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. A multitude greeted them upon their return. Out of the crowd, Jarius, a synagogue official, approached Jesus with a request for healing. His daughter, who was 12 years old, was dying at home. He was a desperate man who risked his reputation by turning to Jesus. Though his peer group of religious leaders had openly rejected the ministry of Jesus, it did not deter him from publicly seeking Jesus’ help.

Jarius’ confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal his daughter stemmed from what he had seen in Capernaum. So many there had been healed of their diseases, including the son of a fellow city official.

The streets were crowded with many of Jesus’ followers and curious onlookers; as a result, Jesus found it difficult to make his way to Jarius’ home. While on his way, a woman who had been afflicted for 12 years by hemorrhages touched the fringe of his cloak. She had hoped a mere touch would relieve her affliction that many doctors over the years could not cure.

Even though the condition of Jarius’ daughter was critical and time was of the essence, Jesus stopped to minister to this insignificant woman. The woman was content to escape unnoticed into the crowd, but Jesus would not allow it. He not only mentioned her great faith but also healed her permanently of her condition.

The delay cost the daughter of Jarius her life. Messengers came to replay this sad event to Jarius and Jesus. Jesus rejected this report, telling them not to fear but believe, for she would be well. When Jesus arrived at Jarius’ home, he took three disciples, Jarius and his wife, into the dead girl’s room. He touched the girl’s hand and commanded her to rise. Instantly, her spirit returned to her. She was alive again.

Jesus left Capernaum and was on his way to Nazareth when three men approached him with different afflictions. Two men were blind and called on Jesus to give them sight. Jesus healed them because of their faith in him. The third man was mute and was brought to Jesus because his affliction resulted from demon possession. The multitudes marveled when this man was healed, but not the Pharisees. They claimed that Jesus was a ruler of demons, thus giving him authority to perform this miracle.

Jesus returned to Nazareth not long after leaving Capernaum. His previous encounter in Nazareth met with much rejection when he indirectly claimed Messiahship by teaching that a Messianic prophesy in Isaiah was being fulfilled in him. Nevertheless, he returned to the same

synagogue to continue his teaching. Many who had grown up with Jesus were amazed at his teaching and wisdom of the Scripture. Their response, though, was that of rejection.

Because they were offended by his presence, Jesus left Nazareth again, refusing to authenticate his ministry with them by performing any miracles. Though he laid hands on a few sick, he left abruptly, amazed at their lack of belief. Jesus' message to the disciples at Nazareth was that a prophet could expect to be rejected in his home territory, even by his family and friends.

The Mission of the Twelve Disciples

After leaving Nazareth, Jesus began teaching the Gospel to some of the surrounding villages. He then collected his twelve disciples and gave them a mission. Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, he had performed all the preaching of the Gospel, healing the diseased and casting out demons. Now Jesus wanted his disciples to take on this responsibility.

Though the disciples had seen Jesus heal many people and preach the Gospel dozens of times, he gave them exact instructions on accomplishing this mission. His plan had four points and was meant for future ministries and the present ones.

1. The Approach the Ministry

The disciples were to go in pairs to familiar villages that Jesus had already visited. They were not to include the Samaritans in this first mission. They were not to take any provisions with them, only the clothes on their backs. Their needs would be met by the people they encountered, and they were not to collect any money for their services.

They were to stay in the homes of those who had heard the Gospel and received it joyfully. They were to remain in only one house per town. They could distinguish a receptive household by giving a greeting, perhaps something like "Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ," and then observing the response. If there was rejection or no response, they were to leave and go to the next village. They were not to waste time with the "bad soil," as described in the parables by the seashore.

2. The Authority and Resource of the Disciples

Jesus gave the disciples special authority in their ministry of healing and casting out demons. Even though they had observed how Jesus performed these ministries many times, the disciples were given the added power of the Spirit to accomplish them. Jesus also informed them that the Spirit would give them the words to say if they fell into anxious or challenging circumstances.

3. The Ministry the Disciples were to Perform

They were to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, cast out demons, and preach the Gospel of salvation. Therefore, they should include themes in their presentations: repentance, hardship, taking up one's cross, and following Christ. Denying Christ would result in being rejected to the kingdom. Yet if anyone confessed Jesus and Lord and willfully forfeited the lordship of their lives that of Christ, they would enter eternally the kingdom of heaven.

4. **The Disciple's Results**

After the disciples returned from their mission, Jesus gathered them together again so that they could share their ministries. This was important because it gave them time to reflect on their own endeavors and hear how the Spirit of God worked with their fellow disciples.

Application of the Message

Rejection at Nazareth

The rejection Jesus received at home should comfort Christians who find a similar response to their belief at home. We can prepare our disciples for this reality by studying this passage in Matthew 13:54-58. Jesus did not give up on his fellow Nazarenes; he tried twice to convince them of the truth.

We must encourage our fellow disciples to do the same in their ministry at home. Though their family and friends may initially reject them, they should continue demonstrating Christ's love and patience in their lives.

The most significant response to Jesus' ministry seemed to be in Capernaum, where he made his headquarters. However, our disciples may find their most significant impact everywhere but at home. If this happened to Jesus, it is certainly possible it will happen to any of our fellow disciples.

Jesus was amazed at the Nazarene's lack of belief; it caused him to withhold from them many of the miracles he performed with other receptive towns and villages. The people we disciples should be taught from this experience that sharing the entirety of their faith may not be the wisest approach at home. The joy and insight they have received from their faith may be too much for their unbelieving family and friends. Therefore, they should carefully consider what to share in each communication.

Jesus' Relationship with the Twelve Disciples

Jesus was intimately acquainted with his disciples. He knew their weaknesses and their strengths. He knew them well enough at this stage to send them on their first mission. God the Father was also intimately aware of the disciples' lives. As Jesus told them, God knew the exact number of hairs on their heads. Nothing would befall them without the specific knowledge of God and Jesus.

The relationship we must strive for in our discipleship groups must keep in mind this intimacy. We cannot expect to know when our disciples are ready to disciple others unless we know them personally. This involves personal contact and a willingness to share our good and bad lives with them. Our transparency with them will open the secret doors of their lives to us. This is a must if we can work intimately with one another in the call to discipleship.

As God knew the number of hairs on the heads of the disciples, he knows us and what we need. Therefore, whether we are presently in a discipleship group or not, be assured that when all else fails, God continues his one-on-one discipleship with us.

The Spiritual Resource behind Disciples

The disciples were given the special authority of the Spirit to accomplish their ministry. Jesus also informed them, before their future ministries, that the Spirit would give them the words to say in difficult circumstances. All of us who have received Jesus as Lord received the gift of the Holy Spirit permanently. God gives this gift to empower all believers to do the work of the ministry. It was a gift given at Pentecost, not many days after Jesus ascended into Heaven.

As we prepare our fellow disciples for ministry, we should emphasize that success comes only because the Spirit dwells within them. Training can provide the necessary tools to do a ministry, but the Spirit of God always brings the results.

In my own experiences of presenting the Gospel, there were three times when I had my presentation tuned to perfection. The step-by-step message I gave was flawless. Yet, I failed to get even the slightest response to my misplaced dependence on a tool. My dependence was not on the Spirit but on the tools of evangelism I had learned in my training. God will use our training to advance the kingdom, but not if we decide to abandon the power and resolve of the Spirit.

He has given us the Holy Spirit. It is comforting to know that if God puts us in a difficult circumstance where we are unprepared, He will provide us with the right words to speak. We should always emphasize our discipleship groups and our responsibility in preparing for a ministry. Still, we should never turn away an opportunity because we do not have time to prepare. If God has brought us an opportunity, we should accept it, knowing He will speak through us. Preparation should never supersede our dependence on the power of the Spirit.

How do we start a ministry?

Jesus sent the disciples to villages and towns where he had already laid the groundwork. In each of those places, many had responded to Jesus. As disciplers, if we are to follow Jesus' model, we should lay the groundwork for the ministry of our fellow disciples. We cannot be content to train them in a weekly Bible study session and just hope they will develop a ministry of their own. We are responsible for helping them get involved in a ministry they feel led.

One of the evangelistic ministries I have been involved in for years has been athletics. Through this avenue, I have seen many athletes come to know Christ. The Christians that played on these teams could expose their faith to their non-Christian friends. The Bible studies that were offered to the teams provided the opportunity for these non-believers to hear the Gospel for the first time.

Some men I was discipling were interested in doing this as a ministry. I shared what I had learned with them, but most importantly, I helped them get their ministries started and off the ground. As disciplers, we must realize that our discipleship goes beyond the teaching session; it takes us into the world.

Who do we disciple?

Jesus directed the disciples to pursue households that were responsive to the Gospel message. They were to waste no time with those who were not interested. We must reflect on this advice with our fellow disciples. It may be that the friends or family we desire most to

become followers of Christ have no interest in him. We should not waste time trying to pry them loose from their resistance. Perhaps, later, and under different circumstances, these loved ones will change their minds. Until then, we are to seek out those interested in the Gospel. They may not be our closest friends or our most loved relatives, but we must direct our attention to them.

What do we preach?

Jesus taught the kingdom message throughout his ministry to the disciples and the multitudes. The disciples were to teach the message the same way on their mission. These same truths concerning salvation should be the basis of the testimony in which we train our disciples.

Preaching repentance that a man should turn away from his sins and turn toward Jesus, the Son of God, was the key to the message.

“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”

(Matthew 10:38-39)

“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My father who is in heaven.”(Matthew 10:32)

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”
(Matthew 10:40)

The Time is at Hand

Jesus instructed his disciples to tell their fellow Jews that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Salvation was not in the future but in the person of Jesus Christ. The time to receive him was at hand. There was no reason to prolong a decision to embrace Christ as Lord.

As disciplers, we cannot teach our men and women to force salvation decisions on our people. The people we witness to must decide on their own that Christ is to be their Lord. There is an urgency, though, that we should stress in our testimonies. A delayed response to the offer of salvation can only postpone the joy and peace resulting from forgiven sin and the eternal reward in the kingdom of heaven. The people we witness to must be taught the urgency of accepting Jesus as Lord. Their eternal lives are at stake, and they need to know that.

Application of Discipleship Principles

How to Minister to the Diseased and Afflicted

Jesus healed the hemorrhaged woman because of her faith. Even though many laughed at the possibility, he raised Jarius' daughter from the dead. The two blind men pleaded for mercy and received their sight. The man who had lost his speech due to demon possession was freed from his affliction.

In each of these last cases, Jesus healed out of compassion and evidence of existing faith in the people who sought his help. The disciples, likewise, were asked to perform this ministry

on the same basis. They were also instructed to use oil in each deliverance. The oil was a reminder to the disciples that it was through the power of the Spirit that anyone was healed. Our prayers for the afflicted need not be conditioned on their faith, but they may be. God may use us to free someone from an affliction so that they might believe, or he may use us to identify a person's faith and be part of God's healing experience. Regardless of what God does or how He does it, we should remember that it is through his power.

Jesus' model of healing others was always without fanfare. He never announced ahead of time a healing session. Instead, as the opportunity arose, he healed in a simple fashion, usually by touching the afflicted person and commanding the person to be healed.

In the same way, we should be available and unafraid to offer the ministry of healing to the afflicted. So it should be during our daily walk and should go without fanfare or a circus atmosphere. Instead, it is appropriate to touch the person as Jesus did and to command them to be healed by his power.

Working with Disciples on a Small Group Basis

Jesus chose twelve disciples to be with him daily so they would eventually be equipped to disciple others into the kingdom. Many disciples followed Jesus, but only twelve received more personalized training.

There was even more personalized training given to a few disciples within the "12." When Jesus approached the house of Jarius, he took Peter, James, and John with him. This is the first of many times Jesus would spend special time with a smaller group. He did not exclude the others or put them in a lesser status, but there was a need to spend even more time with a smaller portion of the group.

The size of our discipleship groups need not be so large that we cannot spend time on an individual basis with each of our men and women. Jesus' time on earth was short, and perhaps, for this reason, he singled out Peter, James, and John for more personal attention. So likewise, we should not feel guilty if we spend more time with some than others. It should never be based on favoritism, but only as God leads us. Fortunately, we have more than three years to disciple our men and women, so no need to exclude anyone.

A Plentiful Harvest

Jesus shared with the disciples an essential reality of their work in the kingdom's service. It came before their mission and after the two blind men and the dumb-spirited men were healed.

"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'" (Matthew 9:37-38)

Even though the harvest of potential believers seemed impossible to gather, the disciples were to begin the joyful task. There is also a great harvest of potential believers today. Our discipleship groups are the crux of God's movement to reach the world. Of all the ways Christ could have chosen to reach the world, discipleship of a small, insignificant group of men was his choice. We cannot be burdened with thinking the great harvest in front of us is an impossible job

to be accomplished in too short a time. We must rest assured that the discipleship we are all participating in will reach the world God wants us to reach. He is the Lord of the harvest.

Jesus returned to Nazareth to preach the Gospel in his hometown. The rejection he had suffered there once before forced him to make his home in Capernaum. He returned, though, hoping to find a more positive response. Nevertheless, he did not give up on his fellow Nazarenes even though they rejected him a second time.

We must inform our fellow Christians of this tenacity that Jesus appropriated in his teaching ministry. Even if we are rejected at home, we should not take it personally and leave them. Instead, like Jesus, we should periodically return and teach the Gospel to them.

Platform of Teaching

Jesus chose the synagogue on the Sabbath to launch many of his teachings. He chose this platform again when returning to Nazareth. The established platform in our day is the church. We should encourage our fellow disciples to use that as a platform to teach the truth. It is not the only platform of Jesus' teaching, but it was a proper place he chose to launch the Gospel.

Ministry of Healing

Jesus did not always heal men or women because of their faith. When he did, he had a method for his ministry. He asked the two blind men to declare their faith. After hearing their positive responses, he commanded them to be healed. In other healing ministries, Jesus laid hands on the afflicted. The procedure was predicated on God's power and will rather than the method. We must teach our fellow disciples that although there can be methods gleaned out of the Scriptures which can be helpful to the ministry, our dependence should always be on God's sovereign power and will.

Application of Jesus' Model

"Not Too Busy for Anyone"

Jesus healed a hemorrhaging woman while he went to Jarius' home to heal his critically ill daughter. The woman had no importance but was just another afflicted person. Jarius was a synagogue official with significant influence and power in Capernaum. He had requested Jesus' assistance with urgency, and while Jesus was making his journey to Jarius' home, the woman came up to him. Jesus refused to bypass the woman's need, even though he knew that if he arrived too late at Jarius' daughter's bedside, he could lose the support of Jarius. This is precisely what happened; Jesus' delay with the woman caused the daughter of Jarius to succumb to death before he arrived.

Christians today tend to put the urgent in front of the important. We must teach our disciples to be open to interruptions and be willing to have their plans altered or changed by God. Many times in my life, I have denied ministry to some spiritually needy people to prepare teaching for what I deemed a more critical audience. If God sends people to us, as was true with the hemorrhaging woman, we can depend on him to work out our future commitments. The daughter of Jarius was brought back from the dead. Everything worked out, even though it did

not seem so when it was reported that Jesus was too late. Everything will work out for us, even if our priority system falls apart.

“The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”([Proverbs 16:9](#))

Love Suffers All Things

Jesus risked his all to relieve the people of their anxiety and problems. He loved his people and wanted to see them free from worldly turmoil and sinful addiction. The reason behind his healing and preaching ministry was his compassion for lost people.

“And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.”(Matthew 9:36)

Our love for the lost must motivate us to reach out to them. We must inform our fellow disciples that we all must have the loving compassion modeled by Jesus in his ministry. If we minister because it elevates us before other Christians or gives us a sense of significance, we should abandon any further efforts to be Jesus’ representatives. Our approach to the ministry, whether clergy or layman, must be built on a compassion to serve God and the lost. It is not a spiritual ladder to be climbed as the world would interpret it. The Christian life is nothing more than a life of serving others for Christ’s sake.

Suggestions for Further Study and Discipleship

1. Discuss the central teachings in the Gospel message.
2. Devise an approach that will include the themes in the Gospel message.
3. What modern-day parables or illustrations can be put into your Gospel package?
4. Discuss a ministry all your disciples can go to and present the message of salvation.
5. Come together in prayer, split up in pairs, and go to your chosen ministry places.
6. Come back together and share your experiences.



Chapter 15

Summary and Conclusion

“He will never desert you”

Once, a man was building a log cabin, and someone asked if he thought it was too big of an undertaking. The man replied that if he had to think of cutting down all the trees, skinning their barks, setting each log in place, and all the other work, it would be an impossible job. Right now, though, he had to think about the one log he was working on at the moment.

The responsibility of discipleship can be overwhelming if you try to accomplish it all in one step. It takes years to disciple another Christian, and it should only be looked at one step at a time.

The Purpose of Jesus’ Discipleship

Jesus’ discipleship was to equip some men to do the ministry he had begun. They were to carry his message of truth to all nations and disciple others the same way they were discipled.

This first mission was the proving ground for them. It was their first real ministry. Jesus gave them a solid foundation to accomplish it. But it was just a foretaste of the ministry they would eventually achieve. This first year of ministry prepared them for the first mission. After this successful venture, they were ready to receive more training.

The Importance of the First Mission

The disciples needed to test their knowledge. Jesus had been preaching the Gospel, healing the diseased, and expelling demons. His life was a ministry in active service. If they could not apply their faith in such a test, they would not be able to meet the greater demands ahead.

How Did Jesus Prepare the Disciples' First Mission?

Jesus prepared the way for the disciples to accomplish their first mission. Just as God prepared the way for Jesus through a forerunner, John the Baptist, Jesus cleared the way for the disciples' ministry.

There was never any part of the first mission that Jesus did not accomplish himself. He had already been to many towns and villages, teaching the Gospel, healing the diseased, and casting out demons. He did not ask the disciples to do anything different or go to another unknown or unprepared place. Jesus completely set up the first mission.

How Did Jesus Train for Their First Mission?

Jesus taught the twelve disciples many significant lessons during the year and a half they were with him. First, the message of the Gospel was given in their presence in 14 major addresses. This does not include many unrecorded instances where he preached the Gospel to or in front of them. He taught them on six occasions how to identify those likely to respond to the message. Finally, he taught them four lessons on how to handle rejection and three lessons on who to approach with the Gospel.

Jesus asked the "12" to heal the physically afflicted in their first ministry. There were at least 13 significant events that the Gospels recorded in detail concerning this ministry. The way he approached a victim and the method he used was not mysterious procedure. Jesus never hid the power and compassion needed to accomplish this ministry from the disciples.

The "12" were asked to cast demons out of the possessed. There were many instances where Jesus cast out demons in front of the disciples. The Gospels recorded four major events, including the detailed approach Jesus applied to this ministry. The disciples confidently performed this ministry because of the battles Jesus openly won against the evil spirits. They not only knew his approach but a special appropriation of the Spirit.

There were many other lessons that Jesus added to the spiritual foundation of his men. Some of the teachings added support to their preaching of the Gospel on their first mission; some would apply to later ministries. Jesus taught the disciples seven times about the reward and inheritance awaiting a believer. He led the disciples in three different facets of prayer and fasting, which was essential to their final preparation before leaving for their mission.

One day the disciples would be sent out to make their own disciples. Jesus spent 16 different occasions teaching them how to recognize a prospect for a disciple. The role of the

Holy Spirit was a critical doctrine that the disciples needed to understand. The Spirit would be their helper, guide, and power in their ministries.

The disciples grew up under a significant misunderstanding of the Law. The religious leaders of the day had selfishly turned the Law into a system of “dos” and “don’ts.” As a result, Jesus taught six major lessons to the disciples concerning the Law and god’s view of true righteousness.

Other teachings that Jesus touched on included how to forgive others, deal with anger and revenge, keep one’s word, sexual relationships, and find God’s will. Jesus also taught the disciples a great deal through his example. It is one thing to teach what is right and quite another to live it out in front of one’s peers. Jesus not only taught righteousness; he lived it in front of his men. He modeled boldness many times in his confrontations with the Pharisees. He was humble in Spirit, serving the multitude almost daily. He accepted anyone that desired the kingdom of God. Jesus did not need to teach the disciples about compassion, acceptance, and humility; these things were demonstrated before them in almost every town that Jesus entered.

Jesus did not lump all his teachings categorically into subject areas. For example, he taught his men about the inheritance of a believer one day and then introduced the subject of faith the next. Then, later, he would mention another facet of the believer's inheritance.

Jesus also intertwined his teachings with events of ministry. Healing the man at the Bethesda Pool in Jerusalem led to an entire teaching on his relationship with God. Another confrontation with Nicodemus led to teaching how a man could be saved by believing in Christ as Lord. He rarely sat down like the Sermon on the Mount and taught the series of truths without a subsequent ministry event.

Were the Disciples Ready for Their Mission?

It is impressive that even though the disciples had received excellent training before this first mission, their faith failed them in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus’ analysis of their readiness can be best quoted in his own words, “Why are you timid, you men of little faith?”(Matthew 8:26) Yet despite their failure, he trusted them to represent him throughout Galilee with the message of the kingdom.

Regardless of Judas's ever-present flesh and presence, these men were given authority to spread the Gospel, heal the diseased, and cast out demons after only a year and a half in his service. From Jesus’ perspective, they were ready to minister even though they were far from being mature men.

Application of Discipleship

Not to be Overwhelmed

As we take on the responsibility of discipling other men and women, we must not be overwhelmed. Jesus told the disciples at the end of the great commission that he would be with them always, even to the end of time. Jesus is with us as we approach the discipleship of others. We need to take only one step at a time.

Prayer is the first step because that brings us into communication with our discipler and helper, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Then, as God leads different ones to be disciplined, we can begin studying the life and discipleship ministry of Jesus.

As the group of disciples develops and begins studying the Bible, the Holy Spirit will guide them about the 21st-century application of the scripture in the Bible. Therefore, we need never worry about our call to disciple others. Jesus and the Spirit have already promised to be by our sides in this matter.

Helping Our Fellow Disciples in the Ministry

Discipling has a great deal to do with teaching the truth, demonstrating how to do a ministry, and being an example of God's character. Another essential aspect of helping our fellow Christians mature in this discipleship program is to help them develop a ministry of their own. Otherwise, their Christian experience will largely depend on receiving truth but not imparting it to others. We must help them find a ministry so that they can share their learning experiences. If necessary, we may have to start it for them.

Preparing Our Disciples for Their First Ministry

Jesus taught his men much about Christian life but asked them to do only three things in their first ministry. They preached the Gospel, healed the diseased, and cast out demons.

We must set a similar goal for our fellow disciples. Jesus took a year and a half before issuing a challenge to his disciples to go out and present the Gospel message. A year and a half is a good time framework that we can use. Our disciples, likewise, should be able and willing to present a clear proclamation of the Gospel. They may also include a ministry of visitation to the sick and seek out perhaps those who Satan and all his vices heavily influence. They may not heal miraculously as the disciples did 2,000 years ago. Still, the miracles were intended to be ministries of compassion and demonstrations that authenticated Jesus as the Son of God. If our works can accomplish compassion and authentication of Jesus, then we will have done the same.

Modeling the Truth

There would have been little power in Jesus' ministry if he was not an example of the truth. Our application of the truth in our lives is an essential teaching tool we can offer our fellow disciples. There is no doubt that God can and will reach beyond our sometimes poor examples.

The most remarkable men I have learned from have not been the elegant speakers who draw many to God through their gift of teaching and preaching. It instead has been through those who often lived unpublicized lives but lives that were spiritually genuine and consistent.

Jesus Intermixed the Disciples Experience

Good discipleship will not try and set up a classroom atmosphere of teaching only Bible doctrine. The discipleship of the "12" included sessions of teaching the truth, but it was intermixed with a ministry.

We must likewise not consider that our discipleship is accomplished by teaching a month of prayer, a month on evangelism, and a month of spiritual welfare. This kind of discipleship is not reflective of how Jesus trained his men.

For the most part, Jesus did not always teach prayer; he simply prayed in the disciple's presence. He did not always teach on the fundamental basis of the Gospel; he just presented it. For example, he taught prayer alongside evangelism in one session, and then on another occasion, he taught prayer in context with something else. Jesus did not use complicated, theological language with anyone. Instead, he made a great effort to take the complex concepts of men and break them down so that people could understand them and his view on life. This is the way Jesus built the Spiritual foundation of his men, and this is why we need to consider studying the chorology of this discipleship for the sake of those we are discipling.

Were They Mature Enough to Minister?

The great dilemma among many disciples today is the question of when a disciple can actually minister. The disciples were far from mature, yet the Lord saw fit to put them on their first mission after only a year and a half.

As disciplers we can only teach, minister and model the truth in front of others. If we are too cautious with the maturity of our men or women, we can frustrate God's timing in their lives. On the other hand, if we move too quickly, great mistakes and failures will result.

This is an area that we must pray about and depend on the Spirit to guide us. Even if we err in our judgment, God will cover our bases unless we have intentionally been neglectful of relying on him in these matters. When Jesus told the disciples that he would be with them always, he meant it for all his disciples, even those in the 20th century. We can depend on him; he will not desert us in our discipleship of others.