

Expressions of Love

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach ...*

So read the opening lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s love sonnet to her husband.

People respond to love. The words of love are music to our ears. Receiving love brings joy to our lives. Human beings thrive on love because we are created in the image of God, who is love. And each of us was created to be an expression of love.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”¹

Jesus Christ, the Son of God spoke these words to His disciples on the night before He died. A few hours later Jesus would express His love for every man by becoming the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On that night however, Jesus explained to His disciples that the way to express love towards Him; was the same way He expressed love to His Father in heaven during His lifetime. *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.*²

“Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”³

These were the final words that Jesus spoke to His followers before ascending into heaven. Jesus chose His words carefully. They were important words, memorable and intended for lasting impact. Study them for just a moment!

Two questions come to mind immediately. What did Jesus command His disciples to do? Why is it so important to teach others to do as He commanded? The answers to these questions are the heart of the disciple making process used by Jesus.

During the three-year period of His ministry on earth, Jesus took ordinary men and women who followed Him and transformed them into powerful disciples. Within twenty years of His ascension into heaven they had become known throughout the Roman Empire as “those who have turned the world upside down.” They had truly become expressions of God’s love on earth.

What happened to them to cause such a great impact on the world? It’s simple. Jesus gave His disciples only one task; make more disciples. He told them exactly how to do it. They did what Jesus told them to do and He sent the Holy Spirit to help them do it! The rest is history.

Jesus’ five-step disciple making process was simple. Go, preach, baptize, and teach.

1. **Stay** until you are clothed with power from on high.
2. **Go** into the entire world.
3. **Preach** the gospel to all creation.
4. **Baptize** those who have believed, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

¹ 1 John 14:15

² 1 John 15:10

³ Matthew 28:20

5. **Teach** all those who have believed and are baptized, to do everything that I have told you to do.

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

What is a disciple?

By definition, a disciple is a **learner**; one who puts into practice what he or she has been taught. Jesus said it this way. *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher and the slave as his master.”*⁴ Therefore, the goal of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to become as He is . . . having the same values, character, goals, desires and mission.

What is discipleship?

From a Christian perspective, discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus. It is the transformation from “learner” to “teacher.” Some churches refer to discipleship as spiritual growth or spiritual maturity or spiritual transformation. It involves changing the way the learner thinks and acts, so that he becomes conformed to the image of the teacher. The Apostle Paul said. *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*⁵

How is the mind renewed?

The key word is having a renewed mind is **repentance**.⁶ Most Christians associate this word with either their salvation (Repent and believe the gospel) or giving up their sins (Repent of your sins). However, it simply means to change the way you think or believe.

In our everyday lives this is happening all the time. For example, we get more facts or information on a particular subject, which allows us to change the way we think about the subject. Sometimes we hear an exclamation like, “Wow, I never really thought about it like that before” but in most cases we just assimilate the information daily, which in turn affects our general belief system.

All of us are affected to some extent by what we hear. Jesus even cautioned His disciples to be careful what they listened to⁷ because he knew that it would affect their hearts and minds. As Christians we need to remember that both the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are being ruled by words. Satan is able to usurp rulership over the kingdoms of this world because people believe his words, which are lies and then are passed on. God’s kingdom advances when His words are believed, acted upon and then passed on.

In the information age we live in today, we are constantly bombarded with words all day long. If Christians are to advance the Kingdom of God it is imperative that they repent or

⁴ Matthew 10:24-25

⁵ Romans 12:2

⁶ **Repentance**. Simply defined as, *stop doing it your way and start doing it God’s way.*

⁷ Mark 4:24 and Luke 8:18

replace the lies they have believed in with the truth of God’s Word. The replacement occurs by acting in faith towards God’s words. True Biblical faith has three parts to it before it is complete:

1. Believing the word of God as truth in the heart,
2. Confessing the word of God to others, and
3. Acting upon what the world of God says to do.

By using a combination of the three learning styles: audio, visual and kinetic, the rate at which the mind can be renewed can be increased. First you tell the person how to do it, then you show the person how to do it and then you let them do it. One example of renewing a mind is when we teach a child how to tie his shoelaces. First we tell them how to do it, we demonstrate how to do it and finally we have them do it . . . over and over and over again until it comes second nature to them. When the child grows to the point where he teaches others how to tie their shoes he has become like his teacher or in other words, he has been disciple. Jesus used this process with His disciples all the time.

Is the discipleship process systematic?

I believe the answer to this question is yes. People raise their children systematically. For example, people teach their children to walk before they teach them to run. Then they teach them to play baseball before they teach them to manage a baseball team. The entire human learning process is systematic and even the Bible concurs with that . . . *“For God says, ‘Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there.’”*⁸

Jesus never took a haphazard approach in making disciples. He was intentional in everything He did; from those he called to be the twelve apostles, to the methods and order of their training, to the time that it took to train them and to their final empowering by the Holy Spirit. The teaching series, *A Journey with Jesus* seeks to follow that pattern.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the discipleship process?

Let’s start by saying that in order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ you must be taught by Him. This is one of primary reasons that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to reside within Christians, to teach them what He, the Word of God says.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but **whatever He hears, He will speak**; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*⁹

Christians sometimes have strange ideas when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. Let’s look at a few examples of erroneous belief. Some say they don’t need to know what the Scriptures say since the Holy Spirit will lead them. This cannot be true because 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *“All Scripture¹⁰ is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for*

⁸ Isaiah 28:10

⁹ John 16:13

¹⁰ Scripture means, “that which is written”.

reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

Some Christians say that they don’t need anyone to teach them because the Holy Spirit will do it. In some respects this is true, however the Scripture also says *that Jesus Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*¹¹ So, until we **all** attain to the **unity** of the faith and **knowledge** of the Son of God then these God ordained ministries will remain.

Many Christians expect the Holy Spirit to get them to where they need to be without any effort on their own part. Jesus said, *“When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.”* Notice that Jesus didn’t say that the Holy Spirit would drive His people into all truth but rather to guide them. It is a **joint** effort; the Holy Spirit leads, God’s people follow. This implies that it takes faith and obedience to follow the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:14 says, *“For all who are being **led** by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”*

How many disciples did Jesus have?

Jesus had many disciples, both men and women. Of His disciples, He called twelve men to be His apostles (sent ones). Ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the Bible records that 120 of His disciples gathered together on the Feast of Shavuot, which is known as Pentecost in the Church. On that day the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak in the languages of the people who had come to the feast from other lands. Then Peter preached the gospel to these people. Three thousand believed his message and were baptized. Then, the apostles started going from house to house, where believers were gathering in small groups, teaching them what Jesus had commanded them to do.

What is required to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

1. **Believe** the gospel message concerning Jesus, that He is both Lord and Savior. By believing, a person is “born again” into the family of God. This requires an act of repentance – a change from what was formerly believed.
2. Be **baptized**. By this act a person declares that he has been “born again by the Spirit of God” and is now “saved”. Jesus said, *“He who has believed and is baptized shall be saved.”*¹²
3. Be **willing** to receive Jesus’ instructions.
4. **Sacrifice** time to be trained.
5. **Learn** the commands of Jesus.
6. **Apply** what He says to do.
7. Be **led** by the Spirit of God. According to the Apostle Paul, those who are being led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

What format is best used to make disciples?

Small groups of 5 to 15 individuals make ideal places to learn and grow. They provide the best opportunities for people to practice the one another’s, be accountable, learn and accomplish tasks.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:11-13

¹² Mark 16:16

Can a person terminate or interrupt the process of becoming a disciple?

The answer to this question is yes. One example of this is in John 6:53-66. Many of Jesus’ disciples withdrew from Him. They simply could not believe that Jesus required them, to “eat His body and drink His blood.” In the Church today, this requirement is known as communion or the Lord’s Supper.

How long does it take to become a disciple?

Let’s begin answering this question by saying, that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a life-long process. However, some significant degree of spiritual maturity seems to have been achieved within the first three-year period after an individual’s conversion. Consider the following:

1. Jesus spent three years training His disciples before they were considered spiritually mature enough to “make disciples.”
2. In Acts 1:8; we discover that Jesus told His disciples that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. According to most historians, there was a ten-year period between Peter’s preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem until he preached to Cornelius, a gentile, in Caesarea. When Cornelius, a representative of Rome, was baptized it marked the beginning of the spread of the gospel to the remotest ends of the earth. From this historical notation, it can be deduced that some significant spiritual maturity had been achieved within a three-year period in each of the three areas of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.
3. In Galatians 1:15-18, the Apostle Paul states that he spent three years in Arabia and Damascus after his conversion before meeting with Peter in Jerusalem.
4. In Acts 20:28; the Apostle Paul reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus that he spent three years teaching them.

What is the history of discipleship in the Church?

In the immediate years following the resurrection of Jesus, discipleship was the **primary** focus of the church. The gospel was preached, people repented and were baptized, and those who had been taught the Lord’s commands instructed others in the way of righteousness. Small groups of people were trained in homes and were then sent out to make more disciples.

These small groups of people were autonomous. They were linked to other groups through their common faith. The leadership of a group was invested in its elders. These were usually men who were at least thirty years of age and lived by Biblical standards of holy living. Some time later these elders became known as pastors - those who watched over and cared for the flock.

During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, when the number of groups multiplied in a specific area one elder would be chosen to coordinate activities between the groups. He was given the title of bishop and also served as a representative and spokesman for that area’s groups. Discipleship methods changed little during this period of time even in the midst of extreme persecution.

However, in the beginning of the 4th century the Church began to bind itself to secular world power, thinking that this was the way the kingdom of God would be established in the earth. The focus of the Church began to **shift** from making disciples to developing an orthodox belief system. What a person believed overshadowed the One in whom he believed. Christianity became the official religion of the empire and individuals were forced to convert. Church buildings began to be constructed. The New Testament portion of Scripture was developed from various writings and then combined with the Old Testament. These writings became our Bible.

The struggle for political authority and **orthodoxy** (correct belief) continued to increase in scope. Bishops decided the issues of orthodoxy after much dispute among themselves. The bishops from the five major centers of Christianity (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem) were viewed as having greater authority than other bishops because of their great number of followers. These powerful men coerced other bishops to join them in voting on issues of orthodoxy. The wrangling continued until there were only two main bishops who had their own followings. These two were the Bishop of Rome (who had political ties to the western portion of the Roman Empire) and the Bishop of Constantinople (who had political ties to the eastern portion of the Roman Empire). The infighting between these two groups lasted until 1054 AD when the Church suffered its first split into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches.

In order to maintain orthodoxy and control of people’s beliefs, the Church trained men to lead the individual churches. Eventually this group of educated men would become an elite class. They were known as the clergy. Latin and Greek had become the languages of the Bible and could only be understood by a properly trained member of the **clergy**. With the rise of the professional clergy, ordinary men and women in the Church no longer made disciples on their own. That job was left to the trained staff. Christians tended to be adherents to an orthodox system of beliefs rather than ardent followers of Jesus Christ.

The simple group gatherings of the early Church involving fellowship, communion, prayer and the apostles’ teachings on the commands of Jesus gave way to elaborate ritual. The celebration of the Eucharist, also known as the Mass, became the focal point of these gatherings. During the “Middle Ages” the Church plunged into moral decay and its leadership became corrupt. Despite this turn of events, hope was on the horizon.

In the latter part of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century three major events occurred that would shape the Church’s future. In 1454, John Guttenberg used the first movable-type printing press in Europe to print the Bible. This eventually led to widespread ownership of Bibles by individuals, printed in their own languages. In 1492, Columbus’ discovery of America became a safe haven of migration for those who sought freedom from religious persecution. And in 1517, a German Catholic priest named Martin Luther ignited the fire of reformation that spread throughout all of Christendom.

Because of the reformation Christians began protesting many Church practices, wanting to return to a purer faith. These protesters were divided into two camps: those who remained in the Catholic Church and those who left. Those who remained tried to reform the Church from within but were killed or silenced. The other camp felt it was impossible to reconcile with the “Roman Catholic Church” and separated from it. The latter group has become known as **Protestants**.

Reformation took time. The transformation from man made tradition and ritual, back to the Bible and a simple faith in Jesus Christ, began to evolve slowly. However, orthodoxy still remained the focus of these new Protestant Churches, so much so that we now have hundreds of denominations

and thousands of independent churches. “What a person believes” is still in ascendancy over “the One in whom a person believes.” Most of the Reformers believed it was necessary to exert control over the people in order to maintain orthodox belief, considering the laity to be ignorant. Therefore, the professional clergy remained and with it the expectation that they would do the work of ministry.

Today, it appears that many within the Church are attempting to return to the fundamental roots of Christianity. People want to know Jesus! And discipleship has become the buzzword in many congregations. There is a hunger in Christians for fellowship with one another and a desire to serve their Lord. They want to be a holy people clothed with power from on high. They want to be Jesus’ disciples. And they want to participate in the transformation of the lives of others.

There is hope, but Christians must act. We need to be involved in small groups, loving one another and working together to effect transformation in the lives of people. We should celebrate the Lord’s Supper when we meet. Prayers need to be offered up to God as a sweet smelling aroma. And Christians must learn the things that Jesus commanded them to do, and then do them.

What are the purposes of this book series?

1. To answer commonly asked questions about becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.
2. To establish the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church.
3. To give insights into the disciple making process.
4. Provide a teaching outline for everything Jesus asked His disciples to do.

How is the disciple making process accomplished?

1. The disciple making process is divided into fifty-eight teaching lessons.
2. In each lesson, one or more of the action commands that Jesus gave His disciples, will be featured. There are a total of 263 individual commands.
3. A short teaching will provide insight into understanding the command.
4. Group discussion questions are used for reflection on the lesson.
5. An activity is suggested to implement what has been learned in the lesson.