

LESSON ESSENTIALS

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 3: Characteristics of a Disciple of Christ

Becoming more like Jesus Christ doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't even completely happen in a few years or decades. This lesson highlights how becoming like Christ is the mission of a lifetime. We cannot hold back when it comes to following Jesus.

Read on to know what it takes to live a life of perfect submission to Christ.

Do people recognize us as Christians because we wear crosses around our necks, shout 'Hallelujah' in our conversations, and go to Church, or do they recognize us because our nature shows that we are followers of Jesus Christ? This lesson looks at the characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The first important characteristic of a disciple is he or she is a learner.

In the Gospels, the first twelve followers of Jesus are mostly seen going through intensive learning. Either they were listening to messages from Jesus or they were being sent out by Him for practical training.

A famous saying goes like this, "Sitting in church won't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage will make you a car"

We identify an object as a car, regardless of whether it is in a garage or not, because it has certain standard features like four wheels, a steering wheel, an engine, and can transport us from one place to another. Likewise we identify ourselves as Christians, not because we have Christian sounding names or go to church, but because we believe in and are followers of Jesus Christ.

Followers who believe in the values and wisdom of a learned person are also called disciples. When we speak about disciples, the picture that often comes to mind is a gathering under a tree where the teacher is teaching and the disciples are listening with great care. The first important characteristic of a disciple is he or she is a learner.

In the Gospels, the first twelve followers of Jesus are mostly seen going through intensive learning. Either they were listening to messages from Jesus or they were being sent out by Him for practical training. Jesus says in Matthew 11:29-30, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". This is an invitation from Jesus to all His disciples. He is inviting them to carry His yoke and to learn from Him, and to live their lives 'walking' with Him.

If we want to be good disciples, we need to always be ready to learn. We should be open to whatever the Lord has to teach us, especially the fact that the learning of a disciple spans an entire lifetime. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." If the great teacher and the Apostle Paul found it a constant upward call, imagine how much more we have to learn.

But why go through all this rigorous learning when we can't ever graduate from the Discipleship school in this lifetime? Luke 6:40 reminds us that, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." We are fully trained only when we become like our Master and teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing this we are no longer surprised that a disciple's learning is for life.

So, the ultimate characteristic of a disciple is to be like Jesus Christ and to obey Him. Moving from the gospels to Acts and the epistles will reveal that the disciples were slowly learning to reflect the character, conduct, and commitment of Jesus. It is a dramatic change from being people who were weak, scared, and doubting to being passionate representatives of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the disciples to obey by

saying, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15) As we follow Christ, we will seek to imitate and obey Him. We will want to look like Jesus and act like Jesus more and more. Luke 6:40 reads, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.” This should be our aim: to be fully trained by the Lord through the teaching of the Word that we do, indeed, become like Him. If we agree that the first characteristic of a disciple is that of being a learner, then certainly it follows that once we learn about Christ, we ought to live like Christ by obeying Him.

In fact, as we come to understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, we will want others to be followers of Jesus as well. So very often it is the example of our lives of joyful obedience that speaks the loudest to those who don’t yet know the Lord. Obeying the Lord’s instructions and following His example is not always easy. In fact, we ought to remember that Jesus calls us to serve others, to love our enemies, and even to lay down our lives for others. This is not an easy list of items to obey. But with our eyes fixed on Jesus, and with our heart desiring to be like Him, we too will take up our cross and follow Jesus for our good and for His glory.

As disciples of Jesus who have been richly blessed by knowing Christ, we will, out of love for Jesus, want to learn from Him and to live like Him. This is true discipleship – following our teacher in every respect. Even if the learning and the obedience seems difficult now, what a joy it will be to hear Him say to us on the last day, “Well done, my good and faithful servant!”

IN REVIEW

- A disciple is someone who follows another person; this person teaches the disciple how to live.
- We are disciples of Jesus Christ, who is guiding us even today.
- Disciples are learners and learning for Christ lasts a lifetime.
- When disciples are fully trained, they become like their master. We, as Christians, are called to become like our Master, Jesus Christ.
- Following Jesus means imitating His example and obeying His instructions so that we can live in a way that accurately reflects His character.

The ultimate identifying characteristics of a disciple of Jesus is his Christlikeness, and his obedience to Christ.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- How are Christians different from disciples of other leaders?

- What picture of Jesus Christ do non-believers get when they observe you? Can you think of aspects of yourself that need work and aspects where you have already seen positive changes?

- Jesus told the rich man to sell all his wealth, distribute it to the poor and then follow Him. He couldn't. What are some of the things you find difficult to give up in order to follow Jesus?

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