



**MATURITY IN CHRIST**  
*The Call to Disciple*

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## *The Call to Disciple*

First Edition

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call2disciple

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Printed in the United States of America

Cover Design: The Rev. Patrick Dominguez, [patrickdominguezart.com](http://patrickdominguezart.com).

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# Maturity in Christ...The Call To Disciple

My dear friend,

I have written the following to those who have a longing to know Jesus. Something happens in the soul when we experience “the glory of God in the face of Christ.” We know why the disciples “left everything and followed Him.” We know why the merchant, finding the pearl of great value, “sold everything that he had and bought it.” We know why Moses, wanting more, cried out to the Lord, “show me Your glory!” <sup>1</sup>

Is this you?

It is this pursuit that makes us disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my fear, in many churches, in many pastors’ hearts, we’ve lost the pursuit; we’ve lost the vision and meaning of discipleship; and, as a result, our fellow Christians *speak, act, and live like people who don’t know Christ*. I want that to change, don’t you? And should it not begin with our pastors and leaders, those mature in Christ? Isn’t that why they are in ministry – *to lead us to Jesus?* It is for this reason I make my first appeal to all Christian leaders. In these darkest of days, we need their eyes on Him.

Is it not time to pursue Him with all that we are, all that we have? I pray fervently for you, dear reader, that if you know Him and love Him you will “fan into flame” a passion for Him that will last all your days. <sup>2</sup>

Come with me, let’s see how it’s all possible.

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## **Question: What Makes the Christian Faith Contagious?**

*It starts with an encounter with the Lord. When the women saw Jesus on Easter morning alive from the dead, how could they stay quiet? How can we stay quiet? How often we’ve heard the gospel, but it made no sense to us. Then one day we hear it, it comes alive, and we come alive! The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to behold the glory of the Lord. We find, as we turn to Jesus in repentance, confess our sins, and receive His forgiveness by faith, we experience the wonder of new birth. We are saved and we know it. We know Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father and He comes to live in our heart. How can anyone stay quiet?*

It's then that we become a contagion for the kingdom of God. *We’ve got to share it!* And we find the more we meet with Him and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, the more contagious we become.

First, for evangelism – it’s our testimony of new birth.

Then, for discipleship – it’s our testimony of ongoing transformation.

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## **Question: How Do We “Make Disciples” in Our Local Church?**

I find that if pastors have the contagion, leaders will have it, the church will have it. Steal it from the pastors and the fire dies. Without the fire, the way we make disciples loses definition and focus. It morphs into meaning *any activity that promotes spiritual growth*, such as bible studies, community life groups, newcomers classes, one-on-one meetings, spiritual direction, prayer meetings, and the like. Do we think that’s what our Lord meant when He commissioned us to “make disciples”? <sup>3</sup> I say emphatically, it is not.

Let’s define it as He defined it when He said, “Follow Me!” <sup>4</sup>

Disciples are followers of Jesus Christ. The Bible says it this way: We “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”<sup>5</sup> Notice there’s movement in these words. It assumes 1- We’re in daily relationship with Him and that 2- We’re in constant motion pursuing Him, listening to His voice, following His lead, and growing “in the grace and knowledge” of Him.<sup>6</sup> It’s in this *active following* two principles emerge:

- The Holy Spirit is at work in us -- sanctifying us; building godly character; transforming us into the image of God; and growing us into maturity in Christ<sup>7</sup>
- We’ve got testimony to share; we can’t keep quiet; *we want people to see Jesus!*<sup>8</sup>

It’s this pursuit that defined the Apostle Paul. It’s why he could say, “For to me, to live is Christ” and, again, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” It’s in being an active follower, he could help others follow; in being a disciple, he could make disciples. He had no greater task (“*For this purpose I labor*”) than to “present every person mature in Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

*“We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete (mature) in Christ. For this purpose I labor, striving according to His power which works mightily within me.”*

Colossians 1:28-29

This becomes our working definition of discipleship: We present every person mature in Christ. It is the Great Commission. It’s the non-negotiable for all in pastoral ministry. *For our pastors and leaders to give it, they first need to get it.* They can’t disciple unless they’re being disciplined. They can’t help us pursue Him if they’re not pursuing Him. If they’ve got no testimony, no contagion to share Jesus with others, the church has no testimony.

This has got to change.

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## **A Principle and a Prayer**

Before speaking of discipleship in more detail, it’s vital to identify the principle at work here. When the Lord Jesus sent His disciples to preach the gospel, He said in Matthew 10:8, “freely you received, freely give.” In other words, *you can’t give it until you get it.* And to get it, He told them, one thing matters most.

*He wants our heart.*

He said to Peter, “Do you love Me?” Once Peter said yes, then Jesus could say, “Tend My lambs.”<sup>10</sup> It’s here we learn that *ministry flows out of a relationship with Him.* The order is essential. Nothing is ever to supersede our relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are first called to Him and then to ministry. Invert this order and we fall headlong into idolatry. When this inversion happened at the church in Ephesus, the Lord Jesus was strong in His rebuke and warning.

*“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent.”*

Revelation 2:4-5

Inversion is all too common for pastors and leaders. We say our identity is in Christ, it’s in who He is, not what we do. But ministry is demanding, time-consuming, stressful, often straining marriage, home life, as well as our time with the Lord. All too easily ministry becomes our focus, *not Him.* We give and give but have no time to receive. Without knowing it, we’ve “left our first love.” He doesn’t have our heart.

As a result, the Matthew 10:8 principle breaks down: *We cannot give what we do not have.* We need our pastors and leaders to come back to their love for Jesus. If they're healthy, the church is healthy. And so we pray for all pastors and all who serve the Lord in ministry to...

- Respond to Jesus' question, "Do you love Me?" and examine their heart. Where there's distraction, idolatry, and sin -- confess it, break from its grip, and pursue the Lord with all their might
- Commit to being in active discipleship with others
- Open their hearts to experience a fresh encounter with the Lord and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit so they, once again, might be a contagion for the gospel of Jesus Christ

*We need the sound of their testimony!* This is what strengthens the church. It builds faith in the hearers, so they too seek after Jesus, encounter Him, and have testimony of their own. When they get it and share it they live the principle Jesus taught – *freely you've received, freely give* – and the contagion spreads. For this to happen, for this principle to come alive in our churches, we've got to talk about discipleship.

And so, we begin.

It's time to ask: *What is biblical discipleship?* Why is it done in a group setting; what happens in group; why is it different than bible study; and what biblical themes are used to disciple?

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### **Question: What is Biblical Discipleship?**

Scripture is clear: To "*present everyone fully mature in Christ.*"<sup>11</sup> Our Lord modeled three principles for us: 1- We need someone to disciple us, 2- Discipleship happens in community, and 3- Those disciplined are sent to disciple. In addition, He taught us of our need to yield to the Holy Spirit who administers the sanctifying power of the gospel to us. His ministry is to transform us into the image of the beloved Son.<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, we enter *the gymnasium of godliness.*<sup>13</sup> As we meet in group with a seasoned discipler, we soon discover the benefits of discipleship. It changes our perspective, our character, and our conduct.

- Perspective: The Exodus narrative has two distinct movements: 1- The Lord first saved Israel by bringing them out of Egypt, and then, 2- He saved them by bringing Egypt out of them. In every way, the Exodus story foreshadows the glory of the gospel and the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

*"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV)

It's this second movement that defines discipleship. Everything about us, our identity, our value, our philosophy of life, our view of God, has been shaped by a lifetime in the *domain of darkness.* As we step into the kingdom of God, as the Lord opens Scripture to us, we find our *perspective changes.* The influences of the world, flesh, and devil no longer shape us. In the Exodus imagery, Egypt is coming out of us and we're slowly being "transformed by the renewing" of our minds.<sup>14</sup>

- Character: At the time of new birth, we are seen in Scripture as "newborn babies" in need of the "pure milk of the word." As we grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord, and in obedience to His word, the more we need "solid food."<sup>15</sup> We are coming *to know who we are in Christ.* He who made us in His image at creation is – by His saving work at Calvary and by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit – *transforming us back into the same image day by day.*<sup>16</sup> This is discipleship. We are growing into maturity. His character is becoming our character to His praise and glory.

- **Conduct:** As character changes, conduct changes. We're learning, as apprentices, to walk by faith, live by grace, and daily "put into practice" <sup>17</sup> all He has said to us in His word and by His Spirit. By so doing, we find our "senses trained to discern good and evil" so we can say no to sin -- to the lusts of the world, flesh, and devil -- and say yes to what's right and true in Jesus. <sup>18</sup> Our testimony of Him is inexorably linked to how we conduct ourselves. This is why, as disciples, we learn to...

*"...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"*

*"...say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age"*

Colossians 1:10 and Titus 2:12 (NIV)

It's here we rest on the promise of Philippians 2:12-13. As we work out our "salvation with fear and trembling" in the gymnasium of godliness, God is mightily at work in us changing our perspective, growing our character, and leading us in wise decisions and godly conduct.

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### **Question: What Makes Growth in Christ Possible?**

There's mystery here. The Scriptures teach we can plant, we can water, but *God gives the growth.* <sup>19</sup> As we do our part, we trust the Lord to do His and bring the gift of life. It's both miracle and mystery to see a crop spring from the earth; a newborn become a toddler; and a lost soul come to born again faith in Christ. It's this principle of life, *this expectation of growth to maturity in Jesus*, that captures the heart of discipleship.

The danger is this: We limit discipleship to the training of the mind. It happened in Corinth as they prized knowledge and yet proved in character they were "infants in Christ" and, in conduct, "walking like mere men." Biblical knowledge alone "puffs up." It makes us "a noisy gong." <sup>20</sup> It steals the mystery and wonder of being a disciple of Jesus who is, by His mighty power, being changed into His image and likeness.

For this reason, when it comes to growth in Christ, we say: *We do our part. He does His.* <sup>21</sup>

#### Revelation

It begins with revelation. The apostle taught us to pray:

*"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened..."*

Ephesians 1:17-18 (ESV)

Sin blinds us. We do our part as we meet together, worship, pray, and hear His word. What we need most is for Him to do His part. Scripture teaches, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." <sup>22</sup> As we listen to the gospel, the Lord acts: Faith comes and awakens our spiritual senses so we can hear His voice; we can see with new eyes as *He gives the gift of revelation!* He opens the eyes our heart. He brings Scripture alive, heals our blindness, and gives us ever increasing glimpses of His kingdom and glory.

And the more He reveals, the more He calls us to respond and obey.

#### Obedience

Jesus said, "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice" builds their life on rock that stands the test of any storm. It's this combination of *hearing and obeying* that is the key to growth as a disciple. In simple terms: the more He reveals, the more we obey, the more we grow as disciples. If we do not obey, we do not grow, and find our life built on sand that collapses in the storms of life. It's why the Bible urges us to be "doers of

the word”, not just hearers. We do our part by working out our salvation “with fear and trembling.”<sup>23</sup> He does His part by working in us by the Spirit who gives us power to obey.

This is the wonder of being His disciple. The more He reveals His glory to us, the more we come to know Him, love Him, and serve Him, the more we want to obey Him -- today, tomorrow, and forever.<sup>24</sup>

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### **Question: Why Disciple in a Group Setting?**

Jesus modeled it for us. He disciplined twelve. By so doing, He gave us a glimpse into His church as those called by Him to be together with Him. For this reason, when we’re baptized into Christ, we’re baptized into each other. The imagery is profound: *“By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*<sup>25</sup> As the physical parts of our body can’t function on their own, independent of one another, neither can we. For us to be healthy, function properly, and grow in strength, we need to be intricately connected to each other.

The Scriptures makes this imagery come alive:

*“...we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, cause the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”*

Ephesians 4:15-16

In other words, we say: *Our growth as a disciple of Jesus is inseparable from our growth together.* As we strengthen others, they strengthen us, so that we build each other up in love. It’s by this love, Jesus said, that “all people will know that you are My disciples.”<sup>26</sup> In the same way, we say: *It is not possible to be a disciple of Jesus on our own, independent of others.* He calls us together. He disciplines in community.

For this reason, we state emphatically: *To grow as a disciple, we must be in a group setting.*

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### **Question: Do the Scriptures Teach Us How to Disciple?**

At Pentecost, three thousand came to Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit. As these new Christians met in homes, the apostles disciplined them in the Scriptures, in fellowship, in worship, and prayer. It’s these four areas of focus, as outlined in Acts 2:42, that set *the biblical precedent in how we make disciples.* In other words, it’s how we do our part. The Lord, for His part, promised: “where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst”<sup>27</sup> and then sent the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

We, therefore, follow this apostolic pattern. It’s as we meet together and devote ourselves to the principles outlined in Acts 2:42 that we, in His presence and by the Holy Spirit, make disciples as He commanded us.

In a sense, we see it modeled on the road to Emmaus.

The disciples were together talking about the things of the Lord (fellowship). As He came alongside, they engaged in dialogue with Him (prayer). In response, “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (apostle’s teaching). Then, at meal, in the *breaking of bread*, the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to behold the risen Lord (worship).<sup>28</sup> It’s how they came to faith in Jesus. It’s how we evangelize. It’s how we disciple.

In every way, *Acts 2:42 shapes what we do in the group setting.*

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## A Vital Emphasis

Before we go into more detail, it's essential to underscore our Lord's directive. We cannot be a disciple, or disciple others, without *utter dependence on the Holy Spirit*. He is, Jesus said, "the Spirit of truth" who "will guide you into all the truth...teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you." It is He who brings the gift of revelation so "we may know the things freely given to us by God."<sup>29</sup>

And so, meeting together in group, following the apostolic pattern of Acts 2:42, we recognize this most vital principle: *We need the Spirit of God to bring the Word of God alive to the People of God.*

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### Question: What Happens in a Discipleship Group?

In every way, the four principles of Acts 2:42 are put into practice. Each are needed, each intricately woven together without diminishment and led by someone equipped by the Lord, and affirmed by the church, to disciple. It's this movement of these four essentials that distinguishes discipleship groups from Bible studies, prayer meetings, fellowship groups, worship events, and services on our Lord's day.

Leaders face practical administrative questions of when and where to meet; how often; and with whom. As culture and context are discerned, what's most important is to remember that *discipleship is relational*.

For some, this means the group should remain small, informal, and more intimate in nature. Others choose a larger group setting in which, at discussion time, it breaks into smaller groups with an appointed leader.<sup>30</sup> Either way, providing small group interaction is essential for growth in the Lord as well as our growth in the "royal" command to love one another which, as said previously, is the mark of a disciple.<sup>31</sup>

With this in mind, we're ready to look at the four essentials in Acts 2:42 of a discipleship group.

#### 1- Worship and Prayer

In New Testament, the words "fellowship" and "breaking of bread" can be used interchangeably either for worship or for our sharing together. Both are crucial in the discipling process.

We start in worship. Our Lord invites us to experience *what it means to worship in Spirit and truth*. This is not a time for entertainment or superficial engagement. We're learning to come into His presence as priests of the Most High to minister to Him and worship Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.<sup>32</sup> We're offering ourselves as a living sacrifice and learning to enter into adoration, praise, and thanksgiving with a heart of reverence and awe. It's in worship, as we open our "lips praising His name", we're also tuning our ears to hear the voice of our Shepherd.<sup>33</sup>

It's in the intimacy of worship that our intimacy with the Lord deepens. It's why we must never neglect devoting ourselves to public and private worship. It's at the very heart of a disciple's life.

#### 2- Apostles' Teaching

In this context of worship, we come to the teaching of God's word. We are disciplined on the anvil of Scripture which is "God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."<sup>34</sup> As farmers sow seed into the ground, Jesus said, so He sows His word into our hearts that it might come to life. It's the "word of the cross" that is the "power of God" training us by the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, with reverence we invite the Lord to open His word to us.

As always, in the discipling process, we bring "the pure milk of the word", the first principles of faith in Christ, before giving the "solid food."<sup>36</sup> We will talk more about this in our next section.



## *Selah*

After the teaching, we encourage a brief time for reflection, quiet prayer, and journaling. Our Lord taught that on hearing the word Satan will try to snatch it from us.<sup>37</sup> To prevent this, we pause, as the Psalmists often call us to do by their use of *Selah*. In this way, we can reflect on what we've heard the Lord say to us and how it might apply to our lives. We have found that journaling, as modeled in the Psalms, helps us articulate what we've heard. As we make it our own, it allows us to enter into the discussion time more fully.

### 3- Fellowship with One Another

It's here, in group interaction led by an appointed leader, we get to ask questions; listen to each other; share testimony; and begin the journey of applying what we've heard in Scripture to our lives. It is not a time for theological debate. It's a time to strengthen each other in the faith; spur each other on to obedience; and build each other up in our love for the Lord and for each other.

Scripture says: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."<sup>38</sup> It's here, in group, we experience the Holy Spirit ministering to us and through us to each other. It's in the give and take we gain confidence not just in what we believe but *how we live what we believe*. We're learning to put it into practice by His strength, for His glory, as His disciples together. The more we meet, the more we get front row seats to see the Lord's life-changing power at work in each other's lives.

It's why we can't say it enough: *To grow as a disciple, we must be in a group setting.*

### 4- Prayer

At beginning of group, we pray in the language of praise, thanksgiving, adoration, and worship. At end of group, we pray in supplication and intercession for each other. As our relationship deepens with the Lord, our prayers – *our dialogue with Him, our listening to Him* – deepens and becomes more natural and fluent. We gain confidence in praying out loud for others and feel our own faith strengthen as people pray for us. It's in group, in the practice of prayer, we find our hearts filled with expectation for all the Lord will do as we submit our deepest concerns to His faithful care.

It's in the discipling process we learn the mystery, the wonder, and the power of prayer. It becomes an intricate part of who we are, how we live, how we worship, and how we minister to others.

The early church taught us how to disciple. Inasmuch as a farmer needs seed, soil, sun, rain, and the Lord's blessing to grow a crop, so we need to be together in worship, in Scripture, in fellowship, and in prayer. It's here, in the rhythm of Acts 2:42 and by the Holy Spirit, we grow into maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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### **Question: How Do We Use Scripture to Disciple?**

Discipleship is the development of the whole person in heart, mind, body, and soul. Using the language of parenting, Scripture teaches that we begin as "newborn babies" with "the pure milk of the word." The Apostle Paul wrote, as "infants in Christ...I gave you milk to drink, not solid food."<sup>39</sup> As we grow in the Lord, in His word, and in obedience to the Spirit, our longing for the solid food of His word increases.

This sensitivity to development -- from milk to meat, newborns to adulthood -- is critical in discipling.

As we begin, we find four thematic movements most commonly used in early discipling. The first focus is on identity: *Who am I and who is God?* The second movement presents the Cross: *"What must I do to be saved?"*<sup>40</sup> The

third brings us to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our walk with Christ: *How then shall we live?*<sup>41</sup> And the fourth deals with our purpose in life and our call to service: *Why am I here?*

In simple terms, it brings us to Christ (evangelism), then to the cross and how to confess Christ (baptism), then to know how to follow Christ (discipleship), and finally to equip us to serve Christ (mission.)

As these themes follow a systematic study of Scripture, it's essential we speak of them in more detail.

- **Our Identity in Christ:** *Who am I and who is God? Why am I here? What's my purpose? Does my life have meaning? Is there a reason for sickness, evil, suffering, and death in this world? Why do I crave acceptance? Why do I feel guilt, shame, and regret when I sin? What is sin, and what happens when I die? It's these kinds of questions that begin our journey with the Lord. We soon find that to understand our story, we need to know His story. It's why we begin at the beginning in Genesis 1.*

Recommended Themes for Study:

- 1- Note in Psalm 139:13-16 that we're created and known by God in the womb. It's in Genesis 1 and 2 where we see God, in the fellowship of the Trinity, as Creator of all things; making us in His image; uniting Adam and Eve in marriage; and offering, as His intended plan, the tree of life that we might live in fellowship with Him and each other in perfection for all eternity. We also see, in His love for us as image bearers, that He gave the gift to choose.
- 2- It's then, in Genesis 3, we see sin's devastating impact. We ask: What is Satan's story? Why was he disguised as a serpent in the garden? What does it mean that Eve was deceived, and Adam tempted? What happened to Adam and Eve – physically, emotionally, spiritually – when they sinned? What happened to all creation? What is the meaning of sin, evil, death? Why did God clothe them? Why did He block access to the tree of life and send them away?
- 3- Already in Genesis 3:15, 21 we witness the Lord's plan to save us; redeem us at great cost, and provide a way back to the tree of life to be with Him forever. It is here we come to the great themes of the Lord entering into legal covenant with Abram; the Exodus from slavery; the protection of the Passover Lamb; the journey to the promised land; the giving of the Law; the means of worship at the Temple; and the promises of the coming day of Messiah.

As we start at the beginning of Scripture, we discover the more we know about the Lord and His love for us, the more we know ourselves. Our identity no longer finds its source in what we do or what other people think of us. It's found in Him.

- **Our Salvation in Christ:** *"What must I do to be saved?"* After Eden, all of Scripture points us to the coming of "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."<sup>42</sup> It's there, at the waters of baptism, we ask: What does it mean to be saved, forgiven, born again, a new creature clothed in Christ? The cost of being a disciple of Jesus is the call to follow Him, deny ourselves, and take up our cross. For us to say, "I am crucified with Christ"<sup>43</sup> we must know why He died, what it accomplished, what it means for us, and how, by His death and resurrection, we are changed. *What is the gospel of our salvation?*

Recommended Themes for Study:

- 1- At the first preaching of the gospel, Peter said: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>44</sup> It's Peter's sermon that outlines the great doctrines of salvation: Who Jesus is, why He came, the power of the cross to forgive sins, the meaning of His resurrection, ascension, exaltation as both Lord and Christ, and how it has led to the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- 2- It's here we learn we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, His blood shed the forgiveness of our sins. We hear of His mighty work in terms such as justification by faith; being clothed in His righteousness; adopted as His children; reconciled to the Father; and being filled with His Spirit. It's in the hearing of the gospel we begin to experience the conviction of our sins and the cry of our soul for the Lord to give us grace to repent, faith to believe, and power to save us from our sins and make us new with resurrection life. It's here the gospel becomes real to us.

At our baptism, as we make public confession of Christ, we step into the kingdom of the beloved Son where we're united with our Lord in His death and resurrection; become members of His church; and ambassadors of the Cross of Christ.

- **Our Walk with Christ:** *How then shall we live?* The Lord Jesus says to us, "Follow Me!" At new birth, He gives us the gift of the Spirit, grafts us into His church, and infuses us with power to live the Christian life.<sup>45</sup> As we step out in obedience, relying not on our works, but on the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves with a new ability to say "no" to ungodliness, resist the devil, discern good from evil, be led by the

Spirit, love one another as He loves us, and conduct ourselves “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”  
<sup>46</sup> As the fruit of the Holy Spirit is manifest more and more in our character, we’re learning to hear Him, walk with Him, and daily follow Him.

Recommended Themes for Study:

- 1- In our discipleship group, we learn the many ways the Lord grows us by grace. He does it as He brings Scripture alive and reveals His purposes and promises for us. He does it as we learn why we pray, how to pray, and the power of prayer. He does it as we come together in public worship, hear the proclamation of the gospel, make public confession, share the Lord’s peace, and receive communion. He does it as we meet in regular fellowship with other Christians. And He does it as we meet with Him in our private devotions, inviting Him to be Lord over our minds, our hearts, our families, and the stewardship of our time, our finances, our ministries, never forgetting the poor.
- 2- Early in the discipling process, our Lord sent out the twelve to serve. At new birth, the Lord puts His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. <sup>47</sup> We experience it by our desire to love and serve others, forgive those who’ve hurt us, seek forgiveness from those we’ve hurt, and be witnesses of Jesus in word and deed. In this, we come to know the Holy Spirit more personally and explore questions like: How do we hear His voice; what are the gifts of the Spirit; what gifts do I have; how do I mature in these gifts and step out, in obedience, to share these gifts in His service?

This third focus is critical in the discipling process. It is where Bible and life meet. Our witness as Christians is found in the genuineness of our character and the godliness of our conduct. Without it, we cannot come to the fourth movement.

- Our Mission in Christ: On Easter night, Jesus said, “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” At Pentecost, He said, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.” If we belong to Christ, *we are called into ministry*: “priests to our God”, ambassadors of reconciliation, and missionaries of the gospel. With the servant heart of our Lord, we equip “the saints for the work of ministry” <sup>48</sup>, empowering each one with the gifts of the Spirit, and apprenticing those gifts to maturity. It’s here where disciples become apostles sent to serve.

Recommended Themes for Study:

- 1- We begin by asking: Who are the ministers? Is it the select few, educated and ordained? Or does ministry belong to every Christian? As we receive the Holy Spirit at new birth, so we prepare each person to receive the empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost. We begin to explore the vast topic of ministry to the church and then ministry from the church in evangelism and mission both locally and internationally. We speak of suffering, rejection, persecution, dangers, and trials that come as we testify of Jesus. We speak of the urgency of the last times as we prepare for our Lord’s return. And more, we speak of the reality of spiritual warfare and what is needed to diagnose and resist it.
- 2- It’s critical, in discipling for ministry, we focus on the posture of the heart. We are to have the same attitude as our Lord who came not “to be served, but to serve.” He showed us by example as He washed His disciple’s feet and “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.” <sup>49</sup> This is His heart, His nature. Do we have that same attitude of service in us? Is it how we serve our spouse, children, family, friends, and neighbors? Is it how we serve the needs our church, community, nation, and world? As the posture of our heart becomes more like His, we see the needs of the world through His eyes and feel a new longing inside that prays, Lord “Here I am. Send me!” <sup>50</sup>

In these four movements, we have laid the foundation of early discipleship. Once completed, we must not stop. The call to “Follow Me!”, to be His disciple, and to grow in our relationship with the Lord is lifelong. We are to stay in group; follow the Acts 2:42 pattern; listen together, pray together, and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit as He directs our study of Scripture and leads us deeper in worship, obedience, and service.

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## A Final Word

My dear reader, is it possible, after reading this brief “word of exhortation”<sup>51</sup> that a fire is lit inside you to pursue the Lord Jesus with all your heart – to know Him, love Him, serve Him? This is my prayer for you.

To say *yes* to being His disciple.

The culture around us has become increasingly hostile to the gospel. The mind of the culture has invaded our churches and it’s got power. It’s stealing our children. It’s causing Christians to stumble, pastors to compromise, and many to leave the church, go it alone, and choose to believe what they want to believe. The fact is quite simple: *It costs to be a Christian* uncompromised and “not ashamed of the gospel.”<sup>52</sup>

But that is the call of our Lord Jesus to us in this day: *Be My disciple. Make disciples.*

He calls us to be citizens of His kingdom, submitted to His rule, who in character and conduct are faithful and true witnesses of Him in the world. We are, as the apostle said, to be “children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.”<sup>53</sup> We have no excuse. He has granted us His Holy Spirit; given us His living word; and placed us in His church with pastors and leaders who, in obedience to the Great Commission, are to present us mature in Christ.

It is time.

Time for our pastors and ministry leaders to get it so they can give it. It’s their testimony of Jesus, His mighty transforming power at work in their lives, modeled in character and conduct, that becomes the contagion for spreading the kingdom of God. This is what disciples us in Christ, brings the church alive, and sends us out in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear the testimony of Jesus to the world. As my wife, Erilynne, often said, “*the strongest witness to a dying world is a transformed life.*”<sup>54</sup>

This is what discipleship is all about. And I pray, for you dear friend, it becomes your heart’s one desire.

Thad Rockwell Barnum  
January 5, 2024

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6; Luke 5:11; Matthew 13:45-46; Exodus 33:18
- <sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6 (ESV)
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew 20:19
- <sup>4</sup> John 21:19
- <sup>5</sup> Revelation 14:4
- <sup>6</sup> 2 Peter 3:18
- <sup>7</sup> See 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Timothy 4:7; Romans 8:29; and Colossians 1:28 (ESV)
- <sup>8</sup> See Acts 4:20
- <sup>9</sup> Philippians 1:21; 3:8; Colossians 1:28
- <sup>10</sup> John 20:15, 16, 17
- <sup>11</sup> Colossians 1:28 (NIV)
- <sup>12</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18
- <sup>13</sup> See 1 Timothy 4:7-8
- <sup>14</sup> Romans 12:2
- <sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:14
- <sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16
- <sup>17</sup> Matthew 7:24 (NIV)
- <sup>18</sup> Hebrews 5:14 (NASB1995); Titus 2:12 (NIV). See also Ephesians 4:17-24
- <sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6
- <sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NASB1995); 8:1 (NIV); 13:1
- <sup>21</sup> See Philippians 2:12-13
- <sup>22</sup> Romans 10:17
- <sup>23</sup> Matthew 7:24 (NIV); James 1:22; Philippians 2:12
- <sup>24</sup> See this principle in John 14:23 and modeled by our Lord in 14:31
- <sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13
- <sup>26</sup> John 13:35
- <sup>27</sup> Matthew 18:20
- <sup>28</sup> Luke 24:45; 31
- <sup>29</sup> John 16:13; 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12
- <sup>30</sup> The Alpha Course, for example, can be offered with either option
- <sup>31</sup> James 2:8; John 13:35
- <sup>32</sup> Revelation 5:9-10. See Luke 10:27-28
- <sup>33</sup> Romans 12:1; Hebrews 12:28; 13:15; John 10:3-4
- <sup>34</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV and NASB1995)
- <sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18
- <sup>36</sup> 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:2
- <sup>37</sup> Matthew 13:19
- <sup>38</sup> Proverbs 27:17
- <sup>39</sup> 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 (NASB1995)
- <sup>40</sup> Acts 16:30
- <sup>41</sup> See Ezekiel 33:10; 2 Peter 3:11
- <sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2
- <sup>43</sup> Galatians 2:20; see also Mark 8:34
- <sup>44</sup> Acts 2:38
- <sup>45</sup> See 2 Peter 1:3
- <sup>46</sup> Titus 2:12; 1 Peter 5:9; Hebrews 5:14; Romans 8:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Philippians 1:27
- <sup>47</sup> Romans 5:5
- <sup>48</sup> John 20:21; Acts 1:8; Revelation 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 4:12
- <sup>49</sup> Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:8
- <sup>50</sup> Isaiah 6:8
- <sup>51</sup> Hebrews 13:22
- <sup>52</sup> Romans 1:16
- <sup>53</sup> Philippians 2:15
- <sup>54</sup> Erilynn Barnum, founder of call2disciple

# Notes

# **Dedication**

This writing is dedicated in honor and memory of

*Erilynne Barnum*

She lived and taught these principles in her many years of discipling

To know more about us, visit [call2disciple.com](http://call2disciple.com)

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