

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **A DISCIPLE HAS RECOGNISABLE CHARACTERISTICS**.

There are three very important things that distinguish the Christian message from all other religions in the world. **One**. Not you, but Jesus Christ earns or merits salvation in your place. **Two**. Not you, but Jesus Christ initiates and applies this complete salvation to your life. **Three**. Christians must change and genuine Christians do change! They must change their thinking, attitudes, words and actions. Such Christians are called 'disciples'.

(S) **POINT 1. DISCIPLES ARE FOLLOWERS AND LEARNERS.**

**First. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ.** The call of Jesus to discipleship has no social barriers. Among his original disciples were sinful fishermen, like Peter, James and John (Matthew 4:19, Luke 5:8), a political zealot, called Simon and a despised tax collector, called Matthew. The call to discipleship is *a call to follow Jesus*. It is a call to be with Jesus Christ wherever he goes (Mark 3:14). The powerful and direct impression of the person of Jesus, together with his powerful teaching, impels people to become his disciples (John 1:45-51, Luke 5:1-11).

**Second. A disciple is a learner of Jesus Christ.** The word 'disciple' generally means 'a Christian' in the book of Acts, but in the Gospels it has a more specific meaning. The original meaning of the word 'disciple' is 'learner', 'student' or 'apprentice'. A disciple learns by seeing, hearing and imitating. He learns as he follows Jesus. He observes the life and ministry of Jesus from nearby (John 13:13-15, Matthew 4:23). The original disciples heard his teaching, saw how he taught people, heard how he answered people's questions and saw how he rebuked or encouraged people. They saw his love for people and how he helped the helpless. They were eyewitnesses of his authority and power over the forces of nature, over the mighty rulers and the wise men of this world and over the devil and his demons. And finally, they were witnesses of his love to die and his power to be resurrected from the dead. They learned, not simply to increase their knowledge, but to obey the teachings of Jesus. As they obeyed his teaching, Jesus changed their whole lives! Later in the early church, the continuing influence of Jesus on their lives was very evident. In Acts 4:13 we read, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

(T) **How do disciples learn?**

(S) In the New Testament disciples learn from both the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ and the apostles. In Philippians 4:9 Paul says, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice".

(T) **POINT 2. SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE.**

A disciple is *a learner and follower* of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught that a true disciple *has specific recognisable characteristics*. Let us discover these characteristics from the Bible.

**First characteristic. A disciple believes in Jesus Christ.**

In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And in John 12:36 he says, "Put your *trust* in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." Jesus called people to believe in him. A characteristic of a disciple of Jesus is faith in Jesus Christ. Stopping to follow Jesus actively is an expression of unbelief (John 6:60-71).

(S) **Second characteristic. A disciple is obedient to Jesus Christ.**

In John 8:31-32 Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is obedience to Christ's teaching. The disciples are never presented as engaged in discussions with Jesus as the disciples of the Greek philosophers as well as the disciples of the Jewish teachers did. They listened and asked questions only when they did not understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus determined the direction of their teaching and training. Decisive was their acceptance of Christ's teaching and unquestionable obedience to his authority. The teacher-student relationship was paralleled by their master-slave relationship (John 13:14-16).

(T) **Third characteristic. A disciple serves Jesus Christ in his assigned task.**

In John 12:26 Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be." A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is being a servant. The call to discipleship was a call to work together with Jesus. He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." They were sent out two by two to

proclaim the gospel and serve people in their needs (Matthew 10, Luke 10). They had to work hard with the talents entrusted to them and to serve all kinds of people in need (Matthew 25). Each disciple was assigned with his own God-given task (Mark 13:34). The disciples never sought to be more than God's fellow-workers (1 Corinthians 3:9).

**(S) Fourth characteristic. A disciple is characterised by Christian love.**

In John 13:34-35 Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is love in all his relationships. This kind of love is self-sacrificial and unselfish like the love of Jesus. Love is patient and kind. Love is humble, modest and generous. Love has good manners and is self-controlled. Love forgives and rejoices in the progress other people make. Love trusts people and is hopeful that God can change people and situations. Love perseveres in doing good to people and in influencing people to be their best for God and others.

**(T) Fifth characteristic. A disciple has an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.**

In John 15:5-8,16 Jesus says, "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. ... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." This passage has several characteristics of a disciple.

A disciple remains in Jesus Christ. To remain in Jesus means to accept Jesus Christ into your heart and to exert yourself to maintain a personal relationship with Christ and the Bible. Whoever has only an outward relationship with Jesus Christ, will be thrown in the fire.

A disciple bears much and lasting fruit. The main lesson is that a disciple will bear spiritual fruit only when he remains in Christ. It is by bearing *much fruit* and *lasting fruit* that a Christian shows himself to be a true disciple of Christ. 'Fruit' in the Bible has different meanings: One. The fruit that is produced by those who preach the gospel is new converts (Colossians 1:6). Two. The fruit produced by those who make disciples is "lasting fruit" or mature Christians (John 15:16). Three. The fruit produced by the Holy Spirit is Christian character (Galatians 5:22-23). By remaining in Christ, the disciples bear *much fruit* and by the pruning of God they bear even *more fruit!* This pruning consists of God's rebuke, correction and discipline through hardships. By continually caring for the new believers and by building them up the disciples bear *lasting fruit*, that is, Christians, who are mature and who persevere. In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches that in some disciples his words yield 100 fold, in others 60 fold and in still others 30 fold. That is because not all Christians are equally repentant, trustful, faithful or courageous. Not all Christians are equally productive in evangelising or discipling other people. Not all Christians have the same personality, circumstances, tasks or spiritual gifts.

A disciple is continually controlled and changed by the words of Christ, that is, the Bible. Christ's Word cleanses, that is, justifies the new disciple (John 15:3). Christ's Word should so control and influence the disciple's mind, heart and behaviour that he is continuously changing and permanently changed.

A disciple prays according to Christ's will. Only when the disciple remains in Christ and Christ's word remains in him, will he receive answers to his prayers. He will also pray for fruit and bear fruit in answer to his prayers.

**(S) Sixth characteristic. A disciple changes and develops Christian character.**

In Luke 6:39-42, Jesus tells a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student (disciple) is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your own brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye', when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is learning and training of character. A disciple must first change himself before God can use him to change others. A disciple gives attention to his own weaknesses and failures, before he corrects others. His goal is to become Christlike in his character and behaviour.

**(T) Seventh characteristic. A disciple is characterised by self-denial and self-sacrifice.**

In Luke 9:23-26, Jesus said to them all, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is self-denial and self-sacrifice. His only commitment is to glorify Christ every day, by preaching Christ and by accepting the rejection, shame and suffering it brings.

**(S) Eighth characteristic. A disciple is completely committed to Jesus Christ.**

In Luke 9:57-62 we read, "As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay

his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” A disciple of Jesus is completely committed to Jesus Christ.

The first aspirant disciple was too eager to follow Jesus and had neglected to count the cost of discipleship. He saw the crowds following Jesus, the miracles and the enthusiasm of people and wanted to be closely associated to Jesus who was the centre of all this action. But as the gospel story develops, Judea rejected him (John 5:18), Galilee cast him out (John 6:66), Gadara begged him to leave their district (Matthew 8:34), Samaria refused to give him lodging (Luke 9:53), earth would not have him (Matthew 27:23) and finally even heaven forsook him (Matthew 27:46). Permanent discipleship implies struggle, rejection and suffering.

The second aspirant disciple was not ready to follow Jesus. On the one hand he wanted to become a close follower of Jesus like the apostles. On the other hand he *set a condition* for following Jesus. He first wanted to go and bury his father, who had just died. Jesus wanted to impress on this particular man’s mind the fact that he is the sovereign Lord and must be obeyed completely and without qualification, condition or reservation. He wanted this man to understand that in the kingdom of God, the spiritual family of God is more important than the earthly family ties. Remember that Jesus is saying this to a particular aspirant disciple and not to everyone listening. Jesus does not say that Christians must not provide for their parents or care for their funeral. But Jesus does say, that a Christian must love Jesus more than his parents. A disciple must obey Jesus unconditionally.

The third aspirant disciple probably did not know himself well enough. Jesus was able to see what we cannot see (John 2:25). He was able to search the hearts and read the minds of people. Jesus knew that when this aspirant disciple reached home, his family members, friends and neighbours would easily persuade him to stay home and not join Jesus.

**(T) Ninth characteristic. A disciple loves Christ more than any other relationship.**

In Luke 14:26-27,33, Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ...Anyone who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is that he loves Jesus Christ more than any other relationship. A disciple prefers Christ above his parents, his own family and even himself. This does not mean that a disciple should “hate” his parents and family, abandon them and forget them. The Bible commands Christians to care for their parents, to love their wives, to raise their children in the instruction of the Lord and to even love their neighbour as they love themselves. The word “hate” in this context means, “to prefer less” (cf. Matthew 10:37). If the choice is between a family member and Christ, the family member’s wish, no matter how ardent, should be rejected. The disciple’s supreme loyalty is to Christ and no other relationship may replace it. The disciple chooses Jesus Christ so unconditionally as his Lord and Guide that he makes all other loyalties and relationships subordinate to his loyalty and devotion to Christ.

A disciple accepts the sacrifice, rejection and suffering of being a committed Christian. This is the real meaning of “carrying his cross”. And a disciple prefers Christ above all things and ambitions of this world. A disciple is willing to give up anything and everything in order to follow Christ. He does not allow the love of money, success, fame and power to disqualify him from being a disciple of Christ. If the choice is between making money and following Christ, then the attraction of materialism and worldly success is rejected. The disciple’s supreme commitment is to Christ and no other commitment may replace it.

**(S) Tenth characteristic. A disciple proclaims Jesus Christ to other people.**

Luke 24:45-48 says, “Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” A characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus is being Christ’s witness. The disciples were not faithful mediators of religious insights or bearers of a religious tradition. They were simply the obedient witnesses of Jesus Christ. They were never among the wise philosophers or learned teachers of the law, but they were among “the little children” to whom God gave his revelation (Matthew 11:25-27).

**(T) POINT 3. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Memorise the ten characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Which characteristic should you allow the Holy Spirit to develop in you? Ask God what you should do.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. Etc.

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.