ΖΩΝΤΑΝΗ ΕΛΠΙΔΑ
ΣΧΟΛΗ ΜΑΘΗΤΕΙΑΣ

LHDS 1 - What is a Disciple?

Central Theme: A disciple of Jesus is someone who has answered His call to follow Him, is learning to become like Him through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and remains faithful to Him through every season of life—joy and sorrow, victory and suffering—because Jesus is not merely the teacher of the Way - He is the Way.

Key texts: John 14:6; Luke 9:23; Mark 3:14; John 14:16–17, 26; John 15:4–5; 2 Corinthians 4:7–10; Hebrews 12:1–3.

1. The invitation: "Follow Me" (0–5 minutes)
    a. Read Mark 1:16–20: *"And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him."*

    b. "When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, what exactly was He inviting them to do?"
        i. They were not being invited simply to accept a set of doctrines, attend religious meetings, or adopt a new moral code.
        ii. They were being invited into a relationship with a Person. They would walk with Him, listen to Him, observe His character, share His ministry, and gradually become like Him.
        iii. Mark 3:14 is particularly important. Jesus appointed the Twelve so that they might be with Him, and so that He might send them out to preach.
        iv. Notice the order: presence precedes mission.

    c. Key Points:
        i. Jesus takes the initiative. He calls us before we fully understand where the journey will lead.
        ii. Following Jesus involves a change in allegiance. He becomes our Master and King.
        iii. Discipleship is not simply knowing what Jesus taught. It is learning to live as He lived.
        iv. The disciples were ordinary people. They were not spiritually mature when Jesus called them.

    d. John Mark Comer, in his book "Practicing the Way," describes discipleship using the ancient concept of apprenticeship. His framework—being with Jesus, becoming like Him, and doing as He did—captures this relational and practical dimension of following Christ.
    e. Being a disciple of Jesus involves risk. Jesus did not give His disciples a complete itinerary before they started. He simply said, "Follow Me." And they began walking.

f. CHALLENGE: Comer puts the challenge this way: "If we're not being intentionally formed by Jesus himself, then it's highly likely we are being unintentionally formed by someone or something else." (Practicing the Way, p. xiii)
    i. The world is shaping us. Forming us.
    ii. We don't live in a vacuum.
    iii. WE ARE BECOMING SOMETHING!

2. Walking in the Way: A lifelong journey – Christian faith is walking with Jesus and growing with Him.
    a. Colossians 2:6–7 – *"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."*
    b. Philippians 3:13–14 – *"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*
        i. Interestingly, the early Christian movement was sometimes called "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14).
        ii. Christianity was understood not merely as a collection of beliefs but as a way of life centered on Jesus.
    c. The image of walking is deeply biblical:
        i. Genesis 5:24 — Enoch walked with God.
        ii. Micah 6:8 — *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"*
    d. 1 John 2:6 – *"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."*
    e. Discipleship is a journey, not an arrival - important distinction:
        i. We do not follow Jesus perfectly, but we are called to follow Him faithfully.
        ii. Faithfulness does not mean never falling. It means continually returning to Jesus, trusting His grace, and allowing Him to transform us.
        iii. It's about surrender. Submission.
        iv. But for what purpose? FOR THE MASTER'S PURPOSE – TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST. (Luke 19:10)
    f. Peter is a compelling example. Growth. Failure in the garden. Denial – but then a strong witness for the Kingdom.
        i. Peter's journey demonstrates that spiritual maturity is not instantaneous. Jesus patiently transforms those who remain responsive to His call.
        ii. In Steps to Christ, chapter 8, "Growing Up Into Christ," Ellen White emphasizes the daily surrender that allows a person's life to become increasingly like

Christ's. She also describes the Christian life as one of abiding trust rather than constant emotional excitement.

iii. This fits the journey metaphor: discipleship is a daily relationship, not an occasional spiritual experience.

3. <u>We do not walk alone</u>: The Holy Spirit and the Word of God
    a. One of Jesus' greatest promises to His disciples came shortly before His crucifixion.
    b. He knew they would face fear, uncertainty, persecution, and discouragement.
    c. He promised another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would remain with them.
    d. The Holy Spirit is our constant Companion

i. The Spirit:
    a. Teaches and reminds us of Jesus' words — John 14:26.
    b. Guides us into truth — John 16:13.
    c. Convicts us of sin — John 16:8.
    d. Transforms our character — Galatians 5:22–23.
    e. Empowers us for witness — Acts 1:8.
    f. Strengthens us in weakness — Romans 8:26.
    g. The Spirit is not an impersonal influence. He is the divine Comforter whom Jesus promised.
    e. The Bible is our foundation
        i. Read Psalm 119:105: <u>"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."</u>
        ii. A lamp illuminates the next steps. It does not necessarily reveal the entire journey.
        iii. The Holy Spirit does not lead us away from Scripture. He opens our understanding of God's Word, reminds us of Jesus' teachings, and helps us apply biblical truth.
        iv. This is important because Christian discipleship must be more than following our feelings or impressions. The Scriptures provide the authoritative standard by which we evaluate our beliefs, choices, and spiritual experiences (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Acts 17:11).

4. <u>The practices that keep us walking with Jesus</u>
    a. If being an apprentice and disciple of Jesus is a journey, then it follows that there are some tools and practices that will assist us as we walk with Him. We will explore these more in some of future classes. What are they?
        i. Prayer
        ii. Reading Scripture
        iii. Practicing Solitude
        iv. Sabbath rest
        v. Christian community.
    b. Spiritual practices do not transform us by their own power. They help us remain open to the One who transforms.
    c. Ellen White writes in Steps to Christ, p. 70: "Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work." Disciples don't just make one decision to follow Jesus – no! Every day they choose to continue their journey with their Savior.

d. Disciples have one goal – to be like their Master.
e. CHALLENGE: Not easy to be formed – why? Because we already are formed! Yes. Comer, in his book "Practicing the Way" says that we are formed in three basic ways:
    i. We are formed by the stories we believe. Worldview.
    ii. Our Habits form us. "What we do, we become." (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 12:2)
    iii. We are also formed by our relationships. We become like the people we spend time with. This is especially true with our families of origin. There is a saying that goes: "Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones!" This is absolutely true – not only of our family, but of our ethnicity, nationality, where we live, the school we attended, the digital world we spend hours in each day.
    iv. THEREFORE: Being a disciple of Jesus is a call to be re-formed; transformed.

5. <u>Yes, there is a Cross</u>!
    a. Read Luke 9:23–24: *"Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."*
        i. This is the central and perhaps most challenging section of the class.
        ii. We often interpret "carrying our cross" as dealing with the ordinary difficulties of life: illness, financial hardship, an unpleasant situation, or a difficult relationship. But in the Roman world, the cross meant something far more serious. It was an instrument of execution, public humiliation, and submission to imperial authority.
        iii. When Jesus told His followers to take up their crosses, He was calling them to a radical surrender of self-preservation, personal sovereignty, and competing loyalties.
    b. What does taking up our cross mean for us today?
        i. <u>First</u>: Jesus becomes our highest allegiance. Luke 14:26–27 uses startling language about family relationships.
            1. Read alongside Matthew 10:37, Jesus' meaning is clear: even our closest human relationships must not outrank our loyalty to Him.
            2. This does not mean neglecting family responsibilities or treating relatives harshly. Jesus calls us to love others deeply. But when human expectations conflict with faithfulness to Christ, the disciple chooses Christ.
        ii. <u>Second</u>: We surrender the right to define life entirely on our own terms.
            1. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane provides the supreme example: *"Not My will, but Yours, be done"* (Luke 22:42).
            2. Cross-bearing involves obedience even when obedience is costly.
        iii. <u>Third</u>: We may experience rejection because our values are different.
            1. A disciple may face pressure in relationships, business, education, or social life because Christian convictions conflict with prevailing expectations.

2. Examples might include refusing dishonest business practices, maintaining sexual integrity, honoring Sabbath convictions, rejecting prejudice, or choosing forgiveness over retaliation.

iv. Fourth: We may suffer because we identify with Jesus and His mission.
1. 2 Timothy 3:12: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."
2. Following Jesus does not guarantee social approval, financial success, comfort, or safety.
3. Notice: Not every difficulty is a cross. Ordinary sickness, grief, and hardship are part of life in a fallen world. Cross-bearing specifically concerns the surrender and cost involved in following Jesus.
4. God accompanies us through all suffering, but we should not automatically label every hardship as persecution for righteousness.

c. Paul's life: Following the King against the current regardless of the cost!
i. 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 - Paul describes imprisonment, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, danger, hunger, and exposure.
1. Acts 16:16–34 — Philippi: Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned after Paul's ministry disrupts an exploitative economic arrangement. Yet they pray and sing hymns in prison.
2. Acts 17:16–34 — Athens: Paul challenges idolatry and proclaims the Creator and the resurrection in a sophisticated religious and philosophical culture.
3. Paul did not oppose culture simply for the sake of being different. He challenged beliefs and practices that conflicted with the gospel, while also seeking points of connection with the people he hoped to reach (1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

ii. He was courageous without making cultural antagonism his objective. Later, Paul wrote: "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21).

d. "What are some crosses that a disciple of Jesus might be called to carry in our society today?"

6. Four realities of the journey:
1. Joy and victory — The seventy return rejoicing (Luke 10:17–20) — Celebrate God's power and grace
2. Uncertainty and fear — The disciples in the storm (Mark 4:35–41) — Trust Jesus even when circumstances seem threatening
3. Sorrow and loss — Jesus at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:32–36) — Faith and grief can coexist
4. Suffering and perseverance — Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16:22–25) — God's presence is not dependent on comfortable circumstances. The disciple may weep, question, grieve, and struggle—yet continue turning toward Jesus. Walking with Jesus!

7. Closing Thoughts:

a. If someone observed our lives over the next five years, what changes would demonstrate that we are followers of Jesus and becoming more like Jesus?”
b. Consider three questions silently:
    a. Where am I on my journey with Jesus right now?Is there an area of my life where Jesus is asking me to surrender my own will and take up my cross?
    b. What is one concrete step I can take this week to walk more closely with Him?
c. Homework – Read Steps to Christ Chapter 7-8.