

Discipleship course for new believers

by Shirley Davis

Lesson 1 – Understanding our commitment

1. God's part

God sent Jesus Christ to give his life so that we can be saved (**John 3:16**).

Because we have all sinned we deserve to be punished by eternal separation from God (**Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23**) but Jesus received the punishment for us and his life was the only sacrifice accepted by God that would pardon our sins and restore our personal relationship with God the Father (**Acts 4:12**).

Therefore Jesus Christ made it possible for us to be saved and have a personal relationship with God (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

2. Our part

Perhaps we hear the Gospel and about Jesus Christ and we want to be saved - but we must understand that we are not saved by raising our hand or by repeating a prayer. Maybe we do not understand it all but we must make a decision and make a commitment:

- a) Decision – We must recognize and confess our sins to God, and with our whole heart we must want to turn away from sin and be forgiven by God. (Repentance) (**1 John 1:9**). And we must believe that Jesus Christ died for us and was raised from the dead so that we might be saved. (**Romans 10:9-10; John 3:18**)
- b) Commitment – Although maybe we don't understand everything we must commit our life to Jesus in order to love and serve Him from that moment forward. That means that we no longer do what we ourselves want, but instead we choose to do what Jesus wants us to (**Luke 9:23**). In other words, we make Jesus Christ Lord of our life, and before doing anything or making a decision we think "What would Jesus do?" (**2 Corinthians 10:5; Matthew 6:33**)

3. Done in faith

As said before, although we don't understand everything, we must do this "in faith" – believing that God is faithful and keeps His word. As we read these Bible verses, we believe that they are true and we can trust in God and everything He says. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments we can read stories of men and women who also trusted in God and His word, and even though they passed through very difficult situations (even impossible ones!) they experienced the love and power of God helping them. (**Hebrews 11:32-34; 1 Corinthians 10:11**). These stories encourage and help us in our daily lives as we also follow the Lord.

Can you remember any bible stories you have heard that tell of God's love toward His people?

Do you know any Bible stories that tell how God did miracles or kept His promises?

4. Discussion

We want to take about 10 minutes here to talk together about the bible verses above and how we can trust in them and God's promises "by faith". Some well-known bible stories can be considered that show God's faithfulness in the middle of hopeless or impossible situations, talking especially about how the people involved might have been thinking. (For example, what might an Israelite have been thinking as he walked on dry land across the bottom of the Red Sea with the water piled up like high walls on either side? Or what might Elijah have been thinking on Mount Carmel when he had prepared the altar with wood and the sacrifice and then poured water all over it, trusting that God would send down fire from Heaven over it all in front of everyone?)

We cannot understand everything about God; and yes, we might have fear in the middle of a situation but at the same time we can have FAITH – because we put all our trust in our Heavenly Father and His word.

We'll finish by reading this bible passage in **1 John 5:1-5**.

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Lesson 2 – The next steps

1. Getting to know Jesus

If we believe that we now can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus, we can do several things to develop that relationship. Making friends with someone involves finding out more about them, talking with them, and spending time with them. As we get to know them better we recognize their voice (even when we don't expect to hear from them!) and we gradually begin to understand who they are and why they act the way they do. Can you think of some ways we can do this with Jesus and our Heavenly Father?

2. Reading the Bible

This is one of the best ways – but we don't have to start at the beginning and read through every page! The Gospels of **Matthew**, **Mark** and **Luke** are good to start with so that we can learn about the life of Jesus; and the Gospel of **John** gives us many of the most important teachings of Jesus so that we can understand how we can follow Him and please God. Even if we do not have our own bible, it is often possible to obtain a copy of one of the Gospels, or a small booklet of selected bible verses to start with. Then as we are able, we should also go on to read the other parts of the Bible, including the Old Testament. As we read and study the scriptures, we may not always understand all that we read, but if we pray and ask God to help us, He is faithful to do so. (**2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 15:4**)

It is also a good idea to start learning and MEMORIZING important bible verses, so that we can think about them any time and get a better understanding of them even when we don't have a bible with us. As we remember them and repeat them, it is easier to start applying them to our everyday life. (**Psalms 119:105, 130; 2 Timothy 2:14; Romans 1:16**)

3. Praying

Listening and talking with a new friend is very important as we build the relationship, and it is no different with Jesus and our Heavenly Father. Of course it seems strange because we cannot SEE them, but as mentioned before we must start "in faith". (**Hebrews 11:6**) That is what prayer is – talking openly from our heart to God and listening!! When we don't understand something we should ask Him to explain it to us. We rarely actually hear God answer in an audible voice, but if we pray and believe that He hears us and will answer us, some time later (maybe even when we're busy doing something else and not even thinking about it!) we find that we suddenly KNOW the answer!! God just reveals it to us in our heart and we suddenly know and understand! (**James 1:5-8**)

Praying is so important that Jesus even gave us an example of HOW to pray – it is called the LORD'S PRAYER and we can read it in the teaching that he gave his disciples in **Matthew 6:5-13**. It is good to repeat and even memorize this prayer, but we should always remember that God doesn't just want to hear us repeat the words of a good prayer – He wants us to talk to Him from our heart!!

4. Church fellowship

Another way to learn about someone is to get to know others who are also their friend. As new Christians we should spend time if possible with other Christians who are faithfully serving God and have been following Jesus for a longer time. Often we can do this by attending church or a bible study group or a Christian club for children. Sometimes we have a choice in where we can go, and so we need to pray for God to guide us to a group or church where the leaders live godly lives and are good examples of Jesus, as well as teach the Gospel. (**1 John 2:3-6**) In some places there are few churches or Christian groups, in which case we should pray that God will lead us to get to know some other true believers so that we can study, pray and fellowship together. (**Matthew 18:20**). Remember that Jesus said in **Matthew 7:7-11** that if we ask and seek God, we will always find Him and He will answer us!

So now that you know what to do next, it is up to YOU whether or not you move forward and begin to know more of God – and remember what it says in **James 4:17**! Take this opportunity to discuss together how you plan to take YOUR next steps forward – and pray together for the Lord to guide each of you.

Lesson 3 – Following Jesus

1. Obeying his commands

As we read and learn more of Jesus, we find out that while Jesus teaches us many things and gives us many examples of how we should live our lives and please God, there are SOME things that He COMMANDS us to do. These are not just good suggestions! If He is truly our Lord and we want to follow Him and be His disciple, then we MUST obey these important commands! Maybe He will not PUNISH us if we do not obey them, but as a true Christian we should want to please and bless Jesus to show how much we love Him, and so we should be happy to obey Him! (**John 14:15**)

In **Matthew 28:19-20** we read what is known as the Great Commission, although it is really something Jesus COMMANDS all his followers to do; and we can read it again in a little more detail in **Mark 16:15-18**. Each and every one of us is to go out and share the good news (the Gospel) of Jesus Christ with everyone we meet – no matter what country or people they come from around the world. We should tell them about Jesus and the Bible and help them also become disciples of Jesus. We should start doing this from the very beginning of serving Jesus – not wait until we know everything! As soon as we learn the good news about Salvation, we can start sharing that; when we find out that Jesus already took our pain and suffering on the Cross so that we might be healed, we can share THAT good news! As we learn more and more about how much God loves us and how Jesus helps us in our daily life, we can share THAT good news!

In **John 13:34-35** we see that Jesus gives us a new commandment – TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER! He doesn't say "except when...." because He wants us to love one another with the same kind of love that our Heavenly Father has for us – even when we do not deserve it! A good definition of that kind of love is found in **1 Corinthians 13**.

As his disciples, Jesus tells us of many things that we should do if we want to follow Him. His teaching known as the SERMON ON THE MOUNT is full of many such "commands", and we should all spend time studying it again and again. You can read it in **Matthew chapters 5-7** and as you do so, you will find that what Jesus says is quite simple and not at all difficult to understand – although we don't always want to do it!

Maybe you have heard some parts of the Sermon on the Mount before – which ones?
Is there a particular teaching that you like best?
Is there one that you find especially hard to obey?

2. Water Baptism

As we read the Great Commission we see that Jesus specifically talks about his followers being BAPTIZED as well as obeying his commands. Early in each of the four gospels, we read how Jesus himself was baptized in water by John the Baptist, and in **John 3:5** Jesus explained how important water baptism is. Throughout the Book of Acts we also read how new believers were baptized in water as a sign of repentance and leaving behind their old way of life and starting over "clean". (**Acts 8:35-38; 10:47-48; 16:29-34**)

Water Baptism is an act (even a special ceremony) that proclaims our faith in Jesus Christ to others, and is a sign that we have begun a new life in Christ – and so it is a serious step in our walk with God. It unites us with all other followers of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4-6**) and Paul explains it further in **Romans 6:3-13**. Talk to your pastor or church leader to learn how YOU can obey Jesus and be baptized.

3. Holy Communion

This is another "sacrament" or religious ceremony of the church which is celebrated by all believers who are following Christ, although sometimes it is celebrated in different ways. Jesus told his disciples to share the bread and wine of the Passover meal at the Last Supper in remembrance of Him. (**Luke 22:19-20**). It is explained in more detail in **1 Corinthians 11:23-29** and is celebrated in churches and gatherings of believers all around the world, sometimes weekly, sometimes only a few times each year. Ask your pastor or church leader if you want to learn more about how your church does it.

4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Different church groups teach this in different ways, but here are some Bible verses that you can read and pray about to learn more. Before Jesus ascended into Heaven he said that his disciples would receive special power from the Holy Spirit so they could be His witnesses around the world (**Acts 1:7-8**). In fact He told them to wait and not leave to carry out the Great Commission until they had received that power. (**Acts 1:4-5**) As we continue to read the story in **Acts 2**, we learn how this promise was fulfilled and the disciples and followers of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit in a dramatic way. This "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" changed them from being uncertain and even fearful, to being bold preachers of the Gospel whose words caused thousands of people to repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord, change their lives and follow His teachings.

Throughout the Book of Acts we read that wherever the Christians went preaching the Gospel, they also taught the importance of being baptized in the Holy Spirit – and sometimes the people were so eager to give their lives to Jesus and receive whatever God had for them, that they were baptized in the Holy Spirit even while they were still praying! (**Acts 4:31; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7**)

Many scriptures also tell of miracles performed by those who preached and believed the Gospel just as Jesus promised in **Mark 16:17**. Even though many were persecuted and even beaten or killed for their preaching, they refused to stop and God continued to work through them (**Acts 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 8:4-8; 14:3-7**)

Jesus told his followers that He had to go away but he would send them the Holy Spirit in His place (**John 16:5-6**) to be their Counselor and Guide. He explained in great detail about the work of the Holy Spirit and how he would always be with them and help them after Jesus was gone to Heaven. You can read this in particular in **John chapters 14 and 16**.

Paul wrote in several of his letters and explained about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (**1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 6:19-20**) and he wrote about the Gifts of the Spirit in **1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14**. Paul also wrote about the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives in **Galatians 5:16-26**.

Jesus said that if we want to receive the Holy Spirit, all we have to do is ask our Heavenly Father who will give him to us (**Luke 11:13**) because the Holy Spirit is a gift given to us to empower us to carry out Jesus' commands. Would YOU like to pray and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit right now?

5. Expecting Jesus' return

Towards the end of his time here on earth, Jesus often warned his disciples about future events and how to stay prepared for them. He told them of his coming death, burial and resurrection – although they did not understand it at the time, but after it happened they remembered and understood more. Jesus often told them "PARABLES" or stories that were easy to remember that taught important messages. Can you think of any of these parables? Maybe you have heard of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**) or the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**). Jesus spoke several parables that teach of the End Times and used them to help explain what will happen when He returns to take all His followers up to Heaven to live with Him and our Heavenly Father forever. This is often known today as the SECOND COMING OF JESUS. Jesus said no-one can know exactly when He will return but we must always be prepared and expect it at any time. He taught his disciples very clearly about what to expect in the Last Days before His return and we should all study these passages and pray for understanding so that we can stay prepared. Read **Matthew chapters 24 and 25**, which include the parables of the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and Goats, which are all very clear and simple to understand. You can also read more in **Mark 13** and **Luke 21**.

One of the greatest promises we have from Jesus is that He will come back and take us all to Heaven to be with Him forever (**John 14:1-3**), and even if we die here on this earth before His return, we can be reassured that as faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we will also go to Heaven. This is one of the meanings of being given eternal life when we are saved and give our lives to Jesus Christ. Therefore as Christians we do not need to fear death any more (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**).

Spending eternity in Heaven with Jesus and all who love and serve Christ is something we can look forward to as Christians – and again is part of the Good News we must share with those who are lost and still do not know Jesus. Jesus made it very clear that EVERYONE will one day individually stand before God and be judged for his or her sins, deeds, and words. (**Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Jude 14-15**) As in the parable of the Sheep and Goats, some will go on to live in Heaven but the others will be sent to Hell with Satan and his evil spirits – now THAT may give you something to talk about! Remember to look in the BIBLE to find your answers!

Lesson 4 – Living an overcoming life

1. Knowing our enemy

As we begin to read in the Gospels about Jesus' life and ministry we learn that immediately after he was publicly baptized he wanted to spend special time with God. He went out into the wilderness alone to pray and there he was tempted by Satan, the devil. (**Matthew 4:1-11**) Even as new believers it is not long before the devil starts tempting us also – if we promise to attend a meeting, or help someone, or we decide to start praying or reading the Bible, something just “happens” to come along to try to stop us from keeping our word! Although we do not see or hear the devil himself, temptation comes in other ways – maybe our friends hear about our decision and make fun of us; perhaps we start feeling scared or doubting what we believe; sometimes we feel we are getting sick or we get an invitation to finally go somewhere we've been wanting to go for a long time! Just as Satan tried different ways with Jesus, he tries many different ways with us.

In fact, even though we may feel that a certain person or group is our enemy, the Bible tells us that is not so - **Ephesians 6:10-12**. Our enemy is Satan, who with his evil spirits tempts and persuades people to doubt God and be led by their natural feelings (sometimes called the “flesh”) to act against God's people and His purposes. Here are some scriptures that tell us more about Satan:

- a) He is a liar – **John 8:44**
- b) He causes disease and illness, and possession by evil spirits – **Job 2:7; Mark 1:23-27**
- c) Jesus described him as a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy – **John 10:10**
- d) He goes around seeking people to harm – **1 Peter 5:8**
- e) He tries to snatch away the Word of God from us – **Matthew 13:19**
- f) He plots and tries to deceive us – **2 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 11:14**

2. Winning the battle

But we can be encouraged by knowing that Jesus was tempted too and even came to face to face with Satan himself – and we can learn from Him how to overcome temptation and the lies of the devil. As you read the story in **Matthew 4**, answer this question: HOW DID JESUS RESPOND TO SATAN? The answer is: HE QUOTED SCRIPTURES (THE WORD OF GOD).

God's Word has very special power – read in **Genesis 1** how the earth and everything in it was created simply by God SPEAKING it into existence! When we realize how powerful the scriptures are we can use them to overcome Satan's attacks against us throughout our Christian life. This is another reason why we should memorize bible verses. Here are some more verses that tell us of the power of God's Word:

It is like a sword - **Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12**
It lasts forever – **Mark 13:31**
It brings life – **John 6:63**
It accomplishes God's purpose - **Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 5:18**

As we read through the Bible we come across many promises that God has given us. When we promise someone something, we are giving them our word – saying that they can trust what we say because we WILL do it. The Bible is full of stories and examples of how God kept His word to His people, so we can put our trust in Him and His promises. If we have memorized some of God's promises, when the devil comes to tempt us or try to make us doubt what God said, we can speak out those promises – this not only encourages us but, just as happened with Jesus in the wilderness, the devil has to submit to the Word of God and eventually leaves. See if you can remember some promises that God has given us in His word – share them and discuss them; then write them all down so you can start to memorize them and use them.

3. Staying prepared

Paul teaches us in **Ephesians 6:13-18** how to be prepared to withstand attacks from Satan. Study this passage and talk about how you can put it to practice in your daily life. Also discuss **James 4:7** and **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**. When you meet together in the future, you can share testimonies of scriptures that encouraged you and how the Lord has helped you, and together you can all give praise to God! (**Hebrews 13:15-16**) (**Colossians 2:6-7**)