

DISCIPLESHIP IS....

By Bob Young

[Eight lessons that provide a fresh look at discipleship development. Introductory lesson plus seven outlines]

In this series, we will take a fresh look at the Gospel story with a focus on one great truth – accepting Jesus as our Master and Teacher alters the way we live. What does it mean to be a disciple? Using the words of the New Testament words, teachers have students and masters have disciples. If we are serious about being Jesus' followers or disciples, we must answer his call and claim on our lives. This series studies seven concepts that flesh out the biblical description of discipleship. After an introductory overview, I will unwrap these concepts over the next seven weeks.

Discipleship requires -- Choosing, Listening, Obeying, Imitating, Committing, Connecting, Sharing.

-1- CHOOSING. I have to make a choice. Who will be my master? Choosing a master means I completely give up control of my life. When we talk about "being a Christian," often the understanding is that it depends on us. "Being a disciple" makes clear that my life depends on my relationship with my master. I choose new priorities. Since Jesus has all authority, no one else can better instruct me, guide me, protect me. Who will be my master? I have to make a decision!

-2- LISTENING-LEARNING. As a disciple, I must listen to the Master, I must learn how to listen. I must listen to learn. How can a disciple listen to Jesus? Students listen to their teacher. Here is a primary question—since I have chosen Jesus as my master, am I really listening to Jesus?

-3- OBEYING. Obedience is key. Synonyms like yielding and submitting help us understand obedience. The teacher understands the pitfalls, the problems. Listen, obey. Jesus has the answers. The disciple follows the instructions of the Master. Am I willing to let him have control -- to lift my burdens, solve my problems, and correct my course?

-4- IMITATING. Students learn and teach what the teacher teaches. Students speak the words of the teacher. Disciples become like their Master. Following Jesus means we are imitators. We become like Jesus by changing our nature (not through masks, the basic meaning of the word "hypocrisy"). Disciples—followers—imitators, what a challenge! Do I look like Jesus? Do I do what he did? Are his values my values? His goals my goals? Am I an authentic disciple?

-5- COMMITTING. By definition, disciples are "all in." No half-hearted discipleship! The word "Christian" has become impotent. We hear talk about uninvolved Christians, non-attending Christians. Impossible! Discipleship is whole-hearted—by definition!

-6- CONNECTING. Students who enjoy the same teacher spend time together—camaraderie, talking about the teachings, focused on points of commonality. Disciples spending time together because they are disciples—remembering, sharing, encouraging, focused on what unites them. A bane of the modern church—too many "church" activities that say nothing about and have nothing to do with our common faith and allegiance! The earliest disciples assembled specifically—time, activities, why, how. The church has a lot of learn. Many churches have redefined the connections that disciples share.

-7- SHARING. A primary characteristic of disciples—a disciple makes other disciples. If I am not actively involved in making other disciples, I must ask myself if I am an authentic disciple.

DISCIPLESHIP REQUIRES CHOOSING WHO WILL BE YOUR TEACHER (#1)

By Bob Young

Introduction

“We are at a point in Christianity where people do not care if you can back it up with the Bible. Their feelings, desires, and emotions override what Scripture says. They don’t follow Christ, they follow self. They do not follow Christ because they do not understand who He is and because they do not respect his total authority.”

- The essence of discipleship is follow-ship. Whom will I follow? Who will be my teacher? my boss?
- Authentic, genuine discipleship requires a choice. I choose my teacher, I choose my instructor. Who can guide me, tell me what to know, how to do it? I must decide.
- No one is a disciple who does not choose to be a disciple. A choice is essential, necessary. There are no accidental disciples. An impossibility: “I accidentally became a disciple!”
- The first step in being a disciple is to answer the question, “Who will be my master?”
- Disciples have teachers; servants or slaves have masters.
- We struggle with discipleship because we do not understand the Bible terms, “master” and “Lord.”
- No man can serve two masters, Matt. 6, do we get it?

Choosing a master means I give up total control of my life, there is no room for a second master, there is not even room for me! There are no disloyal, half-hearted, uncommitted disciples.

- Focusing the problem: when we speak of “being a Christian,” often the understanding is that it depends on us. “Being a disciple” makes clear that my life depends on my relationship with my master.
- I choose to adopt the priorities of my master. No uninvolved disciples.
- The master has all authority my life. No disobedient disciples.

Jesus has all authority (Matt. 28:18). No one else can better instruct me, guide me, protect me.

If you choose Jesus as your master, you will be compelled to ask what he wants you to do (Matt. 28).

What are his commands, what are his instructions?

Let’s talk about choice, how to make a choice, what factors are involved, how to avoid a bad choice.

I want you to make a viable choice. You owe it to yourself to make a good choice. To make a good choice and being a disciple of Jesus, it will be valuable to review some basic Bible truths.

- God loved you so much he gave Jesus, Jn 3:16-17; 1:1,14; God the Father gave his Son, Jn 5:18; Jesus is divine.
- The identity of God as three persons in one is not easy to grasp, but what we can grasp is that the words of God the Father are the words of Jesus are the words of the Holy Spirit, Jn 14:23,24,25,26; 16:13
- The words given in Scripture are all we need in order to obey Jesus. The Bible is complete, 2 Tim 3:16-17

Many people will make the wrong choice, Mt. 7:13,14,15, 21-23

Choosing Jesus means respecting his authority, hearing and doing his words, Matt. 7:26-27

Choosing to be a disciple of Jesus may at times make your life more difficult, Mt. 10:34-38

Various versions of Jesus’ teachings are set forth in our world, Gal. 1:8-9, not by angels or messengers but by family, friends, religious leaders. Choosing Jesus may bring conflict with those we love.

Remember who has authority. Jesus has authority. The words of Jesus have authority.

No other master has more compassion and concern, desire to make your life easy and bearable, Matt. 11:28-29

Who will be your master? What will you choose? Will you accept Jesus as your Lord, Master?

First lesson summarized, a choice is necessary, you must decide for yourself, here are some basics—

- God loves us; God sent his Son, Jesus, who shares the divine nature and has all authority
- Jesus brought the words of God, gave them to the Holy Spirit who gave them to the apostles (Bible), all truth
- The Bible (all truth) is dependable, no additions or subtractions are necessary, none are allowed
- Many people are mistaken and will not go to heaven; I must follow the beliefs and practices of the Bible
- Being a disciple and going to heaven means I must learn and do what Jesus commands

OK, I have decided. I want Jesus to be my Teacher. How do I listen to Jesus? Discipleship is listening -- next lesson in this series. Once I accept Jesus as Lord, another question comes. How can I be in a place where God will accept me?

DISCIPLESHIP REQUIRES LISTENING TO AND LEARNING FROM THE TEACHER (#2)

By Bob Young

Introduction

I hope you have studied the first lesson in series. We are seeking to be disciples, understand, grow, develop. First step: choose, accept Jesus as your authority. Accept him as your guide, wisdom, direction. Accept Jesus as Lord!

Step One: make a good choice. Here is a brief review of basic truths: God loves us, beware of false teachers, Jesus is God's Son and has all authority, authentic disciples let Jesus have complete control of their lives, beliefs which contradict Jesus' teachings and the Bible must be rejected, disciples are always ready to listen and learn.

Once you accept Jesus as Lord, how can you put yourself in a place where Jesus accepts you? This the concept of covenant, a bi-directional agreement. What is the next step toward discipleship? Genuine disciples listen and learn! How do I listen to Jesus? listen to the words of Jesus? How? Where do I find the words of Jesus?

This is a Bible study--more detailed than what you normally hear in a study of discipleship, but essential to answer questions and help with misunderstandings. Many do not know what it means to listen to Jesus as the Teacher.

God gave the law to Israel through Moses, Exod. 34:27,28; 20:19; Deut. 5:1

- God gave the Old Testament covenant (Ten Commandments) to Israel, not to Gentiles, not to Christians
- The law was supposed to last only until the seed (Christ) should come, Gal. 3:16-19
- Jesus came to fulfill (complete) the law; the law would not pass away until all was fulfilled, Matt. 5:17,18
- Jesus did not say that Law would never pass away, but that it would pass away when it was fulfilled
- Jesus came to fulfill the law, Jesus did what he came to do

Jesus came bringing grace and truth; the law came through Moses, John 1:17

- This is my beloved Son, listen to him! Matt. 17, Matt. 3. Listen to the words of Jesus. Seek God through Jesus.

The Old Testament legal system was a wall of separation and enmity between Jews and Gentiles, Eph. 2:11-19

- Jesus came to abolish the barrier (the Old Testament decrees that the Jews followed) and thus to bring unity
- All people now have access to God and fellowship with one another through the death of Jesus, by grace and truth, not through the Ten Commandments.

Is it possible to follow the Old Testament Law and follow (be a disciple of) Jesus at the same time?

- Rom. 7:1-4, can a woman have two husbands at the same time?
- The Law included the Ten Commandments, Rom. 7:6, 7
- Through faith in Christ, Jews were released from the law, Christians were never bound by the law
- The law lasted until Christ, it was fulfilled, it passed away when it was fulfilled, Jesus abolished the barrier
- The covenant and ministry of Jesus is a better covenant than the Old Testament, Heb. 8:6, 7
- A covenant becomes effective with the death of the testament maker, Heb. 9:15-17. The New Testament became effective when Jesus died on the cross.

We must listen to Jesus

- God does not excuse ignorance, Acts 17:30-31
- At Jesus' coming, what will matter is to know God and to obey the Good News of Jesus, 2 Thess. 1:7-10
- Sincerity is not enough, sincerity does not determine if I am right or wrong in my beliefs
- Being sincere and doing good works will not guarantee that I am pleasing to God, Matt. 7:21-23
- Jesus is the only way, John 14:6, 15
- Can you obey Jesus if you do not know what his commandments are?
- The words of grace and truth, the words of Jesus, are found in the New Testament.
- These are the words that will judge us, John 12:47-48
- These are the instructions we must hear, listen to, and follow, Matt. 11:28-29.

#1--Discipleship means making a choice—accepting Jesus.

#2--Discipleship means listening and learning—understanding what Jesus wants; this desire points us to the New Testament where we learn the will of Jesus.

#3--Discipleship means obeying — responding to Jesus in order to put myself where Jesus will accept me. What does it mean to obey, to yield my life to Jesus as my Lord, Master? How? That is the next lesson in this series.

DISCIPLESHIP REQUIRES OBEYING, YIELDING AND SUBMITTING TO YOUR TEACHER (#3)

By Bob Young

Introduction

I like to explain Bible concepts with everyday illustrations. What is the meaning of a yield sign? The problem is that two distinct forces may conflict. Yield signs show up at intersections, who has to yield? You do not yield to traffic that is going the same way you are going. This is an illustration of what it means to be a disciple — totally yielded to God.

As we mature in discipleship, many days our lives pretty much run the same direction that God is going, we are learning, growing, maturing. We are moving the same direction. We have made a choice, we have listened, we want to obey. But, as human nature goes, there comes a time when what God wants and what I want diverge.

Through the years, I have appreciated more and more the advice I received as a young preacher—do something today that God wants you to do that you would prefer not to do! That is a mark of discipleship!

But I am getting ahead of the story. I have begun with conclusion rather than introduction.

Review

I express my love for Jesus when I choose him, when I give him total authority over my life.

I express my love for Jesus when I listen to him and learn from him.

I express my love for Jesus when I yield, when I do what he says; John 15:14; 14:15

A study of yielding (obeying, submitting) brings us face to face with three essential concepts of discipleship SIN, resulting in broken relationships

- Sin separates us from God.
- Refusing to do right is sin; doing what is wrong is sin.
- Sin results in spiritual death.
- Sin is person-specific, we do not inherit sin.
- The wages of sin are also specific, paid to the one who earns them.
- Sin is terrible in the sight of God because he is holy and he calls us to holiness.

REPENTANCE, seeking change

God's kindness and goodness are designed to lead us to repentance, Rom. 2:4.

Matt. 21:28-30, we must listen AND do.

Repentance is a change of heart toward God and away from sinful deeds, 2 Cor. 7.

Repentance involves change, not just remorse.

Repentance is the result of godly sorrow, repentance is distinct from worldly sorrow.

Godly sorrow produces repentance which leads to salvation.

RESTORATION, RECONCILIATION, RE-CREATION

- We need forgiveness of sins, which is only possible through the blood of Jesus.
- The blood of Jesus is proof of God's love for us.
- Justification is impossible without the blood of Jesus.
- The gospel must be preached and accepted, the gospel must be obeyed.

Romans 6 makes the connection between the gospel and yielding even clearer — 6:1-4, 11-14. In Romans 6, yielding and obeying have the same meaning.

You will notice that Romans 6 also connects discipleship and imitating — we will study this part of Romans 6 in the next lesson.

Conclusion

The example of the earliest disciples shows us the discipleship process (Acts 2:36-42, 47). Certain knowledge, making a decision, listening/learning, seeking a change, conviction, commitment, and continuing faithfulness.

Step #3 — yield, obey. The teacher understands the pitfalls, the problems. Listen, obey. Jesus has the answers.

The disciple follows the instructions of the Master. Am I willing to let him have control -- to lift my burdens, solve my problems, and correct my course? Matt. 11:28-29.

DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS IMITATING THE TEACHER (#4)

By Bob Young

Introduction

Many learn best by imitation. Often the first stage of learning is imitation. Children imitate parents. Students imitate teachers. People imitate their heroes. Students learn and are able to teach what the teacher teaches. Imitation begins as students speak the words of the teacher—sometimes almost word for word.

Disciples become like their Teacher. Choosing Jesus as our teacher, listening to him, learning his will and his ways inevitably leads us to following Jesus, yielding, obeying, becoming imitators. An important factor in the process for disciples of Jesus is that we become like Jesus by changing our nature (not through masks, which is the basic meaning of the word “hypocrisy”).

Disciples—followers—imitators, what a challenge! Do I look like Jesus? Am I an authentic disciple?

Key text: Luke 6:40, it is enough that the disciple become like the teacher.

Key text: John 13, I have left you an example that you should do as I have done.

Our imitation of Jesus begins with the decision we make concerning the message of Jesus, the good news of Jesus. The gospel message is sometimes summarized as in 1 Cor. 15:3-4 -- the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul uses the same model in Romans 6 when he describes the way the Romans made a clean break with sin to follow Jesus, fully yielded, fully obedient. We studied that concept in the previous lesson.

In Romans 6, Paul says that baptism is a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The first time that a disciple imitates Jesus is in deciding to obey the gospel and thus submit to the Teacher.

How can I imitate Christ in my life? Are you an imitator of Jesus?

Listen to some descriptions of Jesus: Jesus came teaching and preaching, Jesus came praying for the lost, Jesus came seeking and saving the lost.

Are these the primary concerns of my life? What is my life about?

Romans 6: A detailed study will be helpful to establish what it means to imitate Jesus, to become a disciple. (Note: The study is available on the video and in my writings on Romans 6, but is not reprinted here.)

Here is the process—

Discipleship demands imitation of the Teacher.

We die, we are buried, we are raised in baptism.

We learn more and more about the ways of the Teacher. We say what the Teacher said, we become like the Teacher. We have the same goals and purposes as the Teacher.

Biblically, discipleship is (1) choosing, (2) listening, (3) yielding, submitting, obeying.

Now we add a fourth dimension: discipleship means that I am committed to being an imitator of my Teacher.

DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS BEING COMMITTED TO THE TEACHER, TO HIS INSTRUCTIONS (#5)

By Bob Young

No one can serve two masters. One master—who? Jesus has all authority.

Do not miss the major point of this fifth lesson. By definition, disciples are “all in.” There is no half-hearted discipleship! The word “Christian” has become impotent when we hear talk about uninvolved Christians, non-attending Christians. Impossible! Discipleship is whole-hearted—by definition!

What does the Bible say? Much! We can see the point clearly in three texts from Luke.

- Luke 6:46, Jesus is not pleased by those who call him Lord, master, teacher, and do not obey.
- Luke 9, following Jesus means bearing a cross. Hear those words through the first-century context when crosses had only one purpose—death! Daily cross-bearing, daily dying, disciples are disciples every day or they are not disciples at all. Disciples die to self, sin, worldly security, shame.
- Luke 14, nothing can come before the teacher. Imitating the teacher is not for the convenient times; imitating the teacher still holds when it is inconvenient, when I would rather not do it, yielding, submitting, obeying. All of this is a way to say that being a disciple of Jesus means putting Jesus first in everything as we take up our cross to follow him.

Too many have begun the journey without counting the cost, and when the going is difficult, they either fall away, stop, or redefine discipleship so it is less demanding. Salt that is no longer salty.

The commitment of the genuine disciple will bring continual growth until the day we no longer breathe. There is no place for being partly in the world and partly in Christ, no place for becoming entangled.

Discipleship should be getting easier, less thinking required, fewer decisions because you made ONE decision. If you are traveling the path toward discipleship, this commitment step will be easy, if not it will be very hard. Regardless, commitment is required. By definition, disciples are “all in.” No half-hearted disciples!

DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS CONNECTING WITH OTHER DISCIPLES (#6)

By Bob Young

Introduction

I am not trying to confuse, I want to clarify. The first word I thought about was relationship. Disciples must be in relationship with God, with other disciples. That is true, but it did not communicate with me—my new word is connecting!

Understanding discipleship is the key to understanding unity. Genuine followers have no trouble with unity. Followers who bring their own thoughts, teachings, desires, preferences, methods—this is the stumbling block to unity.

Disciples follow the example of the teacher—the Bible calls this a model, a pattern. The pattern is not just the teachings, the pattern is the example. A pattern can be explained, but the explanation is not the pattern. The pattern of New Testament teaching is action.

Following ONE teacher results in ONE group of followers.

Students who enjoy the same teacher spend time together—camaraderie, talking about the teachings, focused on their points of commonality as they share relationship with the teacher. Disciples spending time together because they are disciples—remembering, sharing, encouraging what unites them. A bane of the modern church—too many activities that say nothing about and have nothing to do with our common allegiance! The earliest disciples assembled specifically—time, activities, why, how.

The modern church has a lot to learn because too many “Christian groups” have altered the definition of shared discipleship.

Discipleship is a lot easier when we are “in class”—around the teacher and other learners, which facilitates our connections. Students who enjoy the same teacher spend time together—camaraderie, talking about the teachings, focused on our common choices, learning, actions, commitments.

DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS SHARING (#7)

By Bob Young

Introduction

This phrase is ambiguous. I know it, I recognize it. Bear with me. Share what? With whom?

Authentic disciples have a vertical relationship, sharing time with the Teacher. That is not the subject of this study.

As we noted in the previous point, disciples share horizontal relationships and are connected with other disciples.

That is not the subject of this study.

What is meant by the phrase, “discipleship demands sharing”?

A primary characteristic of disciples—a disciple makes other disciples. If I am not actively involved in making other disciples, I must ask myself whether I am an authentic disciple.

Disciples develop more disciples. Discipleship is the DNA of the church, it is the work of the church corporately, it is the reality of life.

Discipleship is not self-centered, it is not only for personal advantage.

Discipleship inevitably leads to sharing. A primary characteristic of disciples—a learner recruits other learners. I share what I have learned, what makes my life richer, better, more meaningful. I cannot keep quiet!

I am excited about what I have found. It is like a new product, I want to tell everyone. “You should try....” How many times have you heard that? A positive experience shared, a value passed on, a good idea multiplied.

Why does this not characterize modern Christianity? Because we are focused on developing Christians and not disciples. Being a biblical disciple is much harder than being a Christian. Contemporary definitions of Christianity have been watered down. The expectations of a biblical disciple are far beyond the expectations for Christians in most churches. Being a disciple is much harder than being a church member.

If we are serious about being disciples, let us get back to Bible ideas, definitions, concepts.

As we close, I share a brief summary of where we have been--

Discipleship Requirements: Choose, Listen, Obey, Imitate, Commit, Connect, Share.

→**BE SELECTIVE. CHOOSE, MAKE A DECISION.** Who will be your teacher?

→**BE ATTENTIVE.** Once you have chosen your teacher, it is time for **LISTENING and LEARNING.** These concepts are the essence of discipleship. A disciple is a learner. Pay attention, listen, drink in all you can from the teacher.

→**BE OBEDIENT.** Listening and learning are preparation for training. Knowledge must be turned into action. It is now time for **OBEDIENT.** In choosing Jesus as a teacher, yielding and submitting are also strong biblical words.

→**BE CHRIST-LIKE.** I am putting the blocks in place, I recognize my teacher, I am listening and learning, drinking it all in, accepting his training, trying to put knowledge into action. Isn't there an easier way? Yes. The easiest way to reflect the teachings of the teacher is **by IMITATING.** Thinking, words, actions, goals.

→**BE COMMITTED.** It should be getting easier, less thinking required. If you are traveling the path toward discipleship, the next one will be easy, if not it will be very hard. Time for **COMMITTING.** By definition, disciples are “all in.” No half-hearted disciples!

→**BE CONNECTED.** Discipleship is a lot easier when we are “in class”—around the teacher and other learners, which leads us to **CONNECTING.** Students who enjoy the same teacher spend time together—camaraderie, talking about the teachings, focused on our common choices, learning, actions, commitments.

→**BE DISCIPLED / BE A DISCIPLER.** One thing remains, discipleship is not self-centered, only for personal advantage. It is time for **SHARING.** A primary characteristic of disciples—a disciple recruits other disciples. I share what I have learned, what makes my life richer, better, more meaningful. I cannot keep quiet!