

# (Practical Discipleship) 2. Discipleship and the Home

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of making Jesus Christ Lord of everything in our lives, honouring our parents, and seeking God's will in marriage.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:24, Proverbs 19:14, Malachi 2:15, Matthew 11:29, Matthew 18:18-20, Luke 2:51, Luke 14:26, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:22 - 6:9

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Family Relationships"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that true discipleship begins at home, where honoring parents is foundational to following Jesus. He explains that while Jesus taught to 'hate' one's parents, this must be understood in the context of honoring them first, as demonstrated by Jesus' own life. Poonen highlights the importance of unity between spouses in raising godly children and warns against the dangers of prioritizing parental or societal expectations over God's commands. He encourages young people to seek God's will in marriage, emphasizing that discipleship should take precedence over romantic pursuits. Ultimately, Poonen calls for homes that reflect the values of discipleship, as the strength of the church is rooted in the godliness of its families.

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## Transcript

A disciple is a learner and a follower of the Lord Jesus. He is one who has made Jesus his Example and seeks to conform his life to his Master's in every possible way.

Like charity, discipleship also begins at home, first of all.

### Discipleship and Parents

The foundation for true discipleship is making Jesus Christ Lord of everything in our lives - giving Him all that we have and all that we are.

Let us consider first of all, how we are to "hate" our parents, as the Lord commanded us to, in Luke 14:26.

The first step is to honour them. This is the first command with a promise attached to it (Ephesians 6:2). We cannot "hate" our parents the way the Lord wants us to before we have learnt to honour them. There are plenty of ungodly children in the world today who are only too glad to hate their parents!! The cults too,

misuse this verse extensively to gather to themselves those young people who have never learnt to honour their parents.

The example of Jesus is what every disciple of His must follow. If we do that, we will never go astray. If however we interpret the sayings of our Lord without looking at His example, then we will go astray, as so many Christians have done. Our Lord has told us to "learn from Him" (Matthew 11:29).

How did Jesus "hate" His earthly mother? First of all, He honoured Joseph and Mary, by submitting to their authority, as long as He was in their home in Nazareth (Luke 2:51).

Only two things are mentioned in the Bible about the 30 years that Jesus spent in Nazareth.

First of all, in Hebrews 4:15, we are told that He was tempted as we are and never sinned. From that, we learn that He must have faced many temptations during those 30 years at Nazareth - the same temptations that anyone faces during the first 30 years of his life - from childhood to adulthood.

Mark 6:3 tells us that Jesus had at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters in his home. So there were at least 9 members living in His home - and it was a poor home. (We understand that, when we compare Luke 2:24 with Leviticus 12:8, and discover that Mary was too poor to bring even a lamb as an offering to the Lord). So Jesus obviously did not have a private bedroom to retreat to, when things became difficult in the house. John 7:5 also tells us that His brothers did not believe in Him. They were obviously jealous of this One in their home who never got angry or acted selfishly. They must have all "ganged-up" against Him many a time and teased Him and irritated Him. Anyone who has lived in a large family in a small house, with unconverted relatives will understand the problems that Jesus must have faced in Nazareth. Yet He never sinned. To add to all that, it is quite likely that Joseph died, when Jesus was in his teens or twenties (because we never read of Joseph during the years of Jesus' public ministry). Then the burden of supporting the 8-member family fell on Jesus, as the eldest son. He had to work hard to support that family. There must have been many temptations that Jesus faced in such situations. Yet He did not sin.

Secondly, Jesus "continued in subjection to Joseph and Mary" (Luke 2:51) - as long as He was living in their home - for 30 years. That would not have been easy - as all of us know from our own childhood days. How often in our childhood days, when we wanted to do something, our parents asked us to do something else that we did not naturally like to do!

We can therefore hold up the example of Jesus to all our children. Fathers are commanded to bring up their children in "the instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). What is "the instruction of the Lord"? It is primarily the example that the Lord Himself set for children during His years in Nazareth.

If any boy or girl will follow the example of the Lord that we have looked at in the above two areas, he too will grow in wisdom and in favour with God - as it is written about Jesus Himself (Luke 2:52).

Even when we are grown up and married, we must still honour our aged parents. In Genesis 9:21-27, we read that Noah's son Ham saw his father drunk and lying naked in a tent. Ham was a grown man at that time, for he was a married man even before the flood came. Ham went and told his brothers about this and thus disgraced his father. What Ham said was true, but he dishonoured his father. And Ham and his family were cursed, as a result. Backbiters are cursed by God, even when they speak the truth! No backbiter can be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Noah's other two sons - Shem and Japheth - however honoured their aged father, by walking backwards (so that they would not see their father's nakedness) and covering him. And they and their families were blessed.

What we learn from that example is that God blesses those who honour their parents and He curses those who despise their parents. That example has been placed right at the beginning of the Bible, as a warning and an example for all of us - young or old.

Although Joseph and Mary were God-fearing people (according to the standard of the old covenant), yet we must remember that they did not have victory over sin (which is a distinctively new covenant promise - see Romans 6:14). They did not have the Holy Spirit and could not come under grace as we can today. So they must have had arguments at home, lost their temper with each other and sinned in many other ways. (If you find it difficult to believe this, it is probably because you think that Mary was immaculate!!) Jesus must have seen Joseph and Mary sin many, many times, in that home of His in Nazareth. Yet He did not despise them. This is a major part of what it means to honour our parents.

Proverbs 23:22 says, "Don't despise your mother when she is old". If you see some faults in your parents ("their nakedness"), don't despise them. Cover their weaknesses and never speak about those weaknesses to anyone. In fact, that is the way we should treat all people, for we are told that wherever there is true love, it will "cover a multitude of sins."

If you are born-again, and your parents are not, and they ask you to do something contrary to the Scriptures, (for example, to worship an idol or to marry an unbeliever, etc.), you can tell them respectfully that you cannot do such things, because God's Word forbids you to do so. You certainly must take a stand for the Lord. But you don't have to do it arrogantly! You can do it graciously.

But in matters that don't involve disobedience to the Scriptures - children must obey their parents when they are staying at home. But once they have left their parents' home and set up their own home, they are no longer obliged to obey their parents. But they must still honour their parents and care for them.

We see this also in the example of Jesus - that His disciples must follow. After Jesus left home at the age of 30 and was baptized, one of the first incidents recorded in the gospels is the incident at the marriage-feast at Cana. Mary had already seen Jesus for 30 years as an obedient son who had solved many problems at home. And she knew that Jesus could do something even about the lack of wine there. She probably did not expect a miracle, for Jesus had never done a miracle thus far. But she had seen at home that her Son was wise and ingenious. So she asked Jesus to do something.

And there we see for the first time Jesus speaking sharply to Mary: "Woman, what do I have to do with you?" (John 2:4). He had now left His home and was therefore free from having to obey her thereafter.

This is what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to "hate" their parents. This is the balance we need to have too. We must obey our parents when we are living in their home and we must "hate" them in matters connected with following God's commands. It was when it came to doing the will of God and fulfilling the ministry that the Father had given Him that Jesus said to Mary, "My time has not yet come." (John 2:4). Once we leave our home and set up our own homes, we are no longer under our parents.

It is interesting to note that the FIRST command given in the Bible for all men is this: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife" (Genesis 2:24). And this command is

mentioned at a time when Adam did not even have a father or mother to leave!! It was obviously written for those who would marry subsequently.

Unfortunately, in most marriages in India, the husband does NOT obey this command of God. We can understand non-Christians being more attached to their parents than to their wives. But what shall we say about Christians who follow the non-Christian culture of India in this matter? They fail to manifest the type of married life that God wants to show to our country.

It is not a question of leaving one's parents physically primarily, but of being emotionally detached from them. A husband's first loyalty and inward attachment must be to his wife and not to his parents.

In the same way a wife is commanded to forget her father's house (Psalm 45:10).

We must certainly care for our parents when they are old and feeble. Jesus has given us an example here too, by making the provision of a home for his widowed mother with John, when He was dying on the cross (John 19:26, 27). But parents must never be permitted to come between a husband and wife at any time. Many Christians in India have been hindered from following the Lord, because of an inordinate, natural attachment to their parents.

In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, we are told why the tribe of Levi was chosen by God to be His priests. They were given this ministry as a reward for placing God above their parents, their brothers and their children. When Moses saw Israel worshipping the golden calf and asked who would stand with him on the Lord's side, only the tribe of Levi came forth and stood with Moses that day. The Levites were then told to go into the camp and slay even their own relatives who had practised idolatry (Exodus 32:26 - ff). These Levites were the forerunners of the true disciples of Jesus.

The Law had been given by Moses to the Israelites just a few days earlier, in which they had been told to honour their parents (Exodus 20). But now they were being asked to take out their swords and kill their relatives. There we see the two sides of truth. When the Levites saw their relatives worshipping idols, they could have spared them and gone and slain someone else. But they didn't. "They did not consider father or mother or brothers or sons..." (Deuteronomy 33:9).

How many there are who have not followed the Lord's commands, because they were moved by seeing the tears of their mothers or by hearing their parents' words saying, "See how much we have done for you". Thus they render themselves unfit to be the disciples of Jesus.

If, on the other hand, you are one who already hate your parents for your own selfish reasons (like many children do), then what has just been said does not apply to you. What you need to learn first is how to honour your parents.

Only those who have first learnt to "honour" their parents can understand what Jesus meant when He said that we are to "hate" our parents - for it was to those who had learnt to honour their parents that the Lord first spoke those words about "hating".

The people who don't use the sword (as Jesus did), because of a human softness, and who thus compromise, will suffer spiritually in the long run. It was painful for the sons of Levi to treat their parents thus. But they did it for the Lord's sake.

In Malachi 2:4, 5 the Lord says that He gave Levi the covenant of life and peace, because the Levites feared God and revered His Name. But that peace was bought with a sword!!

How does all this apply to us today? We don't use physical swords against others as the Levites did in old covenant times. The meaning of "using the sword" for us today is that we cut off the human affection that we have for our parents and our relatives and replace it with a Divine affection. Human affection for our parents etc., can make us commit sin in order to help them or please them. Whereas Divine affection will not only prevent us from committing sin, but will enable us to love them far more deeply and purely and will also enable us to love them when they hate us!!

And if in some situation, there is a conflict between what our parents tell us to do and what God tells us to do, then we must obey God. It is in such situations that God tests us to see whether we fear Him and want to please Him or whether we want to please our relatives.

This issue of the place that our parents, wife, children and other relatives have in our life, as opposed to the place that God has in our life must be settled once and for all, right at the beginning of our Christian life. Otherwise, we will have constant problems throughout our life.

God will honour us if we honour Him. Even your parents will be blessed if you take a stand for the Lord. The ultimate purpose of God is our good and the good of others. So those who compromise will not only lose out spiritually themselves, their parents will also lose the blessing of God thereby. You can never lose ultimately, by obeying God's commands.

When God asked Abraham to give up Isaac, it was this same principle that God was emphasising. Isaac had become the darling of Abraham's heart and his idol. So God told Abraham to give Isaac up.

Do you have an attachment to your parents or to your wife or children like that? Then you cannot be a disciple.

When your wife comes to you and gossips about one of the brothers in the assembly, do you cooperate with that gossiping spirit or do you inwardly reject it. Do you seek to please your wife? If you do, then you will be lost yourself and you will lose your wife too. If however you keep yourself pure, you will at least save yourself. And in the long run, your wife may be saved too. So the way of "hating" is the best way for all concerned.

Nobody can stop us from being new covenant priests, if we are radical in such matters.

Let me say this once again: When you have to take a stand against parents, you must NOT be rude. Be gracious and say, "I am sorry, Dad. I can't do that because it is against the Word of God." A lot of problems are caused just because many young believers have not learnt to distinguish between being rude and standing for the truth.

## Discipleship and Marriage

Marriage is a very important step because it can make or mar a person's entire life.

Young people who are seeking God's will in marriage must tell the Lord that they are first of all His disciples and therefore marriage is not the biggest thing in life for them, but following Jesus IS.

A disciple is one who has forsaken all. He is even willing to be single if the Lord desires that of him. Only such young people find God's best in marriage. When we see the number of unhappy marriages among believers today and the lack of harmony in such marriages, it is clear that these couples did not enter into marriage as disciples of the Lord first of all.

Once we have put the Lord first, we can seek God's will from a foundation of "rest." Remember that God put Adam to sleep, while preparing a wife for him. Adam did not have to run around the garden looking for a partner! We too need to be "at rest" doing the will of God. Then at the right time God Himself will bring our life-partner to us. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't be looking for a partner, but it does mean that we need not panic.

Young men when they reach the age of 25 and young women when they reach the age of 20 should start praying about their future life-partner. Before you reach that age, you should be occupied only with the Lord and His Word and His work, without a thought of marriage. Don't waste your time considering every attractive girl or boy you meet as a possible life-partner. And when you find a really attractive one, don't say, "I better grab her/him quickly, before someone else gets her/him!!" If God has indeed chosen that person for you, He will keep her/him reserved for you. Nobody else will be able to grab her/him!! If you are a true disciple of the Lord, He will reserve the best for you.

David did not grab the throne from Saul, but waited for God's time and God called David "a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22). He will say the same about you, if you too are willing to wait and receive everything from His hand. You can safely leave the matter of your marriage in God's hands, if you spend your time seeking God's kingdom first. If you honour Him He will honour you.

Proverbs 19:14 states that a father can give his sons lands and riches, but only the Lord can give them good wives. So seek your marriage partner from the Lord.

How should a disciple go about finding his life-partner?

I am a firm believer in "arranged" marriages - marriages arranged by God!! In the Bible we are told of two such marriages. God arranged a partner for Adam. And God arranged a partner for Isaac. And my own testimony is that God arranged a partner for me too - the best I could have possibly got.

The eyes of the Lord still run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for ways to help those whose hearts are totally His (2 Chronicles 16:9). No-one can search the whole world like God can. And those who trust in Him will NEVER be disappointed.

So, if you want a good wife or husband, be a whole-hearted disciple of Jesus first. And God Himself will arrange your marriage. "According to your faith be it unto you." Abraham's servant prayed and asked the Lord to lead him to the right girl for Isaac - and the Lord did (Genesis 24). This God is your Father and He can do the same for you too.

The Bible says that God reveals His will to us through a renewed mind (Romans 12:2). So we must allow our minds to be transformed to prove the perfect will of God. A renewed mind is one that has learnt to look at people from God's point of view.

We find in Proverbs 31:10-31, the type of wife God recommends. The virtues given there are what all young men should look for when considering a girl in marriage. And those are the values that all young women should pursue in their lives.

Many young men look only for beauty and charm in a woman - the very things that Proverbs 31:30 says are empty and deceptive. Proverbs 11:22 uses very strong language when it says that a beautiful girl who does not have discretion (and the fear of God is the first step to discretion) is like a pig with a golden ring in its nose. Some men get so taken up with the "ring" (the pretty face) that they marry the pig (the girl)!!

The woman described in Proverbs 31 is one who works hard with her hands, rising up early every morning (verses 13, 15). She plants a vineyard in order to earn something extra for her family (verse 16), she is careful in spending money, she helps the poor and has "the law of kindness on her tongue" (verse 26) - in other words, she is hardworking, frugal and generous, and her speech is gracious.

Her hands are hard (through hard work) and her tongue is soft. Unfortunately, what we find with many Christian girls today is the exact opposite - their hands are soft (through laziness) and their tongues are hard (through arrogance)!! Woe unto the man who marries such a woman!!

A good wife is not necessarily found among those girls who are always taking Bible studies here and there. Young men should beware of mistaking religious activity for spirituality!! When you get married, what you will need is a wife and your children will need a mother. Neither of you will need a woman who is a Bible-teacher! Remember that!

Song of Solomon 8:9 speaks of two types of girls - those who are like walls and those who are like doors. The door is the "forward" type of girl who comes at you, with her heart wide open. The wall is the girl who is modest and reserved, like God created all girls to be. If a girl is like a door, the verse goes on to say that her parents will have to barricade her in (that is, restrain her in many ways). If however, she is like a wall, a palace (KJV) - a godly home - can be built through her life!

1 Peter 3:3-4 urges all women who want to be disciples of Jesus to avoid expensive clothing and jewellery, since the most valuable thing that God looks for in a woman, is "a gentle and quiet spirit". Although discipleship is not primarily seen in the way a person dresses, yet it is true that a woman's dress reveals a great deal about her character. The values she cherishes in her heart are often revealed in the way she dresses. A disciple of Jesus will not be slovenly or carelessly dressed. But neither will she waste her money on gaudy, expensive clothing or jewellery.

So young men who are looking for a godly wife, should look primarily for the fear of God coupled with a gentle, quiet spirit, diligence, kind speech, modesty and simplicity.

When girls consider marriage, they usually look for education, money and good looks in the man. It is true that a woman should not consider a man in marriage who does not have the means to support a family, for the Bible exhorts all men to first develop their business (means of earning an income), before building their home and family (Proverbs 24:27). But that is not everything!

What you as a girl, need to ensure first of all is whether the boy you are considering is a wholehearted disciple of Jesus, whom you can look up to. Can you make him your head - joyfully and not just because the Bible commands you to do so? This is one of the first things you need to ask yourself, when considering any boy.

For more information on this subject, please read my book "Sex, Love & Marriage - The Christian Approach".

Discipleship and the Home

In Malachi 2:15, we read that God made a man and his wife one in order that through them He might receive godly children. Anyone can raise children. But the disciple of Jesus raises godly children.

And for this, the very first requirement is that at least one of the two parents must be a wholehearted disciple of Jesus who loves the Lord with ALL his/her heart. Half-hearted Christians will not be able to raise godly children.

A second important requirement is unity between husband and wife. This may not be possible if one partner is not a disciple. Then the other partner must battle it out alone against Satan, for his/her children. But if both are wholehearted, the work is much easier. This is why the right choice of a marriage-partner is so very important.

It is very difficult to bring up children in a godly way if the husband and wife are always quarrelling with each other and blaming each other. If you want to build a godly home, seek unity with your husband/wife at any cost - even if, as a result, you have to give up many of your rights. It will be worth it in the long run, when you see the way your children follow the Lord.

There is tremendous power in unity between two disciples. Jesus said in Matthew 18:18-20 that when two disciples are united together on earth, they have authority to bind the activities of the Satanic forces in "the heavenlies" (Ephesians 6:12). That is how we can keep evil spirits away from our homes and away from influencing our children.

In Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9, the Holy Spirit speaks of home relationships - between wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters. Immediately thereafter, (verse 10 onwards) the Holy Spirit goes on to speak about wrestling with evil spirits in the heavenlies. What does that teach us? Just this - that Satan's attacks are primarily directed at home relationships. Here is where we must overcome Satan first of all.

Husbands and wives who quarrel with each other don't realise that they are opening the door (through the gap thus created between them) for Satan to enter their homes and attack their children. A rebellious child who answers his parents rudely may have caught the infection from his mother who speaks in a similar way to her husband or from his father who is rebellious against the Lord in some area. It is no use blaming the poor child for the infection that the parents brought into that home first of all!! It is the parents who need to repent first.

Unity in the home is far more important than the size or the beauty of your home or the gadgets you have therein. The glory of God can be manifested in a family that lives in a shack, if they are disciples of the Lord first of all.

A true disciple of Jesus will be free from the terrible disease of "blaming others" that Adam and Eve were infected with in Eden. Adam blamed Eve for his sin and Eve blamed the serpent for hers.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to "the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) - and the first characteristic of one who is poor in spirit is that he has an awareness of his own failure and need first of all. A husband and wife who are both poor in spirit will convert their home into a foretaste of heaven on earth. In such a home, each will be judging himself and not blaming the other. The Devil can never have any access into such a home. Can you imagine what tremendous blessing the children in such a home will inherit?

Let me say a word about "working mothers". In our day and age, this has unfortunately become a necessity in some cities, because of the high cost of living. But certain principles must be borne in mind by such mothers.

Titus 2:5 tells us that God's will for women is that they be "workers at home", first of all. So, no mother should neglect her home responsibilities to pursue a profession outside the home. The Lord, her husband and her children must always be primary in her affection and devotion - in that order. Her job (if at all she has to take one) must be Number Four priority, after the above three.

Married women who do not have any children at home can go to work, without much of a problem.

There are usually TWO reasons why mothers with small children, go to work these days:

For survival, where the income of the husband is just not sufficient to meet the family's needs.

For luxury, because the husband and wife want to enjoy a higher standard of living.

If you can honestly say before God, that in your case the reason is survival, then you can be certain that God will give you special grace for all your family responsibilities.

If however, the real reason is luxury, then I must warn you that you are in real danger. You may reap the consequences only many years later, when your children have left home and become wayward and useless to God. Then it will be too late to do anything about it.

God is my witness that I am preaching only what I have practised. My wife was working as a medical doctor, when our first son was born in 1969. At that time, our only income was the little that I received from month to month, and we had no savings at all. But we decided that my wife would give up her job and stay at home to look after the family. For 28 years thereafter, she never took a job but stayed at home and brought up our four sons to love and follow the Lord. What is the result? Today, we have the joy of seeing all our four sons born-again, baptized, following the Lord and witnessing for Him. Such a blessing is far greater than the three or four million rupees that my wife could have earned as a doctor in 28 years. We have no regrets at all today. We give our testimony here only to encourage other mothers who are seeking the Lord's will in this area.

A true disciple will also be careful about the magazines and books that are brought into his home and the type of television and video programmes that are watched by his family members. The husband as the head of the home must be like a strict doorkeeper who ensures that nothing worldly enters his home. He has to be like the head of the quality-control department in a factory who examines each product and certifies it. Parents who want their children to be disciples of the Lord must ensure that they do not give in to their children's whims and fancies, in such matters, for that is not love, but foolishness and unfaithfulness to the Lord.

The strength of any church is found in the strength of its homes. If the homes are weak, the church is weak. It is not in loud noise or in melodious singing or even in good preaching that the strength of a church lies, but in the godliness of the homes that constitute that church.

May we build homes in our land then that glorify our Lord.

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