

THE

DISCIPLESHIP

LIFE

30 DAYS TO BECOMING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

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The Discipleship Life: 30 Days to Becoming a Follower of Jesus

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PREFACE

Matthew 28:18-20, “18 Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

The above passage known as the “Great Commission” is probably my favorite section of Scripture in the Bible. It captures my heart and imagination every time I read it. I picture the remaining eleven disciples standing around the resurrected Jesus ready to take over the world. However, like Jesus did in Acts 1:4-8, He does the unexpected and tells them that there is still work to be done before the physical Kingdom of God can come to earth. Jesus gives them the mission that they and their followers will do until the church age ends in judgment. The faithful eleven disciples must go and make disciples of the nations with the authority that Jesus had been given; baptizing and teaching them all that Jesus commanded them while at the same time being confident that God will be with them through the Holy Spirit everywhere they go in every generation.

We know that after Jesus gave His “Great Commission” Luke continues the timeline in the book of Acts and records Jesus telling the disciples to wait until being filled with the Holy Spirit to begin this adventure (Acts 1:4-5). The expectation they all must have felt is unimaginable. Finally after waiting patiently in the upper room the promised Holy Spirit came upon them in power. They received the evidence of this empowerment by speaking in unlearned languages-how exciting this must have been!

Is it any wonder that within moments of being filled with the Holy Spirit they all rushed out onto the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming the gospel for all to hear? Should we be surprised that Peter, who just a few weeks earlier was a coward, is now leading the charge to make disciples of all the hearers? It was this very moment

they had all been waiting for. Now was the time to make disciples of every nation, tribe and tongue!

In each chapter of the book of Acts, we read about what these ancient disciples did as they preached the gospel to the Jewish leaders with boldness even in the face of the death. In awe we read about how they confronted the pagan religion of a world empire without hesitation and how they multiplied themselves everywhere they went. It was their obedience to Jesus' "Great Commission" that gave them all the inspiration they needed. They knew that their risen Jesus was King of Kings and Lord of Lords and so they were fully convinced that since all authority in heaven and on earth belonged to Him, there was no power in the entire universe that could stop them from teaching all that Jesus commanded!

Oh to God that we in the 21st century would have such an encounter with the risen Jesus that we would cast aside every sin and weight that so easily hinders us from fulfilling the "Great Commission" in our generation. If Jesus, God in the flesh, chose discipleship as His method to change the world, how dare we do anything else but obey.

We ought not to expect to have the presence of Jesus in our midst if we purposefully forsake His specific command to go and subdue the nations to His teachings- not only in church but in every area of life.

Disciples of Christ are the legacy of Jesus upon the earth and His treasure in heaven. One day, those eleven disciples will sit on thrones and rule the world with their King and have their names written on the foundation stones of New Jerusalem. Though we may not have their same rank in the Kingdom, we do have their same privilege of turning the world right side up and preparing the way for the Jesus' second coming!

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

1. Read a lesson each day consistently for 30 days.
2. Prayerfully consider the reflection at the end of each lesson.
3. Put into practice the three actions listed each day.

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DAY 1: DISCIPLES ARE BORN AGAIN

1 Peter 1:23, *“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”*

It is always important to remember that the most pivotal aspect of being a disciple is being born again. To be “born again” means that you have been given a new spiritual life from God. Jesus taught Nicodemus, that if you’re not born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). A person is born again by the Holy Spirit when they believe in Jesus, God’s only begotten (unique) Son (John 3:16).

Today’s passage teaches that the Word of God plays a special role in our process of being born again. Peter wrote that the Word of God acts as a seed that gives us new life and it never perishes because it is always living and enduring. Likewise, Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”*

When a lost person hears the Word of God, it is like a seed being sown in their heart. However, Jesus taught in the “Parable of the Sower,” if the seed falls on the road side (an unbelieving heart) the devil will come and take it away like a bird. If the seed falls on the rocky soil (a weak faith) the sun (persecution) will come and burn the small plant that sprouted. If the seed falls among thorns (a sinful heart), it will be choked out by the weeds (sins). However, if the Word of God comes to a heart with faith (good soil) it will grow and produce good fruit (Luke 8:4-15).

The Word of God is always the same and nothing can change its power. However, it is faith that determines how the seed will grow in one’s own life. Therefore, choose to have faith in God’s Word to be born again and remain in faith to let the Word of God produce good fruit in your life.

It's important that we hear the Word of God, as the very voice of Jesus speaking to us His will for our lives. Many people have read the Bible but they haven't had the faith to receive and obey it as if it was God speaking to them. Alexander MacLaren wrote, "Christ's voice sounds now for each of us in loving invitation; and dead in sin and hardness of heart though we be, we can listen and live. Christ Himself, my brother, sows the seed now. Do you take care that it falls not on, but in, your souls?" Listen to the Word of God and choose to believe what it says because by it we are born again and changed from the inside out!

REFLECTION

Do you have a fruitful new life in Christ?

ACTION

1. If you are not born again, place your faith in Jesus and be born again today.
2. Allow the Word of God to grow deep roots in your life and produce good fruit.
3. Remain in faith by not letting anything take away the Word of God from your life.

DAY 2: DISCIPLES ARE FISHERS OF MEN

Matthew 4:19, *“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’”*

The first four disciples of Jesus were two sets of brothers who were fishermen. Jesus had met them when He was teaching by the Sea of Galilee. Today’s passage comes from the time Jesus called the first set of brothers; Peter and Andrew. Next, Jesus walked further down the seaside and called the other set of brothers; James and John. After both sets of brothers heard Jesus’ call to be fishers of men, they immediately left their nets and boats and then followed Jesus.

When Jesus called four fishermen to be His first disciples, He made a direct comparison to their fishing occupation to what He was going to do with them in the ministry. They were going to work hard at catching the lost and bringing them into God’s Kingdom, just like they used to work hard to catch fish.

Both sets of brothers were trained from small children by their fathers to be successful fisherman. They were mentored by their fathers to be able to read the weather patterns, safely navigate a boat, find where the fish were at, cast a net properly, clean fish and bring them to the market to make money. They were experts at what they did because they received instruction that probably had been passed down for many generations. Jesus understood this same principle of mentorship because he was taught by His earthly father Joseph to be a carpenter (Matthew 13:55).

When Jesus picked His first disciples, He didn’t pick Jewish scholars because He didn’t want to spend time arguing with them. His time was short upon the earth and He chose those He knew would be ready to learn new things about God and not be afraid to take risks. Jesus wanted His first disciples to be untrained in religion, but men familiar with mentorship and hard work.

Jesus didn’t give these brothers sugary words or bribe them with promises of an easy life; rather He inspired them to work hard to change the world one person at a time. Now before we jump to a

naïve conclusion and say we'd be just like these two sets of brothers who were willing to leave everything for Jesus, ask yourself, "What would I do if a teacher asked me to leave my family business and follow him?" Or imagine what most "Christians" would say if their pastor told them this Sunday, "Everything I teach you here today, I expect you to go out and teach others because I will be following you everywhere you go." I believe many "Christians" would say, "But I'm not 'called' to do that, that's the pastor's job!" Yet, according to Jesus, He never intended one Christian not to be a disciple that makes new disciples. Vance Havner said, "A true disciple is a soul-winner."

To call yourself a Christian and deny your call to fish for men is to reveal you joined something other than biblical Christianity. You might have joined a religion but you didn't join yourself to a real relationship with Jesus because He is always looking for the one lost sheep (Luke 15:7). Those who make excuses and say they love Jesus but aren't ready to fish for men have either lost their first love or have never known Jesus.

Jesus never calls someone to salvation without at the same time calling them to save souls.

Sadly, most churches today have forgotten the lesson Jesus taught His first disciples, which is, "Forsake everything to teach others, what Jesus teaches you." In summary, the two steps to becoming a disciple of Jesus is to first forsake all to follow Jesus; and second teach others what Jesus teaches you.

REFLECTION

Do you fish for people?

ACTION

1. Honestly consider what you would do if Jesus showed up at your job and asked you to leave it and follow Him.
2. Teach others everything Jesus teaches you.
3. Consider three people you can fish for this week!

DAY 3: DISCIPLES FORSAKE ALL

Matthew 4:20, *“At once they left their nets and followed him.”*

What if your whole life revolved around being a fisherman? Everything you would do everyday would be focused on just one thing, catching fish. You would wake up early each day to get your nets ready, work on the boat, get bait and head out on the water. Consider your family were fishermen for generations before you and they counted on you to keep the family business going. Plus, your wife and children depended upon every fish you caught because it provided for them food, clothes and a place to live. Now imagine if Jesus showed up unexpectedly one day and said to you, “Drop everything you’re doing and come follow me because I’m going to make you a fisher of men,” what would you do?

Maybe you would say, “I’m sorry, I can’t leave now because my family depends on my fishing” or, “Let me first check with my father and see when is a good time to take off.” And no one would blame you because it would seem crazy in everyone’s eyes to quit a job to follow an unknown teacher from a small nearby town.

Take a moment to consider what you do for a living. Could you leave your job in the middle of the day to follow Jesus? Would making disciples with Jesus be worth you giving up everything?

The first disciples; Peter, Andrew, James and John, were willing to leave everything behind to follow Jesus and be His disciple makers. Today’s verse says they didn’t even hesitate, but rather, *“at once they left their nets and followed Him.”* When Jesus, God in the flesh, walked the earth He deserved total commitment and abandonment of everything else. Even people’s jobs and family commitments needed to bow at His glorious feet. Remember, Jesus wasn’t just asking them to leave things behind to be “saved,” He also

wanted them to leave things behind to make new disciples. Don't fall for the error in the church that tries to separate salvation from being a soul-winner; both go hand-in-hand.

Today in modern times Jesus is no longer walking the earth, so we don't have to literally stop working just to be close to Him. However, at the same time, Jesus is still asking His disciples to do whatever it takes to follow Him to make new disciples. For some people they may have to forsake certain friends, others might have to give up distracting hobbies and for some they might even have to leave everything to be missionaries. The ole' timers used to say, "Jesus is Lord of all, or He ain't Lord at all."

Therefore, no matter what it is, if Jesus asks you to leave it behind to follow Him, do it because He is worth it. Leaving things behind may not seem easy at first, but with Jesus all things are possible and everything we give up for Him, He gives back in the Kingdom (Mark 10:29-30). Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" Now it's your turn to forsake all to make disciples with Jesus!

REFLECTION

Are you willing to forsake everything to be a disciple maker with Christ?

ACTION

1. Pray and ask God to show you anything that may be getting in the way of you following Jesus and making new disciples.
2. Leave your past behind, along with your fears and excuses and choose to follow Jesus.
3. Prioritize making new disciples with Jesus everyday.

DAY 4: DISCIPLES DENY THEMSELVES

Matthew 16:24, *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”*

The word disciple, *“mathetes”* in the Greek means, “a student or pupil of a teacher.” Just like in modern times when a person joins a mentoring program for their job, a college class or a martial arts dojo, the student is first asked to agree to the requirements of the course given by the teacher. Likewise, when people wanted to follow Jesus they had to agree to His standards.

Jesus’ three main criteria of being one of His students was; (1) Deny yourself, (2) Take up your cross and (3) Follow Jesus. If a person agreed to these requirements, then Jesus would consider them one of His students or disciples.

Jesus didn’t give multiple options to choose from to be His disciple. Nor did Jesus give one way for those who were rich and educated and another way for the poor and uneducated. All people, for all times, are given the same criteria if they want to be a disciple of Jesus- deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him!

The first criterion Jesus gave is to “deny yourself.” To deny yourself means to no longer rely upon your own abilities and human effort to guide and save your life. This was Jesus’ way of teaching His students to no longer depend on their mental intellect, good works or even religious beliefs for salvation and daily guidance, but rather trust in God for everything. A popular way of saying this today would be, “let go and let God.”

We deny ourselves by repenting of all the times we worshipped and made an idol of ourselves. We repent and turn away from being the “god” of our own lives and stop believing the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden, *“ye shall be as gods,”* (Genesis 3:5 KJV). J.I. Packer

wrote, “Repentance is more than just sorrow for the past; repentance is a change of mind and heart, a new life of denying self and serving the Savior as king in self’s place.” Jesus takes His seat rightfully in the throne of our heart and we deny ourselves the right to ever rule our lives again.

Certainly, Jesus didn’t want His disciples to turn off their brain and lay helpless on the floor because they denied their own ability to even sit, stand or walk and then wait for God to move them like a puppet. Rather, Jesus was referring to the principle He had taught in Matthew 5:3, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

Therefore, the first step to being a disciple of Jesus is to honestly realize your spiritual poverty and put your faith in Him to receive the true riches of heaven. In other words, “I deny my efforts to save myself, but I believe Jesus can fully save me.” It’s not about my dreams, ideas and plans; it’s all about God’s will for my life. The cry of the disciple’s heart is Jesus’ prayer to the Father before He took up His cross, “*Not my will, but yours be done*” (Luke 22:42).

REFLECTION

Have you denied yourself to be a disciple of Jesus?

ACTION

1. Think of 2-3 ways you have tried to save or guide your own life.
2. Ask God to help you deny your impulses to guide your life.
3. Trust Jesus to save and guide you everyday!

DAY 5: DISCIPLES TAKE UP THEIR CROSS

Matthew 16:24, *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”*

The second criterion Jesus gave to be His disciple in Matthew 16:24 was to “take up your cross.” The cross was a form of torture and execution in the Roman world. Jesus was letting His disciples know that they had to be willing to suffer persecution if they wanted to follow Him. Promised persecution for being a disciple of Christ was a consistent theme of Jesus’ teachings (For examples see Matthew 5:11, Mark 13:9-11 and Luke 10:3).

Some people have tried to promote the false idea that to “carry one’s cross,” means to “die daily to sin.” Despite it being a popular interpretation, it is neither true to today’s text or the whole of Scripture. Jesus never taught that the act of continual sinning would be normative in the believer’s life. Jesus actually taught in John 8:36 in regards to sin, *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* Also, Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:31, *“I die daily”* is directly related to the persecution he faced everyday preaching the gospel.

If someone wants to consider “carrying your cross,” as a reference to sanctification, it shouldn’t be looked at as a “daily dying.” But rather a “once and for all spiritual death” that happened the moment they accepted Jesus. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh [past tense] with its passions and desires.”* Likewise, Paul further taught that Jesus’ disciples no longer had an inner sinful nature because it was once and for all put to death with Jesus’ sacrifice.

The flesh may be sinful from the fall of Adam, but you are no more your flesh, than you are your stomach. One day the flesh will die because of the curse of sin and now you must count it as crucified with Christ, so your spiritual soul can live free. Thus, all disciples currently are, in this life, the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). As a result, being willing to suffer persecution is the real

criterion all future disciples must consider and agree to, if they want to follow Jesus.

Everyone knows eventually the Romans crucified Jesus, however, most don't know how the rest of the disciples died. Here is just a brief overview of how nine of Jesus first disciples died; (1) Peter was crucified upside down, (2) James was beaten to death, (3) Thomas was speared and then burned alive, (4) Philip was crucified, (5) Matthew was beheaded, (6) Nathaniel was crucified, (7) Simon was crucified, (8) Thaddeus was beaten to death and (9) Andrew was hanged.

Christians shouldn't walk around depressed or with a death wish, however, we must be willing to take up our cross and lay down our lives if we want to be Jesus' disciples.

Sadly, over 100,000 Christians around the world die each year for their faith in Jesus, mostly in Muslim and Communist countries. May we never forget the reality of Jesus' words. Yet, let us remember that what John Stott wrote, should be our attitude during persecution from the encouragement of Jesus, "Rejoice and be glad! We are not to retaliate like an unbeliever, nor sulk like a child, nor lick our wound in self-pity like a dog, nor just grin and bear it like a Stoic, [or] pretend we enjoy it like a masochist. What then? We are to rejoice as a Christian should and even 'leap for joy' (Luke 6:23)."

REFLECTION

Are you willing to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ?

ACTION

1. Repent of false beliefs you might have about carrying your cross.
2. Ask Jesus for the courage to suffer for Him (Philippians 1:29).
3. When you suffer persecution; (1) Rejoice that you share in the same suffering of Christ and the righteous prophets, (2) Forgive your enemies, (3) Remain faithful and (4) Be encouraged to know that you're not alone (Hebrews 12:1-3).

DAY 6: DISCIPLES FOLLOW JESUS

Matthew 16:24, *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”*

The last of the three criteria that Jesus gave to be His disciple was to “follow Him.” To follow a teacher in the times of Jesus meant you had a sold out dedication to the leader’s teachings. Likewise, whatever Jesus taught the disciples, they were to fully believe and practice. Jesus reiterated this concept of being sold out to His teachings, at the end of His ministry in John 14:15 when He said, *“If you love me, keep my commands.”*

For Jesus there was no such thing as a disciple that did not follow His example, teachings and commands. Jesus never made a “Plan B;” it was always His way or no way.

After Jesus’ ascension to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit to daily guide the disciples and lead them into all truth, just like He promised in John 14:26. He also said that through the Holy Spirit, He along with the Father, would make His home in the disciple’s life so we would never be alone and always be able to follow Him. John 14:23, *“Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’”*

Therefore, even though we cannot physically see Jesus and follow Him from town to town like the first disciples did, we can be led by the Holy Spirit every day and follow His example. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:25, *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”* Consequently, every disciple, for all times and in all places, are able to follow Jesus by obeying all His commands by following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When we follow Jesus everyday and in every way, we show the world Jesus. God said in 1 John 4:17, *“In this world we are like*

Jesus.” We are not supposed to be known for being like politicians, sports stars, the rich and famous or entertainers- we are commanded to be like Jesus in this world. The born again disciple doesn’t have to try to make himself or herself like Jesus, all they need to do is believe that they are already like Jesus and now live like it!

You can follow Jesus in everything you do. Just as much as you were a sinner and lived like the devil before Jesus, now in Christ, you can be a saint and live like Jesus and do the works of God. Mountain moving faith is yours. Water walking courage is yours. Demon casting out power is yours. Gospel preaching boldness is yours. Disciple making strategies are yours. You have all you need to live like Jesus because the same Holy Spirit that anointed Him, now is upon you. Rid yourself of all excuses and follow Jesus!

Zac Poonen wrote, “God is looking for men and women who will never be content with mere experiences and ‘blessings,’ but who will take up the cross daily and follow Jesus and thus manifest in their lives and in their service the reality of those words, ‘It is no longer I, but Christ that lives in me.’ This, and this alone is the Spirit-filled life.”

REFLECTION

Are you willing to follow Jesus by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit?

ACTION

1. Repent of anything that keeps you from following Jesus 100%.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you everyday in the ways of Jesus.
3. If you ever get out of step with Jesus, repent and return to walking in His footprints!

DAY 7: DISCIPLES COUNT THE COST

Luke 14:28, *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?”*

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is free, but it will cost you everything you have. In other words, to be a disciple doesn’t require an application or a sum of money to pay a fee. But rather, discipleship is costly because it’s not a one-time decision or purchase, it’s a life long journey of obedience to King Jesus.

Jesus never manipulated people or tried to water down His message to gain more followers. He wasn’t “seeker sensitive,” but rather Jesus was always, “Father sensitive.” Jesus consistently pleased the Father by preaching the truth, rather than pleasing men by accommodating their opinions and feelings (John 8:29).

Today’s verse is taken from a set of parables Jesus gave to express the seriousness of being His disciple. Jesus used both the example of building a tower and going to war to demonstrate the kind of forethought someone should have before choosing to follow Him. In both examples the cost must be soberly considered because lack of commitment will end in horrible consequences.

The general, who doesn’t properly examine both his army and the one he is opposing, can lead his men into a blood bath. Also, if the person building a tower doesn’t consider the amount of supplies needed to complete the project, they will only be able to build a half-finished structure that will be dangerous to those around it and a mockery to those who see it.

Therefore, Jesus taught that all who follow Him and choose to be His disciple must first “count the cost.” Every person will pay a different price to follow Jesus, but no one can follow Jesus without giving up everything they have. Some will lose friends and family, others will lose jobs and money; and still some will even lose their

lives.

Alan Redpath wrote, "If you look up into His face and say, 'Yes, Lord, whatever it costs,' at that moment He'll flood your life with His presence and power." All those who give up everything for Jesus will be given everything that Jesus has for them. It is a marvelous trade to give up one's life for Jesus and the gospel. Take time today to count the cost of following Jesus and make a well-informed decision to follow Him!

REFLECTION

What cost do you have to pay to be Jesus' disciple?

ACTION

1. Repent if you have taken being Jesus' disciple half-heartedly.
2. Consider what it will cost you to follow Jesus all the days of your life.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to forsake all to be Jesus' disciple (Philippians 4:13).

DAY 8: DISCIPLES ARE ALWAYS WITH JESUS

Mark 3:14, *“He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”*

By far the most important aspect of being a disciple is spending time with Jesus. Doing good works, performing miracles and helping others are all results of spending time with the Master. If a disciple ever attempts to do good works, miracles and help others without Christ, their work will be in vain and lack lasting good fruit.

God has always desired fellowship with the human race, this was the reason we were made in His image, male and female. The two becoming one was an illustration of God joining Himself to us (Ephesians 5:30-32). Everything from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 tells the story of God’s desire to be in blessed union with us.

There was never a time when God had another agenda with the human race other than relationship. The story of creation in Genesis shows God created man in His own image and likeness. God is a multi-personal being (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) with emotions, a mind and a will. When God created mankind He gave them the same abilities for communion with Himself (Genesis 3:8).

When man freely chose to separate Himself from God by sinning, the Father sent His Son to restore what was lost, by taking our place of punishment on the cross (John 3:16). Also, the Bible teaches that after Judgment Day the Father will say to every born again believer, *“I will be their God and they will be my children,”* (Revelation 21:7). From beginning to end, and everything in between, God has always desired fellowship with us. Adrian Rodgers once said, “Christianity is a love relationship between a child of God and his Maker through the Son Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

As a result, the question to all potential disciples is, “Do you want to be with Jesus?” Everyone may be called, but not everyone is chosen (Matthew 22:14). God’s choice has already been made, He has called the whole human race into fellowship, but each individual person now must decide to choose a relationship with God. Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”* Therefore, just like the first disciples had to make a personal choice to be with Jesus, you must make a faithful commitment to be with Jesus.

REFLECTION

Do you want to spend eternity with Jesus?

ACTION

1. Proclaim your love for Jesus by opening the door of your heart to Him now and for the rest of your life.
2. Repent if sin gets in the way of your relationship with God.
3. Make a daily choice to never leave Jesus.

DAY 9: DISCIPLES DO THE WORK OF JESUS

Mark 3:14, *“He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”*

When disciples spend time with Jesus they get the honor of knowing Him and making Him known. Good works for the disciple are a privilege, not a burden. Our good works may not save us, but we are saved to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus loved us so much that He came in the flesh to die for our sins and make us co-laborers with Him in the Father’s Kingdom.

The Bible teaches us how Jesus saw lost humanity in Matthew 9:36 and we should see the world in the same way, *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”* No one understands and knows the condition of the human race better than Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30). In Luke 15:1-32, He told the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son to express how valuable each person is to Him. Jesus gave us a glimpse of the Father’s heart in Luke 15:10 in regards to just one soul being saved, He said, *“There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

There is no greater joy given to disciples than to share in God’s happiness of sinners being saved.

The disciples caught Jesus’ heart and passion for the lost and spread it everywhere they went. That is why, like on Pentecost and in others places in the book of Acts, they preached with passion. Their passion for the lost was fueled by Jesus’ compassion flowing through them.

John declared in 1 John 2:2, that Jesus didn’t die just to forgive the sins of Christians, but His death paid the debt for the sins of the entire world. Also, Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9 that the only reason Jesus hadn’t come back to judge the world yet was because the Father was patiently waiting for more people to repent. Therefore, if God is

patient and loving with sinners, we as forgiven sinners have no excuse to be impatient and unloving with them. We should be loving and patient with people as we keep preaching and praying for them to be saved.

Today's passage teaches us that Jesus sent out His closest companions to preach the gospel. The word "preach" means, "to proclaim and publicly make known the message of Jesus." Preaching and proclaiming the message of Jesus isn't just for pastors on Sundays, it's a command for every disciple 24/7! Sadly, many Christians don't preach the gospel, but they preach "self-help" and give "motivational speeches." Leonard Ravenhill said, "If Jesus preached the same message minister's preach today, He would have never been crucified." As a disciple of Christ, be obedient to be with Jesus and share Jesus with the world by preaching what He preached!

REFLECTION

Are you willing to publically tell people about Jesus?

ACTION

1. Repent of any shyness or timidity you may have in proclaiming Jesus' message to the world.
2. Pray for three people in your life that you can preach the gospel to this week.
3. Find a time and place to preach the gospel to strangers. For example in a park, in front of your church or door-to-door.

DAY 10: DISCIPLES HOLD TO JESUS' TEACHINGS

John 8:31, *“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.’”*

To be a disciple of Christ it is essential that you hold to His teachings. To claim that you know Jesus and then not do what He teaches makes you a liar according to John. He wrote, *“Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person”* (1 John 2:4).

In today’s verse Jesus was speaking to Jews that had come to believe in Him as the Messiah. Jesus went on to teach them that their “belief” must be followed by their “obedience.” Jesus did not only want “believers,” He wanted “disciples.” Sadly, they chose to get offended because they didn’t want to admit they needed freedom from their sins. They thought they were good people, since they were religious Jews, and that they only needed to add a “belief” in Jesus to their already righteous lives. However, Jesus wanted them, along with all of His disciples, to be transformed from the inside out by His teachings.

The revelation of following Jesus’ teachings, being what separates a casual believer from a dedicated disciple, is seen all throughout the New Testament. James, the half-brother of Jesus declared, *“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”* (James 2:17). And Paul wrote that we were saved to do good works. The good works bear witness to our salvation. In Ephesians 2:10 it reads, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* There is no way around it; true disciples believe and follow all of Jesus’ teachings. The ole’ timers used to say, “If you work the Word, it will work for you!”

Jesus is calling all believers to be followers of all His

teachings. He commands everyone to not only “believe” what He teaches, but to “do” what He teaches.

The idea of “holding” onto Jesus’ teachings gives the impression that we must never let go of what He says. Think about holding on to Jesus’ teachings like you would hold on to a life preserver in the middle of the ocean. At anytime you could let go, but because you value your life you hold on to it with all your strength. As born again believers, Jesus expects us to hold on to His teachings by the power of the Holy Spirit. Make a decision today to hold to Jesus’ teachings and never let go!

REFLECTION

Are you holding on to all of Jesus’ teachings?

ACTION

1. Learn all of Jesus’ teachings by reading the Bible.
2. Hold onto Jesus’ teachings by obeying them.
3. Never let go of Jesus’ teachings in disobedience; if you do, be quick to obey His command to repent.

DAY 11: DISCIPLES ARE SET FREE FROM SIN

John 8:32, *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

In today’s passage, Jesus gave the promise of spiritual freedom for all to receive. The teachings and the words Jesus spoke, now found in the Bible, are the truth; and all those who believe Him and do what He says will be completely set free from sin. All throughout Jesus’ ministry He taught that He was not only able to save His people from sin’s penalty, but also its power and presence. He said in John 8:36, *“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* To be “free indeed,” means to never return back to sin’s bondage and slavery.

The same Holy Spirit that cleanses our spiritual souls from sin is also able to completely lead us out of every temptation and deliver us from every evil thing. That is why Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:13, *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* Sin was never meant to be in the disciple’s life, nor does it have any power over our lives.

Disciples of Christ are no more to have sin in their lives than an airplane is to have holes in its wings.

Do you admit that without Jesus you were bound to sin and its consequences? Then admit and confess with Jesus you are free from sin and all its bondage! Joyce Meyer wrote, “Nobody can be set free from a problem until they’re willing to admit they have one.” Sin is a disease, Jesus is the cure. Sin is an addiction, Jesus is the remedy. Sin is a prison, Jesus is the deliverer. Sin is a slave master, Jesus is the emancipator. Sin is a stain, Jesus is the cleansing. Sin is a lie, Jesus is the truth. Sin is destruction, Jesus is restoration. Sin is death, Jesus is life.

What if you do sin as a Christian? Repent and desire to never do it again. John wrote, *“I My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate*

with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). Though the disciple can still sin and be forgiven, the first and most important command is to not sin.

Therefore, “Will you believe the truth of Jesus and be set free from sin or will you believe the lies of Satan and live in continual sin?” Make a choice today to be a disciple of Christ and decide to know the truth of Jesus Christ and be set free from all your sins!

REFLECTION

Are you free from your sins?

ACTION

1. Learn the truth by studying God’s Word.
2. Ask Jesus to set you free from all of your sins.
3. By the power of the Holy Spirit, live by the truth of God and remain free from sin (Psalm 119:9). If you do sin, be quick to repent and return to following the path of truth and freedom.

DAY 12: DISCIPLES ARE NOURISHED BY JESUS

John 6:35, “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

The teaching of Jesus found in John 6:25-71 is one of the most misunderstood but pivotal passages in the book of John. Jesus finished feeding the five thousand and had walked across the Sea of Galilee from one shore to the other to start a new day. But the people, who had chased after Him to have their stomachs filled again, bombarded him.

The passage begins with Jesus rebuking them sternly because the people were seeking signs and wanting Jesus to give them manna from heaven to eat like how Moses gave the Israelites in times past. Basically, they wanted to live like the Israelites in the time of Moses in the desert. Sadly, they didn’t realize that the reason the Israelites were in the desert and eating manna was because of their disobedience. They hadn’t trusted God to live in the Promised Land and were being punished.

Yet, now many thousands of years later, the Jewish people were wanting Jesus to be their new Moses, so they could hide out in the desert and eat His miraculous loaves and fishes. Jesus then spoke to them in metaphorical language and said; *“56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever”* (John 6:56-58).

The people got offended because they didn’t understand the meaning behind Jesus’ words. They took Him literally and assumed they would have to be cannibals to be His disciple. However, Jesus explained in John 6:63, *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.”* But because their hearts were hard and had misplaced

expectations, most of the people were offended and stopped following Jesus (John 6:66).

All their offense could have been avoided if they would have humbled themselves and believed today's verse in John 6:35 at the beginning of Jesus' talk with them. Jesus was teaching them to be spiritually nourished with His words and to drink from the Holy Spirit. They didn't need more miraculous food; they needed to be satisfied in a personal relationship with God. As Jesus taught, even miraculous food will not stop death, but spiritual food gives eternal life.

Jesus, the Bread of Heaven, came to satisfy all our needs. And the Holy Spirit, the Wine of Heaven, quenches every thirst in our soul.

True disciples of Christ should come to the bread of heaven and eat of His Words until their souls are filled and drink of the Holy Spirit until they overflow to the world around them.

REFLECTION

Do you daily eat Jesus' words and drink from the Holy Spirit?

ACTION

1. Make time each day to read God's word and let it feed your soul.
2. Daily take time to invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with the character and mind of Christ.
3. Never stop feeding on Jesus' words and drinking from the Holy Spirit. Consider the chorus from the hymn, *Fill My Cup, Lord*; "Fill my cup, Lord; I lift it up Lord; Come and quench this thirsting of my soul. Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more. Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole."

DAY 13: DISCIPLES RECEIVE CORRECTION

Matthew 16:23, *“Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’”*

Could you imagine what it felt like to be Peter and have Jesus call you “Satan?” Some people think Jesus was actually talking to Satan personally while he was using Peter to speak his words. Others believe Peter was being called “Satan” directly because he had adopted Satan’s words. Either way, I’m sure it was embarrassing for Peter to be rebuked so sternly by Jesus in front of everyone.

In the prior verses Peter was being honored with a new name and given a foundational role in the establishment of Jesus’ church because he was the only disciple to publically affirm who Jesus was, “The Christ” (Matthew 16:16-19). However, just a few moments later Peter tried to persuade Jesus to not go to the cross because Peter believed, along with the Jews of his day, that the Messiah was only going to come once to conquer the enemies of Israel and establish the Kingdom of God on the earth.

They didn’t understand Jesus was going to come first to die for sin and conquer men’s hearts, then come a second time as a King to conquer the world. Jesus was quick to correct Peter’s satanic inspired plan because if Jesus would not had died on the cross, no one could be saved and cleansed of their sins.

Though we may never have the chance to rebel against Jesus’ plans face-to-face like Peter did, we may at times reject Jesus’ plans for our lives in our hearts and share in Peter’s rebellion. In those times of rebellion, may we be able to hear and receive the kind of rebuke Peter was given from our Lord.

Many times God commands us to do something but like Peter we resist and say, “Never Lord!” However, Jesus loves us enough to correct us and let us know, at those times, our ways are not His ways

and that we should repent and follow Him. Jesus loves us enough to call us out. Like a parent that must discipline their child for their own sake, God is willing to discipline us to free us from stinking thinking and sinful living. We need real grace, not cheap grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”

God taught in Hebrews 12:5-13 that He disciplines those He loves like a Father. If God wouldn't correct us in our times of rebellion it would actually mean He doesn't love us. As a result, we as Jesus' disciples should always be teachable and humble. And if we can take it, we will make it! Hebrews 12:11 states, *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

REFLECTION

How do you react when the Lord corrects you?

ACTION

1. Repent of the times you did not receive the Lord's correction with humility.
2. Ask God to show you the areas in your life that need to change.
3. Always be sensitive to follow the plans and commands of God for your life. If you get off track, hear the Lord's correction, be quick to repent and continue following Jesus in humility.

DAY 14: DISCIPLES HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

John 6:68, *“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’”*

Could you leave Jesus and no longer follow Him? What if hundreds of people left Jesus because of bitterness and offense, would you still stay? Jesus’ twelve main disciples watched a great exodus of their fellow disciples leave; some were probably their close friends and family. What would you do if Jesus gave you a chance to leave with them and asked, “Do you want to leave too?”

Peter’s response in today’s passage shows the heart of a true disciple. He basically said, “I can’t leave you because no one else has the words of eternal life.” Later on in Peter’s life after he denied Christ three times He tried to go back to fishing, but even then Jesus found Him, restored Him and brought Him back (John 21:15-19). Peter knew there was never any place he could go and find the same things Jesus offered.

There are multitudes of religions, philosophies and groups to choose from, however, Jesus is the only One that can offer you the words of eternal life. His words are powerful because He was and is the only Good Shepherd that laid down His life for His sheep and raised it up again (John 10:11-18).

Likewise, Jesus is unique because He was not just a good man with good teachings or a prophet that God raised from the dead; He was (and is) God the Son in the flesh. Jesus didn’t start existing at His virgin birth; He had always existed as the eternal Logos (Word), dwelling face-to-face with the Father (John 1:1). Therefore, Jesus didn’t only teach God’s Word, but He is the Word. He created all things by His words and every Word in the Scriptures were sent by Him. John declared that, *“Through him all things were made; without*

him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3).

With these things in mind, how do you treat Jesus in times of doubt and fear? Do you walk away from Jesus whenever things don't go your way? Do you quit when times get hard? Do you follow people in their offense when they leave church, which is the Body of Christ? How do you respond to persecution and hardships? I pray that we all have the response of Peter and decide nothing is worth trading Jesus for because only He has the words of eternal life.

REFLECTION

Have you ever thought about leaving Jesus?

ACTION

1. Make a personal decision to never leave Jesus. The ole' timers used to say, "Quit your quits."
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to comfort and strengthen you during times of doubt and testing.
3. If you should ever walk away from Jesus like Peter eventually did, always remember He will come after you and try to bring you back!

DAY 15: DISCIPLES RECEIVE LIKE CHILDREN

Luke 18:17, *“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

Jesus was so popular that people from all over Israel began to come to Him just to be blessed. Some of the people would even travel with their children so Jesus could touch them and speak a blessing over their lives. One day as a large number of parents brought their children for Jesus to bless, the disciples told them He was too busy (Luke 18:15).

Upon seeing what the disciples were doing to the parents, Jesus corrected them and said, *“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”* (Luke 18:16). Jesus then used the children as an example for the disciples and taught the following truth in today’s verse, which is, unless everyone receives the Kingdom of God like a child they will never enter into it.

Children, though not perfect or free from error, have simple faith and trust in their parents. Children receive by faith whatever their parents give them because if they don’t they will die. They literally have to receive whatever their parents give them for their day-to-day survival. Jesus wants us as His disciples to trust Him in the same way.

Jesus taught that His disciples must receive the Kingdom of God just like a child receives good things from their parents.

God’s Kingdom is the rule of King Jesus in our lives. In Romans 14:17, Paul taught the three main attributes of the Kingdom, *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* Therefore, we are to be born again and receive by faith (like a child) Jesus’ righteousness, peace and joy.

Often when we face hardships we lose our child-like faith in Jesus and try to fix our own problems in pride. We say, "I can fix this on my own." However, in our times of testing Jesus wants us to humbly trust Him even more. Like a child humbly trusts their parents during a scary thunderstorm, God wants us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6). A.A. Hodge wrote, "There is nothing in the world that works such satanic, profound, God-defiant pride as false assurance; nothing works such utter humility, or brings to such utter self-emptiness, as the child-like spirit of true assurance." Therefore, decide today to have child-like faith in Jesus and receive all that He has for you in the Kingdom of God!

REFLECTION

Do you have child-like faith in Jesus?

ACTION

1. Examine your heart to see if you trust Jesus 100%.
2. Repent of any prideful mindsets you may have.
3. Daily receive from Jesus His righteousness, peace and joy like a child receives from their parent.

DAY 16: DISCIPLES HELP THE POOR

Acts 2:45, *“They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”*

The book of Acts serves as a historical record for the early church. The full name for the book of Acts is, “The Acts of the Apostles.” The book was written by Luke, who was a companion of Paul and a physician, with the intent of leaving behind a legacy for future generations of disciples to follow and aspire to.

In Acts 2:42-47, after Luke described the day of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he wrote an overview of what the church of the first disciples looked like in those early times. Today’s verse is taken from that summary and is helpful because it highlights the generosity and love the disciples had for the needy.

The foundation for the first disciple’s generosity comes from following Jesus’ example and teachings in the gospels. The church’s instruction manual was the life of Jesus.

In the gospels we see the following things that teach us generosity and compassion from the life of Jesus; (1) Jesus stated He came to preach to the poor in Luke 4:18, (2) He commanded a rich man to sell all he had and give it to the poor in Matthew 19:21, (3) He commanded His disciples to invite the poor, the cripple and the outcasts to their banquets and treat them equally in Luke 14:13, (4) Jesus taught to regularly give to the poor in Matthew 6:3 and (5) He gave a chilling insight that He would judge people based on their acts of compassion to the needy in Matthew 25:35-40.

It is of no surprise to see in the first moments of the church’s conception that the more prosperous disciples were willing to sell what they had to give to those who were in need. The church was willing to do what Jesus taught concerning their money because they were His disciples. They weren’t going to try and keep one foot in the world and one in the Kingdom of God. Also, more than likely, they

were inspired by such people as Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8, who gave half of all his possessions to the poor.

Likewise, Paul taught later on in his epistle to Timothy that caring for widows was extremely important and should never be neglected (1 Timothy 5:3-16). And James, Jesus' half-brother and the first leader of the early church, wrote that caring for orphans and widows was considered "true religion" (James 1:27).

Giving to the poor not only blesses them but it blesses us. King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 11:25, "*A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*" Likewise Lester Roloff said, "God's greatest blessings are upon those who show the proper respect for the poor and the needy." Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 21:13, "*Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.*"

As a result, all disciples should live a lifestyle of compassion for the poor and needy. Whether it is giving regularly to acts of charity in their home church, taking mission trips, volunteering in local charities or helping their neighbors in times of need; all disciples of Christ should have a generous heart for the poor.

REFLECTION

Do you give regularly to the poor and needy?

ACTION

1. Repent for the sins of greed and selfishness if you haven't been like Jesus and the disciples in regards to the poor.
2. Pray for God to show you what you can do to help others. For example support foreign missions, local charities or a Good Samaritan fund in your church.
3. Ask God to bless you so you can be a blessing to others!

DAY 17: DISCIPLES

SERVE

Matthew 23:11, *“The greatest among you will be your servant.”*

Today’s verse is found in the midst of Jesus’ harshest rebukes to the Jewish teachers and Pharisees of his day (Matthew 23:1-39). He repeatedly rebuked them for their hypocrisy and selfish ambitions. They had placed their man-made traditions as a burden upon people’s souls, but yet they wouldn’t even lift a finger to help carry them. Plus, most of the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day no longer cared for the poor or practiced mercy as prescribed in Isaiah 58:10, where God had said, *“If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”* Sadly, they did just the opposite.

They only looked out for themselves and used God’s sheep for their own personal gain. They were just like the wicked shepherds in Ezekiel’s time when God said, *“Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?”* (Ezekiel 34:2). And whenever these Jewish leaders did charity, it was just to make themselves look good in the eyes of people because they’d announce their giving with trumpets on the streets for all to see (Matthew 6:2-3).

Jesus said they did these kinds of things to impress people because they traded the praise of God, for the praise of men (John 12:43). Everything they did was tainted with selfish, man-made tradition. They pretended to be holy, but were white washed tombs. They looked clean on the outside but were full of dead men’s bones on the inside (Matthew 23:27). Jesus even went as far as to call these hypocritical leaders “children of hell,” “blind guides,” “fools” and “snakes & vipers.”

Despite all the name-calling, Jesus ended His rebuke with a metaphor about the nation of Israel being like small chicks and that Jesus, as the mother hen, wanted to still gather them to Himself (Matthew 23:37). Tragically, despite God’s great love and mercy, the

Jewish leadership kept rejecting Him and eventually handed Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified (Acts 2:23).

Jesus' words to His disciples and future leaders of the Church were clear, He didn't want them to be like the Jewish leaders who were hypocrites and loved to be in authority over people. Jesus wanted His disciples to be servants like Him. Jesus said He didn't come to "be served," but rather to "serve" (Matthew 20:28). Andrew Murray wrote, "Christ is the humility of God embodied in human nature; the Eternal Love humbling itself, clothing itself in the garb of meekness and gentleness, to win and serve and save us."

As Christ's disciples we should have the same heart Jesus had to serve. Let us not desire a title, but rather a towel. For it was when Jesus took off His cloak and grabbed a towel to wash His disciples feet, that He exemplified a servant's heart (John 13:5).

REFLECTION

Do you want a title or a towel?

ACTION

1. Repent if you have fallen into the trap of loving authority or being a religious hypocrite.
2. Ask Jesus to make you a servant like Him.
3. Pray that the Holy Spirit empowers you to be the kind of leader that always loves and serves God's people.

DAY 18: DISCIPLES ARE DEVOTED TO MATURITY

Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

In today’s passage, Luke the author of Acts and companion of Paul, notes four major things the first disciples were devoted to, (1) The apostle’s teaching, (2) fellowship, (3) breaking of bread and (4) prayer. These four things are still very important for today’s disciples to be devoted to because they produce spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity is defined as doing the basic things God commanded with consistency. In faithful obedience, God grows the disciple and takes them from “glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Let us examine each one of these important spiritual disciplines. First, to grow spiritually mature we need to be devoted to the apostle’s teaching. Remember, in the early church, before the New Testament books were completed, the disciples had to learn the Word of God directly from the apostles. The modern equivalent of disciples devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, is to daily read the Bible and go to church regularly. Both personal study and public teaching from trained leaders will mature your walk with the Lord. Paul told Timothy, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV).

Second, fellowship with other disciples in small group settings will produce spiritual maturity. The ole’ saying is true, “Birds of like feathers, flock together.” You don’t see eagles hanging around chicken coops and you never see a chicken living by an eagle’s nest.

The first disciples knew they weren't going to grow in their faith by going to the Roman amphitheaters and watching plays, nor were they going to spiritually excel by going to sports arenas. They knew the best fertilizer for their faith was to fellowship with other Christians; like iron sharpening iron. This kind of Christian-synergy would produce massive growth in their lives. The modern application of this is to join discipleship-based small groups in your local church.

Third, the phrase "breaking of bread" most likely refers to taking communion. Communion is a time when disciples remember the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross by partaking of unleavened bread and wine (or grape juice). The symbolic act of taking communion results in a spiritual renewal and testimony of God's amazing grace. The modern application of breaking bread is simply taking communion and rejoicing in God's goodness with other disciples, either in church or in fellowship (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

Fourth, the disciples devoted themselves to prayer. Prayer could either be done in groups, like in Acts 4:31, when the church prayed for God to fill them with boldness and the house they prayed in was shaken; or praying can refer to private times of fellowshiping with God, like in Matthew 6:6. The modern application of prayer would be to pray in public with others and privately by yourself.

In summary, every disciple should be devoted to reading their Bible and going to church, fellowshiping in small groups with other disciples, partaking of communion and praying. When we do what the early disciples did, we will see what the early disciples saw- God's Kingdom come to earth!

REFLECTION

Are you devoted to spiritual maturity?

ACTION

1. Examine your heart to see if you need to repent for not being devoted to spiritual growth.
2. Describe your strengths and weaknesses in each area.
3. Ask God to grow you in each area.

DAY 19: DISCIPLES ARE FILLED WITH POWER

Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus promised the first disciples they would be filled with power by the Holy Spirit and be His witnesses in all the world. This endowment of power was given after an extended prayer meeting while the disciples were in an upper room. Luke records in Acts 2:1-3, *“1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

The evidence that the disciples had received power was that they began to speak in languages they had not learned. Many of these languages were understood by the people in the city because Luke records in Acts 2:11, *“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”* Afterwards, Peter stood up and preached and 3,000 people were saved.

Is it any coincidence that the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s power was during a prayer meeting? Certainly not, because the second major filling of power happened again at another of the disciple’s prayer meeting and the house was shaken (Acts 4:31). If we have not Holy Ghost power, it’s because we pray not.

A.T. Pierson wrote, “There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.” Prayer is the source of the disciples’ power from on high, it’s the lifeline of every child of God; no disciple can function effectively in the Kingdom of God without it. Every good thing the

disciple will ever receive will come through prayer. In prayer the nine gifts of the Spirit are received and manifested, strength is imparted, the mind is sanctified, sins are forgiven, bondages are broken, Satan's work is thwarted and direction is given. To live without daily prayer would be to try to operate a car without gas or fly a plane without wings. The human soul needs daily fellowship with God, like a fish needs water.

Here are some practical ways as taught by Jesus in Matthew 6:5-15, to have a great prayer life that will enable you to receive and be a conduit of God's power; (1) "*When you pray,*" Jesus always expects us to have a consistent prayer life- not praying is not an option, (2) "*Go into your room,*" find a private place to pray where you won't be disturbed; (3) "*Close the door and pray to your Father,*" once you're alone address God as your Father and make known to Him your needs in the name of Jesus, use the "Our Father Prayer" as an example and (4) "*Will reward you,*" believe that God will reward you both here on earth and in heaven.

Be a disciple that spends quality time alone with God everyday in prayer- your soul depends on it!

REFLECTION

Do you have a consistent private prayer time to receive the power of God?

ACTION

1. Pray to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues (if you haven't already done so) and pray in tongues everyday (Jude 1:20).
2. Make time to pray everyday and ask God to fill you with His power.
3. Operate in the power of God, with the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit in your daily life (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

DAY 20: DISCIPLES

STUDY THE WORD OF GOD

2 Timothy 2:15 (AMP), *“Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth.”*

Do you love the Word of God? Do you study it with passion and consistency? For the disciple of Christ, the Word of God is the winning playbook for the game of life. The Bible is the battle plan to win every spiritual battle in life. Think of the B.I.B.L.E as your, “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” If you want to make it to heaven, you must follow what it teaches. A.W. Tozer said, “The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection. And we must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian.”

All the great leaders of the past have loved the Word of God. As a matter of fact, David wrote the longest chapter in the Bible on the Word of God, Psalm 119. David wrote in Psalm 119:11, *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* In Psalm 119:16 he joyfully declared, *“I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”* And in Psalm 119:105 he said, *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”*

In today’s verse, Paul commanded his beloved spiritual son Timothy to study the Word of Truth with his best efforts so he could be an approved worker for God without shame and properly handle the Bible in all situations.

Do you want to be like Timothy and be a good worker for Jesus? Do you want to know how to correctly handle the Word of Truth and understand God’s will upon the earth? Do you want to avoid shame and embarrassment in regards to your knowledge of

the Bible? If you answered “yes” to all the questions, the plan moving forward is simple, “Study the Word of God!”

Here are five ways you can study the Bible; (1) Read it everyday, (2) Memorize portions of it, (3) Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and application, (4) Accompany your Bible reading with good commentaries and dictionaries and (5) Take Bible classes online or in person from solid leaders.

REFLECTION

How well, on a scale of 1-10, do you understand the Word of God?

ACTION

1. Repent if you have not been committed to studying God’s Word.
2. Make plans to read the Bible everyday.
3. Look into buying good study materials like study Bibles, commentaries and Bible encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries.

DAY 21: DISCIPLES BUILD THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of [Hell] will not overcome it.”

When Jesus was on the earth He had a two-part mission; the first part of His mission was to redeem lost mankind by His death on the cross and the second part was to build a living organization that would remain after His departure to heaven and represent His Kingdom upon the earth.

The living organization that Jesus came to start is called the “church.” The Greek word for church is, “*ekklesia*.” Generally speaking, the word *ekklesia* means, “the called out ones who gather together.” Specifically, the Church of Jesus Christ refers to disciples who have been called out of the world and gather together to know God and to make Him known.

The main purpose for Jesus making disciples was so that we could be members of His church and spread the Word of God to all the nations. The church is the representative of God’s Kingdom on the earth.

One day Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter received a revelation from the Father and said that Jesus was the “Christ” or the “Anointed One.” Jesus then replied in Matthew 16:17-18, “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of [hell] will not overcome it.*” Jesus declared to Peter that it was upon the revelation of who He was, that He would build His church and that Satan himself could not stop it.

Gates, like those around an enemy’s prison camp, are meant to keep the captives inside and the rescuers outside. Tragically, since Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, Satan has established his gates of

authority around people's lives as the "god of this age." He has done all that he can to keep people trapped in his captivity (2 Corinthians 4:4). Thankfully, Jesus came and destroyed the works of the devil on the cross (1 John 3:8). Now, as Christ's disciples, we can invade the enemy's prison camp and set the sinners free (Luke 4:18).

After Jesus' resurrection He said in Matthew 28:18-20, "*18 All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Therefore, because of the disciples' obedience throughout the years, Jesus is the most well known name of all time, the Bible is the most read book and Christianity is the largest religion in the world!

Today, join a good church (if you haven't already) and build it with the power of God as a co-worker with Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9). When you help build the church with the knowledge of who Jesus is and with the power of God, the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The gates of hell will not prevail against your house, community, city or nation! And don't worry about the other things in life that you need to build, like your career or family, because Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" My Dad, a successful Christian businessman always taught me, "When you take care of God's house, He will take care of your house!"

REFLECTION

Do you want to build the church with Jesus?

ACTION

1. Be committed to a good local church with your time, talents and finances.
2. Do whatever it takes to become a faithful leader in your church.
3. Be a faithful co-laborer with Jesus to build the church!

DAY 22: DISCIPLES LEAD IN THE CHURCH

Acts 14:23, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”

After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost they went everywhere and preached the gospel with signs following (Mark 16:20). As the people believed the message of truth, the first disciples made new disciples by teaching them all that Jesus had commanded. This disciple making process was a fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19.

Due to the disciple’s passion for power-evangelism the church exploded with growth and they had to appoint leaders from within the new disciples to govern the people in each location. The main leaders they appointed and gave the responsibility of the preaching and teaching to were called, “elders.” The Greek word for elders, “*presbuteros*,” means, “an experienced leader.” Another word for these leaders was “overseer,” which comes from the Greek word, “*episkopos*,” which means, “a leader with oversight.”

The words, “elders and overseers” were used interchangeably to describe the same position as seen in Titus 1:5,7. Paul said, “5 *Appoint elders (presbuteros) in every town...* [and] 7 *Since an overseer (episkopos) manages God’s household...*,” therefore, the disciples that were the most experienced and trustworthy were appointed as leaders in the church by the apostles to oversee the work of God.

Paul went into great detail giving the qualifications and responsibilities of elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. However, the elders needed help too. As a result, deacons were established as the second level of leadership (Acts 6:1-7 & 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The Greek word for deacon, “*diakonos*,” means, “servant leader.” The word is similar to our modern day word, “waiter,” in the sense that deacons serve and wait on the people like at a restaurant. In the church, the deacons are not just “water boys,” they have authority

and can do great works for the Lord (read the stories of Stephen and Philip in Acts 6:8-8:40).

The Bible teaches that everyone can aspire to be a leader in the church (1 Timothy 3:1). God desires to anoint and appoint men and women for all the roles to serve in because the same Holy Spirit dwells within each person (Acts 2:17-18).

D.A. Carson wrote, “The most extraordinary things about the biblical prerequisites for elders is that they are not all that extraordinary.” I would like to challenge you to read Paul’s requirements for being a deacon and elder and believe God to make you a leader in the church that others can follow!

REFLECTION

Do you want to be a leader in your church?

ACTION

1. Read Paul’s requirements for leadership in 1 Timothy 3:1-13.
2. Talk to the leaders in your church and ask how they appoint elders and deacons.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to make you an elder or deacon.

DAY 23: DISCIPLES

DEFEND THE TRUTH

1 Peter 3:15, *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*

Today the Christian faith is being attacked in many different ways and on many different levels. For example, the educational system, both on the college and elementary school level, is undermining the very foundation of the Bible claiming that it is nothing more than an inaccurate book filled with ancient myths that was poorly handed down over thousands of years.

The outspoken atheistic community loves to distort such issues like “intelligent design” versus “evolution” to make the Christian look unintelligent and blinded by “religious fanaticism” rather than being “scientific” and “rational” like themselves. Even the mainstream media loves to present fundamental Christians as “backwards” and “intolerant” when it comes to social issues such as gay rights, abortion and stem cell research. Yet, they portray the godless as champions of human flourishing.

At the same time secular skeptics are fighting against the Christian faith. Thousands of cults, like Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, along with world religions like Islam and Hinduism, teach their false interpretations of the Bible that brings confusion to the seeker. Plus, just in the last 50 years there have been literally hundreds of new religious sects, many with people claiming to be Jesus, who attack us from a thousand different angles but they all agree on one thing; they teach that the historic Christian faith is wrong!

Peter faced similar times when he wrote today’s verse. The Roman world, with their pantheon of gods, mocked the Christians for only having “one God.” The Greek philosophers ridiculed the Christians for believing in old Jewish myths and not the wise teachers like Plato, Socrates and Zeno. Plus, the Jewish leaders called the new Christian faith “a cult” because it deified Jesus and broke with popular

Jewish scholarship. And to top it all off, multiple groups in Christianity like the Gnostics distorted the teachings of Christ to fit with their previous pagan ideals like “dualism.”

Therefore, Peter taught that all disciples must do the following in every age; (1) Revere (honor) Jesus as Lord, (2) Always be prepared by studying the Bible thoroughly, (3) Give an answer to those who question our faith (Greek, “*apologia*,” known as “apologetics,” the art of defending the truth) and (4) Give our answers and defense of historic Christianity with gentleness and respect.

Despite the great and numerous attacks against the church, the gates of hell still have not prevailed, nor will they ever do so. The Christian movement grows the most when the opposition is the greatest.

Vern Poythress wrote, “A true disciple is never ‘off duty.’ He is always a disciple. He is a disciple in the actions of his body, and a disciple also in the actions of his mind—a renewed mind. Consequently, he is a disciple in every word that he utters in an apologetic discussion.” Now is the time to know why you believe what you believe and to defend it, while preaching the gospel and making new disciples!

REFLECTION

Are you ready to give biblical answers about your faith to the world around you?

ACTION

1. Study the Bible to show yourself approved (2 Timothy 3:16-4:5).
2. Consider taking Bible classes on apologetics and buying the following books; *Reasonable Faith*, by William Lane Craig, *Kingdom of the Cults*, by Walter Martin and *Apologetics: A Justification for Christian Belief*, by John Frame.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to use you to preach the truth, with gentleness and respect, to those who question your faith.

DAY 24: DISCIPLES FORGIVE

Matthew 6:15, *“But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Everyone will be hurt and sinned against. Some people naively think that once they become a disciple, God will protect them from offense and hurt. However, God never made such a promise, but actually said the opposite. Jesus said in Mark 13:13, *“Everyone will hate you because of me.”*

As a matter of fact, I would say that disciples of Christ deal with more personal hurt and offense than the average person because they on average are involved in more people’s lives. If the average person has 5-10 close friends, the church going person will have double to triple that because of being consistently in large church services, participating in small groups and always attending church events with new people.

As a pastor, I can attest to having more people in my life on a personal level than probably any other profession. I’m not like a doctor, lawyer or mechanic that can avoid my customers’ problems after work hours. Plus, we as pastors can’t “pick and choose” our customers, we are commanded by God to love and serve everyone. The same is true with church leaders; they invite 2-3x more people into their life from the church than they do from their job.

When dealing with people remember; (1) Messy people make messes and (2) Hurt people, hurt people. If you’re involved in people’s lives eventually you’re going to run into messy people and hurt people. Therefore, you must learn to “Forgive Em’ and Move On (F.E.M.O). Forgiveness doesn’t mean you excuse their behavior, it simply means you let God deal with them and you keep a pure heart.

Sometimes disciples can overlook the characteristic of forgiveness because they feel they have the “right” to hold onto a

grudge, “I have a right to hate you because of what you did to me!” However, I can speak from experience, that unforgiveness is one of the most deceptive and harmful tricks of the enemy. Bitterness is like anthrax, deadly in small amounts. And the devil knows how to bait it with subtle lies. Don’t let the poison of others pollute your soul. Guard your heart and emotions by always forgiving others when they sin against you. God said in Hebrews 12:15, “*See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*” Bitterness can destroy the work of God’s grace in your life.

John Bevere wrote, “The man or woman who doesn’t forgive has forgotten the price that Christ paid for them on the cross.” Think about forgiveness in terms of the Golden Rule, “God will forgive you, in the way you forgive others.” Do you want to receive on Judgment Day the same amount of forgiveness you have given those who have sinned against you? Decide to live by the words of Jesus, forgive because you have been forgiven.

REFLECTION

Are you holding any grudges against someone?

ACTION

1. Ask God to search your heart and reveal any unforgiveness you may have.
2. Always be quick to forgive others when they sin against you because it’s not worth trading your forgiveness from God.
3. Overlook as many offenses in life as you can; some things are not worth your time and peace of mind (Proverbs 19:11).

DAY 25: DISCIPLES ARE PUBLIC WITNESSES

Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Some misinformed Christians have said that though all believers are to preach the “message” of Jesus, not everyone is commanded to follow Jesus’ “method” of public witness. They believe that even though Jesus preached outdoors in public more than any one place—more than the temple, in homes or at local synagogues; they’re free to neglect preaching in public because “it’s not their calling.”

The streets and outdoor countryside was Jesus’ pulpit and the public was His congregation. Now is the time for Jesus’ disciples to do what He did, so that we can see what He saw; the lost saved, demons cast out, the sick healed and cities changed!

No one would disagree that disciples are to witness and have freedom to choose whatever methods work best for them; whether it’s at lunch with coworkers, family functions or at church events. However, the overwhelming example of Jesus’ method of public evangelism must be followed and obeyed as the first priority. The very reason Jesus gave the disciples spiritual power was to be a public witness for His gospel.

Some might argue that Jesus didn’t add the word “public” into Acts 1:8, so wherever disciples go and witness is fulfilling Jesus’ command. Though it may be true we are to witness everywhere we go, how did the disciples first and foremost interpret being a witness? Luke records that within moments of the Holy Spirit being poured out in the upper room, they began to street preach among the crowds of people and three thousand were saved (Acts 2:14,40-41)! Not only did the disciples publicly preach on the first day the New Testament church was officially started, but also many of them preached their last sermons on the streets before being murdered by the crowds.

Timothy, the beloved disciple of Paul, whom two books of the Bible are named after, was beaten to death while preaching at a pagan festival in Ephesus.

Often times, for the early disciples it was either revival or riot when they preached in public. Just like in the times of Jesus the people either loved Him or hated Him. One of the revivals in Acts is from the preaching of Philip in the city of Samaria. Luke records in Acts 8:4-8, *“4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.”*

When Jesus promised to give power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, He expected His disciples to get out of the four walls of the church, leave their home bible studies and take the message of the gospel to the public just like He did! C.T. Studd, the great missionary to China said, “Some want to live within the sound of church or a chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell.” I challenge you to be a public witness for Jesus a minimum of once a month. Stand on the street in front of your church, go door-to-door in your neighborhood, meet people at the park, go downtown, witness at the mall- whatever you do, “Go and preach in public!”

REFLECTION

Are you a public witness for Jesus?

ACTION

1. Repent if you haven't followed Jesus' command to be a public witness.
2. Set a day and time to go witnessing.
3. Find others in your church to go with you; don't let the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses out witness your church!

DAY 26: DISCIPLES PREACH EVERYWHERE

Mark 16:20, *“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”*

Consider the following evangelism stats in the U.S. from 2012:

- 95% of all Christians have never won someone to the Lord.
- 80% of Christians never even share their faith.
- Only 2% of all Christians are active in evangelism ministries at their church.
- 63% of the leadership, including deacons and elders, have not led one stranger to Jesus in the last two years through the method of “Go Ye” into all the world.
- 49% of church leaders spend zero time on an average week ministering outside of the church.
- 89% of church leaders have zero time reserved on their list of weekly priorities to evangelize.
- 99% of church leaders believe that every Christian, including themselves, have been commanded to preach the gospel to a lost world (notice the hypocrisy, “they know and teach, but they don’t do and obey”).
- 97% of all Christians believe that if church leaders had a greater conviction and involvement in evangelism, that it would be an example for them to follow.
- 96% of church leaders believe their churches would grow faster if every Christian would be more involved in evangelism.

How much more destruction do we as Christ’s disciples need to see before we go into the places of suffering and sin and preach the gospel like Jesus did? Christianity’s media empire, self-centered book sells, celebrity conferences and mega church addiction has done nothing to stop the massive moral decline in

the U.S. The only answer is Spirit-filled disciples who are willing to go everywhere, preach the gospel and make disciples!

Charles Spurgeon said, “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.” I challenge each and every disciple to be faithful to publicly proclaim God’s message everywhere you go and expect miraculous signs to follow!

REFLECTION

Are you preaching the gospel everywhere you go?

ACTION

1. List the last three places you shared the gospel.
2. Repent for the times God led you to preach to someone but you didn’t obey.
3. Pray and ask God to confirm His Word with miraculous signs!

DAY 27: DISCIPLES ARE PERSECUTED

John 15:20, *“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

Today more disciples are suffering persecution than ever before. These precious saints suffer because of only one reason, they obey the teachings of Jesus, their beloved Master. According to *Open Doors* (a Christian ministry serving the persecuted church), it’s estimated that each month 322 Christians are murdered, 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed and 772 forms of violence are committed against Christians. Their only “crime” was that they believed in Jesus Christ as their great God and Savior. As God said in Hebrews 11:38, *“The world was not worthy of them.”*

Right now in our world there are thousands of Christians being displaced from their homes, arrested, abused, raped, murdered or threatened for their faith in Jesus. Let us never forget them but be motivated by their courage!

The two biggest reasons for persecution are; (1) Islam and (2) Communism. According to *Pew Research*, 75% of the Christian population lives in dangerous areas. Such places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan and Egypt have some of the highest rates of violence in the Islamic world. And even such nations like Nigeria where Christianity is the majority religion; many of the Muslims terrorize the innocent Christians by burning their churches and destroying their property in hopes of stopping the rapid growth. Tertullian, during the time of great persecution under Rome wrote, *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians.”*

At the same time, communist countries like China, North Korea and Vietnam restrict the gospel and persecute disciples that break their state policy of “anti-evangelism” and “non-registered church

gatherings.” North Korea is by far the worst example of a “state run religion” in a communist country. All those who live there and reject “emperor worship” and promote Christianity are arrested, sent to concentration camps, tortured physically and are subjected to mental torture through “re-education.”

At the same time, though some of us may not live in a nation where persecution can result in physical harm or loss of property; many of us in the West suffer persecution in the form of family rejection, public mocking, ridicule, oppression on our jobs and intolerance. Therefore, no matter where you live or how bad you’re being hated for the name of Jesus, don’t think it strange. If they rejected and crucified Jesus, our Master and Teacher, how much more will they hate us as His disciples? Let us rejoice when we are hated for the name of Christ, for that is same way the God-haters treated all the prophets and disciples (Matthew 5:11-12)!

REFLECTION

Have you ever suffered persecution?

ACTION

1. Pray for the persecuted Christians around the world.
2. Consider how you can support the persecuted disciples around the world.
3. Rejoice in your times of persecution because you are being honored to suffer for the name of Christ (1 Peter 1:6).

DAY 28: DISCIPLES TEACH JESUS' COMMANDS

Matthew 28:20, *“Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Disciples (students of Jesus) are not only to be taught everything Jesus commanded, but also they are to go out and teach others all that Jesus commanded. In other words, “disciples make disciples.” Thomas Aquinas wrote, “To teach in order to lead others to faith [and obedience] is the task of every preacher and of each believer.”

Jesus’ commands can be found in the New Testament; the twenty-seven books from Matthew through Revelation. Some commands come from Jesus’ own words and the others come through the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples after He ascended to heaven to speak on His behalf. Jesus said in John 16:12-13, *“12 I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

The best way to learn and obey all of Jesus’ commands is to read and study the New Testament.

Here is a helpful way to understand the breakdown of the New Testament’s twenty-seven books; (1) *Four Gospels*: Stories written about the life and teachings of Jesus found in Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. (2) *One Historical Book*: The book of Acts, written by Luke, which recounts the history of the early church and the first disciples. It includes their application of Jesus’ teachings and the further revelation given by the Holy Spirit.

(3) *Twenty-One Epistles*: Personal letters written by the

apostles to the churches and leaders. There are thirteen written by Paul (Romans-Philemon), one by an unknown author (Hebrews), one by James (James), two by Peter (1 & 2 Peter) and three written by John (1-3 John). These epistles are the best place to understand Jesus' commands with the additional insight of the Holy Spirit because that was their primary purpose in being written. To teach the disciples how to live God-pleasing lives. (4) *One Prophecy*: A book about the end times given to John (Revelation).

There are a total of 260 chapters in the New Testament with an estimated 100 unique commands. If you were to read just three chapters a day you could read the entire New Testament 4x each year. Or if you read just one chapter a day you could read it over once a year.

Certainly, the Old Testament is useful for teaching as well. However, the Old Testament must be taught and applied through Jesus and His commands. Only apply the Old Testament commands in the ways that Jesus and the disciples did, otherwise, you'll be looking for animals to sacrifice and a temple to worship God in! Read the New Testament everyday, obey Jesus' commands and then be obedient to teach them to others.

REFLECTION

Are you a disciple that knows Jesus' commands and teaches them to others?

ACTION

1. Repent if you are currently breaking any of Jesus' commands.
2. Be faithful to the read the Bible everyday, especially the New Testament.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom and boldness to teach Jesus' commands to others.

DAY 29: DISCIPLES HAVE BLESSED FAMILIES

1 Timothy 3:4, *“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”*

The nature of God can be seen in a happy and healthy family. God intended the ideal family to have a godly father and mother that lovingly work together as one to raise their children to be obedient to God’s commands. The unity of persons in one family is an earthly example of the Trinity, which is the family of God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share the same nature and essence with different roles, but they work together as One.

First, when the husband and wife work together as one, with different roles, they display the perfect nature of God to their children. If moms and dads both humbly serve God and each other, then nothing can separate them or tear them apart! The marriage that is built on the Word of God will last.

Second, when the children in the family obey their parents, it reflects the way we as God’s children are to obey our heavenly Father. If a disciple’s home is out of order and the children don’t obey the parents, this sets a bad example to the world because outsiders may think Christian children are rebellious or that our heavenly Father really doesn’t expect us to always obey Him.

God commanded all of Jesus’ disciples who desire to be married to have a blessed family. A blessed family is not a mirage or something that is man made, but rather when God is at the center of a home, the family is built and sustained by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Paul wrote in today's passage that if disciples don't have "their family" in order, they shouldn't be trusted with leading "God's family" ("the church"). First, we practice and perfect our leadership in our family and then second, we lead other families as servant leaders in the church. Don't be discouraged if your family has problems that arise, because every family does, but remember Jesus is the Problem Solver, able to deliver you from every evil.

Chuck Swindoll wrote, "A family is a place where principles are hammered and honed on the anvil of everyday living." Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and lead your family in a way that not only blesses everyone in your home, but also is an example to those around you. And if you're single or have come from a broken family, follow God's Word all the more and let Him direct your paths to start a new family with a godly heritage.

REFLECTION

What is your family life like?

ACTION

1. Repent if you haven't always managed or served your family in a godly way.
2. Follow God's commands for the family and set the example for the rest of your family to follow (Joshua 24:15).
3. Pray and ask the Lord to make your family a blessing and example to those around you.

DAY 30: DISCIPLES ARE ALWAYS DISCIPLES

2 Peter 1:12, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have."

Some people in the church wrongly believe that when the discipleship program ends that means discipleship ends. Not only that, but even some pastors believe that once they graduate Bible college or achieve success in the ministry they no longer need further training or accountability. However, Peter taught the exact opposite. In today's passage he wrote to remind his disciples of the things he had already taught them. It didn't matter how much his disciples knew or how successful they were, Peter was committed to reminding them of the basic things of God because he didn't want them to forget them and rely upon the flesh.

On one hand, we as disciples should always be growing and be able to eat steak and not just suckle milk from a bottle. On the other hand, we shouldn't act in pride and wrongly think we don't need to be re-taught the Word of God and held accountable.

I can attest to being an avid student of the Word of God. As a pastor, I spend hours a day in private study of God's Word. I have earned a Master's Degree in Religious Education from a renowned seminary and have taught Biblical Studies on a college level. At the same time, I am also very much aware of my limitations and tendency to forget what I have already learned. I have to constantly go back over things to keep them fresh in my mind. Plus, I, like every other disciple, need to stay in accountable relationships with other pastors and leaders so that I don't become self-deceived and led astray by the sinful desires of the flesh.

Each one of us has our own God-given strengths and fleshly weaknesses, thus God helps us to grow when we're in relationship with each other. My personal strengths are boldness and consistency.

Other leaders may have the strength of compassion and pastoral care. When we spend time together we can disciple one another and help each other grow in our walk with God. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Nothing paralyzes our lives like the attitude that things can never change. We need to remind ourselves that God can change things. Outlook determines outcome. If we see only the problems, we will be defeated; but if we see the possibilities in the problems, we can have victory.”

I want to encourage you for the rest of your life to be in discipleship-based relationships with other disciples. Stay accountable, learn from others, be willing to change and always be open to godly correction. King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 9:8-9, “*8 Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you. 9 Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.*” If you do these things you will be safeguarded against a lukewarm heart and an ineffective faith.

REFLECTION

Are you willing to be a life long disciple of Christ?

ACTION

1. Repent if you have taken being Jesus’ disciple too lightly.
2. Prayerfully consider the practical ways you can remain a disciple for the rest of your life, for example accountability, on-going classes, etc.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to send you dedicated disciples to grow with.

ALL THE BOOKS IN THE 30 DAYS SERIES

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2. The Promised Life: 30 Days of Experiencing God's Promises
3. The Prayer Life: 30 Days of Practicing God's Presence
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