

Week 38 – Introduction To Discipleship

Introduction to Discipleship

God's purposes in salvation are not just to gather us in heaven, but also to build us into the image of Jesus, God's pattern Son. The purpose of a home's foundation is for the entire house to be constructed properly. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to "leave the foundational teachings" and to "press on to maturity" (Hebrews 6:1-3). Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles had similar messages of pursuing all that God has to offer through Christ Jesus:

"Therefore you are to be perfect, (teleioi, mature, complete) as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

"Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was also laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ..." (Ephesians 4:14-15)

"For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude." (Colossians 2:5-7)

According to these Scriptures, the path to maturity is only possible as we decide to become a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship is that progress of becoming more like Jesus. It's a commitment to embrace your cross, live in self-denial and grow with Christ and other disciples on a daily basis.

Those who respond to the call to maturity become genuine disciples of the Lord.

Christianity is infinitely more than a creed and implies a life-long pursuit of Christ. Those who are committed to this life and are pursuing the Lord are called disciples. You could define a

disciple as “a person-in-process, who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christ-like lifestyle.”

The emphasis here is the process of discipleship, which resembles a marathon race much more than a 100-meter sprint. Christ is more concerned that we make it to the end (Matthew 24:13) than that we have an explosive start...only to drop out after the first discouraging moment.

Discipleship requires a life-long, consistent and persistent Christian lifestyle (see Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13 and Mark 4). Because discipleship is a process, we should not be discouraged in the fight. God is for us and will help us to grow and make it, even when we fail. A wise saint said, “I may not be what I want to be, but thank God I am not what I used to be.” We must stay in the race even when we’re not pleased with our progress. Our discipleship process may begin as a baby learning how to walk, but in the end, we will run and not grow weary if we press on.

Take Up Your Cross

Jesus warns us that, like Himself, all who follow Him must take up their own cross:

“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:38)

“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’” (Luke 9:23)

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:27)

As we embrace His cross, we are also called to pick up our own. Picking up our cross means serving and obeying Christ in a world that strongly opposes him and enduring the resulting persecution. We are called to resist the lazy and sinful desires of our flesh that war against our spirit (Galatians 5:17). As we follow Christ each day, the Holy Spirit helps us to put to death our sinful nature (i.e. sanctification). To run from our cross is to disobey our Lord. Whenever we deny the cross we are called to bear, we delay the blessings the Lord has in store for us.

What is your cross to bear? Many years ago, the Lord called me to surrender my vocational pursuits to become a preacher of the Gospel. That was my cross that I continue to carry.

According to A. W. Tozer there are three marks of one who has picked up his cross to follow Jesus: this person is facing only one direction and is not looking back, he has said goodbye to the world and is not going back, and he is not making any more plans of his own but is totally in God’s hands. As we pick up the cross, we should totally align ourselves with the purposes of God and His kingdom. Good works, teachableness and our humility toward God and others become our evidence that we have indeed exercised saving faith in Christ.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Review

1. Describe discipleship.
2. Is discipleship “free” or does it cost something? What is its true cost?

(Cheap grace) amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sins depart. ...

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it, a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ ... the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “ye were bought at a price, and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us.

The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer