

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-01 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

The goal of discipleship is to become like the master, to absorb their teaching and lifestyle, and to develop Christian character.

Duration: 25:28

Scripture: Matthew 13:52, Titus 2:3

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his past experiences of preaching and teaching discipleship. He acknowledges that he may have started off on the wrong foot by trying to make the audience laugh instead of focusing on the teachings of Jesus' discipleship. The goal of discipleship, according to the speaker, is for the learner to become like their master. He references Matthew 10:25 and emphasizes the importance of disciples becoming like their teacher. The speaker also refers to 1 Thessalonians 2, highlighting the courage and sincerity with which the gospel should be presented. He concludes by introducing Bill McDonald, an experienced Bible teacher, who will be leading a discipleship class.

Transcript

I'm so glad you have joined us again for this important series of messages on discipleship. I would like to take the time to thank you, our listeners, for your cards and letters of encouragement. Also, I want to remind you that if you have questions you would like answered on this most important subject, please write to us and we'll be happy to respond to you.

Nothing would give us greater joy than to do that. Our speaker today is Bill McDonald. Now, for those of you who do not know Bill, he is an author of over 50 books, correspondence courses, and many magazine articles.

He has been a Bible teacher for over 35 years and is presently one of the instructors of a leadership training program here in San Leandro, California. We have entered into his class on discipleship for this series. The subject is discipleship, and you can't read the Gospels without realizing that the Lord Jesus was the master and he called 12 disciples to be with him.

That's really the basic idea of discipleship, a master-learner relationship, a teacher-learner relationship. And the whole idea was that the disciple learns the doctrines and lifestyle of his teacher, and then he goes out and helps to spread them. That's what it was all about.

Jesus took these 12 men and he was going to teach them his doctrines, and they were going to observe his lifestyle, and then he was going to send them forth to propagate the message throughout the world. You have that in Mark chapter 3 verses 14 and 15. Mark chapter 3 verse 14.

He appointed 12, designating them apostles, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. Notice that. He appointed 12, designated them apostles, that means sent ones, that they might be with him.

The purpose to be with him, of course, was to absorb his teaching, to realize what made him tick, and then that he might send them out to preach. It was what we would call on-the-job training. They lived with him, and it's kind of strange that we don't have much of that in the world today, do we? We have seminaries, we have bible schools, and the like, but the disciples actually lived with the Lord Jesus.

They really got to know him, and an interesting thing about his teaching was that as he worked with them, he taught them as they were able to bear it. John chapter 16 verse 12. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

I think that's a beautiful thing about the Lord Jesus. He knew where they were spiritually, and he taught them as they were able to bear it. I taught for 18 years in a bible school, as you know, and what we really did was put a funnel in the student's mouth, and just poured information down into that funnel, until many of them really had spiritual dyspexia.

They really couldn't absorb it, you know, it was coming too fast for them. It would have been better if we had taught them a little, and then taken them out and say, now put it to work this way, you know, and then brought them back in and taught them a little more, and then sent them out to put that into practice. That's what the Lord Jesus did, and I think this is very important in the whole subject of discipleship.

There really has to be preparation, there has to be growth, there has to be advancement to the stage where you can absorb it. Years ago, I was invited to give a series of messages at a conference at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, and I went charging in with the stern demands of Jesus discipleship, and the other speaker was rated as the greatest comedian in evangelical Christendom, and the whole thing was a nightmare when I looked back on it. I wish I had never gone.

So, one thing, he would have the people rollicking in laughter, and it was really funny, I had to laugh myself, and then I'd come on with the teachings of Jesus discipleship. Well, first of all, the students at Taylor University weren't ready for it. I would have been better probably to start with the gospel or assurance of salvation or something like that, and lead up to it.

And, as I say, I look back and it was a bit of a nightmare. The Lord Jesus taught them as they were able to bear it. Now, the goal of discipleship is for the learner to become like his master.

That's the goal of all discipleship, and there are two verses in that connection. Matthew chapter 10 verse 25. Matthew 10 verse 25.

I'll go back to verse 24. A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It's enough for the student to be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.

That's what the Lord Jesus was working toward, raising those men and maturing them so they would be like him. Matthew chapter 10 verses 24 and 25. And then Luke chapter 6 verse 40, and we'll be looking at this again.

Luke chapter 6 verse 40. A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Disciple is not above his master, but when he's fully trained, he'll be like his master.

So, that's the goal of all discipleship. But, there are limitations on discipleship. For instance, a master.

There's a limitation on a master. He's limited by what he knows and where he goes. You've heard the expression, you can't teach what you don't know, you can't lead where you don't go yourself.

This limits what a master can do with his students. He cannot expect them to advance beyond what he is himself. It reminds you of some of the might in the course of time, but if so, it's no thanks to him.

And that's what we read in Luke a moment ago. Luke 6 verse 40. A student is not above his teacher, everyone who's fully trained will be like his teacher.

The student's not above him. The master can't expect to lead him beyond what he is himself. What about the disciple? What's the on the disciple? Well, I think that a disciple can only progress as far as his faith permits him to go.

Matthew chapter 9 and 29. The Lord Jesus laid down a principle that we'll be referring to frequently. Matthew 9 29.

Then touched he their eyes and said, according to your faith will it be done to you. Well, let me explain that. In the life of discipleship, you can go in up to your ankle if you want, if you have faith to do it.

You can go in up to your knees. You can go in up to your thighs. I mean, there's a lot of water in the life of discipleship.

You can go up to your chest. Actually, there's water to swim in, and when you get through with that, you can walk on the water, but it depends on your own faith, and this will be something that you who are married will be discussing in the days to come. Maybe the husband will have faith, and the wife won't.

Maybe the wife will have faith, and the husband won't. You can only go as far as the two of you have faith, as far as you're united in your faith in this matter. It tries to go any further than that.

Now, as far as I know, there's only one true disciple, and that's the Lord Jesus, and he's the true master as well, the true teacher. It's an interesting verse in Isaiah chapter 15 verses 4 and 5 that speak of the Lord Jesus as a disciple, and it's a beautiful verse, and I'd like you all to turn to it. Isaiah chapter 50 verses 4 and 5, and I'm reading from the New International Version.

It says in verse 4, "...the sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He awakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught." That expression, like one being taught, is translated in some versions like a disciple. Now, this refers to the Lord Jesus in incarnation.

It's a prophecy of what would happen with the Lord Jesus in incarnation, and what it's really saying is that every morning he got up and opened his ear to receive instructions from God the Father for that day. "...the sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught." That's quite a thought, isn't it? So, the Lord Jesus, as a man here on earth, had his daily quiet time, and he opened his ear to get instructions from God the Father for that day.

He was the true disciple. It goes on to say, "...the sovereign Lord has opened my ears and I have not been rebellious, I have not drawn back." Well, that would be a good place for us to start, wouldn't it? Day by day to go into the presence of the Lord and open our ears to hear what he has to say to us, if we're going to be his disciples. Okay, now, the Bible makes a difference, makes a distinction between nominal disciples and genuine disciples.

Anyone who professed to follow the Lord Jesus when he was on earth was a disciple. Anyone who even professed. You see, he wasn't born again.

He was still a disciple in one sense. He was a nominal disciple, and you have a couple of illustrations of that in John's gospel. John chapter 2 verse 23.

John chapter 2 verse 23. Now, while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name, but Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in man.

Well, these people saw his miracles and they, quote, believed in him, quote. But it really says Jesus didn't believe in them. The Lord isn't particularly pleased with a faith that demands miracles, and I think that's what people who watch a lot of religious television today should realize.

The faith that demands miracles isn't a pleasing faith. Blessed are ye if you have not seen and yet have believed. God wants us to believe on the basis of his word alone and not because we see the miracle.

So, here it says, yeah, these people believed on him, quote, quote, but he didn't believe on them because he knew what was in them, and he knew that they weren't genuine. Then in John chapter 6, there's even a more striking illustration of this. John chapter 6 and verse 66.

The Lord Jesus had just given the bread of life discourse, and he said some very difficult things. He said, you have to eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink his blood, or you'll never have everlasting life. And, of course, that was horrifying to a Jew, to his Jewish listeners, to eat flesh cannibalism and to drink blood which was forbidden by the law of Moses.

If they knew anything, they knew that that was, those things were abominations to God. And here Jesus is saying, eat my flesh and drink my blood. Of course, what he meant was believe on me.

To eat his flesh and drink his blood is equivalent to believing on him. There's nothing to do with the communion service or anything of the sort. It's a simple matter.

It says in John 6 47, he that believeth on me has eternal life. But the more they rejected it, the more difficult Jesus' sayings became to them. And that's the background.

Verse 61, aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? The Spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken unto you are spirit and air life.

In other words, even if you could eat my flesh, it wouldn't do you any good. Flesh doesn't profit anything. Believe my words.

It's not eat my flesh, literally. It's believe my words, literally. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.

For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him. From that time, notice, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

Many of his disciples? Not the twelve nominal disciples. They were never born again. They weren't true believers.

They professed to be students of his. Jesus asked the twelve, you do not want to leave too, do you? Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

Then Jesus replied, have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil. He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who though one of the twelve was later to betray him. In other words, Peter says, we believe and know that you are the son of God.

And Jesus said, when you say we, just realize that we is eleven, not twelve. Even of the twelve, one of them was not a true disciple, was not a genuine disciple. So here you have a host of nominal disciples leaving the Lord Jesus, turning away from him, and even Judas proved to be not real.

But even among the true disciples, there are gradations of discipleship, and I think the Lord Jesus hinted that in John 8 and 31. John 8, 31. If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

In other words, the more we obey the teachings of the Lord Jesus, the more we are his disciples, and none of us will ever be a perfect disciple. After we've done all that we should, we still have to say that we are unprofitable servants. Now, I'd like to say this at the very beginning, that all true believers are disciples of the Lord Jesus.

I know this is an argument today. Some people say some are believers and some are disciples. No, all true believers are disciples of the Lord Jesus.

In fact, as I've already said, it's wider than true believers. Nominal learners. And I'd like to say, too, that discipleship includes all the teaching of the Word of God.

We're going to use it in a more restrictive sense in this course, but in its broadest sense, discipleship includes all the teachings of the Scriptures, because the Lord Jesus certainly went over the whole gamut of truth with his disciples. And you get that in Matthew chapter 13, verse 52. He said to them, Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.

New treasures as well as old. And so, he was saying that the disciples, they would go back into the Old Testament and bring out precious truths from the Old Testament, and then the new truths that he was

giving them here concerning the kingdom of God. Some of you sisters might be wondering, well, what part do we have in this whole matter of discipleship? The Lord Jesus was a male, and all his disciples were male as well.

Well, in Titus chapter 2, verses 3 through 5, we have the answer to that question. Titus chapter 2, verses 3 through 5. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God.

So, the sisters have a real ministry in discipling other sisters in the truth of the word of God. We might list some of the ingredients of discipleship. Just think of it this way.

Supposing you were to take another person and start them on the road to Christian discipleship, I mean, assuming they're already born again, what are the things you would want to get across to them? Well, I would suggest to you that the primary emphasis of the Lord's teachings on Christian discipleship is the emphasis on character, and we're going to see that again when we go over Luke chapter 6 in detail. We're going to see that the emphasis in the New Testament is on the person's own character, what he is. The man is the message.

What I am is more important than anything I'll ever do or say. People are amazing. They can read character.

We have those expressions, don't we? People say, what you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say. Edgar gets that I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day, which was another way of saying the same thing. And probably the greatest stumbling block to the spread of the Christian faith in the world today is the lives of Christian people, probably doing more harm than any other single thing you could possibly think of.

And so that's why all through the New Testament you have this tremendous emphasis on character. I think that's what Jesus said when he uttered those words, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. We try so hard to be fishers of men, don't we? We take courses, we follow all the latest angling devices, but listen to what he said, follow me.

To follow him means to live the way he lived. And he's saying, look, follow me and I'll take care of the fish for you. And I really believe that's true.

Okay, that's why you have sections in the New Testament like this. The section on fruit bearing in John chapter 15. What's that all about? It's about the development of Christian character.

Abide in me, as I in you. The branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine. When we think of fruit, we invariably think of souls one to Christ, but I really don't think that's what it is primarily there.

Fruit primarily there is the development of Christian character. Think of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5, verses 22 and 23. It's character, the fruit of the Spirit.

Think of the armor of the Christian in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 11 through 17. What's that all about? Well, I believe it's Christian characters. The breastplate of righteousness.

I think that says that if I have a righteous life, the devil will have little to shoot at. All of the parts of the Christian armor there, a lot of our brethren take them and make them positional. They say, well, that's what I am in Christ.

I'm righteous in Christ. I don't think that's what it is at all. I think it's what I ought to be in everyday life.

That's how you put on the armor of the Christian soldier. Now, if you want to see the importance of it in practice, turn to 1 Thessalonians 2. You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know.

With the help of God, we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. In other words, courageous. It was part of his character.

He was a courageous servant of Christ. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, truthfulness, purity, nor are we trying to trick you. No hocus pocus in his presentation of the gospel.

On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We're not trying to please men, but God who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed.

God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ, we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Now isn't this interesting? Describing his entrance to Thessalonica with the gospel, and he's talking about what he himself was, and his fellows, what they were as men. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship.

We work night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preach the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed.

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