



## Session I Introduction

### I. DISCIPLESHIP DEFINED

**Disciple** = "learner, pupil, student" (Gk. *mathetes*, from the verb *manthano*, "to learn")

- Jesus is not the only "teacher" to have "disciples" in the New Testament;
  - There are also "disciples of John [the Baptist]" and "disciples of the Pharisees" (Mark 2:18; 6:29; Matt 9:14; Luke 5:33).
- In the ancient world, students/disciples usually sought out a teacher (cf. Luke 9:57-62);
  - But Jesus usually reverses the dynamic, "*calling*" people to become His disciples (Mark 1:16-20; 2:14-17; 3:13; etc.).
- Jesus did not establish a "school" in a particular location, but was an itinerant (wandering) preacher/teacher;
  - So His disciples literally had to "*follow*" him around (Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:57-62; John 1:43).
- The word "disciples" is used 233 times in the Gospels for Jesus' followers, but one should *not* assume that it refers only to "the twelve";
  - The phrase "twelve disciples" occurs only three times (Matt 10:1; 11:1; 20:17), and "disciples" often refers to this core group;
  - But other people are also called "disciples" of Jesus (Matt 8:19-22; Luke 6:13, 17, 20; 19:37; John 4:1; 6:66; 8:31; 9:28; Acts 6:1-7; etc.).

### 2. TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE

- **A call or appointment**
  - Jesus: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.*" JOHN 15:16
  - Jesus: "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" JOHN 20:21
  - Jesus to Simon Peter: "*Follow me.*" MARK 1:17/JOHN 21:19
- **Renunciation**
  - Jesus: "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself...*" MARK 8:34
- **Cross-bearing**
  - Jesus: "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up a cross and follow me.*" MARK 8:34
- **A deep, growing, and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ**
  - Jesus: "*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit in itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*" JOHN 15:4-5

- The apostle and disciple Paul: *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.”* PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11
- **Life-long spiritual formation**
  - Paul: *Not that I have already attained obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on...* PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14
- **Multiplication**
  - Jesus: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* MATTHEW 28:19-20
- **Authorization/Empowerment**
  - Jesus: *He [Jesus] called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.* MATTHEW 10:1
  - Jesus: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* MATTHEW 28:18, 20
- **Humble service**
  - Jesus: *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”* JOHN 13:14-16
- **Integration** (discipleship as a way of life, 24/7)
  - Paul before Felix, governor of Judea: *“I admit that I worship the God of our fathers, as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect.”* ACTS 24:14
- **Obedience rooted in love**
  - Jesus: *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands, and remain in his love.”* JOHN 14:9-10
  - Jesus: *“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.”* JOHN 15:12

## **FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION**

1. Which of the ten characteristics above challenges you the most right now as you think about being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. Why do you think we tend to compartmentalize our discipleship into an hour or two per week?
3. Where do you see the difference in your day (24/7) because you follow Jesus Christ? In other words, what practical difference does it make that you are a disciple of Jesus?
4. What way(s) has God used to continue to shape you as a Christian disciple?
5. What form(s) has cross-bearing taken in your walk with Jesus?
6. If time and money were not an issue, how would you most like to serve Jesus Christ?
7. What is the hardest part of following Jesus? The easiest?