

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disciples

The Master Disciple Maker – Part VIII

Selected Scripture

## Introduction

We have, in our recent discussions, taken a close look at Jesus' disciples. We have studied the doubters and looked at the hotheads; the impassioned. We have looked at the skeptical and the analytical. We have looked as closely as we can at these men. Today, we will complete this study of the disciples.

Our focus will primarily be on ourselves today. Where are we to be as disciples of Jesus Christ? What would mark us as His disciples? What makes it clear to not only us, but to the world that we are really following Jesus Christ?

The answer to these questions is really not difficult to determine. Let me give two characteristics; two marks that will be evident in the lives of those who say, "Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ."

## A True Disciple is a Student

The first characteristics of someone who considers themselves to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is that they are a student; they are one who learns. This characteristic is found in Matthew chapter 11.

Look at Matthew 11:28-29a. Jesus has just had a discussion with His disciples and He says,

***Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me . . .***

The original Greek word for "learn" is the word "manthano". This word is related to "mathetes," which means "a disciple," and could be literally translated "a learner". This is someone who is a student of whatever they happen to be following. Whatever we follow in life is that which we are a disciple of.

Jesus is saying, "If you are My disciple, you will be learning from Me."

## Characteristics of a disciple who is a student

Now to be a learner involves two other things. Let me give two sub-points to this characteristic of being a student or a learner.

1. Number one is that a disciple who is a student is submissive.

Jesus basically says, in these verses, "If you follow Me, I'm going to place a yoke upon you."

A yoke was a hand made, hand hewn piece of wood that fit the shoulders and the neck of the oxen that pulled the mill beam or pulled the plow. It was this piece of equipment that allowed the master or farmer to guide the animal.

Jesus says, "If you want to be My disciple, let Me fit a yoke around your neck in order to guide you into useful work."

It is not a surprise that in this early day, the term "yoke" was used as a metaphor for submission; a metaphor for the individual who was being guided by someone else. In fact, in Christ's day, it was not uncommon to talk about a student who was under the yoke of his teacher.

One ancient manuscript told of a rabbi who said, "Put your neck under the yoke and allow your soul to receive instruction."

The idea then, is one of submission. The disciple, as a true learner of Christ, has allowed Christ to fit a yoke about his neck.

2. Number two is that a disciple who is a learner is teachable.

Notice carefully the text in Matthew 11:29a again. Jesus says,

***Take My yoke upon you and learn . . .***

The word "learn" is again, "manthano," which is related to "mathetes". A disciple is synonymous with someone who is learning; someone who has submitted himself to the teaching of a teacher and is, in fact, dedicated to learning.

The question for us, as disciples in this day, is, “Are we learning from Jesus Christ? If so, what are we learning from Him?”

A disciple is a learner who never stops studying. If we stop studying, we stop following because we have stopped learning.

### **Ways a disciple can live what they learn**

Now true learning involves much more than just listening, it involves living. In fact, if we are not living God’s word, it is proof that we are not really learning His word.

Turn in your Bible to the book of Colossians. This book gives us the idea that we are supposed to put into practice that which we are learning. If we are disciples, we are living what we have learned.

Let us briefly look at three ways we are to be living what we are learning. In William’s New Testament, the verb is translated with the great English word “practice”. In the book of Colossians, he says, three times, that we, as learners who are living what we are learning, are to practice certain things.

1. First, a disciple who is living what they are learning is to practice living prudently.

This is the translation of Colossians 4:5 in William’s New Testament. In other words, “practice living wisely before the world.”

This is an outward activity. The world observes and sees whether or not we are really disciples of Christ.

2. Secondly, a disciple who is living what they are learning is to practice occupying their mind with things above.

Colossians 3:2 in William’s translation tells us this. It is an inward arrangement. The thoughts in our minds are to be arranged in such a way that the priority and the focus are things related to our teacher, Jesus Christ.

3. Thirdly, a disciple who is living what they are learning is to practice being thankful.

William’s translation of Colossians 3:15 gives us this, which is an upward attitude.

We, as disciples, are to practice, practice, practice what we are learning from Jesus Christ.

You have probably heard the word “practice” from your parents or from your coach or from your

teacher or from someone who is teaching you. I remember hearing it related to a musical instrument.

“Practice the piano,” were the dreaded words in my life. I had a piano teacher who was from the old school in terms of practice. Now if you take piano lessons or have a child involved in piano, it will probably startle you that I took lessons for two dollars and fifty cents per hour. That was the way it was then.

My teacher was an individual who was very strict. She had a long pencil that she would use, if I did not hold my fingers right, to whack my hands. She had not read the book, *How to Win Friends and Influence . . .* piano students, or something like that! “Whack!”

This teacher demanded that I practice one hour every day. Kids today, practice fifteen or twenty minutes per day, but I had to practice an hour a day. My parents had bought into this lie, so if I did not practice an hour a day, they would not forget. The next day, I would have to practice for two hours. If I missed again, I would practice three hours the next day.

I remember, in my stunted childhood, that I would sometimes spend four or five hours playing the piano on a Saturday. I even ran away from home one time, because I had five hours to practice and decided it would be better to leave home than do it. I remember trying to explain to the neighborhood kids what I was doing all day on Saturday, while they played ball. I did not want them to think that I did not have my parents under control, so I would make up some kind of story.

When I finally graduated from high school and went to college, that was the end, of course, of piano lessons – I thought. However, at college, I thought of all the money my parents had invested in my piano lessons and I now enjoyed playing, so perhaps I should take a piano course. So I knocked on the door of the teacher that I was told would be the best teacher at the college from which to take lessons. She was involved in a lesson when I knocked on her door – I did not know the system. I said, “Ma’am, I’ve been told that you are a great teacher. I’d like to take piano lessons from you.”

She said, “My calendar is full.”

So I replied, “If I might interrupt, maybe I could just play a tune for you. They told me you’re the best.”

She said, “Well, okay.”

She was an elderly woman and was rather irritated, but she had her student get up. I sat down and played the best thing I had in my repertoire. She cleared her throat and said, "I'll make some room in my calendar."

However, she then said, and I have taught piano and know exactly what she was doing with these words, "If I am to teach you, then you are to practice two to four hours."

Before I could say, "That's a piece of cake – I have practiced six hours in a day before," she said, "Every single day."

I had a decision to make. The decision was in the question that I asked myself, "Am I satisfied with how well I can play the piano?"

The answer came back loud and clear, "Yes!"

In truth, I cannot play the piano any better today than I could as an eleventh grader. Why? Because I stopped practicing; I stopped learning.

We, in our Christianity, have the misconception that living like Christ will come naturally because we are following Him. However, the only thing that comes naturally is falling, not walking. Living like Christ takes muscle; it takes work and coordination.

Paul exhorts the Colossian church, and us, to practice, practice, practice in order to bear in life, the marks of individuals who follow Christ.

I went, a moment ago, to the church nursery. A three month old baby was in one of the cribs. There is no more frustrated person on planet earth than a three month old. The moms put them down on a pallet on the floor and roll them over on their stomach and immediately, what happens? They do a balancing act on their tummy. Their hands and feet shoot out and they start to wobble and kick. What are they doing? If they could talk, they would say, "I see you moving and I desperately want to move."

Finally, after a few months, they land that arm on the carpet and grab and pull a little bit, and they say, "Hey, I can move forward just a tad here," as they start to work on it.

This is like one of my boys who never learned how to crawl. He did the GI Joe crawl. He pulled himself along with one arm. Finally, pulling himself over to a couch, as an eight month old, he discovered, "Hey, I can pull myself up and I can stand here."

If a nine or ten month old could talk, we could ask then, "What are you trying to do?"

Would you expect him to say, "Well, nothing. I've decided to give up. I thought I'd try walking, but three hundred falls are enough. It's a lot more comfortable just to sit here on the floor."

You'll never hear these words from the lips of a little baby. They are committed to exercising every potential – not just to make motion, but to make forward movement.

One thing that scares me, ladies and gentlemen, is the thought that our church might become a church that makes an awful lot of motion, without any real forward movement.

Look at I Timothy 4:6, which gives a principle needed to make motion; to move forward. This is the principle of discipline and effort in the life of the believer.

***In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.***

It is implied in this verse that this is to those who are following as disciples. Continue to I Timothy 4:7 and note the last phrase.

***But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;***

The word "discipline" comes from the original Greek word "gumnazo," from which we get our word "gymnasium" or "gymnastics". This is saying, "Get involved in the gymnasium and exercise in that which produces spiritual strength; godliness."

Look at the illustration of this thought in I Timothy 4:8.

***for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.***

When you get your Bibles out, ladies and gentlemen, and go to that corner or that place where you study, what are you doing? You are going to the spiritual gym to work out. When you go to that corner somewhere and pray, what are you doing? You are spiritually exercising yourself unto godliness. It is work.

Have you ever felt guilty that it was such hard work to read and study and pray? This is the way it

really is. It is the reason Paul says to Timothy, in I Timothy 4:10a,

***For it is for this [godliness] we labor and we strive . . .***

This is the way Paul refers to spiritual exercise, as he writes this passage, dripping, in a sense, from spiritual sweat.

Now we have talked about submission and teachability, but what is the curriculum? Turn back to Matthew 11 for the curriculum. I love this. Look again at Matthew 11:28-29.

***Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you [submission] and learn from Me [teachability], for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.***

Did you catch this? Jesus says, “for *I* am gentle and *I* am humble”. He says, “learn from Me,” which could be translated, “learn *of* Me”. So what is the curriculum? It is the life of Jesus Christ.

For those of us who are teachable; for those of us who are submissive, we will sit at the feet of the One who is, at the same time, the teacher and the subject.

One professor at Stanford University said, “The greatest means of teaching is through modeling.”

How amazing it is that Jesus knew this without ever having attended Stanford University!

Jesus basically said to these men, “You follow Me and take a good, long, three year look at My life, with nothing hidden, and I will model for you what I want you to then live.”

Now some of you perceptive people have already sneaked a look at Matthew 11:30 and are saying, “Stephen has been talking about sweat and striving and laboring and work and discipline, but I’ve already read ahead and have a problem with that.”

Matthew 11:30a says,

***For My yoke is easy . . .***

Before you tar and feather me, let me tell you that the word “easy” can be translated “pleasurable; delightful.” Jesus’ yoke is at the same time, demanding and delightful.

Now how can this be? Think back and remember a high school or college or graduate school class that was demanding. I was in one graduate school class that was *very* demanding. It was a class on the life of

Christ, which was taught by a man named Dr. Dwight Pentecost. There were about seventy-five men and women in the class and we would sit and listen to this man teach for an hour and a half, without a break, while sitting on hard chairs. He was in his seventies and never used a stitch of notes. We would read certain things and do research outside of class and come prepared. Our reading was in a very thick book entitled, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, which you should have in your library. Dr. Pentecost never pulled any punches with students and if you raised your hand to ask a question, you had better be prepared to justify your reason for asking it. He was that kind of teacher – *very* demanding.

Dr. Pentecost had the habit of sitting at his lectern with his roll book, and asking questions like, “Would you explain to me what Jesus meant, in light of these kingdom principles, to that particular Pharisee?”

He would then say, “Let’s see . . . Mr. Davey, would you give us that?”

I would think, “Oh my, I thought I was hidden from his view behind some other student.”

He always called us “Mister”. I think it was a cynical comment. If you did not have the answer, he would say, “Mr. Davey, you would have known the answer, if you had read the reading for today.”

So, in front of seventy-five people, you felt quite small.

However, at any time, while taking this class, had you asked me, “What do you think about the class on the life of Christ?” I would have said, “It is fantastic. I love it.”

You might respond, “Wait a second! It’s embarrassing at times and it’s difficult and there is a lot of work involved.”

I would answer, “Yes, it is demanding, yet at the same time, delightful.”

Why? It was delightful, even though demanding, for two reasons. One reason was the teacher, who was a man that I admired and respected. The second reason was the subject, which was the life of Christ. Could any subject be more delightful?

So Jesus Christ is telling His disciples, “I’m giving you something very demanding, but you’re going to find it, at the same time, delightful, if you will submit to it and if you will be teachable.”

We have spent a lot of time on this first characteristic of a disciple; that is, the fact that a

disciple is a student. Let us move on to the next characteristic.

## A True Disciple is a Reproducer

The second characteristic of someone who considers themselves to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is that they are a reproducer. Let us take a brief look at two passages that tell us this.

Turn to Matthew chapter 28, where we will look at verses 16 through 20. We refer to this passage as the “great commission”. I heard one man refer to it as “the great omission” and I think he is correct.

Look at Matthew 28:16.

***But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.***

What is the setting of this? The setting is post-resurrection. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave and is on His way to ascending back to the Father.

The participants are the eleven disciples. Judas has already taken his life.

There are two responses to notice.

The first response in Matthew 28:17a.

***When they saw Him, they worshiped Him;...***

The second response is in Matthew 28:17b.

***... but some were doubtful.***

After reading this second response, we might think, “You’ve got to be kidding! After all that has occurred, the disciples get to the mountain where the post-resurrected, pre-ascended Christ is in visible form – and some are *doubting*; some of these eleven still have a problem?”

I think this is a little different from the doubting that we studied in our last discussion, which was of Thomas. This doubting is not that Jesus Christ is alive. I think this doubting is that they can perform the commission that they are about to receive. It is not that they had less confidence in Jesus Christ, but rather that there were some, I think, who had very little confidence in themselves.

So what does Jesus Christ do? Does He come with a big stick and give them a lecture? No. Jesus Christ, in effect, says, “Okay, men, you’re ready. Let’s go win the world.”

This gives us reason to pause long enough to look at the implication. This implies that Jesus Christ has chosen to use imperfect people. He will use us to serve Him before we are totally sanctified. This is

wonderful, is it not? Jesus will employ us in His service before we really have it all together. This is His plan.

We have the idea that God gives the really big jobs to the super saints. Look at Matthew 28:17 again.

***When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.***

Then notice, in Matthew 28:18, Jesus moves right in with confidence. What makes Him confident? Underline Jesus’ statement.

***And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”***

We forget that Jesus has been given all authority on earth. God is not biting His nails in heaven. He is not up there saying, “I sure hope this discipleship plan works. I hope the church makes it.”

Jesus Christ is saying, “I have all authority in heaven and, by the way, I have it all together on planet earth.”

This should have settled the hearts of these disciples a bit.

Jesus then gives the commission. Note the command, in Matthew 28:19.

***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, . . .***

We normally consider the word “go” to be the command, but it is a present participle that should read “having gone”. This is not the command. The command is to “make disciples”. The word “go” implies that we are going. This could read, “Now that you are going, make disciples . . .” or “Having gone, make disciples . . .”. Jesus *never* anticipated a disciple not going into his or her arena to make disciples. He is saying, “Having gone; now that you are in the process of going, here is the command – make disciples . . .”

How are we to make disciples? Let us look at two ways.

- First, Jesus tells us to baptize disciples.

Look at Matthew 28:19b.

***... baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,***

The word is “baptizo,” which means “to immerse”. We bring the disciple to the point at which they publicly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord.

There is a lot of debate about the meaning of this word, but I take it as literally as the word “teaching” that we will read in the next verse; as literally as the word “go” that we read in the first part of this verse.

“Baptizo” means, “to immerse”. People say to me, “I have known the Lord for twenty years and let me tell you, my friend, baptism is not a mark of maturity.”

Did you catch this? Baptism is not a mark of maturity, it is a mark of discipleship. This is the first way.

- Secondly, we are to teach disciples.

Look at II Timothy 2:2, as Paul writes to his son in the faith.

***The things which you have heard from me . . . entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

The word “entrust” is a banking term that literally means, “to make a deposit”. Paul is saying, “You have learned things from me, Timothy, that now I want you to take and deposit into the lives of other people who are also disciples.”

We, who are walking with Christ, have all had people in our lives who have made deposits in our lives. When we teach a child that something is sacred about Christ, do you know what we are doing? We are discipling that child; we are depositing into their life, things that we have learned from others. When I speak to you as I am now, I am giving things to you that have been deposited in my heart by others. It is the reason I study.

I look back at my college days and remember a gentleman by the name of Dr. Fred Afman. He had taught my father thirty-five years earlier and then, transferred to a different college where I met him. For four years, he called me by my father’s name, Keith, and I never had the nerve to correct him. I would read something in God’s word that confused me or hear some super saint say something that troubled me and I would go to this older gentleman’s office for help. Dr. Afman would say, “Keith, come on in and shut the door behind you.”

I would sit in his office and Dr. Afman would make a deposit into my heart.

Do you know what discipling is? It is taking what Jesus Christ taught you and depositing it in the hearts of others who follow Him.

The promise, in Matthew 28:20, is this,

***teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

Jesus promises, “I am with you always.”

## **Application**

Let me give one final comprehensive thought about this entire study of disciples. I hope you have caught this; I hope this has encouraged you and at the same time, challenged you. It is:

*Disciples are not perfect people, but disciples are progressing people.*

Let me tell the story of a wealthy Swiss banker named Henri Dunant. He traveled to France to meet with Napoleon to suggest that he get involved in a particular business venture. Dunant knew this venture would make both of them even more wealthy than they already were. By the time he arrived, however, Napoleon was headed for a battle that was taking place on the soil of France. So, being a young thirty year old and an enthusiastic entrepreneur, Dunant got onto his horse and began to gallop to the battlefield.

The story is told that Dunant made it to the field just as the battle was beginning. He sat alone on his horse at the top of a hill and watched the battle take place below. He heard the musket fire. He heard the screams. He saw the cavalries charge and collide. He saw men die. Dunant was so moved by the carnage of war that he stayed in France for three weeks. He helped bandage the wounded and got involved in helping children who were now without a daddy, find a place to live.

Dunant never went back to Switzerland. In fact, he gave his fortune to creating a cause that would help in times of war and need. In 1901, Henri Dunant was the recipient of the very first Nobel Peace Prize. Attached to that was a handsome sum of money. Dunant, now penniless because he had given his fortune to this cause, took that sum of money and put it right back into the cause that he had created. That cause is now known around the world as the Red Cross. Henri Dunant died in a poor house.

As I read this story, my heart was kindled with fire that we follow a cause marked by a bloodstained cross. The question is, “Are we as committed a disciple to our cause as Henri Dunant was to his?”

If we are, we will win the world and make disciples in the name of Jesus Christ.