



V. The Attributes and Disciplines of a Disciple

"Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit." Jeremiah 17:5-8

Attributes are intrinsic qualities or characteristics. Disciplines are codes of conduct or patterns of behavior. The following attributes and disciplines prescriptively and descriptively portray the being and behavior of a disciple of Jesus Christ. These are presented in an order that is not entirely random ... however, the order is not one of prioritized importance. The Bible passages quoted and referenced are a mirror for self-analysis, challenge, and correction if needed, James 1:23-24 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. These attributes and disciplines set a very high standard for one who aspires to be a disciple ... a high goal to be actively and intentionally pursued. *"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,"* Philippians 3:12-14. Disciplines steadfastly practiced become attributes ... conduct slowly morphing into character.

1. Worshipping the Lord. Proper worship is appropriately reverent and cautiously joyous. *"Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling,"* Psalm 2:11. Worship is humbly deferential. *"Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,"* Psalm 95:6. *"I will give thanks to the Lord according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High,"* Psalm 7:17. Worship is much more than singing a few songs once or twice a week. Worship is a vital and daily part of a disciple's life.

2. Continuing in prayer. A disciple has continuing communication with God. *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus,"* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God,"* Philippians 4:6. A lack of prayer or a de-emphasis of prayer demonstrates self-reliance and pride.

3. Being a disciple and making disciples. Jesus said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,*" Matthew 28:18-20. Paul wrote, "*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,*" 2 Timothy 2:2. It was truth transferred by Paul to Timothy ... then by Timothy to faithful men ... and then by those faithful men to others also. A disciple is in this kind of multigenerational discipling chain. Seek a Paul in your life who can say, "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ,*" 1 Corinthians 11:1. Then, as a Paul-mentored Timothy, seek teachable faithful men who can teach others also. A Timothy becomes a Paul to his faithful men ... continuing the chain. Believers come to Jesus in faith. Disciples follow Him in faith. Do not settle for being just a believer. Be a disciple and a discipler.

4. Esteeming and obeying the Word. A disciple knows that the Word is God-breathed ... that it is the voice of God, 2 Timothy 3:16. A disciple knows that it is truth, John 17:17 ... knows that it is pure, Psalm 12:6 & 19:7-8 ... and knows it does not wither with age, Isaiah 40:8. A disciple knows that the Word is powerful and piercing, Hebrews 4:12. A disciple's immediate decisions and life's path are defined by the Word, Psalm 119:105 & Proverbs 6:23. There is freedom in obedience to the Word. Jesus said, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free ... truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin,*" John 8:31-34. Obedience causes and cultivates intimacy with God. "*The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us,*" 1 John 3:24. A disciple strives for the high character that Paul described in 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:5-9 & 2:1-10. There is freedom in holiness and maturity.

5. Being a serious student of the Word. Serious study is imperative. A disciple knows and continues to be rooted in the Word, John 8:31. Devotional Bible reading is very important. Reading Bible commentaries, books about the Bible, daily devotionals, and Christian biographies can be very helpful. However, serious study is much more than these. Be intentional. Dig deep into the Word. Paul wrote, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth,*" 2 Timothy 2:15. Study and learn the Bible. Be able to use the Word accurately. A studying disciple longs for the pure milk of the Word, 1 Peter 2:2, and presses on to the maturity that comes from deeper study and application, Hebrews 5:11 - 6:8. The purest form of an English Bible is one that is closest to the original languages. Choose a translation such as the *New American Standard Bible*, the *English Standard Version*, or a *King James Bible* as your main Bible because these are more literal and better facilitate in-depth study. Dynamic Equivalents, such as the *New International Version* or a *Revised Standard Bible* are more thought-for-thought than word-for-word ... often presenting what the translators believe the text to mean rather than what it might literally state. Paraphrases such as *The Message*, primarily conveying Biblical ideas, seriously compromise in-depth study and frequently state concepts not presented in the specific text. Literal translations, although more accurate than the others, can be more difficult to read. Based on familiarity or reading level, you might want to use the others (non-literal translations) as part of your devotional reading. However, as a disciple one should make the transition to a good literal translation for regular reading and serious study.

6. Having deep co-disciple relationships. *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,"* John 13:35. *"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,"* Proverbs 27:17. Seek co-laborers, fellow-disciples, in your obedience of the Great Commission. *"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart,"* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

7. Being engaged with the Body of Christ. There was a unity, a relational oneness, in the multi-generational community of believers in the First Century Church that extended far beyond, and far deeper, than attendance at weekly meetings. *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved,"* Acts 2:42-47. This is the model of how a disciple engages with other believers today. In this relational oneness, a disciple knows and uses his or her spiritual gifts, Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12-14.

8. Witnessing actively. The fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23, is very important. However, the Great Commission does not command us to manifest *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Jesus commissioned us to *go therefore and make disciples*, Matthew 28:18-20. The first step in making a disciple is helping a person believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, evangelism is a vital part of making disciples as well as part of becoming and being a disciple. *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be (i.e., become) My disciples,"* John 15:8. A disciple is passion-driven to win others to Christ, Romans 1:13-17 and I Corinthians 9:19-23. A fruitless disciple is a contradiction of terms. A fruitless disciple is really just a believer. A disciple is prepared to defend the faith ... confident and equipped to give answers. *"But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence,"* I Peter 3:14-15. A disciple persuades others to believe, Proverbs 15:2.

9. Living after a one-time unreserved and irrevocable sacrifice. A disciple makes a decisive post-salvation once-for-all-time sacrifice of self to God. *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship,"* Romans 12:1. A disciple fights daily against conformity to the world and strives for renewal and transformation. *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect,"* Romans 12:2.

10. Paying the daily price to follow Him. You cannot be His disciple if you do not put Him above all other relationships, above your self, and above all else. An initial decision to be willing to pay the price to follow Him is necessary. Then you cannot be His disciple if you do not daily take up your cross and purposefully follow Him. Jesus stated that you cannot be His disciple if you do not pay this price, Luke 14:25-35. The Bible is emphatic that marriage is a permanent and intimate oneness. Disciples neither desert nor neglect their spouses ... but in the oneness of marriage prioritize Christ above all.

11. Being motivated by the invisible and the eternal. A disciple walks by faith and not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal,"* 2 Corinthians 4:15-18. A disciple sees all of life, relationships, opportunities, time, treasure, and stewardship from an eternal perspective, Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:16-31, Acts 2:41-47, Acts 4:32, and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. A disciple does not fear of death, John 5:24, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-9.

12. Seeing suffering as an opportune manifestation of the life of Christ. *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh,"* 2 Corinthians 4:7-11. His divine light shines forth through our human affliction as a testimony to the lost world. A disciple understands that God is the Potter and we are the clay, Isaiah 64:8.

13. Being engaged in spiritual warfare. A disciple recognizes that earth is not home ... that being in the world is not being of the world ... that citizenship is in Heaven, John 15:18-19, John 17:14-21, and Philippians 3:20. A disciple battles against the world, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17, and 1 John 5:4-5. A disciple battles against the flesh, Mark 7:20-23, Romans 7:15-25, Romans 8:1-13, Galatians 5:13-25, Galatians 6:7-8, and 1 Peter 2:11. A disciple battles against the Devil, Ephesians 6:10-17 and 1 Peter 5:8-9.

14. Being self-perceived as a servant. A disciple seeks to be a Christ-like servant. A disciple does not see being a disciple as being in an elite position above others. *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,"* Philippians 2:3-8.

15. Being steadfastly faithful. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen ... and without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him,"* Hebrews 11:1 & 11:6. Being a steadfast disciple and a disciplemaker is not a phase in the Christian life ... it is life itself. It is absolutely true that *once saved always saved*. However, it cannot be said that *once a disciple always a disciple*. It is possible for a disciple to cease following Him and to slip back to being just a believer, John 6:66. Therefore, being a disciple is a life-long marathon. *"My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord,"* 1 Corinthians 15:58.

16. Anticipating the return of Christ. *"For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words,"* 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,"* Revelation 22:20.

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