



WHAT IS
DISCIPLESHIP?

GREG LAURIE

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

What Is Discipleship?: How to Be a Disciple of Jesus

Copyright © 2017 Greg Laurie. All rights reserved.

Published 2017

www.harvest.org

Requests for information should be addressed to:



Harvest Ministries
6115 Arlington Avenue
Riverside, CA 92504

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked PHP are from The J. B. Phillips: THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH, Revised Edition. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

INTRODUCTION

Without question, the Christian life is the greatest life there is. I'm more and more convinced of this as time passes. And more than ever I am so thankful that, at the age of 17, I chose to follow Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, I hope you feel that way as well, because we are living life as it was meant to be lived: in fellowship with a God who created us and discovering His unique plan that He has custom designed for each one of us.

But the Christian life is more than just praying a prayer or walking down an aisle at a church or a crusade. The Christian life is meant to be dynamic. It's meant to be exciting. It's meant to have a radical effect on the way that you live and your outlook on life. Jesus Christ does not only want to be your Savior, but He wants to be your Lord. He not only wants to be your Friend, but He also wants to be your God.

I'm afraid that many of us are living a substandard Christian experience. That's really an oxymoron in many ways. I mean, if it's Christian, it shouldn't be substandard. So in a sense that isn't even a technically correct term. But there are many believers who are failing to receive all that God has for them.

Why is it that a handful of ordinary people turned their world as they knew it upside down? Without television. Without radio. Without megachurches. Without all the resources that we think are so important today in reaching the goal of world evangelism. How is it that they were able to do it?

I think you could sum it up in one word: *discipleship*. They were disciples of Jesus Christ. Not fair-weather followers, but true disciples. They weren't living an anemic watered-down ineffective version of the Christian life. They were living the Christian life as it was meant to be lived. As Christ Himself offered it. As the early disciples apprehended it. And as the early church lived it. If we are going to impact our culture today, we too must be disciples.

Now, it's important to note that all disciples are believers but all believers are not necessarily disciples.

What does it mean to be a disciple? Certainly we need to know the answer to that question. After all, Jesus gave marching orders to us when He said, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." How can I make disciples if I don't know what a disciple is—if I am not a disciple myself?

Are the qualifications of discipleship different than those of simply coming to faith? I think the answer to that is yes.

SO, WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST?

True discipleship is the Christian life as it was meant to be lived. In Luke 14, Jesus lays out the requirements of discipleship. He tells us what we need to do to really be His disciples.

Understand that He addressed these words to a huge group of people that were beginning to follow Him. Jesus was at the peak of His popularity. At this point in His ministry, He was the talk of the town. Everybody wanted a piece of Him. Everybody wanted to be around Him. He looked out on that huge multitude of fair-weather followers and could clearly see that these people really didn't know what they were doing. He could see that they didn't understand what it really meant to be a follower of Jesus. He challenged them. He essentially said, "If you really want to be my disciples, these are the requirements..."

Let's take look at what He said it means to truly be His disciple:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish"? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Luke 14:26–35)

Now, I want you to notice that three times Jesus uses the word *cannot*. In other words, if you do not do these things, you cannot be His disciple:

- Verse 26: If you don't hate your father, mother, etc., you cannot be His disciple.
- Verse 27: If you don't bear your cross, you cannot be His disciple.
- Verse 33: If you don't forsake all that you have, you cannot be His disciple.

HERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS FOR BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST:

1. You must love God more than anything or anyone else.

If you want to be a disciple of the Lord, you must love Him more than anyone or anything else. This is based on verse 26: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Now, I know that those words sound shocking. "Hate"? *Did I read that right? Jesus is telling me to hate my father and mother, my wife and children, my brothers and sisters to follow Him?*

Certainly in light of the New Testament teachings, Jesus was not demanding an unqualified hatred. After all, He could not command us to honor our father and mother and then at the same time demand that we hate them. He could not command husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church and then tell him to hate her. Nor could He tell us to love our enemies and then turn around and also hate them. So what is this Scripture saying? What does it mean when Jesus says to hate father, mother, wife, children, etc.?

Jesus was using the method of sharp contrast and essentially saying this: your love for God must be so strong, so intense, that all other loves would be like hatred in comparison. Another way to put it is this: if you want to live your Christian life to its fullest, you must love God more than anyone or anything else.

That is really the essence of what Christ is communicating. Love God more than anyone or anything else. Love the Lord Jesus Christ more than your career. Love the Lord more than your possessions. Love the Lord more than your friends. Love the Lord more than your ministry. Love the Lord more than your family. Love the Lord more than anything.

Now some would say, "You know, family is my number-one priority. It is all about family." Listen, no one is more pro-family than I am, but family should not be your number-one priority. Jesus Christ should be. Even

family can get in the way of your relationship with God. It's possible to make family an idol, taking God out of His rightful place in your life.

Others will say, "Children are number one. It is all about our kids." No. If you want to ruin your children, make them the most important thing in your life. You should teach your kids that Jesus Christ is the most important thing in your life and that He should be the most important thing in their lives.

Family and children are very important. But they are not the most important thing of all. Jesus is the number-one priority. And if ever there comes a time in your life when the call of the highest earthly loves and the cross of Christ conflict, then the cross of Christ must prevail.

There can sometimes be conflict in families. There is a story in Luke 9 where Jesus called a man to come follow Him. The man said, "Lord, let me first go bury my father." Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead. Come and follow Me." You might read that and say, "Now, wait a second. This is totally weird. So this guy's dad is lying there dead and the guy just wants to bury him before going with Jesus—but Jesus says no? How insensitive." No, that is not what is happening. That man was using an expression that was common at the time. Effectively the man was saying, "Wait until my father grows old and eventually dies and when it is more convenient and easier, then I will follow You."

Some people say, "I don't want to follow Jesus because, do you know what would happen in my family if I did?" There are families today in which if you become a Christian, you could lose your family. In the Muslim culture, if you believe in Jesus as Savior, Lord, and God, you can lose your whole family. It can happen in the Jewish culture as well, and in other nations around the world. But even in America, there can be friction when one family member becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

But here is the choice you have to make: you can have harmony with God and friction with people, or you can have harmony with people and friction with God. But if you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, it is likely going to cause some ripples in your relationships. And actually that is a good thing. It is that very tension that is going to bring about conversion in the lives of some of them.

The Bible says, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26), and it also says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). If you are a real Christian, your lifestyle

will affect others. And if everyone thinks you are wonderful and you don't have a single critic in the world, I have to wonder, do you have a pulse? And more to the point, are you a real Christian? Because if you are living a godly life, it will make some people upset.

Here is what Christ is saying: "Love Me even more than family members. Love me more than things. Love Me more than anyone or anything else."

Let me ask you, Christian, do you love Him more than anyone or anything else? Let me put it another way. Is there something in your life that if God asked you to give it up, you would be unwilling to do so? One relationship? One pursuit? One vice? One whatever? That could be a problem. If you are really His disciple, He wants you to love Him more than anyone or anything else.

That doesn't mean you can't love people. It doesn't mean that you can't enjoy the things that God has blessed you with. But you have to love God more than any of those things.

2. You must take up the cross and follow Him, denying yourself.

The disciple must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. In Luke 14:27, Jesus said, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." And in Matthew 16, He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (verses 24–25).

I know to some that sounds like a miserable lifestyle. Taking up the cross and following Jesus. Losing your life to find it. What does that even mean?

We hear people use the expression "I am going to go find myself." I hate that expression. It usually precedes a selfish act. It is said by a husband to a wife, or by a wife to a husband: "You know, I am no longer happy in this relationship. I don't feel like you are meeting my needs and therefore I am going to leave you to go *find myself*." Right.

Here is what Jesus says: "Hey, you want to find yourself? Lose yourself!" *Well, what on earth does that mean?* It means that you put God first. You come to the Lord with your life and you say, "All right, Lord. Here are my goals. Here are my dreams. Here are my aspirations, as well as my weaknesses

and my shortcomings and sins. I believe Your plans are better than mine in the long run, so I dedicate my life to You.”

If you want to find yourself, you lose yourself. It is God’s trade-in deal.

I am glad that the so-called self-esteem movement seems to have finally seen its day. A friend of mine named Phil Cooke blogged about this. He said, “It all began back in 1969, when psychologist Nathaniel Brandon published a highly acclaimed paper called ‘The Psychology of Self-Esteem.’ He argued that ‘feelings of self-esteem were the key to success in life,’ and his idea soon became the hot new thing in education. At the apex of the craze, the California Legislature even established a ‘Self Esteem Task Force’ for the state’s schools.”

We were told that the reason kids got into drinking, drugs, sex, and crime and had low grades was because they had low self-esteem. So millions and millions of tax dollars were used to build up the self-esteem of our children. And did it work? Is crime lower? Are families more intact? Is drug use down? As Wall Street writer Kay Hymowitz, concludes: “High self-esteem doesn’t improve grades, reduce anti-social behavior, deter alcohol drinking or do much of anything good for kids. In fact, telling kids how smart they are can be counterproductive. Many children who are convinced that they are little geniuses tend not to put much effort into their work. Others are troubled by the latent anxiety of adults who feel it necessary to praise them constantly.”¹

How true. It didn’t work. If you want to see how this plays out, watch *American Idol* sometime. My favorite part of *American Idol* is not who wins it, but the tryouts. It is just amazing to watch the auditions of people who have no musical ability at all but who think they are really good. They go strutting in there and they sing away and the judges reveal the harsh truth and tell them they don’t have what it takes. And sometimes they scream and they yell. Occasionally they throw things and storm off. And then they are greeted by their family, who throw their arms around them and say, “Those judges are so mean. You are so talented. You are so good. You are the best. They just don’t understand.”

News flash: they are not good! A parent needs to say to their child, “You know what, honey, I don’t think this is your greatest strength here. Maybe that is not where your abilities are. Let’s work on this other area instead.” We can overpraise our children.

¹ http://www.philcooke.com/self_esteem/

We even saw this self-esteem mentality seep into the church. A self-love kind of teaching became very popular, and whenever I would speak out against it, I would get people mad at me, writing me letters. Here was my point from the very beginning: we don't need to be taught to love ourselves because we already do love ourselves.

The way it was usually portrayed was, "You know, Jesus said, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' Before you can love your neighbor you must learn self-love." But you don't need to be taught to love yourself. You already love yourself. Everyone does. You do. I do. When you have a group photo shown to you, who is it that you look for first? And if you look at yourself and don't like it, you say, "Can you Photoshop me out of this thing? Or get an airbrush and take a few pounds off? Or erase a few wrinkles?" Why do you do that? I will tell you why: because you love yourself.

You might protest. "No, Greg, you are wrong. I don't love myself. I hate myself. I am ugly. I am unattractive. I am untalented." Let's just say, for the sake of argument, that it's true that you are unattractive and untalented and whatnot. If you really hated yourself, you would be happy that you have those bad qualities! Think about it. You look in the mirror and say, "I am unattractive, but I hate myself, so I don't care." But no one does that. Because you love yourself and you don't match up to the model you want to be, you say, "Oh, I hate myself." But in reality, you love yourself. As Ephesians 5:29 says, "No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church" (NLT).

Here is what Jesus is essentially saying: "Obviously you already love yourself. Duh. So how about loving your neighbor as much as you already love yourself." This is not about esteeming yourself. This is not about finding yourself. This is not about loving yourself. This is about losing yourself.

It is interesting that the Bible says that self-love would be a characteristic of the last days, even implying that self-love would intensify. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:1-4: "Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (NIV). These are all but the outgrowth of loving ourselves rather than loving God.

You want to find yourself? You want to be who you ought to be? Lose yourself and dedicate your life to the Lord.

You say, “But I don’t know what that means.” Jesus defines it: “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). That term forsake could literally be translated, “surrender your claim to; say goodbye to.” That does not mean that to be a disciple of Jesus you have to take a vow of poverty and give every possession away. It means you surrender your claim to your possessions, to everything that you have. In other words, you are not to be possessed by your possessions.

It is fine to have a car. A house. Clothes. A career. It is fine to have friends. Hobbies. Interests. But the true disciple of Jesus is not obsessed with these things. They are, to borrow the word, only obsessed with Jesus Himself. Oh sure, they have their hobbies. They have things they like to do. But what really fires them up, what really rings their bell, what really gets them going—is Jesus. That is a disciple who loves God more than anyone or anything else—a disciple that denies himself, and then takes up the cross and follows Him.

Now what does that mean, “to take up the cross”? This meaning would totally be understood by the people of the first century but it is largely lost on us today. When we think of the cross today, we think of it adorning the top of a steeple. We think of church. We think of Christianity. We think of Jesus Christ. But back in the first century, when you saw a cross, you were reminded of a cruel method of torture and execution.

The early church, by the way, did not use the symbol of the cross. That came much later. That is not how they identified themselves. At that time, the cross was a despicable symbol. It was a form of execution that was really designed to humiliate a person. The Romans crucified thousands of men. And it was done to bring a slow excruciating death and to also stand as an example to anyone who saw it that they’d better not mess with Rome. They would line streets of the Roman Empire with men being crucified. So when you saw a man carrying his cross through the streets surrounded by Roman guards, you knew that the man was going to die a long painful death.

Jesus tells His listeners, “If you want to be My disciple, take up the cross and follow Me.” They would have understood His meaning right away: “Oh, I get what you are saying. You mean like that guy who is carrying his cross and he is going to die on it. You want us to die to ourselves.” Exactly.

But today the cross has lost its original meaning. It has become a fashion accessory. I read a story about a couple that was looking at crosses and crucifixes in a jewelry store. After examining a few, the woman who was looking said to the jeweler, “I like these, but do you have any without this little man on them?” That is what society is looking for, isn’t it? A cross without Jesus. Religion that requires nothing from us. But if we are going to be followers of Jesus, we must take up the cross.

What is meant by “the cross”? People use this phrase today: “Well, we all have our cross to bear.” Some would say, “My cross to bear is my parents.” Meanwhile, the parents would say, “Our cross to bear is our child.” Perhaps right now you are saying, “My cross to bear is getting through this boring book.” I hope not.

But here is the bottom line: your cross to bear is not whatever you find difficult or tedious or unpleasant in life. The cross to bear, so to speak, is the same for every person. It is dying to self. Through death, you find life.

You say, “I still don’t understand. What does it mean to die to self?” Let me give you some examples.

- To die to self means forgiving instead of harboring a grudge.
- To die to self means resisting that temptation to do what everyone else does when you know it is wrong.
- To die to self means not having sex before marriage and being faithful to your spouse after.
- To die to self means to put down the remote control and pick up the Bible and read it.
- To die to self means to pray when you would rather be sleeping.
- To die to self means to swallow your pride and tell someone about Jesus Christ.
- To die to self means to do what God wants you to do instead of doing what you want to do.

Are you dying to yourself and taking up the cross? The fact is, when you do this you will experience joy and overflowing life.

Paul put it this way in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

When is the last time you heard people talk about denying themselves? We hear so much about gratifying ourselves, fulfilling ourselves, discovering ourselves, esteeming ourselves. There is even a magazine titled *Self*. Do you think it would sell if they changed the name to *Denying Self*? No way.

Sometimes people have a false concept that if they are really going to be a Christian and take up the cross, they will never have fun again. It is going to be dull and miserable—a life of bondage to rules and regulations. But that is not true. When you understand what it really means to follow Jesus and lose yourself, you find the greatest joy there is to know in life.

You will know greater excitement and passion than you thought possible in a relationship with God. Anything this world has to offer is nothing but a cheap substitute. There is no drug, no experience, nothing this world can give that even comes close to what it means to be a real follower of Jesus and to find your purpose in Him.

Samuel Rutherford said, “The cross of Christ is the sweetest burden that I ever bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbor.” Rutherford discovered what you can discover as well: that when you die to yourself you find yourself. When you lay aside your personal goals, desires, and ambitions, that is when God reveals the desires, ambitions, and goals that He has for you. God’s plans are better than mine. God’s will is better than mine. It doesn’t always seem that way at first. Sometimes we don’t understand it. But as time passes and we see the outcome of following His plan, then we can say, “Well, Lord, you obviously knew what you were doing.”

Again, it is God’s trade-in deal. It would be like going down to the Porsche dealer and saying, “I want to buy that Porsche.” The guy says, “I will make you a deal. If you want this Porsche, you have to trade in your skateboard.” You say, “But a wheel is missing.” He says, “I don’t care about that. You want the Porsche, give me the skateboard.”

Let me give you a word of advice: take the offer before he changes his mind!

God offers you something better than a Porsche. He wants to give you His righteousness and put it into your account so you will stand right before God. He wants to give you His power to live the way He has called you to live. He wants to give you forgiveness of sins and the hope of Heaven. He also wants your life in exchange. Give Him the junky skateboard in

exchange for the Porsche. Give Him what you have and He will give you what He has. It's a good deal.

A. W. Tozer wrote:

In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross. If he refuses the cross he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king . . . and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar, but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility.

Who or what is on the throne of your life right now?

If you want to find life, you lose it. Come to God and say, "Here are my plans. Here is what I think I would like to do, but what do I know? I dedicate it to You. If You don't like anything that I have decided, if You don't like the choices I have made, I invite You to overrule me. I want Your will more than my own. I have discovered that Your plans are better than my plans. Your purposes are better than my purposes." Do you believe that? Then dedicate your life to God. Take up the cross and follow Him.

3. *You must count the cost.*

I will be direct with you: it costs to follow Jesus. Look again at what He says in Luke 14:28–31:

Don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, "There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!"

Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? (NLT)

In the same way, Jesus is telling us we must count the cost to follow Him.

I want to tell you that if you are a spiritual wuss, you just need to go home to mommy. If you want everything easy and spoon-fed to you, go home. But if you want to grow up and stop being a little spiritual baby, if you want to grow up and be a man or woman of God, if you want your life to make a difference for time and eternity, then it is time to count the cost.

Don't live off of your parents' faith or the faith of somebody else. It is time for you to be the person that God has called you to be. Are you still behaving like a baby? It is time to grow up. It is time to count the cost. It is time to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to count the cost? There was a time recorded in the Gospels when Jesus was walking along and this certain guy had been watching Him for a while and the man's heart was just swelling with admiration. And he yells out, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." Now, you would think that Jesus would stop and say, "You know, I like that. Come here for a second. What's your name? Hey guys," calling over the disciples, "did you hear what this guy just said? Let this be an example to all of you. This is what I am looking for. Come on, buddy. Let's go. You are one of the team now. You are one of the disciples. Come with us."

But Jesus didn't say that. His response when the man said, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go," was basically, "Really? Well, foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have nowhere to lay my head" (see Matthew 8:20).

What kind of a thing is that to say to someone? That is not very encouraging. Here is this guy saying, "I will follow You" and the Lord says this strange thing. Why? Because He looked in that man's heart and thought, "This guy is doing this in the impulse of a moment. He doesn't even know what he is talking about." Jesus is essentially telling this man, "Let Me tell you something, friend. You can follow Me if you want, but I don't have some palatial home I am going to. In fact, I am going to Jerusalem to die. You want to go with Me still? You want to walk in My steps?"

If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you should not do it on the impulse of a moment. You should count the cost and you should have the same attitude of detachment that Jesus had. And anything that would slow you down spiritually or would hold you back should be cut loose. As Hebrews 12:1 says, "Lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares."

What may slow you down may not be the same thing that slows someone else down. We all have to take personal inventory and evaluate our lives and our priorities and ask ourselves, “What is on the throne of my life? Is this relationship over here holding me back? Or is this pursuit holding me back? Or is this hobby holding me back? Or this other thing I am engaged in dulling my desire for prayer? Is it causing my hunger for the Word to be diminished?”

Oh, if it is, let it go. And don't just follow Jesus on the impulse of a moment.

You say, “Well, Greg, you know what? The cost of discipleship is pretty high, isn't it?” Yes it is. Billy Graham said, “Salvation is free but discipleship costs everything we have.”

But you know what else? Although it costs to be a disciple, it costs more not to be.

Jesus said that if a man goes into battle with 10,000 soldiers against someone with 20,000, he counts the cost. Now, that does not necessarily mean that this particular man only had 10,000 men at his disposal. Maybe that was all he was willing to commit. And the implication is that Jesus does not ask if you are willing to commit 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 percent to Him. He is asking if you are willing to give everything. If you are willing to recognize His absolute right over every material thing that He has given to you. And unless you are willing to do that, you are not really His disciple.

So as I count the cost of discipleship, what do I need to take into account? What must I be willing to give up? What's the price I pay for being a disciple?

- **The sins that I now cherish.** If I want to be a true Christian, I must give up every single sin. I cannot pretend to be a disciple of Jesus and cling to any sins. I must forsake those things. And in their place, I can instead walk in fellowship with God and live a holy and happy life.
- **This world's friendship.** This means I am no longer to allow secular and worldly philosophy to color my thinking and living. The Bible says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). It also says in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world . . .” or as another version says, “Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould” (PHP).

In other words, don't allow the thinking of our culture today to taint your thinking as a Christian. It seems to me that the culture is influencing the church today more than the church is influencing the culture. The world seems to be calling the shots and we just seem to go along. Instead of forgiving nowadays, it seems people want to harbor a grudge, bitterness, and sue one another. Instead of serving, we demand our rights. Instead of making a marriage work, we just cave in and dissolve it. Instead of taking responsibility for our actions, we call ourselves victims and addicts. Instead of self-sacrifice and selfless living, we pursue a better self-image and more self-esteem. God help us.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I will pay the price of this world's friendship, which simply means if I am going to be a real believer, there will be people who will laugh at me for my convictions. I will be mocked for my beliefs and scorned for trying to live by what the Bible teaches.

At the same time, in the place of the world's friendship, I will have God's friendship, which is far better. Which do you want: God's friendship or the world's? You can't have both. Jesus said that if you want to be a friend of the world, you will be the enemy of God (see James 4:4). It is our choice.

- **My plans for my own life.** I may have ideas of what I want to do and who I want to be—and those ideas are not evil or wrong. But at the same time, I must be willing to give them up if asked to do so by the Lord. For as Jesus said, “He who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). Yet in the place of those flawed plans that I give up, I will have God's perfect plan for my life.

Yes, there is a cost to being a disciple. But what I have in the place of those things I give up are infinitely better. And anything short of discipleship is missing out on what God has for us. The naysayers are many, but the disciples are few. The selfish are many, but the selfless are few. The cowards are many, but the brave and courageous followers of Jesus are few.

Will you lose your life and take up the cross and follow Jesus today? Will you count the cost and dedicate your life, plans, resources, and future to God? If you will, it will make a difference.

4. A disciple must impact their culture.

Look at verses 34–35 of Luke 14: “Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? Flavorless salt is good neither

for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown away. Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!” (NLT).

What good is salt that isn't salty? That is like a Coke without carbonation. It is the same when you have a Christian who is not making a difference.

We have to understand what salt was back in these days. In the Roman culture that Jesus was speaking to, salt was extremely valuable. It was so valuable that people would be paid with salt; hence the expression, “He is not worth his salt.” Salt was a valuable commodity that was very important.

Obviously salt makes a difference. A little pinch of salt in something can help enhance the flavor. Have you ever tried watermelon with just a little salt? It elevates it from good to great. The same is true with cantaloupe. And a little salt in some oatmeal brings the flavor out too.

What is Jesus saying? He is saying that you are valuable. Your life makes a difference.

I have a friend who is always doing pranks on me and I do pranks on him. One time we were out for dinner before a church service. I had to leave. Before I left, I went to the restroom. I came back and in my absence he had taken probably half of the salt in the shaker and poured it into my cup of coffee. He knew right before I left I would take one last swig of coffee and leave. Sure enough, I came back to the table, grabbed my coffee and took a swig. It filled my mouth. I didn't swallow it. My glass of water was sitting there so I spit the coffee into it. I said to him, “You dog! I will get you.” Then I left. He laughed. He loved it. He was so pleased with himself. Then it was time for him to leave. He decided to take one last sip of his iced tea. He threw it back and swallowed it and it suddenly dawned on him that it was not his iced tea. It was the water that I had spit my salty coffee in! He told me about it later. I said, “It serves you right. I love it when the Lord gets involved in payback. Your sin found you out!”

When Jesus says that you are the salt of the earth, it means that your life should make a difference wherever you are.

What does salt do? Among other things, it stimulates thirst. You have been to the movies and bought popcorn. When you sit down in the theater and eat your popcorn, you realize that you are really thirsty. Salt stimulates thirst. In the same way, when you are living a godly life, you should stimulate in others a thirst for Jesus Christ. A person should be able to look at your

life as a believer and see what you stand for, and what your convictions are, and it should cause them to want what you have.

Remember the story of Paul and Silas, who were thrown into prison for preaching the gospel. This jailer was hard-hearted. He whipped both of them. He put their feet in stocks and they were in agony. The Bible says, “At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). The word that is used there for *listening* means they were leaning in and paying attention.

Then a great earthquake came and the walls shook and the prisoners could have escaped. The Philippian jailer, realizing that these guys would get away on his watch, took out his sword and was ready to kill himself. Paul said, “Don’t do yourself any harm. We are still here. We haven’t escaped.” This guy dropped his sword and this is what he said: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). He had observed Paul and Silas worshipping God in the most adverse circumstances and it so moved his heart that he wanted to know how he could have that same hope.

Do you know that people are listening to you? They are watching you. They are eavesdropping on your conversations. I hope that you are pointing them to Jesus. You are the only Bible that some people are ever going to read. You are a living epistle written by God and read by man. Even if they don’t tell you they are watching you, they are checking you out. It has been said, “Preach the gospel and when necessary use words.” This simply means that we are to live it. We are to be godly people. We are to be salt.

Jesus also tells us that we are to be light. He said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). In contrast to salt, which is primarily living what you believe, light signifies proclaiming what you believe.

Here is the problem: some Christians are light without being salt. By that I mean they talk about it but they don’t live it. Can I ask you a personal favor if you are one of those people? Would you please stop talking about Jesus? Do us all a favor. If you are going to be obnoxious, please keep your mouth closed. If you are going to cut people off on the road and speed all the time, take the Christian stickers off of your car. Better to not be a witness at all than to be a bad witness. What drives me crazy is to see people that talk about the Lord all the time openly contradict Him by the way they live. In other words, they are light without being salt. That is bad.

Then there are people who are salt without being light. They do live it. They are godly people. Thank God for them. But they never tell anybody about Jesus. As it says in Romans, how are they going to hear unless someone tells them? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard about, and how will they hear without a preacher? (See Romans 10:14).

If you are going to be a real disciple of Jesus Christ, you need to live it and you need to proclaim it. As a result, you will impact your world.

You say, “Oh, Greg, what difference could I possibly make? Just little old me?” Hey, God can do a lot with a little. Our numbers may be few, but our power is great because God is with us. And God is all powerful. He knows no limitations. He is just looking for some men and women that will step up to the plate and be real disciples. He’s looking for people that would say, “Lord, I want to live the Christian life as it was meant to be lived.”

Think about Gideon’s army. It was pared down from 10,000 to 300 and they won the day because they did it God’s way.

Let me tell you another story about 300 men. They were from Sparta. They bravely defended their country against the invasion of the Persian army. The historian Herodotus tells us that the Persians, led by Xerxes, amassed an army of 2,641,610 fighting men to attack Greece. And there was an equal number of attendants that assisted them as they went to battle. Plus, there was a navy there in Persia of 1,207 warships. And together they closed in on Greece.

Well, the Grecian army was not able to rally immediately. They were caught somewhat by surprise. In fact, all they were able to rally on short notice were the soldiers from Sparta that were led by their commander, Leonidas, who was ready to face off with Xerxes and the Persian forces. Leonidas commanded his 300 Spartans to go to a pass that leads into Greece that is called Thermopylae. It is a narrow little area that you have to pass through. At that time, you could not get into Greece except through Thermopylae by foot. So that’s where he led his troops. Leonidas rallied the soldiers and they felt if they could hold that ground, reinforcements would soon arrive.

But reinforcements did not come. And the massive army of two million Persians closed in on them. But those 300 Spartans fought bravely. And what came as a shock to the Persians was that the 300 Spartans were turning the Persians back. One after another, they were dying. And soon they were piling bodies on top of one another without one Spartan falling. And they

kept fighting on and fighting on. Thousands of Persians were dying at the hands of these men.

So Xerxes decided to send in his elite fighting force. He had his own version of the Delta Force or the Navy Seals. They were called the Immortals. Just the sound of their name would strike fear into your heart. The Immortals went in against the Spartans and the Spartans killed them too. And the morale began to break down in the Persian army and they began to despair, thinking they were going to lose at the hands of this small group of soldiers.

Well, the Spartans were eventually defeated—but not by a frontal assault. It was when some traitor in their own ranks went over to the other side and told them how to get around Thermopylae. The Persians were able to attack the Spartans from behind and they killed them.

But though the Spartans lost the battle, they did not lose the war. They bought precious time. Reinforcements from Greece arrived and they were so inspired by the example of these 300 Spartans that they conquered the Persian army and prevailed.

In the same way, our numbers are few. There are not many true followers of Jesus in this world today. But as we fight together and move forward, God can use us. And we look at our culture today and we say, “It is so far gone. It is just going to get worse. Let’s just give up and retreat into our little subculture and twiddle our thumbs until the Lord comes back.” Sorry. That is not what the Bible tells us to do. It tells us to be salt and light. We are supposed to make a difference in our world.

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.
How do we affect our world? One person at a time.

That means it starts with you. Go out and make disciples, as Jesus said. Make sure you are a disciple first. It takes one to make one. And then you affect your circle of influence. Your friends. Your family. Your neighborhood. As others believe, one becomes two, two become four, four become eight, and so on.

Maybe our numbers aren’t huge, but if we are true Christians and disciples of our Lord, we can and will make a difference and impact our culture. It starts with us.

5. *A disciple of Jesus Christ will bring forth spiritual fruit.*

In John 15:8, Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” If you are really a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have fruit in your life. Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16 NIV).

What does this mean? The metaphor of bearing fruit is used quite often in the Bible. In the parable of the sower, Jesus talked about seed falling on different kinds of ground representing different reactions to the truth of the gospel message. The seeds that are sown on good ground are “those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred” (Mark 4:20). In other words, the ones that really last are the ones that embrace this truth and bring forth fruit. The Bible tells us that we should bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance (see Matthew 3:8).

Perhaps you don’t understand what I mean by *fruit*. There are different pictures that the Bible gives us as to what this means. For instance, praising and thanking God is bringing forth fruit in your life. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” When you praise God, it is bringing forth fruit.

I remember one night at our church’s midweek service, there was a young lady in the front row. Her legs were gone from just above the knee. She was in a wheelchair. One of her arms was gone too. All she had was a partial arm. It was almost a stump. This young lady, when we were worshipping, lifted what she had of an arm to the Lord. I just looked at that and thought, “This blesses God.” She can’t even lift her hands, because she doesn’t have hands to lift, but what she had she lifted to the Lord. Does she have trouble? Does she have difficulty? You bet. But she brought it to God in a sacrifice of praise. What about you? Do you have two arms? Do you have two legs? Do you have your health?

I asked someone the other day, “Why don’t you praise God more? I just see you standing there and doing nothing during worship time” They said, “I don’t really feel like it. I am not always in the mood.” I said, “You don’t praise God because you are in the mood. You praise God because He is worthy of your praise.”

The very word *worship* comes from the old English phrase *worth ship*. I praise that which is *worthy*. I don't praise God because I feel like it. I praise God because He deserves my praise.

Paul and Silas had their backs ripped open. They praised God. When you praise God—even though you may not feel like it—that is bringing forth fruit.

What else is fruit? What we say is a kind of fruit in our lives. Jesus said, “A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart” (Luke 6:45 NLT). Whatever is in your heart will determine what you say.

When you are a real Christian, it will come out in what you say. Before I was a Christian, I used to cuss quite a bit. I wasn't even aware of the fact. I'd just blankity this and bleepity that. I wasn't raised in the church or reading the Bible. I was like everybody else I hung around with. After I became a Christian, I became aware of the fact that I wasn't supposed to speak like that any longer. I remember how hard it was for me for the first time in my life to say, “Praise the Lord.” It was an alien term. I remember that my heart was welling with praise; I wanted to say it, but I felt uncomfortable saying it. One day I finally broke down and said it. It felt good to verbalize that. That is bringing forth fruit.

Often you will find out what you are made of by what comes bubbling out in both good and bad circumstances.

I heard the story of a little boy who went over to a preacher's house who was doing some carpentry in his garage. This boy just stood there and watched him for a good hour. The preacher wondered why the kid was watching him. Finally, the preacher was so curious, he said, “Son, are you trying to pick up some pointers on how to build something?” The little boy said, “No. I am just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.”

What comes out of your mouth at a time like that?

Our change in conduct and character is also a kind of fruit. Galatians 5:22–23 says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (ESV). Are those traits that people can see in your life? Are you bringing forth fruit? Or is the opposite true? If instead of love, is there hatred, bitterness and prejudice?

Instead of joy, is there constant gloom? Instead of peace, is there turmoil? Instead of gentleness, is there harshness and a short temper? Instead of faith, is there constant worry? Instead of meekness, is there pride and arrogance? Instead of self-control, are you a victim of your own passions? If so, perhaps you don't know God at all, or a recommitment is in order. A Christian should be characterized by fruit of the Spirit. People should be able to look for fruit in your life and find it.

6. A disciple will be a loving person.

Jesus says in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Loving one another is a trait of a disciple of Jesus. It is a unique feature of Christians. I'm talking about genuine love. Before I became a believer, one of the things that attracted me to the Christian faith was the way these people loved each other.

I was raised in the sixties. That was the whole "peace and love" generation. We wore peace symbols and used words like groovy and had beads. It was all about love and peace. But it was a sham; there was no love and peace. It was hypocrisy. I wanted love and peace. I was raised in a broken home and this hippie culture was coming on strong. I thought maybe that is where I needed to look. I took drugs for a time. I was actually buying into the philosophy. I was looking for meaning in life. I wasn't looking for a buzz or excitement. I wanted the love and peace.

I never found it, though, until I started meeting Christians. They had the love and peace I was searching for. I would watch them on my high school campus. They would get together and have their Bible studies. I remember after class would get out, they would get together and hug each other and say, "God bless you." I thought, "This can't be real. They can't really care about each other. There is no way." I kept watching them. I was cynical. They kept doing it. It started bugging me. I actually tried a thought on that I had not considered previously: "What if they are right and I am wrong? What if the love is real and not an act? What if God really is living inside of them? What if they have the truth? If that is true, I don't have it and I don't have the answers. That means I need to hear what they have to say." That is what drew me in to hear the gospel, among other things.

Can people see that love in your life as well? Can they see that you are a person who cares about others? Not just loving in word but in deed and truth. Reaching out to someone when they are hurting. Stepping over a barrier that would normally separate you from another person.

I think when someone comes into our church and sees people of different ages, social or economic backgrounds, races, and cultures worshipping together and setting aside differences and coming together in the name of Jesus Christ, it is a powerful testimony to a world that is more divided than ever. They see that you can get along in Christ. That is a powerful witness.

If you only hang around with people who look like you and people you like, so what? That is no big accomplishment. Jesus said in Matthew 5, “If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that” (verses 46–47 NLT). It is when you can love the unlovable that your love stands out.

It is interesting how God will put unlovable people in your life. *I can't believe I got seated next to that person. I have to spend the semester next to them. I can't believe those people moved in next door to me. I can't believe this person is a part of my family. I can't believe I actually married that person.* News flash: did you know that you most likely are an unlovable person in somebody else's life? You just thought you had to contend with unlovable people. You never thought that you were an unlovable person yourself. But to someone, you are. We have to learn what it means to love those who are difficult to love.

7. True disciples will reproduce themselves.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This means that as a Christian you need to not only seek to win people to Jesus Christ, but to get them up on their feet spiritually, so they can move on in their relationship with God. It is called making disciples.

Somewhere along the line, we have separated evangelism from discipleship. God wants us to not only lead people to Christ but to help them grow and develop spiritually.

I am so thankful that God brought a person like this to me. Shortly after my commitment to Christ, I didn't know any Christians very well. I wasn't

acclimating well. I went to one of their meetings. I was in that awkward stage where I didn't feel totally comfortable with Christians but I also didn't want to hang out with my old friends either. That is where I was for about a week and a half. I would get together with my old friends and think, "These guys are lowlifes. I cannot hang out with them."

It was hard for me. I didn't understand what the Christians were talking about half the time. They would come up to me and call me *brother*. They would tell me I was a "part of the body" now and not to be "in the flesh" and that I was "washed in the blood" now. I wondered, *Is that a good thing?*

I am not making fun of this terminology. I was just ignorant. Do you know what I needed? I needed someone to tell me what it all meant. A guy like that came to me shortly after I gave my life to Christ. His name was Mark. He was just what I needed. He said, "Greg, I saw you make that commitment to Christ. Let me help you out. I want to take you to church. I will pick you up."

He took me to church. Afterward, he took me out for ice cream and he introduced me to Christians. He told me what to read in the Bible and what it meant. I had so many questions. I was trying so hard to figure it out. He sat there and patiently explained it to me. He helped me make that transition. Thank God for him.

You can be that person for someone else. You can be a friend to them. You can hang out with them. You can show them what a real Christian is like in the real world. They need to see how this stuff works. *What do we do after church? What do we do in our spare time? What kind of music do we listen to? What kind of people are we?* They need to see it lived out. That is called discipling a person. It is so important.

Not only will it benefit the person who is being discipled, but it will benefit you too. The question is sometimes asked about keeping the Christian life exciting. Here is Dr. Greg's prescription for maintaining passion and excitement in your spiritual life: find yourself a new believer and take them under your wing and help them get up on their feet spiritually. It will re-energize you.

You show me a church that doesn't have a constant flow of new believers coming in and I will show you a church that is stagnating. On the other hand, you get a church where someone is new in the faith and they come in and are excited about Jesus, there is life. The worship is going on and

Joe Zeal is into it, exploding with joy. Next to him is someone who has been around for 25 years and suddenly, that person catches some of that energy and is reminded of just how amazing God's grace and salvation really are. It revitalizes them.

New believers need older believers so they don't go wacky (new believers can say and do very bizarre things) and the older believers need the new believers to keep things fresh and remind them of what's important.

It is sort of like going to Disneyland with adults versus kids. All the adults want to do is eat. They don't want to go on rides. Adults hate lines. Adults analyze everything. But for a kid it is so amazingly cool, and when you go with a kid, you see the "magic" through their eyes.

A new believer is like that. They are discovering it for the first time. A new believer comes up and says, "I am struggling with this in the Bible. What does it mean?" That's a good question. You really have no clue. You check it out. You start studying the Bible. You rediscover stuff that you had forgotten. You share it with them. You watch them discover it for the first time. As they are discovering it for the first time, you are rediscovering it. As their passion is being enflamed, your passion is being rekindled. That is why it can energize your life. That is why you need new believers around you.

THE HABITS OF A DISCIPLE

Every disciple of Jesus will be abiding in Him and, as a result, growing and producing fruit. There are four basic habits that every Christian should practice in order to remain a healthy, growing disciple of Christ:

1. A disciple of Jesus must read, study, and love the Word of God.

Joshua 1:8 says, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Why is studying the Bible important? Because as Christians, we can face doubt. When the devil came to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, what did he say? He said, "Did God really say you can't eat of any tree in the garden? Why don't you go ahead and eat of that tree over there? God knows that in the day you eat of that tree you will be as a god or a goddess,

knowing good and evil.” What did he do? He challenged the Word of God and planted doubt. “*Did God really say what you thought He said?*” (see Genesis 3:1).

And he will come to the new Christian and whisper, “Do you really think you are saved? Do you really think Christ has come into your life? Do you really think this is real? You’ve just psyched yourself into it.”

But if I know the Word of God, I can defend myself. That is why one of the first things new Christians should do is to start memorizing Scripture. 1 John 5:13 says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (ESV). Your salvation is based in what God has said, not on what you feel. It is important to know the Bible. That is how you defend yourself when you are being tempted.

Remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and He had fasted for 40 days and He was hungry and the devil said, “Hey, why don’t you take a rock and turn it into a piece of bread?” How did Jesus respond? He said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

How did Jesus defend Himself against the devil’s temptation? With the Word of God. Jesus could have just said, “Look. I am Jesus. You are not. Get out.” He could have even said, “Go to Hell.” And I don’t mean it in a profane way. I mean He could have literally sent the devil to Hell. He has that kind of authority. But Jesus did not exercise that divine privilege. He faced the temptation like you and I would face it so we can know what to do when temptation comes: use the Word of God.

So when the devil comes and tempts you—“Oh, do you really think you are saved?”—you quote Scripture.

The psalmist reminds us, “Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). It is nice to carry a Bible in your purse or in your briefcase or on your phone. But the best place to keep God’s Word is in your heart.

Years ago, I heard about a man named Billy Sunday, who had accepted Christ into his life. He was a professional baseball player. And an older believer said to young Billy, “Here is some advice, and if you follow this, Billy, they will never write the word *backslider* after your name.” He said, “Number one: take 15 minutes every day and let God talk to you. Number

two: take 15 minutes every day to talk to God. And thirdly: spend 15 minutes every day telling others about the Savior.” Billy Sunday followed that advice and ended up leaving professional baseball and he became one of the greatest evangelists in human history—sort of a forerunner to Billy Graham in many ways. He reached thousands and thousands of people.

“Take 15 minutes every day to let God to talk you.” How does God talk to us? He talks to us through the Word of God.

I heard about a man that took his wife to a doctor because she wasn't feeling well. So she went into the doctor's office while the man sat in the waiting area. A couple of moments went by, and the doctor came running out of the office and asked if anyone had a screwdriver. Someone found one and gave it to the doctor. He went back into the exam room. He came out a few moments later and said, “Does anyone have a pair of pliers?” The husband is thinking, “What is going on in there?” Someone gave the doctor some pliers. The doctor went in and came back in a few moments and said, “Does anyone have a hammer?” Now the man is alarmed. He says, “What is wrong with my wife? What is going on in there?” The doctor says, “I haven't examined your wife yet. I am trying to get my medical bag open.”

It is not going to do you any good to carry a Bible around if you don't open it. Open the book up and start reading it.

When my grandmother heard I had become a Christian, she bought me a Bible. I still have that Bible. It is decades old. It has all of my crazy little notes and drawings and underlining in it. It has pages ripped out—not because I didn't like parts and tried to get rid of those sections. It just has been abused over the years. It has been said that a Bible that is falling apart is usually an indication of a life that isn't. So I like to see beat-up Bibles. I like to mark up Bibles. I hope you write in your Bible. Please do. Underline things and make notes. Just wear the thing out and then go get a new one and do it again.

What a great thing it was to get that first Bible and then to continue to learn from it. The Bible is the User's Manual for life.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't like to read user's manuals. However, I love gadgets. I am a gadget guy. So when some new gadget comes out, I will go fiddle with it. And if I buy it, I always end up doing the thing I wasn't supposed to do. I start pushing buttons and it blows up. And then

I read the manual and it says, “Whatever you do, don’t do this thing” and it’s the thing I just did. It’s always a good idea to consult the user’s manual.

The Bible gives us direction. And it also gives us warnings about things we should avoid. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing that God wants us to do” (NLT).

God’s Word is full of living power. It exposes us for what we really are. It is a powerful book. I like what Martin Luther said: “The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me.”

It is amazing how the words of the Bible just jump off the page and speak to us individually. Listen to this: success or failure in the Christian life is dependent on how much of the Bible you get into your heart and mind on a daily basis and how obedient you are to it. If you neglect the study of the Scripture, your spiritual life will ultimately unravel.

Why? Because everything you need to know about God is taught in the Bible. If you need to know it for your spiritual growth, it is in the Bible. If you don’t need to know it, it is not in the Bible. It is as simple as that.

One of the ways that a doctor can tell if someone is healthy or sick is by their appetite, or lack thereof. When there is no appetite, that is usually an indication something is wrong. So if you are a Christian and you don’t have an appetite for God’s Word, that is an indication of a spiritual breakdown. It would show that you are not where you ought to be spiritually. Hungry children are healthy children. In 1 Peter 2:2, the Bible says, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (NIV).

When you don’t eat, it can affect your mood. I don’t know about you, but if I don’t eat I get grumpy. My wife figured this out a number of years ago. I would have a bad mood and I would start becoming critical or nitpicking and she would say, “You are just hungry, aren’t you?” Just throw a piece of bread at me and maybe things will get better.

Little kids are this way. Sometimes a small child that can’t talk yet will start crying and you don’t know why they are crying. What is wrong with them? Well they are probably just hungry. Or they need their diaper changed. Or

maybe they need a nap. It's funny—all of those things work for me too. Except the diaper. We are not there...yet.

But even the Bible uses this picture. It says in Jeremiah 15:16, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, LORD God Almighty” (NIV). Eating God's Word can bring joy and delight to the heart, just like food for the body.

2. A disciple of Jesus must have a prayer life.

Prayer is communicating with and listening to God. Ephesians 6:18 says we should be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

We use the word prayer a lot. It is a general term. You can pray publicly. You can pray privately. You can pray verbally. You can pray silently. You can pray kneeling, standing, sitting, lying down, or even while driving (keep your eyes open).

By the way, have you ever been in a group of people and you are praying and maybe the prayer is going on a little long, so you open your eyes? You are looking around. You make eye contact with somebody else that is looking around. And it is one of those really awkward moments. You both look down again—almost like you were cheating. It is not cheating; you can pray with your eyes open.

So there isn't one particular method or posture that is more legitimate than another. The main thing is to pray. You can pray in any position, at any time, in any place. I think sometimes we may feel as though the Lord will hear our prayers more quickly if we are in a church sanctuary. But that is not really true at all. As we look in the pages of the Bible, we find Daniel praying in a lion's den, David praying in a field, Peter praying as he walked on the water (actually, a few moments later while he was going under the water). Jonah's prayer was down even deeper because he prayed from the belly of a giant fish. So surely God will hear your prayer wherever you are. The main thing is to be praying always.

The phrase “praying always with all prayer” speaks of the frequency of prayer. It means do it in the morning. It means do it in the afternoon. Do it in the evening. Do it when you rise. Do it before you go to bed at night. The Bible says you are to pray without ceasing, for this is the will of God in

Christ Jesus concerning you. You are to be constantly praying and bringing your needs before God.

Remember the story of Daniel. There were some people who didn't like him. He had been raised to a position of great prominence in the kingdom under Nebuchadnezzar. Some of his fellow leaders were angry with Daniel, so they were looking for skeletons in his closet. That happens a lot around election time doesn't it? The opponent wants to find something in the other guy's life that he can bring out at just the right time to get ahead in the election.

So they checked out Daniel. He was squeaky clean. There was nothing. They said, "Well, the only way we are going to nail him is in his relationship with God. We know he does one thing every day. Three times a day he goes to his house, opens up all of his windows, gets down on his knees, and prays to God."

They went to the king and tricked the king into signing this decree that no man could pray to any god except the king or it would be a violation of the law. The king foolishly signed it. And then they had the trap set for Daniel.

Now, what would you do if a law was passed stating that you could no longer pray anywhere—not even in your home? Would you stop praying? Would you go undercover? At the very least, if you were praying at home, maybe you would shut the windows and pull the shades. You would think twice before praying publicly, in a restaurant or something like that.

Daniel knew that this law was passed, but he got down and he prayed and gave thanks to the Lord, just like he always had.

That is just a great example, isn't it? The Bible tells us that we should pray everywhere and anywhere. 1 Timothy 2:8 says, "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

What did Daniel pray? Did he say, "God, help! Get me out of this mess"? No. Interestingly, the Bible says, "Daniel gave thanks to God" (see Daniel 6:10). And that is really the number-one thing we should do when we come to the Lord in prayer—give thanks. Why should we do that? Because we are acknowledging the glory and the greatness of God, and as we worship and honor Him, things start to come into perspective for us. We see God for who He is and thus we see our challenges, our problems, and our needs, for what they are. I think if you have a big God, you have relatively small

problems. Are you seeing God in His glory so you can see your problems in their proper perspective?

So Daniel prayed and gave thanks. And here is what he probably thought: “Lord, You are in control. If you want me to get eaten by lions, fine. I will be in Heaven a little bit sooner. If You want to spare my life, then I will be here and I will serve You. It is really up to You.”

Here is another example of a man who prayed: Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer. Now that doesn’t mean a lot to us today, but being a cupbearer means that he tasted all of the king’s food for him. And if someone were trying to poison the king, it would go through the cupbearer—basically, the guinea pig guy. But really he was more than that because being in such close proximity to the king he would hear everything the king heard and he would end up being a counselor to the king, so it became a position of great influence. It would be like having an office right next to the Oval Office in the White House.

So Nehemiah was in an influential position. He had a really sweet situation. You wouldn’t want to do anything to jeopardize that. But, you see, Nehemiah was a Jew and he heard about how the walls of Jerusalem were burned down and ruined. And his heart went out to his fellow Jews. He thought maybe God had put him where he was in order to use his position to do something good for his fellow Jews. And yet, to approach the king and provoke his disfavor would mean he could be put to death right on the spot.

So he was thinking about it. He was pondering it. And he was sad. One day the king noticed and said, “Hey Nehemiah, why are you so sad?” And I love to read that Nehemiah prayed. And then Nehemiah answered, “If it please Your Majesty and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried” (Nehemiah 2:5 NLT).

Nehemiah did not have the luxury that Daniel had, to go to his house and pray. This would have been one of those prayers on the fly. “OK Lord, just help me.” When suddenly you are summoned to the boss’s office, or the principal’s office, or even the Oval Office (who knows where you will be called?), you can pray on the way. “Lord, You are in control and I trust You. Give me the right words.”

Maybe a door opens up in conversation and somebody asks you something. You are praying silently, “Lord, just help me right now and give me wisdom

and let me know what to say in this situation.” That is exactly what Nehemiah did. And the Lord moved the king’s heart.

So again, we can pray wherever we are. The thing about prayer is just recognizing, wherever I am, that God is with me. I like how it says that when Elijah went into the court of Ahab the wicked king, he said, “As the Lord God lives, before whom I stand ...” and he went on to tell the king what was about to happen. Elijah recognized he was always in God’s presence. And so are we.

Why should we pray? Short answer: because Jesus told us to. Luke 18:1 says, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” Is there any better reason than that?

And of course, Jesus was an example of this. Jesus, though He was God in human form, had a very deep prayer life. In the Garden of Gethsemane, there was Jesus praying, calling on the Father, saying, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matthew 26:39). On the cross, He started with a prayer: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Then He said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). Then He said, “Into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). Prior to raising Lazarus from the dead, He first spoke to His Father, looking up to Heaven: “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear Me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me” (John 11:41–42 NLT). Before Jesus fed the 5,000, we read that He looked up toward Heaven and asked God’s blessing on the food (see Matthew 14:19). And why did the mothers bring their little children to Jesus? So He would pray for them (see Matthew 19:13).

Now listen to this: if Jesus felt the need to pray, how much should we feel the need to pray? He gave us an example to follow.

Here is something to consider: even if prayer were extremely difficult, which it is not, or very unpleasant to engage in, which it isn’t, or even if we never got answers, which we do, we should pray because we are commanded in Scripture to pray.

We should also pray because prayer is God’s appointed way for us to obtain things from Him. That is not the only purpose of prayer (some people seem to think it is), but to fail to see this is to miss a lot. Scripture is very clear in pointing out, in James 4:2, that you have not because you ask not. Have you ever stopped and thought that there may be things in your life

that God wants for you, and they have not happened because you have simply failed to ask Him?

I mean it may be you are ill right now and you don't want to be ill. But you have never actually prayed about it. You have never actually just said, "You know, Lord, I have never asked You to heal me. Maybe I thought if You wanted to heal me, You would just go ahead and do it. But I am asking You to heal me." Well, that is what you should do. You know why? You have not because you ask not.

You have a financial need and you have exhausted every resource to meet it and none of these things have worked. Has it ever dawned on you that you could actually pray about that? It says in Scripture that your God will supply all of your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus (see Philippians 4:19). You have not because you ask not.

Maybe your marriage is starting to unravel and you don't know what to do and you have tried everything. You have talked to everyone. Have you actually prayed about your marriage and asked God to intervene? Maybe you have a prodigal son or daughter and you have tried to get them to come back to the Lord and nothing has worked. Have you prayed for them? You have not because you ask not.

That doesn't mean that God will always answer your prayers the way you pray them. But many times He will. So the first thing you ought to do is just pray about it because God's appointed way for us to obtain things from Him is through prayer.

Why else should we pray? Because prayer is the way by which God helps us to overcome our anxiety and worry.

Life is full of troubles. There are all kinds of concerns that we have every single day about our health, our safety, our family, and our finances. And it has been said, "If your knees are shaking, kneel on them." Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything . . . Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (NLT). Worrying doesn't help anything. Worry is a complete waste of time.

In fact, the word *worry* comes from an old English word that means to strangle or to choke. One day I was playing with my grandkids and they

were choking me. And I was letting them choke me. They were having a great time doing that. And my granddaughter came over to my house a few days later and said, “Grandpa, I want to choke you again.” I thought, *I don't think I really want to do that again.* I know there are some people that would seriously love to choke me.

But that is what worry does. It chokes you. It cuts the air off. There is no good in it. It's been said, “Worry is interest paid on troubles that seldom come due.” It is just a waste of your time. Don't worry. Instead pray. And as you pray about it, God will help you overcome your anxiety and worry. Commit it to the Lord.

So next time you panic, pray. Maybe it's in the middle of the night. Isn't that when panic often hits? A dream. You wake up at 3:00 in the morning. I don't know what it is with 3:00 in the morning. That seems to be the magic number for me. I wake up and there's something concerning me, something that is burdening me. Maybe I dreamt about it. You know what I do? I just say, “Lord, there is not anything I can do about it right now. So this is Your problem. I am giving it to You. I am going back to bed. I will see You in the morning.” Cast all of your care upon Him because He cares for you. That is what the Bible tells us to do.

We should also pray because that is one of the ways we make ourselves ready for the return of Christ. Luke 21:34, 36 says, “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day [the Day of the Lord] will close on you suddenly like a trap. . . . Be always on the watch and pray” (NIV). Then in Mark 13:32, Jesus told the apostles that no one knows the day and hour when the Son of Man is coming, so we should take heed, watch, and pray.

Now when you pray, here is what you need to know. Sometimes God will say no. And when He does, we sometimes conclude that God didn't hear our prayer. We will say, “God didn't answer me.” Why? “Well, because it didn't happen. I didn't get what I wanted.” That doesn't mean God didn't answer your prayer. It just means He gave you an answer you didn't want.

Isn't *no* as much of an answer as *yes*? Listen to this:

If the request is wrong, God says, “No.”

If the timing is wrong, God says, “Slow.”

If you are wrong, God says, “Grow.”

But if the request is right, and the timing is right, and you are right, God says, “Go.”

Be always praying. A disciple who is moving forward in faith is a person of prayer.

3. A disciple of Jesus must be actively involved in the church.

Now of course, right off the bat, some will say, “Well, I don’t need the church to get close to God. I can commune with God wherever I am—when I am out on the golf course or waiting for the next set of waves or hiking around. I might even take my Bible with me and say a little prayer. I don’t really need to be part of a church.”

Actually, that is not true. And I would say that if you want to be a growing disciple of Christ, you must be an active part of the church. The Bible commands us to do this. Hebrews 10:24–25 says, “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day [of the Lord] approaching.” That verse is saying, “Look, Christ is coming back. You need to be with your brothers and your sisters encouraging one another, challenging one another, helping one another.” You need the church. And listen: the church needs you too.

Some would say, “Well, you know, I love Jesus. I just don’t love other Christians.” Sorry, that doesn’t work. The Bible essentially asks the question, “How can you love God, whom you can’t see, when you don’t love your brother, whom you can see?” (see 1 John 4:20). Don’t tell me you love God and you don’t love Christians.

Look, I will be the first to admit that the church has a lot of weird people. And I hate to break it to you, but you are one of them. And so am I. I mean, realistically, the church is a place for hurting people. It is a place for broken people. It isn’t always society’s elite. It isn’t always the coolest or the most beautiful or the most handsome. It is a place for everyone and anyone who needs help. So, sure, we end up with a lot of very interesting people in the church. But it is a great place for you to put your faith into action and learn how to love unlovable people.

Sometimes we act as though we are still in high school with all the different cliques. You know what I mean—certain groups that hang out

together. In high school, there were the athletic people—the jocks and the cheerleaders—and they have their little section on campus. There were the surfer kids and they all hung out in a certain section. Then there the nerdy people. They are the ones that own all of the corporations now, by the way. We used to call them *geeks* and *nerds*; now we call them *boss* and *sir*. So you have your different groups, and you tend to want to be with the people who are just like you. But in the church God brings us together in one place—young and old, different cultures, and different backgrounds—and God says, “Love one another.”

This is what the church is. Don’t tell me that you love God but you don’t love His people. To put it frankly, if you are not an active part of church it is a proof that something is wrong with you spiritually. Listen to these words of 1 John 2:19: “These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us” (NLT). Every believer needs to be a part of the church.

Sometimes we think of the church from the perspective of a consumer instead of a communer. And if the church is catering to customers, we are not going to end up with disciples. We often think of church the way we think of going to a movie. *What time does the movie start? Oh 7:00. Well, you know they just roll trailers for the first 20 minutes. So we will get in there about 7:00. We will park, grab some popcorn and a Coke (and pay \$100 for that) and then we will find our seat.* And then, of course, when the movie is over you say, *Well, I don’t want to wait for the credits to roll. Let’s get out of here.* So you get up and leave.

That is how you and I think about the movies. But we can take that same mentality and bring it to church. *Oh, well, it’s just worship music at the beginning, so it’s okay if we get in late.* And we check our texts and emails and social media. Then we leave early, while the pastor is doing the invitation because it doesn’t really apply to us, or interest us, or whatever.

That is not the way to come to church. You are treating it like a movie theater when it is a place of worship. It is the house of God and we are the family of God. So we need to change the way that we think about these things. Worship is not the opening act. Worship is prayer set to song—where we are communing with God.

And we should not come to church to merely have our needs met. Sometimes people will say, “I like the worship over at this church, but I like the

children's program in this other church, but then the teaching over here is really good. So we just sort of hop around. Do you know that is actually not good for you spiritually? You need a place to lock in so you can get a consistent theology (what you believe about God), which is very important. You need a pastor—someone who can speak truth into your life and help you and tell you when you are getting off course and encourage you when you are on course and help you develop your spiritual gifts. You need a place to be accountable so others can check up on you and help you in life as you help them along as well. You need a place to develop your gifts and serve the Lord.

All of those things are what you experience as part of the church. We all need them. The church is like an oasis of hope in a desert of hopelessness.

I know the church has its flaws. I know it has its shortcomings. Actually, I know it better than most because I see all of the behind-the-scenes stuff. I see things that are disappointing and I see things that are very impressive. But the point is, despite our flaws and our shortcomings there is nothing out there like the church. It stands apart.

And Jesus established it. He said that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (see Matthew 16:18) and He wants us to be an active part of it. Think of the ways that God has met the needs of His people and the world through the church. When you lose a loved one—a grandparent, a parent, a spouse, or even a child—where do you turn to? Well, most people turn to the church. Often, even if they weren't a part of the church, they will come to the church looking for help. When your spouse walks out on you, where do you turn to? You find help at the church from your Christian friends. What about when you are having problems with your kids? You come to the church and maybe the youth pastor intervenes and helps you out there. When you are needing direction in life, where do you find it? You find it at church. When you are looking for a spouse, where do you find them? At church.

And that is a good place to look for a spouse, by the way. I am not encouraging you to come to church just to check out all of the other singles, but let me say this: the church is the best place to meet someone. You want to find someone who loves the Lord.

And where do you want to get married? Even people who aren't believers often want to get married in the church. And where did you find Christ? Chances are you found the Lord in the church. And what about when you fall on hard times? You lose your job. Maybe you go to family members or

friends and they help you out a little. But maybe you go to the church and you are offered a helping hand. Maybe it is in the church where you found out that you have a musical ability. I am amazed at how many singing stars today got their start by singing in church.

Church is such a wonderful place for us to gather. And it is actually good for you physically to be in church as well. I read a fascinating article sometime back that spoke of the benefits of faith in the church. They did a scientific study on the subject. Here are some of the observations from the article:

- Heart surgery patients who drew comfort from their religious faith had a significantly higher survival rate than those who did not.
- The blood pressure of people who attend church is lower than those who don't.
- People with faith who attend church regularly experience less depression than non-church attendees.
- Suicide is four times higher among non-churchgoers than churchgoers.

Those are interesting statistics, but they are not the main reason we should go to church. We should go because this is a place where we draw closer to God. It is a place where we can grow spiritually. It's a place where we can give, and a place where we can receive.

3. A disciple of Jesus must fulfill the Great Commission.

What is the Great Commission? Let's read Matthew 28:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (verses 16–20)

What has Jesus told us to do? Go.
Go where? Into all the world.
To do what? Preach the gospel.

Now, there are two things here in the original language that we need to understand. First, it is a command. Jesus was not saying, “Hey guys, if you can work it out in your busy schedules, would you mind, as a personal favor to Me, to please go into the world and preach the gospel?” No. It is a command. “You have submitted your life to Me. I am ordering you now to go into all the world.”

Second, these words are given to every follower of Jesus—young and old, men and women, new believers and older believers. It is not the Great Suggestion; it is the Great Commission. The church was not instructed to wait for the world to show up. The church is commissioned to go to the world. And every follower of Jesus should be doing this.

So here is my question for you: are you doing this? If you are Jesus’ disciple, you are commanded to go and make disciples of others. If you are not making disciples of others, then you are not really being the disciple He wants you to be. So are you doing your part to fulfill the Great Commission?

The Great Commission is, in effect, Jesus’ final will and testament, if you will. These were the last words that Christ gave before He ascended. At the point He uttered these words, Jesus had been crucified, had been resurrected again from the dead, and now, before His ascension to Heaven, He says, “Guys, here is the last thing I want to leave with all of you.” So obviously this is a big deal to Him.

If someone on their deathbed gave their final words, would you pay attention? I hope so. If they wrote down their last wishes in their will, would you take the time to read the fine print? I think so.

Well, this is the message of Christ to each of us. But yet how many of us are actually doing it? Let me say something you might find a bit controversial, but I think it is true: if you are not seeking to fulfill the Great Commission, it can actually be a sin.

“A sin?” you say, “Now you are going too far, Bald One.” Wait. First of all, don’t call me Bald One. That is really offensive. But, secondly, I don’t think I am going too far. There are different kinds of sin identified in the Bible: sins of commission and sins of omission. A sin of commission is doing what you shouldn’t do. A sin of omission is not doing what you should do. And the Bible says in James 4:17, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

We know that Jesus Christ is the answer—that He can forgive sin. We know He can change a life because He has changed our lives. And if I meet somebody and they need God—maybe they even ask me for spiritual help—if I don't give them the answer to their need that can be spiritual negligence. Surveys show that 95 percent of Christians have never led another person to Christ.

You say, “But Greg, I am not gifted to be an evangelist.” Wait a second. Every Christian has been called to evangelize. In Mark's Gospel we have a variation on the Great Commission. In Mark 16:15, Jesus says, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.” So I am to make disciples and I am to preach the gospel.

Notice Jesus did not say, “Go into all the world and live as good examples.” The Great Commission is not to just live a good life or try to reflect the moral standards that you find in the Bible. No, it is to specifically preach the gospel.

Why? Because how do people primarily come to faith in Jesus? They come to faith because someone shared the gospel.

Now, when I say “preach the gospel,” it doesn't mean you have to yell or get behind a pulpit. You can speak conversationally and share the gospel. You can type it up in an e-mail. You can post it on your Facebook page. You can put it in a letter. There are lots of ways you can convey it. But here is my point: the primary way that God reaches lost people is through the communication of the gospel. In fact, the Bible even tells us over in the book of Romans, “How will they hear unless someone tells them?” (see Romans 10:14–15).

Some people will say, “Well, I am not into the whole ‘sharing the gospel’ thing. I believe in lifestyle evangelism. By that I mean I don't tell people about God. I just live a good life. I am a good person. I work very hard. I believe they will look at my example and one day come up to me and ask how to become a Christian.” That is a nice theory. It is a pleasant fiction. But it is just not accurate. That would be like turning on the news at night and the newscaster didn't give you the news. They just lived a good life.

In the same way, sharing the gospel is the broadcasting of a message. In fact, the word broadcast comes from a word that means to sow seed. So we are sowing seed. We are broadcasting it to the world. And our message is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Maybe it would help to personalize this. Let's change one word. Instead of *the* let's substitute *your*. Go into all of *your* world and preach the gospel. Go into *your* neighborhood. Go into *your* family. Go into *your* campus. Go into *your* workplace. Go into *your* sphere of influence and preach the gospel. Reach the people you can.

Our marching orders are to share the message of the gospel to invite people to believe in Jesus. And when they do (they will, if you will ask them), you then teach them to do the things that Christ has commanded. In short, you make disciples. Your job as a disciple is to share your faith, lead people to Christ, and to the best of your ability help them mature spiritually. Then you are to go out and repeat the process again and again.

Colossians 1:28 says, "We proclaim Christ. We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him, so that, if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ" (PHP).

Somewhere along the line we have separated evangelism from discipleship. We preach the gospel but we don't disciple. We don't get people on their feet. But the two go together.

Are you ready to be His disciple?

Discipleship is the Christian life as it was meant to be lived. And it is something we all should be living today. The reason we are not seeing our world turned upside down like it was in the first century is because we don't have many disciples these days. The fair-weather followers are many. The pew warmers are many. The critics are many. But the disciples are few.

Being a disciple is what God has called us all to do. And so I ask you today, are you ready to do that? Will you love God more than anyone else? Will you deny yourself and, in losing yourself, find yourself? Will you take up the cross? Will you surrender your claim to everything in your life? And will you count the cost? If so, you can be His disciple today.

Let's pray a prayer to that effect now.

Lord, it is our desire to be true disciples. Not armchair quarterbacks. Not spectators. Lord, we want to get in the action like those 300 Spartans, or like Gideon's army, and make a difference. Lord, we want to walk in Your will and Your power. What we have read about in this book

is not easy to put into practice. We admit that. That is why You say, "Take up the cross daily and follow Me." It is a daily commitment. The commitment we made a month ago may have no relevance to us today if we have strayed from it. It is something we commit to over and over again. So Lord, again we commit ourselves to You today. We want to be Your disciples. We want to take up the cross. We want to love You more than anyone or anything else and surrender our claim to all that we have and acknowledge it is Yours. Use us, Lord, to impact our world. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Want to learn more about being a growing disciple of Jesus Christ? Sign up for the free online training course *What Every Growing Christian Needs to Know*, available at courses.harvest.org.