

LESSON 2

The Journey of Discipleship

Your new Christian faith makes you a disciple of Jesus. In fact, you immediately became a disciple of Jesus when you became a Christian. So what does becoming Jesus' disciple mean? A disciple is a student or learner of a certain teacher. Following someone's teaching as a way of life is the active side of discipleship. Now that you are following Jesus, His teachings in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will guide you throughout life. Naturally, all of the Bible will instruct you, too. As a Christian disciple, you will read through your Bible many times. The life-changing truths of Scriptures will constantly make you a better disciple.

Christian discipleship is the most exciting journey you will ever undertake. The pathways of a person devoted to Jesus lead to many blessings. As Jesus' disciple, you will experience the joy and power of Christian prayer. Marvelous spiritual treasures in your Bible await your discovery. Biblical truth will continually transform your life. Helpful and encouraging friendships with other disciples consistently become an important part of your new journey.

A prayerful study of the information in this lesson will provide a solid foundation for your relationship with Jesus. He is the Teacher, and you are the student. You will learn to know His voice. Living in obedient fellowship with Him brings increasing joy, and His abiding presence within your life imparts daily strength for every situation.

Like Jesus' first disciples, you will discover walking with Jesus is a new adventure each day. Some days bring great joy while other days present difficulties. A growing disciple learns, however, to move through every situation with grace and victory. Rewarding days of discipleship lie ahead for you. Now, on with your journey!

LESSON OUTLINE

The Three Dimensions of Discipleship
The Qualities of a Growing Disciple
The Four Stages of Discipleship
Habits of a Maturing Disciple
Practical Concerns of a Good Disciple
Discipleship: The Big Picture
The Victorious Disciple

LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Identify the three dimensions of discipleship.*
- 2: *Identify the qualities of a growing disciple.*
- 3: *Explain the four stages of discipleship.*
- 4: *Identify the productive habits of a maturing disciple.*
- 5: *Discuss the practical concerns of discipleship.*
- 6: *Present an overview of the important aspects of discipleship.*
- 7: *Point out six principles that empower the victorious disciple.*

The Three Dimensions of Discipleship

Objective 1:

Identify the three dimensions of discipleship.

Faithfully following Jesus requires an understanding of the three important dimensions of discipleship. The word *dimension* refers to aspects of an object that can be seen and measured. For example, a house has

the dimensions of depth, width, and height. These dimensions are a vital part of a house's physical reality.

Similarly, true discipleship also has three important dimensions. Although these dimensions are not physical in nature, they are very real. The three dimensions of discipleship are biblical instruction, life relationships, and Christian responsibility. Let us now consider each of these.

Biblical instruction

Biblical instruction is the foundation of your walk with God. Therefore, you must avail yourself to sound biblical teaching. This teaching may come through a pastor, teacher, or even a college professor (Ephesians 4:9–16). Like Apollos, you may discover that certain Christian friends can provide helpful instruction from God's Word (Acts 18:24–26). Take advantage of every opportunity to hear sound teaching and preaching from God's Word.

The Holy Spirit will also help you achieve a clear understanding of the Bible. Jesus gave this wonderful promise to anyone who follows Him: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things" and "but when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 14:26; 16:13). God will always answer your prayer for the Spirit's assistance in understanding His Word!

Life relationships

Life relationships include your relationship with God, other believers, and nonbelievers. Your most important relationship is with God. When your relationship with God is healthy, other relationships stay healthy, too. Your relationship with God gains vitality through a consistent prayer life. You discover new ways to walk in fellowship with Jesus. You learn the ways of a true disciple, including ways to develop healthy relationships with others.

Christian responsibility

Christian responsibility is the dimension of discipleship that reflects a caring, helpful attitude

toward others. A healthy Christian takes responsibility for others, and this responsibility is expressed through your willingness to perform any task that helps others. Such tasks include your prayers and ministries given on behalf of believers and nonbelievers (Luke 10:25–37).

The Qualities of a Growing Disciple

Objective 2:

Identify the qualities of a growing disciple.

Jesus anticipates spiritual growth and fruitfulness in those who follow Him (John 15:2–8). Bible writers often used the image of “fruitfulness” to teach the qualities of discipleship. The image of fruit effectively illustrates the qualities of a maturing believer. The apostle Paul referred to these Christian qualities as *fruit of the Spirit*: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). The phrase “of the Spirit” (v. 22) is very important as it connects spiritual fruitfulness to the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no fruit without direct help from the Spirit of God. Are you growing the fruit of the Spirit? Carefully read the following descriptions of the nine fruit of the Spirit.

1. *Christian love* embraces many important qualities. Expressions of Christian love toward God and others will include the qualities of loyalty, devotion, respect, and esteem.
2. *Joy* is a deep gladness of the heart. Gladness often erupts into exuberant rejoicing that is expressed in song and worship. Peter said that our complete trust in Jesus leads to joy that goes beyond words (1 Peter 1:8–9).
3. *Peace* is a sense of calm and tranquility. The quality of peace keeps a disciple undisturbed and untroubled in all circumstances.
4. *Patience* is the quality of self-restraint before jumping into action. Patience waits and gives God every opportunity to help us work things out.

5. *Kindness* is goodness expressed through gracious living. Kindness stands in contrast to the harsh world around us.
6. *Goodness* is a moral quality that is expressed in profitable and useful behavior. Good behavior is defined by what God says is good and right.
7. *Faithfulness* is a quality of God. This means He is knowable and trustworthy. We can depend on Him. When we are faithful, we too are dependable and trustworthy.
8. *Gentleness* is an attitude of grace that accepts all of life as God allows it. When life is harsh, you do not argue with God. Gentleness is quiet strength even when under fire!
9. *Self-Control* allows you to behave properly under all circumstances. Physical appetites like hunger and sexuality demand self-control. Self-control is also exercised over emotional states like anger or discouragement.

Jesus used the image of fruitfulness to teach the need for His abiding presence in our lives. Prayerfully consider His words: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Jesus' statement is clear. We demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit only when He is present in our lives.

The Four Stages of Discipleship

Objective 3:

Explain the four stages of discipleship.

Christian discipleship goes beyond just learning facts. The process of discipleship involves four levels of personal growth. One level of discipleship may overlap another at any time; thus, each level of discipleship complements and encourages the next level of growth. Now, let us consider these important levels of discipleship.

The New Disciple

This level of discipleship is experienced when you become a Christian. You have just begun your spiritual journey, but there is a desire for spiritual growth. You are at the level of *becoming*. You are becoming someone different for God. There is a new you emerging (2 Corinthians 5:17). Typically, the new disciple quickly moves forward to the next level.

The Thoughtful Disciple

The level of thoughtful discipleship involves serious thoughts and reflections concerning vital issues of your new Christian life. Devotional times and church life, along with sermons, books, and good teaching, begin to create a growing awareness of critical issues. You enter this thoughtful level as certain things begin to happen.

- Your purpose in life is viewed more seriously.
- Greater challenges come to your growing faith.
- You feel more strongly about your Christian development.
- There is a growing sense of Christian responsibility toward a lost world.

The thoughtful disciple is in the stage of *becoming aware*. You are becoming aware of many new things. You are exploring the nature of your heavenly Father. You ponder the love and grace of God. Increasingly important is the prayerful consideration of the purpose of your Christian life. The wonders of God's Word are continually explored. Your connection with unbelievers takes on new meaning.

Jesus nurtured this level of discipleship through the parables. These were stories and illustrations that contained great truth about the kingdom of God and important life issues. The parables were meant to get disciples thinking and asking questions. Jesus was actually getting His disciples ready for the next level of discipleship.

The Responsive Disciple

Thoughtful disciples understand the need to respond to what they have learned about the Christian life. A responsive disciple says, "I must now act upon what I know. I must enter the level of response and obedience to God and His Word." A responsive disciple can be described as sensitive, thoughtful, and hard-working. At this level, he or she is in the stage of *becoming aware and then responding*.

The Committed Disciple

The committed disciple is the maturing disciple who *becomes aware of needs and responds to them in an unconditional manner*. The committed disciple serves Jesus unconditionally. Jesus wants soldiers who run toward the battle, not away from it. He wants workers that endure, even when the sun is hot. Jesus wants disciples committed to the task, not committed to themselves.

Have you noticed the development of our definition for a growing disciple? The new disciple is *becoming*; the thoughtful disciple is *becoming aware*; the responsive disciple is *becoming aware and responding* to the needs of others; the committed disciple is *becoming aware and responding unconditionally*.

Increasing joy and peace are the spiritual payoff for moving to a new level of discipleship. After all, doesn't Jesus want joyous and contented disciples (John 14:27; 15:9–11)? Your growth as a disciple deeply pleases the Savior!

Habits of a Maturing Disciple

Objective 4:

Identify the productive habits of a maturing disciple.

A habit is a behavior that is repeated, almost without effort. Certain habits can be harmful or destructive for a growing Christian. For example, gossiping or watching sexually explicit television is wrong behavior that quickly becomes destructive habits. Also, a healthy activity can become a habit that steals time needed for prayer,

Bible study, and other Christian concerns. Always put important spiritual matters first and then enjoy healthy and relaxing activities. Give spiritual matters priority. This enables you to properly balance the rest of life and stay free from unhealthy habits.

Now let us review the most helpful habits for maturing Christians. First, a growing disciple will cultivate the habit of prayer. Prayer brings great spiritual blessings into our lives. Prayer is a means of removing obstacles that block spiritual growth. Divine healing and other miraculous interventions are usually the fruit of much prayer (James 5:13–18).

Andrew Murray, the son of a godly minister, wrote powerful books about prayer during the nineteenth century. Murray's father was a man of prayer, and his home was often filled with the lively sounds of worship and prayer. Young Murray benefited from the family habit of prayer and would himself become a powerful preacher and writer. Murray knew that prayer was a critical factor of the Christian life. He wrote, "God's Word calls us to seek, to strive, to listen to truth, to pray and believe, to forsake sin and follow after what is good" (Murray 1982, 17). Murray knew prayer enables the Christian to live in the truth of God's Word and remain free from troubling sins.

Fasting is another holy habit often connected to prayer. Replacing a normal meal with prayer or study can reflect a deep love for God. The Bible teaches fasting as a way to know God's presence and guidance for our lives (Isaiah 58:6–10; Acts 13:2–3). Jesus viewed occasional fasting as an important part of the growing Christian's life (Matthew 9:14–17).

In addition to prayer and fasting, the maturing disciple will develop the habit of Bible study as he or she discovers new truth about the Christian life. Every time a follower of Jesus studies the Bible, a new adventure begins. Make this your determination as a disciple.

Choosing the most accurate translation of the Bible is important to the new disciple. You may want to seek guidance from trustworthy believers for this important matter. Additionally, memorizing Scripture helps you hide

God's Word in your heart so that you do not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). Beyond memorizing, note-taking during Bible study helps you recall what you have studied.

Practical Concerns of a Good Disciple

Objective 5:

Discuss the practical concerns of discipleship.

You are now in the greatest time of your life. Nothing compares to the joy of faithfully following Jesus. This joy increases as you make good decisions about practical matters of discipleship.

An important practical matter for the new disciple is choosing the right church. It is not productive to hop around for a long time between churches. Ask God to give you wisdom about choosing a church. When you find a church that you sense is right for you, attend it faithfully. The following questions can assist you with finding the church that will accelerate your spiritual development.

- Does the church consider the Bible as God's inspired Word to humankind?
- Does the church consider the Bible the final authority on life and personal behavior?
- Do the ministers of the church clearly and effectively teach God's Word?
- Does the church strongly rely upon prayer for the needs of its people?
- Does the church offer opportunities for ministry and servanthood to others?
- Does the church offer encouraging and helpful fellowship for its people?

The Bible offers encouraging words about this important subject of fellowship within the local church: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). This verse reveals a powerful motivation for

faithful church attendance: the local church should offer encouragement through wholesome relationships.

Another practical matter of discipleship is your relationships with other believers. These relationships are part of the joy of choosing the right church. As time passes, you will find new friends who also follow Jesus. Gaining new friendships is important to your growth as a disciple. Godly friendships will encourage and help you in your newly-discovered faith. These friendships will provide relationships that encourage your spiritual growth.

Wholesome relationships with other believers will usually make you a better disciple. Consider the good things provided through healthy relationships with a mature Christian.

- Godly relationships are sources for encouragement during difficult times.
- Godly relationships provide opportunities for personal ministry.
- Godly relationships offer support in times of personal failure.
- Godly relationships bring the presence of Jesus into our lives.

You must prayerfully guard against relationships that compromise your faith in Christ. Improper relationships carry the sting of spiritual death. God will help you sense the unhealthy nature of improper relationships. Immediately exit any relationship that turns your eyes away from Jesus and holy living.

Discipleship: The Big Picture

Objective 6:

Present an overview of the important aspects of discipleship.

Effective discipleship is never just doing one thing well. Serving Jesus pulls together many significant areas of Christian living. For example, the character and life of the disciple is vitally connected to the spiritual

disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and Christian reflection. Your ministry to the body of Christ is an expression of a variety of gifts, skills, and talents. These gifts are nurtured and developed through prayer, study, and the help of others. A servant-like attitude opens many doors for godly relationships and various ministry opportunities. It is easy to see that many aspects of Christian living merge to create an effective disciple for Jesus.

Gaining a solid understanding of Christian living requires knowing your *call* and *development* as a disciple. First, view your call as a disciple as the center of godly living and ministry to others. In the illustration *Discipleship: The Fundamental Call*, the arrows pointing outward emphasize that healthy disciples become mature servants to God and people. Servanthood is then expressed through a variety of ministry actions toward others.

Discipleship: The Fundamental Call



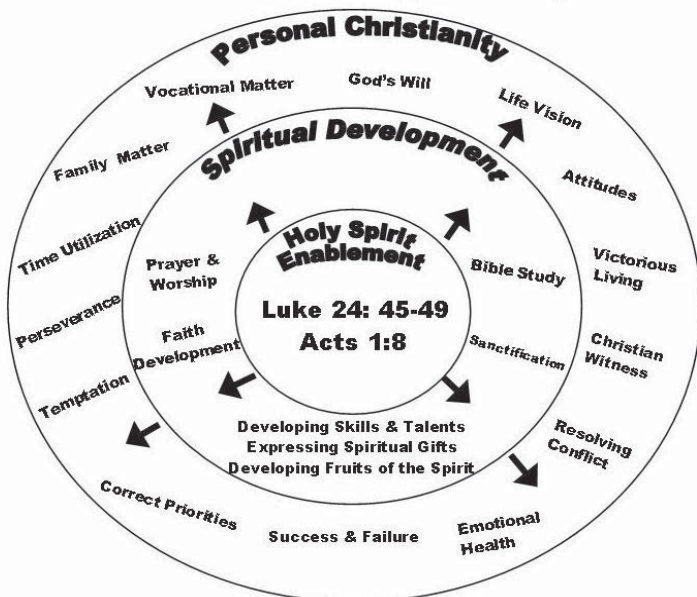
Now let us think about your spiritual development as a disciple. Spiritual development is like a picture puzzle. A picture puzzle has many interlocking pieces,

sometimes a thousand or more. The picture is literally within the puzzle. However, the picture is only a scramble of pieces until the pieces are fitted together. The picture emerges only when the puzzle is completed. Naturally, every piece is important. If only one piece is lost, the puzzle can never be completed.

Discipleship is about putting *all* the significant pieces of Christian living together. When all the right pieces are continually fitted in all the right places, the effective disciple emerges. Maturing disciples learn exactly what pieces are needed and the processes for bringing those pieces together.

The illustration below can help you identify many important areas related to your spiritual maturity. Notice that the Holy Spirit is the center of your spiritual development. The arrows pointing outward indicate how the Holy Spirit empowers all aspects of spiritual development. Spiritual development helps your faith become deeply personal, touching the crucial areas of your life. Every area of your life is impacted by God's transforming power.

The Growing Disciple



As a growing disciple, you invite God's transforming touch upon every area of life. God helps you bring together the important pieces of a growing and productive Christian life. Your Christianity is increasingly a powerful public witness. You are becoming a true disciple both in character and in testimony to others.

The Victorious Disciple

Objective 7:

Point out six principles that empower the victorious disciple.

God is always at work in the life of a growing Christian to secure spiritual progress that promises spiritual victory. Always keep in mind that the power of the overcoming life—the Holy Spirit—lives in you. Thus, victory over any temptation is never in question when you realize that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

The following biblical principles are encouraging teachings that develop discipleship. Memorize these short principles and carefully study the Scriptures that support them.

1. *Good decisions have good results.* Poor decisions regarding personal behaviors and important relationships can endanger your spiritual growth.
2. *God's nearness is the reward of prayerful living.* When we make even the smallest effort to move closer to God in prayer, He responds by moving closer to us (James 4:7).
3. *The wayward desires of the flesh are banished through godly behaviors.* Godly behaviors include prayer, Bible study, and faithful church attendance (Matthew 16:24–25; Romans 6:11–14; Galatians 5:24–25).
4. *Wholesome relationships insure wholesome living* (Ephesians 5:1–7).

5. *Diligently seeking guidance and empowerment from the Holy Spirit guarantees a victorious life* (Galatians 5:16–18).
6. *The victorious life is achieved through an understanding of God's provisional love for the individual* (Romans 8:31–39).

Conclusion

You have discovered in this lesson that growth as a disciple demands spiritual excellence. A healthy and productive disciple is constantly reading, praying, listening, and researching valuable resources that empower personal spiritual growth. You must use every resource God has given you in order to answer a powerful question: *What does Jesus expect from me as His disciple?* Answering this question provides the deep joy and peace achievable only through a life ordered by the Master.

Reference List

Murray, Andrew. 1982. *God's Will: Our Dwelling Place*. Springdale, PA: Whitaker House.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Matthew 16:24–25

Romans 6:11–14

John 14:26

Galatians 5:22–23

John 15:5

Hebrews 10:25

John 16:13

James 4:7–8

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *The three dimensions of discipleship discussed in lesson two include*
 - a) *witnessing, joining a church, and ministry tasks.*
 - b) *biblical instruction, relationships, and Christian responsibility.*
 - c) *love, joy, and peace.*
2. *The most important relationship for spiritual fruitfulness and productivity is your*
 - a) *relationship with Jesus.*
 - b) *relationship to the church.*
 - c) *relationship with other Christians.*
3. *The term disciple refers to one who*
 - a) *studies the Bible for long hours.*
 - b) *investigates Christianity.*
 - c) *follows Jesus and obeys His teachings.*
4. *The committed disciple is a follower of Jesus who*
 - a) *is certain to attend church faithfully.*
 - b) *takes classes about world religions.*
 - c) *becomes increasingly aware of many Christian concerns and responds to them unconditionally.*
5. *The habit of Bible study is*
 - a) *not that important to a growing believer.*
 - b) *a practice for only the most spiritual leaders among us.*
 - c) *an extremely important practice for every growing believer.*
6. *An excellent way to remember what you study in the Bible is to*
 - a) *take notes for immediate reinforcement and future reference.*
 - b) *read the Bible only a few minutes at a time.*
 - c) *ask others their opinions about what you read.*

7. *Godly relationships with other disciples are*
 - a) *really not that important for the growing Christian.*
 - b) *to be avoided.*
 - c) *important to Christian growth and maturity.*
8. *The fundamental call from which all ministry emerges is*
 - a) *apostleship.*
 - b) *discipleship.*
 - c) *evangelism.*
9. *The center of spiritual growth for committed disciples is*
 - a) *reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit in daily Christian living.*
 - b) *steady church attendance.*
 - c) *reading many Christian books.*
10. *The greatest reward of a prayerful life is*
 - a) *others complimenting you for a powerful prayer life.*
 - b) *fellowship with Jesus.*
 - c) *getting everything you want from God.*

ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *b* (2.1)
2. *a* (2.1)
3. *c* (2.1)
4. *c* (2.3)
5. *c* (2.4)
6. *a* (2.4)
7. *c* (2.5)
8. *b* (2.6)
9. *a* (2.6)
10. *b* (2.7)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

Howard Young has served as a senior pastor in churches in Oregon and Wisconsin and as a missionary to Alaska. He also served as president of Trinity Bible College in North Dakota and associate professor with North Central University, Minneapolis, MN. Dr. Young holds two doctorates, one with a core in leadership and the other in education.

