

## DISCIPLESHIP: A PLACE TO START

During the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln often found refuge at a Presbyterian church in Washington, D.C. He would go with an aide, sit with his stovepipe hat in his lap, and never interrupt the meeting because the congregation would all be in a dither if they knew the president of the United States had come to sit in the midweek meeting. He sat off to the side, near the pastor's study, as the minister would open the scriptures and teach God's Word and would lead the congregation in worship. The war was tearing the nation apart and tearing his soul. Having just lost his own son, Lincoln was on the bottom, and he needed solace and sustenance.

As the pastor finished his message and the people began to leave, the president stood quietly and straightened his coat and took his hat in hand and began to leave. The aide stopped him and said, "What did you think of the sermon, Mr. President?" He said, "I thought the sermon was carefully thought through, eloquently delivered." The aide said, "You thought it was a great sermon?" He said, "No, I thought he failed." "He failed? Well, how? Why?" "Because he did not ask of us something great." (Bruce Larson, *What God Wants To Know*)

### INTRODUCTION:

Karl Marx wrote,  
"Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently.  
But, the point is, to change it."

The method that he suggested to be employed  
is stated by one of his followers.

"The revolutionary man is a consecrated man. He has neither his own interests nor concerns nor feelings. He has no attachments, no property, nor either a name. All for him is absorbed in a single, exclusive interest. In one thought, in one passion - Revolution." (Micheiev)

Marxism and socialism still, incredibly enough, hold sway on many campuses and institutions of policy.

The **method** was revolution  
The **means** was committed disciples.

This is a portion of a letter written  
by a young communist  
to his sweetheart  
as he was breaking up with her:

“We communists turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We don’t have the time or money for concerts, or movies or T-bone steaks or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great, over-shadowing factor, the struggle for world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life that cannot be bought by any amount of money. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity. I have already been in jail because of my ideals and if necessary, I am ready to go before a firing squad. There is one thing in which I am dead earnest: the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, my breath, my meat. I work at it in the daytime, I dream of it at night. It’s hold on me grows as time goes on. Therefore I cannot carry on a friendship or a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which guides and drives my life.”

That is a disciple!  
The idea of consecration to a cause.

THE TITLE OF OUR LESSON TODAY IS  
“Discipleship: A Place to Start”

You cannot make disciples unless you are a disciple:

Like begets Like  
Phonies attract phonies  
Half-hearted Christians run with half-hearted crowds.  
Disciples breed Disciples

Today's message is going to hit where it hurts.

Because, quite frankly, talk is cheap.

Excuses are a dime a dozen.

And the world is still lost.

Disciples breed disciples.

For how can one be a Christian  
if he's not a disciple?

It matters not how long  
or how smart  
or how sincere you are,  
the Lord has laid down the gauntlet  
and only those who run it  
can claim allegiance to Him.

To be a disciple you must know and be absolutely dedicated to:

## I. **The Essentials of Christianity**

**The Founder:** Jesus Christ

**His Goal:** To change men through the regeneration of their minds

**His Method:** Salvation through the Word

**Question:** What is the means by which the Lord employs this?

**Answer:** A disciple. A Committed, Consecrated, Dedicated  
Christian.

Not a listener. Not a spectator - A PARTICIPANT  
A committed practitioner of the faith.

## II. Let's turn to **Luke 9:23**

### A. Observations concerning Luke 9:23

**“Then [Jesus] said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**

\* These are the words of Jesus

They have come in from eternity;  
They have broken into **our** world.

- \* They are spoken to all those around Him
- \* This is an offer of relationship and salvation
- \* He is asking for a decision
- \* He spells out the essentials of discipleship

1. Deny self
2. Take up cross daily
3. Follow Jesus

### B. The essentials - One At a Time

1. The first essential is **Deny Himself**

There are two obvious words  
that we have to deal with:  
**Deny and Self.**

**First, the word Deny.**

William Barclay does a good job with this word “deny”:

“Ordinarily, we use the word ‘self denial’ in a restrictive sense. We use it to mean “doing without something” or “giving up something”. For instance: A week of self denial is a week we do without certain pleasures or luxuries usually to contribute to some good cause. But that is only a very small part of what Jesus means by self denial. To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say “No” to self and to say “Yes” to God.”

That’s simple but profound to say “**No**” to self and “**Yes**” to God!

### **Second, the word Self.**

Self - the essential person  
distinct from all other persons in identity.

Self is our personality.

It is our:

Desires  
Wants  
Motivations

Here’s another reason why baptism is so important.

Baptism is a repudiation of one’s past.

It is a rejection of  
**who** you once were  
and **how** you once lived.

This is the same idea as *denying self*.

As we have seen before,  
this idea of *denying oneself*  
is **perfectly displayed** in the life of Jesus.

In denying Himself Jesus:

- Submitted to God in everything
- He Submitted His personal:  
    pleasure  
    glorification  
    timing  
    and personal feelings
- Jesus submitted to the Father's will  
    in subjecting Himself  
    to the humiliation of the trials and the cross.

2. The second essential is [Take up your cross](#)

This of course, was a familiar **term** and **emblem**.

You could see  
someone carrying a cross  
to Golgotha almost any day.

You could hear the sounds of the dying,  
the agony of the cross,  
coming from that skull shaped mound.

The cross is synonymous with suffering.

### Philippians 3:10-11

<sup>10</sup> *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* <sup>11</sup> *and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* (Philippians 3:10-11)

You may be saying to yourself:

“I don’t want to suffer.”

“I don’t want to deny myself.”

“I can’t stand up under the pressure.”

Yes, you can.

<sup>20</sup> *But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* <sup>21</sup> *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* (1 Peter 2:20-21)

3. The third essential is [Follow me](#)

When the Lord Jesus says.

“you want to be a disciple of mine?”

Then spiritually there is something that must take place.

You must prefer my will to your will.

You must give up what you want to do **with** your life and let Me be the preeminent focus.”

We shouldn’t find ourselves believing

that we are “basically obedient”  
because we have a doctrinal pattern  
that we are faithful to.

The real question is: “Have we conformed our own  
desires,  
wants,  
and motivations  
to that of Christ’s?”

Am I obedient to the command: ‘Do exactly as I have done’?”

*<sup>5</sup> This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to  
live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:5b-6)*

How is the Lord to show Himself in this world?

Discipleship!

In my humble opinion:

We have some work to do **to be** the church of Christ of the first century.

They conquered empires  
with the one-on-one discipleship  
taught to them by the Lord.

We don’t want to become a  
doctrine obeying,  
church attending,  
controversy-driven club  
that no longer obeys  
the biblical mandate of individual responsibility  
of conforming ourselves to the very image of Jesus Christ.

You see, we don't want to the church that is basically obedient because we have the right doctrines.

Do you remember the sermon that President Lincoln commented on earlier?

He considered it a failed attempt because the minister did not call them to something great.

Well, is this sermon destined to be a failure?

Are you being called to something great?

## CONCLUSION

Robert Coleman wrote a fine book on discipleship.

It is called *Master Plan for Evangelism* and he says the following:

“Why did Jesus deliberately concentrate His life on comparatively so few people? Had He not come to save the world? With the glowing announcement of John the Baptist ringing in the ears of the multitude the Master could have immediately had a following of thousands if He had wanted them. Why then did he not capitalize on His then opportunity to enlist a mighty army of believers to take the world by storm? Surely, the Son of God could have put into place a more appealing system of mass recruitment. Is it not rather disappointing that one with all the powers of the universe at His command would live and die to save the world and yet in the end have only a few ragged disciples to show for His labor? Jesus was a realist. He realized fully the fickleness of depraved human nature. And with this knowledge, He based His evangelism on a plan that would meet the need. The multitude of discordant and bewildered souls were potentially ready to follow Him but, Jesus could not individually possibly give them the care that they needed. His only hope

was to get men engrossed in His life who would do it for Him. Hence, He concentrated Himself on those who were to be the beginning of this leadership. Though He did what He could to help the multitude, He had to devote Himself primarily to a few men rather than the masses in order that masses could at last be saved. This was the genius of His strategy.”

## CONCLUSION

Discipleship: It's the place to start.

If you're here today and haven't lived as a disciple:

It's time now to do something spiritually.

You have to give up what you want  
and let Jesus be number 1 in your life.

You must be a revolutionary,  
committed,  
dedicated disciple...

one who has a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life

It's your life,  
your business,  
your sweetheart,  
your hobby,  
your breathe,  
your meat.

If you're not a Christian, Jesus is calling you home today.

He wants you to make a decision to be a disciple.

Today He wants you to make a start.

Will you come today?

Please come while we stand and sing.

## SMALL GROUP STUDY

### Discipleship: A Place to Start

**Warm-up:** What kinds of things have been difficult for you to start? Why?

How has Jesus' faithfulness to God the Father impressed you?

#### Look at the Book

#### Luke 9:23

1. Why do you think Jesus depicts discipleship so succinctly in so few words?
2. How can one be a Christian if he/she isn't a disciple? Why?
3. How does one learn how to deny self?
4. What do you think Luke 9:23 says about the meaning of the cross?
5. What are some ways in which one can follow Jesus?

#### Closer Look

1. Have you ever found yourself believing you were "basically obedient" because you have a doctrinal pattern that you are faithful to?
2. How have you conformed your own desires, wants, and motivations to that of Christ's?

#### Looking Around

Go around the room and have each person suggest ways in which Jesus calls you to be something great

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