

## Christian Basics

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### CHAPTER SEVEN

### Discipleship

#### HERE IS WHY THIS CHAPTER IS IMPORTANT

- We must know that God has a mission.

God's mission is to train and nurture believers so they can be useful in his kingdom.

- We must know that we who get involved in God's mission will not be left to ourselves.

Jesus has promised to be with us – even to the end of the age.

- We must know that we will be on a life-long learning curve.

We will sometimes fail, but we have glorious freedom due to our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

What is discipleship? It is an old word used to describe a very vital relationship. It doesn't mean we must all wear robes and say "thee" and "thou." It comes from the word "discipline" which is a description of a student in a training relationship. Think for a moment what it means for someone in the medical profession to study the *discipline* of medicine. They have voluntarily placed themselves under the rigorous training necessary to carry out their duties in the best possible manner. A credible medical career would be impossible (and unthinkable) without this disciplined approach.

The same can be said of the various trades. There are apprenticeship programs to bring people along in the knowledge and skill necessary to successfully ply a trade. A disciple can be thought of as a type of apprentice. A disciple is apprenticed to God.

God's desire is that the people who are in relationship with him be subject to his discipline and training. This is called "discipleship." It is often one of the most neglected relationships in the Christian church. The sad part is that many believers are missing out on the most exciting and exhilarating part of their relationship to God. A healthy life in discipleship/training with the Lord will lead to the most blessed of lives. Discipleship is part of God's mission.

Section One  
**GOD'S MISSION**

We may find it easy to think of people as being on a mission, but do we ever think of the fact that God is on a mission? His mission can be seen as the connecting thread that runs from Genesis through Revelation. His mission is to redeem what was lost to sin and to restore all things.

A continuous mission

God has been on this mission of redemption ever since the fall in the Garden of Eden. It is a mission of redemption that can be seen everywhere in Scripture. God called Abraham at the very beginning and said, "... all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). As God's redemptive history proceeded we can see his plan interwoven throughout the Scriptures.

His mission continued through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yet, it seemed time and time again that his plan would self-destruct. God's people were far from perfect. It was as if sabotage was the rule and disobedience the way. However, the secret to God's mission was that its success did not rest in human hands. Just as one of God's chosen human instruments came close to having everything dissolve into failure, God worked his gracious power. His plan would not fail. Why? It was HIS plan and HIS mission.

Even foreign nations couldn't stand in the way of God's plan of redemption. When the Egyptian Pharaoh tried to stop God's plan the pharaoh was defeated. The Pharaoh held a whole nation in brutal slavery for 400 years. As far as the people knew their situation would last forever. It was an impossible situation, but with God nothing is impossible. This point has been proven over and over again. All we have to do is read God's history in dealing with his people as recorded in the Bible. God's mission was unrelenting even in the face of the most outrageous human failure and never ending foreign interference.

God's mission would continue through David. King David was enjoying unsurpassed success. While he had spent much time and energy building a palace for himself, he realized that God needed a house. But what would God do with a house when all of heaven and earth belonged to him? God had to remind David that it was *he* who gave him his success and that no one was more zealous for the mission of God than God himself.

*The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you; when your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. 2 Samuel 7:11-14 (NIV)*

This episode in the life of David reminds us that God had a plan and a mission beyond what most people realize. David was thinking too small. He had to be instructed that God had eternal plans that went well beyond David's simple, temporal and earthbound concerns. God had his mind on an eternal dynasty (house) headed up by the "Son of David" – the promised Messiah.

Many more accounts could be cited from Old Testament history where it was shown that God had an eternal plan that would supersede all other plans. God's ceaseless mission was pointing to its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

### A costly mission

While God's mission was (and still is) continuous, it was also very costly. Who can calculate the cost of God's own Son? We don't have any way of coming close to really understanding what it cost God, nor what it cost Jesus Christ. How do you measure infinite value?

*God so loved the world that he GAVE his one and only Son... John 3:16 (NIV)*

Make no mistake that this was God's mission. It cost him everything. He held nothing back. Even though we cannot fathom the cost, we must consider it. The more we think and meditate on what it cost God the more we will come to understand the value that he places on his mission. This will also help us to more fully realize the priority God places on his mission as it affects our lives.

His mission is never ending and it cost him a price that cannot be measured by any human standard. This mission is important to God. It should be of equal importance to those who are called by his name. God's mission will lead us into God's commission.

## Section Two **GOD'S COMMISSION**

Matthew 28 we can read the last words of Jesus. This is called "The Great Commission."

*18 All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)*

### **TIME OUT**

There have been great moments in history – so momentous that the slightest reference can lead many people into a treasure trove of memories and associations: Pearl Harbor, D-day, JFK, the lunar landing, "9-11." The memories and the value of the memories associated with these names are all dependent on the special impact any one of these events may have had on people. The greater the impact the more they will trigger associations and deep, meaningful memories.

I would like to suggest that there have been events in the life of Jesus that should evoke strong associations in the minds of his followers. Some of them might be the nativity, Gethsemane, the crucifixion and the resurrection. The mere mention of one of these historic episodes in the life of Jesus should bring in a flood of significant associations. Add "The Great Commission" to the

list. My prayer is that every time you consider The Great Commission it would stir within you greater and greater associations and an impulse to draw closer to God's will for your life. Take time out and read and meditate on the passage from Matthew 28 and let it become a part of your life. It holds the key to untold blessing.

Write out Matthew 28:18-20 on a piece of paper and carry it with you for a week.

Memorize it. Meditate upon it. Know it. Learn to live it.

Let's consider God's commission (the Great Commission) under two headings: authority and authorization.

### Authority

Jesus said that *all authority* had been given him – all authority in heaven and on earth. There is, and can be, no higher authority. Heaven and earth covers all known territory and everything in between. The more we understand the nature of his authority the more our confidence and faith in Christ will grow. This confidence will help us as we endeavor to live what it is to be a disciple.

Jesus' authority came by virtue of his identity: God incarnate – God in the flesh. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Again and again Jesus spoke about his authority.

- He had authority over God's word: “You have heard it said... but I say to you...” (Matthew 5:21)
- He exercised authority over nature: “What kind of man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him” (Matthew 8:27)?
- He demonstrated his authority over sin: “Who can forgive sins but God alone” (Mark 2:7)?
- He declared himself to be Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5),
- He was given authority over all people (John 17:2),
- He stated that he was the judge of all (John 5:22),
- Jesus claimed to have authority over life and death itself (John 10:18; Revelation 1:18).

When Jesus declared himself to be “The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13), he was laying claim to his ultimate authority. No one lies outside the authority of Jesus Christ. He is the Beginning and the End of all things. All of creation will one day bow at the feet of Jesus.

*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth... Philippians 2:10 (NIV)*

Jesus has all authority because of who he is. He also has all authority because of what he has done. His life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension were events that broke the bondage of sin forever. Jesus descended from eternity and entered time. His glory was hidden as he went to the cross to ransom creation. He defeated death and the grave by the power of the resurrection.

*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God... Acts 2:32-33 (NIV)*

Jesus Christ is now “seated at God’s right hand” (Colossians 3:1). This is a word picture for being in the position of absolute authority. This can be said of no one else. If Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and he authorizes something, then his authorization should be given the highest consideration.

### Authorization

After Jesus informed his disciples of his absolute authority, he immediately authorized them:

*“Therefore, go...” (Matthew 28:19)*

The “therefore” is there because Jesus just asserted the reality of his authority. We are sent on the basis of *his* authority. He himself has given us authorization. To be authorized means to be sanctioned and empowered. Jesus is much more committed to us than we will ever realize. We have been authorized to go in his name, i.e., Jesus’ authority. He went to a lot of trouble to make this authorization possible. Think of seeing a sign on a door in a place of business: “Authorized Personnel Only.” Most people would not think of entering that door without authorization. However, the authorized person has every right and complete freedom to enter through the door. The disciple is such an authorized person.

The calling to discipleship that believers have received will set us apart from the rest of the world. Since the world at large has not received this commission they will not have the same concerns we do. Discipleship with Christ is a privilege only for believers in Christ. It is our new mission. The definition of mission is “a task with a purpose.” Our purpose for living and serving God should be clear for all believers. Our purpose in being disciples is to also go out and make disciples.

We cannot go out and make disciples if we ourselves are not committed to being disciples. Discipleship is a job that no one but those so authorized can fill. “Go and make disciples of all people.” Who else is going to take this to heart, but those who are committed to the purpose of God’s mission?

We have a purpose and we also have a task. We are to teach people to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. Our task is to teach people who are called to learn how to obey. The implication of this is that we too will be learning obedience as well.

#### AUTHORITY ALERT

We live in an age where words like “authority” and “obedience” can strike horror into the hearts and minds of people. This is nothing new. Our era is no different than any other era. It is human nature to rebel against authority. C. S. Lewis wrote of his conversion to Christianity in a book entitled, *Surprised by Joy*. I was very amused that a man so brilliant would concede at the very end of the book that his main reason for avoiding belief in the gospel was the simple fact that he just wanted to be left alone. It is very instructive for us to consider that it was not for any deep intellectual or philosophical reason that Lewis resisted the gospel. It was simply that he wanted to be his own boss.

This is an ALERT to bring to light the fact that we need to *unlearn* as well as learn certain things. We need to unlearn natural ways of thinking and learn God’s ways of thinking. We need to unlearn the idea that obedience is a negative word. We need to learn that obedience to God leads to blessing. Disciples are committed to learning how to obey in their everyday lives. We are to live lives of humble submission at the feet of Jesus.

We have been given authorization. We’ve been given purpose. We’ve been given a task. We have also been given a promise:

*“Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20 (NIV)*

We might call this one of the hidden blessings of being a disciple. Remember, we are not in this alone. Jesus promised to be with us every step of the way. This communion with Jesus is a reality that tends to soften the scary prospects surrounding such concepts as obedience and authority. It all melts into blessing in due time when Jesus is with us.

Believers have received God’s commission to go out and impact the world. When do believers receive their commissions? We receive them the moment we are saved. The Holy Spirit has baptized us into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). We have all the resources of heaven at our disposal and the very authorization of Jesus Christ himself. All this is a reflection of God’s mission and his commission. This Great Commission now needs to be our commission. We should really think of it as a co-mission. We are not alone. Jesus is in mission with us. Therefore, it is truly a co-mission.

Section Three  
**OUR COMMISSION**

The Great Commission becomes our mission when we make a commitment of faith to yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To be a disciple is to come under his discipline and training. I will highlight four components to discipleship.

1. Learning How To Obey

There are two misconceptions about discipleship. First, there is the mistaken idea that all Christians are disciples. There are many Christians who have not yielded to Christ. Many Christians have yet to give themselves fully to his leadership. Failure to yield to Jesus results in a faith that is weak. It also can lead to an unfruitful witness to the world. Secondly, there is also the mistaken idea that disciples are perfect. Disciples are not perfect. A disciple is a learner and people who are learning must make mistakes, otherwise they would have nothing to learn. A person who is a learner, by the very definition of the term, will be expected to make mistakes.

I knew a young man who was so discouraged in his Christian life and was in such despair that he felt he must give up. One lonely night in agony of soul he cried out to God, “I can’t do it! I can’t live the Christian life!” His whole world seemed to be collapsing around him. Just then the Lord gently broke through his pain with three quiet words: “You can learn.” In a surprising economy of words that penetrated his heart like a two-edged sword the young man was lifted from his despair. He realized that there was room for mistakes and struggle. What he lacked was the commitment of being a disciple. From then on he committed himself to learn.

Jesus has given us a divine invitation to learn:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)*

This is one of the grand invitations in the Bible. We can be “yoked” with Jesus: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Jesus is the greatest, most patient of teachers. He also knows our hearts and things that we need far more than we do ourselves. His yoke is easy because it is worn in love and the burden is borne by him. It will require three things: that we be teachable, that we be committed and that we have a willingness to be tested.

Teachable

The first step in learning something is to admit that we have a lot to learn. Have you ever tried to teach someone a skill but could not because they had the attitude that they already knew what it was you were trying to teach them? This is called an unteachable attitude. God wants believers to be teachable – willing to learn. A humble attitude is required. We must come to the realization that our teacher might know more than we do.

Because most of us suffer from the ailment of not being very teachable, sometimes the Lord will use failure to get our attention. Failure can be a good teacher. Failure can be the two-by-four that God uses as a way to get through our mule-headedness. When David was king he failed. After he learned his lesson he composed one of the most beautiful and powerful poems of repentance in the Bible: Psalm 51. Here is one verse.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Psalm 51:17 (NIV)*

To be teachable requires that we are willing to repent. An attitude of repentance creates a climate of humility where instruction can take place with a willing heart and open ears. It is similar to that time in our teenage years when we were learning how to drive. We were placed in an ugly car with a huge sign that read, “Student Driver.” It was an insult to our egos. We just couldn’t wait to get out of that car and away from that humiliating sign and into our own cars where WE would be the experts. Yet, we valued the goal so much that we gladly endured the “insult” of the sign. To be teachable is to be humble and willing to wear the sign, “Learner-disciple.”

### Committed

To be committed is to have new priorities. Commitment requires perseverance. We must have a commitment that will stand up against hard times, bad moods, unscheduled setbacks and even gross failure. Read one of Paul’s descriptions of commitment:

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV)*

Notice that three times Paul admitted that he had not yet arrived. Failure and setbacks would not stop him. His eye was on the goal and he was determined to press on toward Christ. We need to have a tenacious grip on this kind of commitment if we are to be disciple-learners in the kingdom of God. There is much to distract us and knock us off course.

There are times we will have to commit and then commit again. This may seem humbling at times because people may be ashamed to admit that they have failed. We might even have to recommit every day. The point is to be like Paul: “This one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...” Never give up.

### Tested

One of the biggest surprises that hits all believers, especially when they commit to discipleship, is that there will come times of testing. Faith will be put to the test.

*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 1 Peter 4:12 (NIV)*

*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (NIV)*

There will be times of testing that will require us to choose whom we will follow. It is not always as simple as it might seem. It can be very subtle until we come to understand exactly where the tension lies. It usually lies where our own will crosses with the will of God. At these times we are forced to make a choice. Many times we won't easily recognize God's will at first because we may have spent most of our lives with little concern for it. The issue of the will of God must be addressed in every area of our lives. This causes tension and conflict.

There could be a conflict in a relationship with another person. We might have an attitude that God would have us work to change. Whatever the situation, we will often find ourselves confronted with the challenge of having to make a choice. We will have to choose between God's will and ours. Our old ways of doing things will no longer be acceptable. The process of making this choice will be a time of testing for us. Someone once said that something as simple as making a choice may be the most spiritual thing we will ever do.

Remember the yoke that Jesus spoke about? He will give it a yank and we'll realize we need to move in a new direction. We can no longer move about in a self-centered, carefree manner. We are now careful as we move through life keeping God's will as our central focus. Choosing God's will may cause some pain, but a disciple is willing to go through these times of trials and tests. This is our training. We will learn by the help of God. With God's help, we will learn how to obey. Sometime this training will happen in the arena of pain and disappointment. We will look back on our times of testing with gratitude when we see the fruit that God has produced in our lives.

## 2. Becoming Equipped

As we enter into the realm of learning how to obey, we will also need to start the process of becoming equipped. This means our training will take us to new levels of usefulness in the kingdom of God. We will become useful vessels in the hands of God to impact the world around us. We have looked at Ephesians 4 in the chapter on the church. Let's take a deeper look.

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)*

The idea of becoming equipped is illustrated by the image of fishing nets being pulled on to the shore. There they are mended. Once mended, they are then put back into service. This is the same for the believer. We have, in a sense, been pulled from the world and God has begun to mend us. We are to be in the process of becoming equipped. Just as the fishermen will use their mended nets, God will also use us. In a lot of ways the church is a hospital, a body and fender shop, a university, a reclamation center, an army barracks and a training depot. We are in the process of being prepared with an eye toward productive service for the kingdom of God.

The goal is both a combination of maturity and of usefulness. There is no unemployment in the kingdom of God. Everyone can employ their gifts in an endless variety of ways. Disciples who are committed to becoming equipped will find it impossible to come to church and remain a spectator. They will be compelled to get involved. They will find it impossible to live a secular life. They will serve God every day. Their lives will be a reflection of God's equipping power all to his glory. They will discover it as the most exciting and adventurous way to live.

### 3. Being Fruitful

Learning how to obey and becoming equipped all takes place in the context of relationship. Becoming equipped for use in the kingdom of God is not a dry intellectual pursuit. We are intimately in contact with Jesus in such a way that will bear fruit.

*1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:1-8 (NIV)*

We must be in close communion with Jesus. This involves a life of learning how to depend on him. We must be willing to give up our old life of independence and replace it with one of dependence. This is not often as easy or as simple as it sounds. It goes completely against human nature. It is something that will have to be learned because we have spent a lifetime fighting for our independence. We can more easily see ourselves signing a declaration of independence than bowing at the foot of the cross to sign a declaration of dependence. A disciple is called to learn to be dependent and to learn to live a life of trust. God's ways are not our ways. (see Isaiah 55:8-9)

In order to learn God's ways we will be subjected to his pruning process. This is an apt metaphor. Just as a tree must be pruned of its old wood so it can bear more fruit, we too must be pruned of our old ways so that we can bear fruit for God. This may involve pain and loss of ease, but God also will bring special comfort as well. God will see that our lives will bear fruit for him as we grow in our relationship with him.

There are many kinds of fruit. There is the fruit of the Spirit.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)*

Look over these nine traits. They reflect the results of a life dedicated to being trained and *pruned* by the hand of God. Think of the revolutionary effect these character traits would have on our lives and on the lives of those around us.

There is the fruit that comes from working amongst people with the goal of leading them to the Lord.

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Matthew 9:36-38 (NIV)*

One of the greatest blessings of bearing fruit for the kingdom of God is allowing our lives to be used in bringing people to the Lord. Who else is Jesus going to turn to except his very own disciples? There are many examples of fruit and fruitfulness, but one thing is certain: it is to God's glory that we bear much fruit showing ourselves to be his disciples.

#### 4. Enjoying Privilege

The commitment to discipleship leads to a surprising life of privilege. It might not be privilege in the way the world thinks of privilege. It is the privilege of involvement and sharing in ministry with the Lord. It is an ever-deepening relationship unknown to those outside the kingdom of God. Jesus told a parable about a man who went away on a long journey. Upon leaving he entrusted his property to his servants.

*To one he gave five talents of money, and to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. Matthew 25:14-15 (NIV)*

Much more could be said about this parable, but what I want to highlight is the fact that when the man returned from his journey he rewarded the servants who gained and multiplied what was entrusted to them.

*Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in little things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness! Matthew 25:21 (NIV)*

To serve was a privilege and it led to more privilege. Faithfulness in little things led to greater things. We cannot calculate the hidden blessings derived from our small gestures of faithfulness in fulfilling the calling that the Lord has on our lives. Notice that it also led to the added blessing of deeper fellowship and of mutual enjoyment between the servant and the master: “Come and share in your master’s happiness.”

## **CONCLUSION**

It is amazing where discipleship will take a person. It will lead to some fantastic blessings otherwise never dreamed of before. Think of some of the people in the Bible that God called: Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, David, Esther, Isaiah and Jeremiah. There was Mary, Matthew, Peter, James, John, Lydia, Paul, Lois, Eunice and Timothy. We may not rise to their levels, but we do have one thing in common with them. They, like us, had to start from the very beginning. None of them were born into greatness. It came to them as they followed the leading of the Lord. None of them had any idea where God would lead them, or what a blessed life they would lead. They all had to start from the beginning (or a new beginning) just like you and me.

The one missing ingredient in the lives of many Christians is that they honestly have not yet begun to take the call of discipleship seriously. How many Matthews, Johns and Peters and Lydias are out there waiting to blossom? “It is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

## **QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK**

1. If people who claim to be Christians haven’t made Jesus “Lord” doesn’t that prove they are not saved?
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This is sometimes called the “Lordship” debate. Some people would say that if believers are not exhibiting exemplary Christian behavior then they have not made Jesus their Lord. They are then, by definition, not saved. The problem arises when it comes time to make the necessary judgments as to who is, or who is not, saved based on observable behavior. First of all, who will judge? Secondly, when will a person be judged as being “not saved?” For all we know that particular person might be in the very midst of the crucible of learning. Nobody really knows except the Lord himself.

There were times when all of us would have been hard pressed to determine the status of either Peter or Judas while they were walking with Jesus. There were times when Judas looked as if he was a great disciple. He even sat at the Lord’s right hand during the Last Supper. Peter, on the other hand, often looked the part of a failure, even to the point of denying the Lord. This should serve as an example for us just how hard it is to make such determinations based on outward appearances.

Once we leave room for the grace of God and the confession of believers themselves, it is true that with birth there must come growth. People who are not growing in their relationship with the Lord might indeed be at risk. Yes, it may be an indication that they are not saved. Our calling is to bring encouragement and exhortation that would lead them to desire growth.

The apostle Peter gave a beautiful teaching on Christian growth and maturity (1 Peter 1:3-9) with the following exhortation:

*Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make you calling and election sure. For if you do these things you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*1 Peter 1:10-11 (NIV)*

A life of committed (eager) discipleship/training will do wonders in helping to make any believer's "calling and election sure."

## 2. What about failure? How many times can I fail and still be a disciple?

We will always fail. We will always fall short in some way. We may grow to the degree that it seems that we sin much less in both thought and deed. However, the true issue is not sinless perfection (which is impossible), but repentance.

Repentance is a beautiful gift from God. It is the mark of true freedom. We are free to admit our mistakes and shortcomings. We do not have to hide them. If we allow the unrealistic pressure to be perfect to keep us from being able to admit our faults we will find ourselves in bondage and our hearts will be hardened. We will also find ourselves living like hypocrites. It might take some getting used to, but repentance must become a lifestyle for a disciple. One way of thinking about this is what is called "walking in the light."

*5 God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

*8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:5-10 (NIV)*

Part of walking in the light is to keep short accounts with God and with people. The longer we wait – the more we procrastinate – the more we postpone healing and growth. Be willing to repent. Be willing to walk in the light. It is not about failure or success, but about truth, honesty and keeping our hearts soft before the Lord and with those around us.

More questions?

Go to **christianlifetools.org** with your questions. They will be answered ASAP.

## REVIEW

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1. List three or four examples from the Old Testament that demonstrate God's mission of redemption.
2. List three of four examples from the New Testament that demonstrate the same mission.
3. Try memorizing The Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:18-20.
4. Explain the nature of the authority that Jesus has and how it relates to his giving The Great Commission.
5. How does his authorization affect those believers who have committed themselves to be in discipleship with him?
6. How do you think Jesus' personal promise at the very end of the great commission will affect you as you follow him?
7. What are the four components that are involved in our living out a life of discipleship as discussed in the section: "Our Mission?"  
  
*Hint: (learning, becoming, being, enjoying)*
8. Try to give a brief summary of each component.
9. How might you pray to the Lord for help in being committed to discipleship right now?