

Discipleship Part II

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Today is our second session in our series on discipleship. There is certainly a lot to learn about discipleship, and if you choose to be a serious disciple it can be a life-long learning experience.

Last week we covered some important aspects of discipleship. First the point that Jesus calls on us as believers to first be a disciple and then make disciples.

We saw that being born again and being adopted into God's family is not synonymous with discipleship. We can point to a time and a place where we were born again and adopted into God's family, but discipleship is the life long ongoing pursuit of the believer who responds to our Lord's call to follow him.

We noted that Jesus cautioned those who appeared interested in following him that there was a significant cost to discipleship.

The discipleship journey needs to take priority in the believer's life.

While there may be many aspects to true discipleship, we learned that discipleship implies learning, understanding, and accepting our Lord's teaching or doctrine.

Discipleship implies being an apprentice, a learning program designed to graduate candidates that are trained and equipped to perform the same ministries as the leader.

We learned that discipleship implied imbibing his Spirit. Imbibe means to absorb or assimilate ideas or knowledge.

So, in that context. imbibing his Spirit means to allow his spirit to connect with our spirit bringing to our minds knowledge that influences our spirit so that we would taking progressive action to make ourselves more like Jesus.

Now as we continue our sessions on discipleship, we will be looking in more detail as several key components of discipleship.

Some of them are:

- a) Obedience
- b) Study
- c) Observation
- d) Imitation.

We start today with the issue of obedience.

Obedience, or more specifically obedience to God's call or God's commands, is a key tenant of the scriptures from the very first pages of scriptures to the last.

Slide two

Genesis 2:15-17 (NLT) reads this way:

The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

God asked Adam and Eve to obey what appeared to be a relatively simple command. They had food in abundance. A beautiful garden environment to live in. A life free of sickness and disease.

Staying clear of one tree, one source of food when surrounded by an abundance of food should have been a slam dunk.

But we know the story. Failure to obey, specifically rebellion against God's command resulted in sin entering the world and God's curse on the planet.

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We now skip forward to Genesis chapter twelve verse one, which in my NLT is entitled the call of Abraham.

Now, as we read you will notice some similarities between God's call to Abraham and our Lord's call to his disciples in the New Testament.

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So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan.

So, like we saw in our Lord's call to his disciples in the New Testament, Abraham is called to leave behind his country of origin, leave behind his relatives and follow God's leading.

You will notice though that Abraham's story is one of partial obedience.

In spite of the specific call to leave his relatives behind including his father's family, Abraham chooses to take Lot with him who was indeed part of his father's family.

This decision was one that would be one of ongoing trials and tribulations for Abraham. His adventures with Lot would impede the plans God had in store for him.

First comes the strife between Lot's employees and Abraham's employees. They divide the land, separate, and go their own ways.

Then Lot and his folks are captured in a tribal war. Abraham drops everything and rallies an army to go into battle to free Lot.

And then of course eventually Lot ends up in Sodom and Abraham is heavily involved in interceding for Lot before God's judgement results in the obliteration of the city.

Three quick points I would like to emphasize here. First God repeatedly calls his people to obedience. We could easily draw many other examples from the Old Testament to emphasize the point.

Secondly disobedience has consequences. We haven't time to review it in detail but the fact that over two thirds of the entire chapter twenty-six of Leviticus is dedicated to telling Israel the severe consequences of disobedience.

Thirdly, before we think badly of Abram, admit that we too have a strong tendency toward partial obedience. EG

Now in the New Testament, Jesus uses the phrase “follow me” on multiple occasions. It is a call much like the call to Abraham. Jesus simply says: ‘follow me, or in other words, be my disciple’.

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One of those calls is found in Matthew 16:24 (NLT)

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.

Note carefully the obedience called for in these words.

Give up our own way! That is a pretty demanding call to obedience.

But we cannot talk about true discipleship without understanding that discipleship begins with, and cannot be entered into, without a commitment to obedience.

Now the word ‘commandments’ appears several times in the New Testament. It is used often to refer to the Old Testament’s ten commandments given to Moses.

And I think its safe to say that when we as Christians today here the word commandments we tend to automatically think of the ten commandments.

But it also is used to refer to the commandments of Jesus.

Now this is really an interesting phrase, ‘the commandments of Jesus’. We don’t often hear that phrase.

If we think back to perhaps our Sunday School days or perhaps our confirmation training, we probably heard lots about the ten commandments of Moses and were most likely encouraged to learn and memorize them.

But in my own experience, I can't recall a similar teaching theme when we would be shown the commandments of Jesus and encouraged to learn and memorize them.

Now think about that in the context of these words from Jesus calling for obedience to his commands.

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First from John Chapter fourteen verse fifteen.

"If you love me, obey my commandments."

Next from John Chapter fourteen verse twenty-one:

Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

Now note carefully the two-stage challenge to those who would aspire to be true disciples. First to accept our Lord's commandments and secondly once accepting them obeying them

Also please note briefly for now, the promise from Jesus that he will reveal himself to those who obey his commandments. We will come back to this point later in our studies.

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And finally, from John Chapter fifteen verse ten:

When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

Jesus repeatedly calls for obedience to his commands.

So, we see that obedience to our Lord's commands is a prerequisite to beginning a quest for discipleship and is a consistent requirement throughout the entire journey.

So, if you are with me and interested in the pursuit of discipleship let's do a little mental test.

Think about the commands of Jesus. How many can you name?

There are some easy ones. Like 'love your neighbour as your self'.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...

But if you are a typical example from today's Christian community of believers you probably will not have a very long list.

But the simple and perhaps uncomfortable truth is that some biblical research will reveal a substantial list.

So, remember we said that one of the characteristics of a true disciple is that of being a learner.

And then if obedience is a prerequisite to beginning a discipleship journey, we have some serious research and study to do if we seriously wish to honour our Lord's call to obey his commandments.

Obviously, we can't hope to be obedient to his commands if we don't know what they are.

Now before we go any further let's assume for a moment that we want to seriously pursue our Lord's call to discipleship.

What are the impediments to that pursuit? What will keep us from becoming a serious follower, a committed disciple of Jesus?

The factors that we list here will probably apply to all aspects of discipleship but for the moment let's just consider them in the context of our first aspect that we have just mentioned, that of obedience.

What are the impediments that will tend to keep us from becoming an obedient follower of Jesus, a disciple in the true sense of the word?

The first, and a very essential one is that of knowledge. Our lack of knowledge that we have just illustrated with the commands of Jesus is a major impediment to becoming a genuine disciple of Jesus.

It is not that we do not have the ability or resources available to obtain that knowledge, we certainly do have the ability and the resources.

But as we learned from our little mental exercise a few minutes ago many of us have a very limited knowledge of the commands of Jesus even though his call for us to follow him, his call to discipleship has been with us from the moment we were saved.

It is obvious that we cannot aspire to be fully compliant with the call of Jesus to keep his commandments until we are committed to spending some time in study searching for them, noting them, memorizing them, and then acting on the commands of our Lord.

So lack of knowledge will result in partial disobedience at best.

Knowing and periodically reviewing the commands of Jesus has the potential to avoid the partial obedience trap.

Now I am going to give you a few of the commandments of Jesus so that you can begin your list of his commands right now.

We have already touched on this one and it is found in John 14:15 (NLT)

“If you love me, obey my commandments.

Very simply put, this command from Jesus is to keep his commandments.

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And the importance of obeying his commands, and conversely the implication of not being obedient to his commands is found John Chapter fifteen verse ten:

When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

Here is another one from John chapter fourteen verse one: (ESV)

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."

Remember that one of the requirements for bring born again is to believe that Jesus did pay the price for our sin.

Here Jesus calls for us to believe in God the Father and in him. Trust him, trust that he has accomplished the work he was given to do.

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Here is another one from Matthew chapter six verse thirty three: (KJV)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Now there's a challenge to your complete obedience commitment!

So, you will note that these examples of commands of Jesus are complementary in that they outline the very beginnings of a life-long walk with Jesus.

And if we are not prepared to obey these fundamental commands there wouldn't be much point in going further.

And as you search and find additional commands of Jesus you will find that they will continue to challenge us to migrate into a closer walk with him.

So, I have given you three examples of the commandments of Jesus to start your list.

We will be touching on others as we go through the series, but for now I want to give you a homework assignment,

Read through the book of Matthew carefully, deliberately looking for commands of Jesus. A casual reading will miss many. Be deliberate and build your own personal list.

Begin to aggressively deal with the first impediment to discipleship, that of knowledge. Get to know the commands of Jesus.

Now the second major impediment to pursuing discipleship with Jesus is that of time.

Note carefully that in the case of discipleship in the New Testament. Jesus simply says: 'follow me'.

And they literally did. They left home to be in full time training and apprenticeship with their Lord.

Now we live in a different time. Jesus ascended into glory so we can't be with him in a physical sense like the first-generation disciples did full time.

But serious discipleship requires serious commitment of time.

Remember from last week Jesus cautioned those interested to count the cost. Serious discipleship will cost you time.

Slide ten

Serious discipleship will cost you serious time
discipleship will cost you some serious prime time.

In Luke Chapter fourteen beginning at verse sixteen, Jesus shares a parable about a great feast. It goes this way:

A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.'

So here the recipients were called to a great feast. But each had excuses. In their minds they had far more urgent things to do.

Remember the urgent things in life are not always important but they will usually outshout the important in demanding our time.

I think it is safe to say that we live at a time where we are more driven by the clock than any previous generation.

Almost every new technology adopted in the workplace is because of its perceived ability to do things more efficiently which usually translates into the word faster.

We have grown up in this environment and we have been conditioned to be clock driven. It's a hard habit to break.

So, here's the question. The counting the cost question. If you are seriously considering the pursuit of a genuine discipleship relationship with Jesus, are you prepared to dedicate and prioritize what ever time it takes?

I have maintained for many years that we always find time for the things we really want to do.

Put another way, an examination of our day timers or calendars reveals our true priorities. A genuine discipleship quest means establishing priorities that provide the time for the essential aspects of discipleship.

So, this brings us to the end of session two. A call to expand our knowledge base, to become familiar with the commands of Jesus and to organize and prioritize our time in order to experience growth in our discipleship journey.