

The **STORY** of **REDEMPTION**



God Reaching Out to Restore **COMMUNITY**
through the cross of Jesus Christ



HOW DOES GOD

WANT ME TO LIVE?

Part 5: The Incredible Life of a Disciple of Jesus

Note: For instructions on how to best use and lead this study, please go to www.StoryofRedemption.com.

- Download free .pdfs of each lesson!
- Watch videos of those who have gone through the study!
- Order additional copies of the Story of Redemption!

For missional and evangelistic resources, including teaching materials, seminars, videos, blogs, and more, go to www.MissionalOutreachNetwork.com.

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The STORY of Redemption

How Does God Want Me to Live?

PART 5: THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE

While some people wander aimlessly through life, most people follow after someone or something, whether they know it or not. We can idolize the rich and the famous. We can follow Ghandi, Confucius, or Buddha. We can build our lives around our children, sports, the environment, or a life of leisure. But if we want to please God, we will live our lives as followers of Jesus. We will become *disciples* (*followers, students, apprentices*) of Christ. When we decide to be disciples of Christ, we decide to take on the heart and character of Christ and do all that Jesus has told us to do.



1. THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES.

After Jesus was tempted in the desert, he went and lived for a time in the town of Capernaum. He began his ministry by preaching the same message as John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mt. 4:17). That is, change your heart & mind--God and his kingdom is available now! At this point, Jesus, the great teacher and rabbi, begins to gather his disciples.

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him (Mt. 4:18-22).

When Jesus comes calling, Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John do not hesitate. "Immediately" and "at once" they leave their nets, their boats, and their livelihood to follow Jesus. What explains this response?

Every Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi (teacher), and in this oral society, learned and memorized the "Torah" (the first five books of the Old Testament). Those who excelled in this and memorized much of the rest of the Scriptures might be chosen to be a disciple of a rabbi. The rabbi would teach them how to *apply* these Scriptures (they already had knowledge) and show them a way of life centered around God. Only the best of the best students were chosen. The rest went into family trades--fishing, carpentry, etc.

By virtue of being fishermen, Peter and Andrew, James and John are *not* the best of the best. They had, so to speak, flunked out of rabbi training school. So when Jesus, a recognized rabbi, comes and asks them to be his disciples,

they jump at the chance. So would others. Jesus drew together men, women, rich, poor, fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, Pharisees--people from all walks of life. Through this, Jesus created a type of new community---a loving, serving community centered around him.



Jesus drew together men and women from all walks of life into a Christ-centered community.

Like these fishermen, we ought to make following Jesus our hearts' desire. We must be willing to leave everything behind, including our jobs, our hobbies, our entertainment, and even our family, for the chance to follow him. **Following Jesus is an incredible spiritual journey in which we are joined together with other Christ-followers, forming a new Christ-centered community on mission for God.**

What implications does Jesus' choosing of ordinary people to be his disciples have for us? Why is it important to be a part of a Christian community when seeking to be a disciple of Christ, and not just follow Jesus on our own?

2. THE BLESSINGS OF DISCIPLESHIP & THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

After calling his disciples, Jesus went around the countryside teaching in the synagogue, preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing diseases, and casting out demons (Mt. 4:23-25). These workings of the Spirit were signs that the kingdom was breaking into history in a powerful way, and that Jesus was indeed the long awaited Messiah. As Jesus performed these miracles, his popularity grew, and many people flocked to him.

On one of these occasions when the crowds were gathered together, Jesus gave what has come to be known as the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew. 5-7). **The Sermon on the Mount is directed at the disciples, and it demonstrates how life is to be lived in the kingdom of God.** The first section of the sermon is called "The Beatitudes," which outlines the blessings that come in the kingdom.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

In the Beatitudes, Jesus turns the world's values upside down, saying that those who are poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst, those who are merciful, those who are pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted will all be blessed. These are often the mocked or ridiculed of society, those that are left out. Jesus says that anyone who is in the kingdom--whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, the intelligent or the mentally handicapped, married or single, attractive or plain, are blessed.

Jesus also makes clear that the disciples are to be a blessing to others:

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown

A Disciple Seeks to:

- Love, serve and bless others
- Pray, fast, and trust God
- Forgive
- Study/meditate on Scripture
- Treasure spiritual things
- Share his/her faith
- Worship & give generously

A Disciple Does Not:

- Remain angry or murder
- Lust, commit adultery, have sex before marriage, divorce
- Take vengeance, retaliate
- Lie or break his/her word
- Cheat or steal
- Worry about tomorrow

For a list of Spiritual disciplines and resources to shape the heart and actions of disciples, go to www.StoryofRedemption.com.

out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:13-16).



Christ-followers are called to serve.

How can you be a light to the world and serve/bless those around you?

3. THE HEART AND LIFE OF A DISCIPLE.

In his teaching, Jesus corrects many mistaken beliefs that people had concerning the Old Testament law. In each case, Jesus tells them they "have heard" a particular belief, and then he gives them the proper understanding. Through this teaching, we see that Jesus seeks to bring about transformation of the heart for God, not mere rule following. **This is often called "Spiritual formation," or the forming of the spirit/heart/will so that it matches the spirit/heart/will of Christ.**

Guarding the Heart from Negative Emotions and Intentions

- Jesus says that not only should a disciple not murder or commit adultery, but he **must control his anger** (5:21-24), **must not lust** (5:27-30), and **cannot divorce his wife unless she is sexually unfaithful** (5:31-32).
- A disciple **should not make agreements that she does not intend to keep** (5:33-37), **take vengeance into her own hands** (5:38-42), or **hate her enemies**. Instead, a **disciple loves her enemies** (5:43-48). This love is a commitment and desire to seek what is best for one's enemies.

At this point, Jesus throws out a shocking statement: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48). How is this possible?!

While God tells us that everyone has sinned except Jesus, he still calls us to set our sights on a perfect--which also means "complete"--life with God. Jesus reduces this perfect/complete life--and all of God's commands--down to two things: **loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves** (22:36-38).

If we seek to merely keep the individual commands, we will try and fail. We must catch Jesus' vision of being a person who loves God and our neighbor so much that we do not want to be angry at them, call them names, lust after them, lie to them, or hate them. Furthermore, while there are things that disciples both do and avoid, Christian life is not a list of do's and don'ts. What God wants is to capture our hearts, from which everything flows. The rest of Jesus' teaching also assumes this vision of life in the kingdom.



A disciple trusts that God will give him good things when he asks for them.

Guarding the Heart from Wrong Religious Motivation

- A disciple does not do religious things to try to impress other people, but to please God and help others. Thus, he **gives to those who are in need** (6:1-4), **prays to God sincerely** (6:5-15), and **fasts at certain times** (6:16-18).

Guarding the Heart from Materialism and Financial Worry

- A disciple's heart is not focused upon material things, but upon heaven, and she **"treasures" spiritual things** (6:19-24). She **does not worry about food, clothing, and shelter** (6:25-34). Tithing, or the giving of 10% of one's income, is an evidence of this trust and a good biblical starting point for giving. Tithing was practiced all the way back to Abraham, the father of faith (see Gen. 14:10; Dt. 12:5f; Mal. 3:10; Mt. 23:23; Acts 2:45).

Guarding the Heart from Judgmentalism and Hypocrisy

- A disciple **does not judge others more harshly than himself**, and he is **careful not to be a hypocrite** (actor) (7:1-6). These are not acts of love.

Guarding the Heart from Doubt and Inaction

- A disciple **trusts that God will give her good things** (7:7-12) when she asks for them, just as loving parents give to their children.
- A disciple will show his wisdom by **actually following Jesus' teachings** (7:24-27). If he is foolish, he will ignore them. This is the conclusion!

We have three main sources of help in our heart shaping: **the encouragement of the Christian community**, **spiritual disciplines** like prayer, Scripture memorization, etc. (for resources on this, see www.StoryofRedemption.com), **and the direct working of the Holy Spirit**. Long ago, God told the prophet Ezekiel that he would send his Spirit to dwell within his people, so that they could actually obey him:

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek. 36:26f).

While we will not be sinless, we can be better people than we ever imagined. God offers us an incredible life! But we must open our hearts & follow Jesus.

Do you want to be like Jesus? Do you want to start doing what he says to do?

In the next part of our story we will begin to follow Jesus' journey to the cross, as the *Story of Redemption* continues.

Disciples Are Called and Sent to Reach Out to Others Like Jesus

The original call of Jesus to the disciples was, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mt. 4:19). In making this call, Jesus was passing down his own mission, which, in his words, was to:

Seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10),

Serve others (Mark 10:45), and

Share the good news *about Jesus and the kingdom of God* (Lk. 4:43).

In fact, Jesus would later explicitly hand his mission over to the disciples, saying, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

So Christ followers are a sent, or missional, people, taking up the mission of Christ of seeking, serving, and sharing. (Missional is from the word "missio," which means "sent.")

We see that Jesus sent his disciples out to "seek, serve, and share" very soon after he called them and taught them in the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness . . .

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give (Mt. 10:1-8).

This mission that Jesus sends his disciples out on is commonly called the "Limited Commission," for they were to reach out to those they were closest to first (the Israelites) and seek (the lost), serve (by healing people), and share (about Jesus and the kingdom, and freely give to others). Later Jesus would send them out on the "Great Commission" to reach all peoples for Christ. The Limited Commission teaches us an important principle about reaching out. No matter how much or little we know, each of us should start to seek, serve, and share--often beginning with those that we already know (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers). We can do this on an individual basis, and with a (missional) small group/community.

Below are some suggested weekly practices for Christ-followers based upon Jesus' life that can help us in this calling. The practices, adapted from Michael Frost's work *Exiles*, form an acronym called "BELLS."

BLESS *three people's lives each week- (both Christians & non-Christians).*

EAT *together with others three times a week (both Christians & non-Christians).*

LEARN *more about Jesus by reading Scripture each week, especially the gospels.*

LISTEN *to God's voice each week through prayer & Spiritual disciplines.*

SHARE. *our faith & meet with 1-3 Christians to share our "BELLS" experience for that week.*



For more on these practices, go to www.StoryofRedemption.com

Part 5: The Radical Life of a Disciple

www.StoryofRedemption.com

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QUESTIONS:

Fill in the Blank.

1. The Holy Spirit helps us to actually _____ God's commands.
2. The central message that both John the Baptist and Jesus preached was "Repent, for the _____ of _____ is near."
3. The greatest commands are to love _____ and our _____ as ourselves.

True/False.

4. _____ A disciple must place Jesus above even his or her family.
5. _____ Jesus said that a person is wise if he or she actually puts his teachings into practice.

Short Answer.

- 6-8. List three things in your life you want to start or stop doing in light of God's kingdom being all around you and your desire to follow Jesus.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
- 9-11. Think of someone you can start reaching out to for Christ. Write down:
 - a. Who will I "seek" to reach out to? _____
 - b. How will I serve them? _____
 - c. What message can I share with them? _____
12. Think of someone with whom you could meet with each week to share and practice your "BELLS." _____

Discovery Bible Study - Make three columns on a piece of paper In column 1, write out the following verse. In column 2, write the verse in your own words. In column 3, write out how you will apply/obey this verse this week. Come to the next study prepared to share this.

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to become my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it (Matthew 16:24-25).

For Further Study: *What do you learn about Jesus & discipleship from these passages?*

Matthew 19:16-30 _____

Matthew 23:23 _____

Acts 11:25-26 _____

2 Corinthians 8-9 _____

To receive answers to the above questions, learn more about Discovery Bible Study, or receive the next part of the Story, go to www.StoryofRedemption.com or see your study leader.