

The Heart of Discipleship

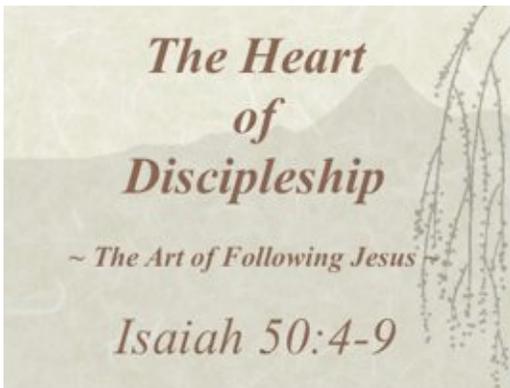
- *The Art of Following Jesus* -

Isaiah 50:4-9

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To follow Jesus

Christian discipleship is best described as following Jesus. This phrase ‘to follow Jesus,’ however, although often song and used, is rarely understood. When I recently asked a class what it meant, they had a great difficulty putting it in their own words.



We generally think it means to try to love people like Jesus loved people. This is an important aspect, of course, but it is only catches one part of what it means to follow Jesus.

To follow Jesus does not simply mean to know His teachings but to do what He did. We are to imitate the way He lived out His life including His ministry.

This does not mean we will do exactly what He did but approach life like He did. We should not focus on the specifics, but on the empowering from His example to live a life like Christ. If we are to imitate Christ's ministry and care for others, we will need to be renewed in our lives by living like Him. When we live like Jesus, we know that He lives within us.

Living like Jesus

When I begin to talk like this, people get bit confused. They have never thought about living like Jesus. Nor have they thought about how Jesus got His power. They just assume He inherently had this power to live out a great ministry.

And so most pastors are busy crying out for more anointing or looking for another method or program to get something done. They do not realize the key to doing the works of Christ is having Christ live more powerfully in our lives. Jesus is not just a special source of grace for desperate situations, but that day-to-day grace for every day living.

Philippians 2:7 give us another picture of Jesus which is much more accurate. “But {Christ} emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” When Jesus came to earth, he put aside His rights and privileges of being God. When He discerned God’s will, He did it the way we need to. When He did miracles, it would be similar to how we did miracles. Now, of course, we are not good at doing these things. It is best for us to learn from Jesus our Master.

Superpower. Right? Wrong!

Most Christians assume that Jesus used His divine supernatural capabilities to carry out such great teaching and ministry. This is not true. If we are careful, we will notice that Jesus prayed, faced dangers, lived and suffered like us. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He lived like us to show how we should live.

Isaiah 50:4-91 gives us a close up on Christ’s life when He lived on earth. We will find that we can follow Jesus in many ways. We will want to learn how He nurtures His relationship with the Father. We will be challenged to have the same attitudes that He held. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,” Philippians 2:5. And, of course, we are to do His works. “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.” John 14:12.

Where does this leave us? Humbled and alert. This is just where God wants us to be. All of a sudden, we realize that we have not learned well. We have not been closely following Jesus at all. We have so much to learn from Jesus. From the Gospels we can get glimpses of Christ’s prayer life and relationships with others, but Isaiah 50:4-9 give us an inside look. We do not just observe what someone recorded that He did, but get to hear how He thought.

¹ The NASB is used unless otherwise noted.

Servant Songs

Tucked away in the Old Testament prophets are four Servant Songs. Each song is characterized by the Messiah talking in the first person (“I” or “me”).

They provide a picture of Christ’s inward life. The Gospels tell us how Jesus lived. The NT epistles tell us the effect of His work. The Servant Songs powerfully lay before us His heart (Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12). Most readers of the Bible are most aware of the last Servant Song,

Isaiah 53. That is where we see the portrait of Christ on the cross painted so vividly before our eyes, even though it was 600 years before His death.

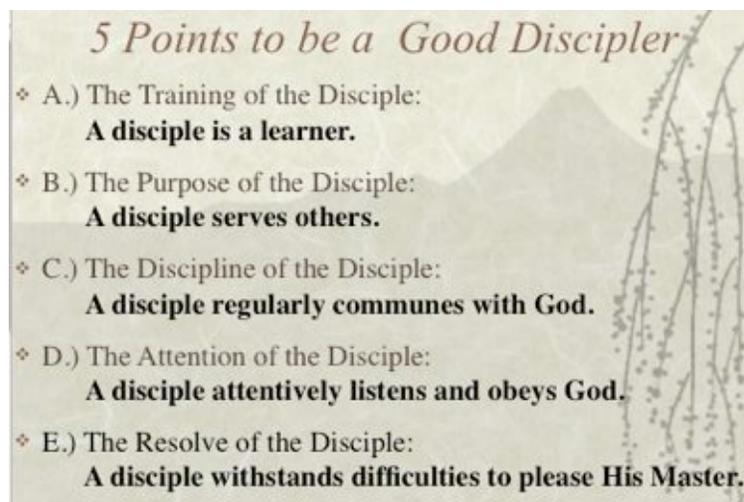
Study Christ’s Example

Just like the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon to find wisdom, so people came from all around to seek Christ’s perspective on things. But we are not just seeking knowledge, we want to learn from Christ how to discern and carry out God’s will even against great odds. May we carefully pay attention to Christ’s greater ways. Christ dropped His prerogative to use His Godhead powers when He came to earth. Let us observe five key disciplines that He learned in order to get done what was necessary. The first four disciplines are found just in verse 50:4!

- A.) The Training of the Disciple: A disciple is a learner.**
- B.) The Purpose of the Disciple: A disciple serves others.**
- C.) The Discipline of the Disciple: A disciple early each day communes with God.**
- D.) The Attention of the Disciple: A disciple attentively listens to and obeys God.**
- E.) The Resolve of the Disciple: A disciple withstands difficulties to please His Master.**

The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. (NAB)

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens



my ear to listen like one being taught. (NIV)

The Training of the Disciple: A disciple is a learner.

“The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples.”

Many of us wished at different times in life that we would know what to say in any given circumstance. It is true that some are more naturally gifted than others in speaking. But what we are speaking about is rooted more in wisdom than gifting. There is a sense of training. In fact, if this sense of just saying what comes to one’s mind, then we would completely misunderstand the whole point of discipleship. Let’s first look more closely to what first line of this verse says.

Literally, it says, “Lord Yahweh has given Me the tongue of learners.” The NASB is similar by using ‘disciples’ instead of ‘learners.’ The NIV says, “has given me an instructed tongue.” A commentator uses the phrase “an expert tongue” while another uses “the tongue of the learned.”

Basically, there are two possible meanings for this verse, though they are closely interrelated. One says that the Messiah was given a tongue of learners while the other a tongue of the learned. This sounds quite different, but both senses can be true and are true. He is both a disciple and a discipler. He has a learning tongue full of right questions and an instructed tongue where He has learned from His Father what He should say.

“And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.” (Luke 2:46-47)

Jesus didn’t miss a step. At twelve years old He already had a learners heart. Notice both how He listened to the teachers and asked questions. This is the discipleship aspect. He had a tongue of a learner. He also had a tongue of the learned. They were amazed at His understanding and answers.

What a challenge for us parents! We need to start training our children to be wise and discerning by twelve years old. No, I don’t mean they know all the players of a baseball team. I don’t mean that they know the names of the books of the Bible either. Our children care so much for the truth that they seek to know and live out the truths as revealed in God’s Word. The Christian church must return to a love for the truth of God’s Word. This is not academic study of truth but the means to know and love God.

One of our failures in training men for ministry is found in the way that we adopt the world’s method of making the person the center of knowledge rather than the all-wise God. By this, I mean we take all the knowledge we can get, combine it with a good amount of Bible knowledge, and in a few years stuff it down into his brain. After this process we hang a tag around his neck and call him a graduate and in some cases ordained. From then on he is suppose to know all the answers. Most

churches when looking for a pastor look for these tags. If they find them, then all is suppose to be okay.

This is very different from how Christ lived out His life. There were seminaries and graduate schools back then. Paul, formerly Saul, attended one. Jesus didn't need them but learned from His Father. Let me reveal three essential differences between these two kinds of training.

Active learning occurs all the Christian's life; it never stops. Once a disciple (literally means 'learner'), always a disciple. Once the heart to learn from God stops, the Christian no longer has genuine communion with God. Those in leadership need to recognize that having a certain authority does not eliminate them from the need to know the Lord more each day.

Discipleship focuses on knowing God as the living source of knowledge rather than some abstract knowledge. People often get bored with hearing the same Bible stories over and over. This is because we focus on knowledge about the Bible rather than knowing God Himself.

Discipleship produces disciple-makers through the way that they experience God's grace. We see that Christ knew what to say because He had been a learner, a disciple. In other words, we can only be as good a teacher as we are a disciple.

The best teacher is the best learner.

Christ lived on our own level of limited knowledge. The key wasn't the right course but the right life. In the right life, He would regularly meet with God. Let's look at a few verses two help illustrate what we mean by this. You will see the common theme: Jesus both was a master learner as well as a master teacher. They go together. One has to be a good disciple to be a good discipler. This never stops throughout a Christian's life no matter how experienced he is. Take the branch off the vine, and it will quickly die.

Illustration #1 Jesus at 12 before the anointing for service. Luke 2:46-47

“And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.” (Luke 2:46-47)

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This is the tongue of the learner. I'm afraid we will be held accountable for all our wasted time not advancing our ability to discern and carry out our Father's will. What a challenge for us as parents to start training our children to be wise so they can hold their own at twelve years old. No, I don't mean

they know all the players of a baseball team. I don't mean the names of the books of the Bible either. They care about the truth. The Christian church must return to a love for the truth. We should be always learning it so that we can always do it. This is not academic study of truth but the means to know and love God.

Unless we are quick to hear, we will not be able to ask the right questions. Questions are avenues into understanding. It has been said that unless a person is asking the question, they do not have room for the answer. This is why a lot of education is so dull. It does not first raise the interest of the student so that they want to know the answer.

Illustration #2 Jesus after the anointing. Matthew 7:28-29

“The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

Jesus' teaching amazed those who heard Him. Early in Jesus' life at age twelve Jesus had a learned or wise tongue. He spoke as if He knew the truth. Here Jesus had another 18 years of wisdom and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Illustration #3 Jesus prayed after His anointing. Luke 9:18

“And it came about that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, ...”

Jesus needed to pray to learn the Father's will. We will look at this a bit more in another point, but we must see that Jesus often prayed. We know God's Word was on His mind because He quoted it so often. Jesus was a disciple but also the discipler trainer. This went on and on, day after day.

Application

- The one who teaches, trains or testifies must regularly meet with God. If he doesn't, then he, whether it be the pastor or an experienced layman, should not teach or disciple. He is trusting his knowledge and experience rather than God's. The disciple will pick up pride more than anything else from his trainer.
- Learning with questions. The point is not that we have a so-called quiet time, but that we are actually meeting God during those times. The learner is not only asking questions but also pleading for help. The sign of learning is the acknowledgment that he is missing something. James says, “If you lack wisdom,” what are you suppose to do? Ask. We are to plead for help in areas that we sense responsibility to fulfill.
- Do we have the attitude of learning? Are we seeking to understand those things around us? Can we not ask God to restore our tongue of learning? As my wife and I walked around Walden

Pond on her birthday, my wife continually made stops to make some observation of what she was looking at. It is this type of inquisitiveness that leads to wisdom and discernment. If we have stopped asking and pleading for wisdom, then we have stopped learning. This is not just a danger for the young and inexperienced but also for the mature and experienced. We all can stray into the dark cave of pride.

Summary

Jesus wanted to know the truth. He wanted to learn it so that He could carry out His Father's ministry of helping others. He regulated His activities so that He could regularly hear from His Father. He expected to hear all that He needed to know. His Father would tell Him. We need to follow Jesus' example.

B.) The Purpose of the Disciple (Isaiah 50:4b)

“The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.”

God's clear purpose for instructing Christ is given here. It is the same for our own lives. The word 'that' introduces a purpose clause. It highlights the reason God gives us wisdom—“that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.” These words call us to examine our motivation for learning. Education has become very popular, but the motives of learning have become corrupted. Unfortunately, many are not learning so that they can serve but to get. They are asking, “What can I get out of these studies?” If we do not have the proper motive for learning, then we easily get prideful and self-sufficient, common marks of the modern society. Below are some highlighted points.

A disciple serves others.

We don't realize how genuine spirituality reveals itself in our daily lives. Some might think it is only in loving to study God's Word or to talk about theology, but, in the end, there must be a special fruit that is seen. This fruit will become evident in some form of service to one another. This is the reason learning takes place. This is the reason teaching takes place. God ultimately is training us not for our own benefit but that we can meet the needs of others. John said, “If we love one another, God abides in us” (1 John 4:12). Those who follow Jesus must focus on serving others not oneself.

His life purpose is to serve.

In our modern educational system we have analyzed everything about the learning process. People are always looking for new theses to write so that they can get their degree! One area of neglect has been the motivation of learning. I do not mean that there are no studies on motivation or getting

students motivated. What I mean is that no one seems to write about getting students motivated to do what God has given us to do: to care for the needy.



My learning and gifts must be rooted in serving others not myself. It is much more popular to take a management course. There we learn to have others serve ourselves. God has given each of us the ability to inquire so that we can advance our knowledge and abilities for the sake of others. I am astounded that so many Christian parents have given themselves over to the pursuit of ungodly goals. Anytime the motivation serves my own ends, then one can see that we are perverting the learning process. The Dead Sea has no life. It has lots of inputs such as the Jordan River but no outputs. Nothing can grow in the Dead Sea. And dead are our lives when we live and learn for ourselves instead of serving others.

His motivation for training is service.

Frankly, the success of our times with God will have everything to do with our purpose in life. If we are self-focused then we simply have not died to ourselves. We will not have a heart like Jesus. We will not be seeking or inquiring God's ways. If we focus on "I want...for me," then we have committed ourselves to using (misusing) all that God has given us in a perverted way. God does not just want your tithe. He wants your heart.

Each one of us must examine why God has so gifted us. We need to understand it is ultimately for others and not for ourselves that God equips us. He made us for 'good works' which He foreordained (Ephesians 2:10). We see this in Jesus. He died to Himself. He lived for others. When the Father asked to give His life, He went back to His purpose of living – to do His Father's will and gave what it took. Do you remember what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1? Paul takes the example of Christ and from it draws an important conclusion about life. Since our purpose is to serve, our experiences in life need to be rigorous and tough at times so that we can become effective ministers to others.

"But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer." (2 Corinthians 1:6)

We focus on strengthening weak ones.

Jesus is much like a doctor who tends to the sick. He went to the ones that needed help. If we find those that we are ministering do not want our help, turn about until you find someone wanting that help.

The faithful disciple knows His Father never makes a mistake regarding the trials he must go through. He endures them because he has confidence that through them he can bring greater help to others.

We get the words we need from the Father.

Education claims that it can give you what you need to live good lives. God says that is all foolish. Christ got His words from the Father. He was the wisest and most helpful. We are fools if we think we can take a class on anger management and think that is all there is to it. We are involved in a spiritual warfare. We need to pray and carefully use the Word of God. We need to regularly meet with God so that we will have the message He wants for the brokenhearted.

Summary: Jesus' purpose was to learn so that He could help the needy. Many learn for the wrong motives such as reputation, knowledge, money or fun. Christ's life purpose was to serve. Because of this, He was learning so that He could be more effective in His service. Isaiah 50:4 captures this sense. Most people learn and live to get. Notice the following selfish examples.

- I go to work to make money.
- I work hard to get a raise.
- I watch a movie to be entertained.
- I wash clothes to finish up the housework.

Once we transform our goals into serving, then all of a sudden our lives becomes a mission. We no longer work to make and spend money but to rightly use it to minister to others. If we watch a film, it would be for a greater purpose of sharing the gospel with a friend. We wonder, pray and seek God in His Word and in the world. We are seeking Him so that we can make a difference for others. It incorporates not just our knowledge skills but our whole lives. It has to do with the size of our savings account, the kind of vehicle we have, and the way I spend time and money.

Learning is only valuable when we have hearts to serve!

- How much time have you really spent in prayer and reading to understand God's place for you in this world? How much do you care about the people who He has called you to minister to? Do you really care for them? Oh, that we might take the precious gifts God has given to us and transform them into gold, silver and diamonds for others!

C.) The Discipline of the Disciple

He awakens Me morning by morning.

God desires to encounter His people each and every day.

Many of us do not daily live out our full potential. For one, we live for our plans than each day. We focus on weeks or months, but rarely live out each day as a whole. Jesus, however, clearly tells us that we are to live out each day as a whole unit. "Each day has enough worries of its own." As God sent manna each day, so God provides for us from His Word each day. We were not made to live off yesterday's blessings from meeting God. If Jesus lived day by day, certainly we need to follow His example. We meet with God so that we, like Jesus, have clear directions as to how to live out and minister to others any given day. This does not mean that God does not at times give us plans that incorporate many days, but that we should accomplish that plan one day at a time. Let's look at this phrase in three parts.

• Guided by my Father's Purpose

Have you ever been nudged awake by the Lord? Most of us are probably wondering whether I am crazy asking this question. We think of being awakened by all sorts of alarms. Many of us have mastered snoozing an extra 5 minutes into our day's schedule. Mothers call us. Phones awake us. Roommates door closing. A cry from a child awakes us.

Rarely are we awakened by the Lord. This is how Jesus started His day. Once we are clear about God's mission for our lives, we then need to seek grace and wisdom for each day. Every day we need to get our mission assignment.

When we go to sleep, we speak with our Father to keep us and prepare us for tomorrow. We look forward to meeting our Heavenly Father each day. We want to hear from Him. We must hear from Him. Morning devotions is rooted not in compulsion or fear but in the desire to meet God and to do His will.

This will not happen if you go to bed watching movies, doing assignments or playing games. It will begin to come into existence when you pray and meditate before retiring with the expectation of meeting Him in the morning so that you can hear how He wants to work through your life the next day. One good brother I know wakes up in the morning with "Praise the Lord." His first thoughts are from the Lord.

We might think of the servant image. The servant is up early tending to the fire for the Master. He knows what his master needs so he is attentive and awakes early enough to complete his jobs. As slaves, we awaken to do our Master's will. We are attentive from the moment go.

• **Anticipation of my Father's Ways**

We live for our Father's purposes. He knows exactly how to combine the acts of love, mercy, words of evangelism with all the other demands of due dates, tests, interviews, sickness, children, etc. We must not separate them from each other. They all are interconnected. "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Whenever any part of our life does not fit into what our Father wants, then that thing becomes an idol. To make matters worse, our heart's affection on things other than God's will and purpose is a form of spiritual adultery. But things are different when we focus on His will.

As we awaken, we anticipate our time with our Father. This is the time He equips us. It is not the only time He helps us, but it is then that He gives us an overall sensitivity as to how He will help us through the day. We look forward to times in His Word and meditate on passages in the scripture. We expect Him to speak.

The opposite to this, unfortunately, is when we do not expect to meet God. Self-reliance and self-preoccupation is normal for many. Many of us have not been trained on how to meditate in God's Word or pray. We just do something and then call it devotions. One can see how cheap and inferior this is to what is suppose to happen. No wonder few Christians anticipate meeting with God! Have you ever heard someone say, "I got devotions out of the way." Whoops! We just showed how trivial our time with God was. In fact, if this is what your time was like, you didn't meet God, at least the God of scriptures who met Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Oh may God restore our passion to know and please the Father. Our times with Him will be totally changed. Do you remember the times Jesus had with the Father? He would often climb a mountain, separate Himself from good friends and lots of admirers to meet with His Father.

• **Consistency in knowing my Father's Will**

We also find that Jesus was awake before the other disciples. They would need to go look for Him. I know many of us would use the "I am extra busy today" thought, but this only hurts us. We fritter so many hours away each day. It is easy to see that we are not very disciplined. Because of the downsizing of the family and the increasing wealth in our lives, we can easily sneak around without good discipline. The Father is clearly asking each of us to meet with Him morning by morning.

Someone might object saying there is no such command. But this is not this voice of a disciple. If Jesus is our Master, are we not to do what He does? I have found in my own life, that God develops more and more discipline in my life. I thought I was disciplined, but then He brought extra responsibility into my life in the form of a project, child or needy person. I had to readjust my schedule to meet His will.

Some will protest that they meet God night by night. That is good, but we need to start off each day right by meeting Him morning by morning. This is where we get His instructions, when we praise and declare His greatness, when we are encouraged or comforted. If our needs are not met by Him, then it is difficult for us to meet the needs of others. If we are worrying about something, can we really be attentive to the needs of others? No.

Jesus, the master disciple, did not make exceptions for learning. Each day He spent time with the Father. Each morning He eagerly sought what God His Father would teach Him. There is no vacation from learning from the Lord.

Applications

- Has He ever awaken you? How did you respond?
- Are your late hours focused on Him or yourself? What changes can you make?
- What do you expect to happen during your morning devotions?
- How regular is your time with the Lord? It needs to be each morning.

D.) The attention of a disciple (Isaiah 50:4d)

“He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.”

A disciple attentively listens to God.

We spoke of the tongue, but now we get to discuss the ear. The ear stands for hearing and listening. In order to hear, we must get close enough for a sound wave to touch our ear receptacle. If I have difficulty hearing someone, I sometimes extend my ear by cupping my hand around my ear. In order to hear, we need to get close. Listening speaks much about a person's attitude.

Did you ever hear a parent call his child, but the child was totally inattentive? He kept doing what he was doing. You wonder if the child even heard the parent. But since you were next to him, you know it was not a hearing problem. He did hear, but he chose not to listen. He didn't respond to the words which were reaching his ears.

When we start seeing this happen in our family, we call everyone to a training session. We remind the children of the response we as the parents are expecting. Then we actually try it out several times. We call, and they are to respond (as we asked them to), “Coming Daddy.” We have them do it several times. For some reason, our children have always seen this as a fun activity, but it is a great way to remind them of their duty.

Listening problems have their roots in attitude problems. The thinking goes like this, “I am busy doing something. I don't want to be bothered by another. I'll just ignore them.” Exasperated parents