

QUIET TIME

Theme: The characteristics of a disciple

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understand.

Day 1 Luke 6:39-49

A disciple learns from Jesus

Day 2 Luke 9:23-27

A disciple follows Jesus, carrying his cross

Day 3 Luke 9:57-62

A disciple follows without looking back

Day 4^{BS} Luke 14:25-35

A disciple prefers Jesus above family and possessions

Day 5 Luke 24:45-48.

A disciple tells the gospel

Day 6 Matthew 10:24-33

A disciple cannot avoid persecution

Day 7 Matthew 28:16-20

A disciple makes other disciples

Day 8 John 8:31-36

A disciple remains in the words of Jesus

Day 9 John 13:34-35

A disciple loves as Jesus loves

Day 10 John 15:5-8

A disciple bears fruit to God's glory

- Think about John 15:7 and 1 John 3:22. A living relationship with Jesus Christ and his Word leads to many answers to your prayers.
- Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

STUDY

Theme: The characteristics of a disciple

Read study 23 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

BIBLE STUDY

Theme: Discipleship in the kingdom of God

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Luke 14:25-35**

MEMORISATION

1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

DISCIPLES

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all.
 "If anyone would come after me,
 he must deny himself
 and take up his cross daily
 and follow me."

Luke 9:23 (NIV)

3. Review and back-review

Review the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

4. Review of the Bible books

All 27 books of the New Testament

The 4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

The 1 Historical Book: Acts

The 13 Letters of Paul: Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

The 8 General Letters: Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude

The 1 Apocalypse: Revelation

23. The characteristics of a disciple

A. What is a disciple in the New Testament?

1. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ

Note how Jesus Christ calls people to become his disciples: “Come and see” and “Follow me” (*Read* John 1:35-51). He calls them to be ‘with him’ wherever he is going (Mark 3:13-15). The word ‘disciple’ especially means ‘follower’ in these Bible passages. Jesus drew followers to himself by his very pleasant and impressive personality en by the words he spoke to them.

The call to discipleship concerns everybody. Jesus makes no distinction between people, whether Jews or Gentiles. His followers were simple fishermen as Peter, James and John, a zealous politician as Simon (Acts 1:13) and a despised tax-collector as Matthew (Matthew 9:9).

2. A disciple is a learner of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ called his followers to learn from him (Matthew 11:28-30). He said, “Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The word ‘disciple’ means ‘apprentice’, ‘learner’ or ‘student’ in these Bible passages. People from different social positions followed Jesus Christ as a learner or student for about three years. They first had to be followers and learners before they could become leaders and teachers (equipped mentors). Real disciples are followers and learners of Jesus Christ. Jesus calls them to follow him (*Read* Luke 5:1-11) and to learn from him (Matthew 11:28).

3. How do disciples learn? By imitating Jesus Christ!

Read John 13:13-15; Matthew 4:23; Acts 4:13; Philippians 4:9. A disciple learns by observing, listening and imitating. You learn as you follow Jesus Christ in your life. Learning is a process. You observe the life and work of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. You learn from how Jesus, the apostles and other Christians teach and how they set an example. And you learn by applying what you have learned in your own life. By doing this on a regular basis and by continuous practice you gain experience.

B. What are the characteristics of a genuine disciple?

Jesus Christ teaches us that genuine disciples have very specific characteristics. For example, a disciple gives the first place in his life to Jesus Christ, lives according to his words, prays according to his revealed will, loves others as Jesus loves and bears much fruit that lasts and brings glory to God.

The following Bible passages teach very specific characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. A disciple of Jesus Christ believes in Jesus Christ (John 8:12; 12:36)

A disciple does not merely follow Jesus Christ, but believes in him with all his heart, mind and life. He believes that Jesus Christ is ‘the Light of the world’, the visible image of the invisible God, that he is God who had taken on the human nature together with his divine nature and had come to dwell among us. He believes that Jesus Christ died in his place for his sins, was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven and now sits enthroned on the right hand of God the Father.

2. A disciple of Jesus Christ obeys Jesus Christ (John 8:31-32)

A disciple remains in the Word of Jesus Christ by hearing it, reading it, studying it, meditating it, memorising it, obeying it and by passing it on to others. A disciple does not believe arbitrary religious or philosophical views. He also does not behave as he likes. He believes in Jesus Christ and obeys his teachings.

3. A disciple of Jesus Christ is a servant (John 12:26)

Disciples are called by Jesus Christ to serve God and others. It is a calling to work together with Jesus within your task on earth. Every believer receives a special task within the kingdom of God (Mark 13:34).

4. A disciple of Jesus Christ shows love in his relationships (John 13:34-35)

God has shown us his great love (Romans 5:8). This same love he also gives through his Holy Spirit to his disciples so that they may love others (Romans 5:5). This love is characterised by self-sacrifice (John 15:13). This love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast and is not proud. It is not rude (causing offence or hurt), self-seeking or easily angered (irritated). This love does not keep a record of other people’s wrongs, but forgives. It has no delight in the evil of this world, but delights in the truth and rejoices when other people make progress in the direction of truth. This love bears with difficult people and difficult circumstances, trusts people unless they violate that trust, expects that God can change people and perseveres doing what is best for God and others (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

5. A disciple of Jesus Christ remains in Jesus Christ (John 15:4-6)

A disciple (John 15:8) has received Jesus Christ in his heart and life and continually develops his personal relationship with Christ. This relationship is genuine and confidential. Jesus Christ does not accept a superficial formal relationship (John 15:6).

6. A disciple of Jesus Christ bears much and lasting fruit (John 15:8,16)

The most important message of the allegory in John 15 is that a disciple of Jesus Christ can only bear fruit as long as he remains bound (connected, united) to Jesus Christ (“Christ in you” and “You in Christ”) (Colossians

1:27-28). By bearing much and lasting fruit he proves that he is a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ.

What is meant by 'fruit' in the Bible?

- Fruit is produced by the preaching of the gospel, namely, new converts or believers (Colossians 1:5-6).
- Fruit is produced by repentance to Jesus Christ, namely, good works like sharing your possessions, being honest in matters of money and by being satisfied with what you receive (Luke 3:8-14).
- Fruit is produced by the making of disciples, that is, mature Christians that never back-slide (John 15:16).
- Fruit is produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit, that is, Christian character (Galatians 5:22-23).

The disciple bears much fruit by remaining in an interactive relationship with Jesus Christ (John 15:5). 'Pruning' (verse 2) is cutting away only the dead or superfluous parts of the branch. In the allegory no whole branch is cut off. Withered branches had no connection with the vine and is therefore thrown out and burned (cf. verse 6). A disciple bears more fruit when he allows God (and others) to rebuke, correct and discipline him. God also uses trials to discipline Christians.

In the parable of the sower Jesus teaches that some of his disciples will bear 30 to 100 times fruit (Matthew 13:8). Every disciple will bear a different amount of fruit. The first reason is that the amount of fruit is dependent on the measure of repentance, faith, courage, perseverance and dedication of the Christian to God's kingdom (e.g. doing evangelism and making disciples). The second reason is that the amount of fruit is dependent on the grace, spiritual gift and special task which God has entrusted to a Christian. The third reason is that the measure of fruit is dependent on the circumstances in which God has placed the Christian.

7. A disciple of Jesus Christ is transformed by the Word of Jesus Christ (John 15:3,7)

The Word which Jesus Christ spoke to his disciples cleansed them, that is, they were justified by their faith in the gospel message (John 15:3). When the Word of Jesus Christ remains in the disciple, his thoughts, motives, attitudes, beliefs and convictions are changed and his speaking and behaviour are transformed. The Word of God does not remain mere knowledge, but influences every aspect of the disciple's life for good (John 15:7).

8. A disciple of Jesus Christ prays according to the will of Jesus Christ (John 15:7,16)

A disciple experiences that God answers his prayers.

9. A disciple of Jesus Christ is trained, equipped and his character is moulded (Luke 6:39-42)

A disciple must first be equipped by Jesus Christ and other Christians before he can equip others. 'Equipping' involves teaching biblical truth, training biblical skills and transmitting a biblical example. A disciple must first learn

before he can teach others. A disciple must first develop Christian character before he can develop others. He must give attention to his own weaknesses and failures before he can rebuke and correct others. The goal of every disciple should be to become more and more like Jesus Christ in character and behaviour.

10. A disciple of Jesus Christ says 'no' to his selfish desires and is willing to suffer (Luke 9:23-26)

A disciple denies himself: because he has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20) he puts the misdeeds of the body to death by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13). He is willing to identify himself with Jesus Christ and his cause every day and is not ashamed to be a Christian. He bears with the negative reactions of people to his Christian faith and is willing to suffer ridicule, rejection, persecution and shame for the sake of Jesus Christ.

11. A disciple of Jesus Christ makes a total commitment to Jesus Christ (Luke 9:57-62)

In these parables three different people want to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The first person wanted to follow Jesus Christ without Jesus Christ calling him. He wants to follow Jesus Christ for the wrong reason. He was impressed by the great number of people around Jesus, the miracles and the enthusiasm of the people. He wanted to be in the centre of all these exciting events, but he had not counted the cost of discipleship. He did not realise that discipleship involves struggle, rejection, persecution and suffering.

The second person was called, but was not ready to follow Jesus Christ. He eventually wanted to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, but not now. He had the wrong priorities in life and therefore posed a condition. His excuse was that he first wanted to bury his father, who may have died, but may still live for a long time. We must not misinterpret Jesus' answer: "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Jesus wanted to make clear that a disciple of Jesus Christ must obey Jesus Christ immediately and unconditionally. Jesus did not say that a person must abandon his parents, because parents should be loved and respected. But Jesus clearly taught that a disciple must love Jesus Christ more than his parents (Matthew 10:37-39).

The third person wanted to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, also without being called. He too had a condition. He wanted to say good-bye to his family and friends. He probably did not know himself well enough, but Jesus Christ could look into his heart and future and see things he himself did not know (John 2:24-25). Jesus knew the insecurities, deliberations and motives of the heart and knew that his family and friends at home would easily persuade him not to follow Jesus Christ. A disciple must be willing to leave his family for the sake of Christ (Mark 10:29-30).

These parables show that a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ follows Jesus Christ for the right reasons and with complete commitment.

12. A disciple of Jesus Christ loves Jesus Christ more than his family and friends (Luke 14:26)

The word 'to hate' does not have the negative connotation it has today in the English language, because in the original Greek language it also means 'to prefer less' (Matthew 10:37). A genuine disciple prefers Jesus Christ above all other relationships that threaten to take his place, no matter whether they are family or friends. This does not mean that a disciple must forget his family and friends, because Jesus taught that a disciple must love his parents and friends as much as he loves himself. Jesus wanted to make very clear that a disciple's relationship with him is the most important relationship. No one in the world may come in between.

13. A disciple of Jesus Christ accepts the suffering of a Christian (Luke 14:27)

Jesus carried his cross. For Jesus 'the cross' meant rejection by people, oppression, persecution, terrible suffering, shame and finally death. A disciple has to carry his own (a different) cross. This means that he may have to suffer rejection, oppression, persecution, shame or possibly death, because he belongs to Jesus Christ.

The opponents of Jesus Christ called Jesus 'the instrument of the devil' (Matthew 12:24-27), 'demon-possessed', 'mad' (John 10:20) and even 'Beelzebub' (the devil himself) (Matthew 10:25). Non-Christians will treat Christians in a similar way (Matthew 10:24). Disciples of Christ will be misunderstood, deliberately misrepresented, their words will be twisted and they will be persecuted, as is still happening in our time (Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:12).

14. A disciple of Jesus Christ prefers Jesus Christ more than possessions or any activities and ambitions (Luke 14:33)

A disciple of Jesus Christ is willing to give up whatever is needed in order to keep on following Jesus Christ as his disciple and to keep on learning from him. A true Christian does not allow love for money, success, fame or power to keep him from being a disciple of Jesus Christ. If he must make a choice between possessions or other ambitions and remaining a disciple of Jesus Christ, he will choose to follow Christ. A genuine disciple prefers Jesus Christ above all possessions, activities, ambitions or duties that threaten to take his place. Nothing in life may come in between.

15. A disciple of Jesus Christ is a witness of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:45-48)

The disciples in the time of Jesus Christ were not wise philosophers or learned scientists, but were ordinary people to whom God had entrusted his revelation (Matthew 11:25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28). They were

'the little flock' to whom God the Father had given the kingdom (Luke 12:32). The learned Jews regarded them as 'unschooled', but acknowledged that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). The disciples spoke courageously and boldly about Jesus Christ and shared what they had learned from him (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7) (*Read* 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). The disciples of Jesus Christ are still doing the same today.

16. A disciple of Jesus Christ applies the truths of the kingdom of God to everyday life (Matthew 13:52)

A disciple of Jesus Christ, who has been made a disciple (trained) with respect to the truths of the kingdom of God, has stored these truths in his heart (cf. Psalm 119:11) and brings forth not only the Old Testament truths, but also the New Testament truths. He teaches and applies these truths. He knows that 'the kingdom' is not the kingdom of Israel, but the kingdom of God as Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) and in all his parables. For example, he has learned how the kingdom grows (Matthew chapter 13) and how Christians relate in the kingdom of God (Matthew chapter 18 – 19). "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34; cf. John 7:38).

17. A disciple of Jesus Christ takes the initiative to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)

Christians are called to acknowledge Jesus Christ before people in the world (Matthew 10:32-33) and to give an account of their faith to those who ask them (1 Peter 3:15-16). A disciple of Jesus Christ does not wait until the people in the world come to him, but takes the initiative to tell people in his family, his neighbourhood and town about Jesus Christ. He tries to bring different groups of people in touch with Jesus Christ, so that they may begin to follow him as disciples. People can only become disciples of Jesus Christ when they hear the gospel, believe in him and obey him (Romans 10:14-17). Paul's calling was to bring people to faith and obedience to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:5). It is also the task of all disciples of Jesus Christ to go and make people of all nations disciples of Jesus Christ.

18. A disciple of Jesus Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit works in his life (Acts 5:32)

Being filled with the Spirit begins with being born again through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:4-7) and continues with the daily submission to the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18). The Holy Spirit will live in the disciples of Jesus Christ for ever (John 14:16-18). His task is to glorify Jesus Christ in the Church (John 16:14), transform the character of Christians (Galatians 5:22-23) and help them to perform the tasks they have received from God (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). 'Disciples' without the Holy Spirit are NOT disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:1-2).