

Living the Christian Life: Discipleship

Unfortunately, many people think something like this, “I have been baptized and confirmed or I have been through a new member class so I have done my spiritual duty and now I move on.” But this type of attitude shows a fundamental lack of understanding of what it means to a disciple of Jesus Christ. The meaning of the word disciple can be defined as “a student of a teacher who desires to share the teachings that they have learned.” Being a follower of our Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, is a life-long journey. Jesus did not call the 12 Disciples to respond to His invitation and then go back to what they were doing before. He wanted them to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), lifelong and devoted students of the Master. You never “graduate” from the Christian life. We continue to grow, learn, and share. When one disconnects themselves from the true vine of Jesus, they begin to wither and die. When we are connected to the True Vine by Word and Sacrament, we have life and experience growth (John 15).

What should a Christian do every day to maintain a vibrant faith and witness?

Simply put, we should listen to God every day and talk to God every day. Think about an earthly relationship that is very special to you. How could that relationship be maintained and grow stronger if you never spent time listening to and talking to that person? How much more vital is this in our relationship with God?

1. Daily Bible reading and devotions. God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. It should be a priority for us to read the Word of God every day. Can you imagine going through a whole day without eating food? Probably not. God’s Word is spiritual food for us and we need it each and every day (Matthew 4:4 and many other passages). I speak from personal experience and what I have witnessed in others than when Bible reading is neglected, it become more common to fall into sin and for the devil to lead us astray. How much of the Bible should you read each day? There is not set answer and the amount will probably vary at different points in your life. Quality is better than quantity. It is better to prayerfully study and contemplate one verse than to fly through reading a whole book without taking any of it in. Reading a short devotional, such as from *Portal of Prayer*, is also a very helpful practice. *Portals of Prayer* also contains short Bible readings (and prayers) that go along with each daily devotion.

2. Prayer. We speak to God through prayer. God gives us the awesome privilege to come to Him. We lift thanksgiving and praise to Him and can bring the needs of others and ourselves before His throne. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says to, “pray without ceasing.” We should continually raise prayers to God throughout the day, not only at mealtimes, when we wake up, or go to bed. God is a good and gracious Father who desires that His children speak to Him in prayer. Include both “prayers from the heart” and “form prayers” such as the Lord’s Prayer, Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers, and you can pray the Apostles’ Creed and portions of the Small Catechism.

Helpful Hint: Set a time of the day for your daily “quiet time” with God. Make it a priority and don’t let other things distract you from it. Be a disciplined disciple. Your daily time for Bible reading, devotions, and prayer should be a time when there are few distractions. Unplug from your electronic devices and choose a time and location where you will have peace and quiet. Many people have this time early in the morning or late in the evening. But the important thing is to find a regular time when you can do it.

3. Remember your Baptism daily. As Luther instructs us in the Small Catechism, *“the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all my sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”* Our Baptism, even if you cannot remember the events of the day itself, is our daily Christian clothing. When we remember our Baptism, it reminds us that we are redeemed sinners who daily battle the desires of the flesh and daily receive the grace of God for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We sin daily and should repent regularly (not just in church). This gives us an appreciation and gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ Jesus by loving us and showing us undeserved mercy.

4. Live a life of contentment and thanksgiving. We may not have as many material things as some people, but we have more than many others and certainly more than we deserve. Work hard to give your best to God and use the gifts He has given you, but always be content in what He has willed for your “daily bread.” Remember that being content and thankful to God and not being jealous of others seeking to wrongly get what they have is the essence of the 9th and 10th Commandments on coveting. Always complaining and being envious of others is a recipe for being miserable in life. For the Christian, every day should be Thanksgiving!

What are things that a Christian regularly participates in?

5. Gathering with other Christians for worship of God and Bible Study. It is important for all Christians to regularly attend worship and fellowship with other believers. This includes new Christians and young people with even more urgency. Satan will seek to attack and destroy new faith. He will seek to warp the minds of the young with the thinking of the fallen world. So, new and “old” Christian alike need to be active in worship and Bible study. In the Divine Service God comes to us in Word and Sacrament with the forgiveness of sins. There are no lone-wolf Christians. Jesus calls His children sheep and when sheep separate themselves from the flock, they get devoured by wolves. Studying the Bible with other believers is very important as well. We never reach a point when we “know it all”. With good and sound Bible teaching, Christians gather around the Word and learn from God as well as hear insights from our brothers and sisters.

6. Service to others. Jesus holds up the servant as the model for who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:42-44). He sums up the Commandments by saying to love God above all things and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). This means by the work of the Holy Spirit we serve others in the Name of Jesus. This could be distributing food and clothing to the needy or volunteering in a homeless shelter. It also means showing

kindness to those we know and love as well as strangers (even our enemies). Organized servant events are great things to participate in, but we also are presented many opportunities to help people inside and outside of the Church as we go about our lives.

7. Sharing the Gospel with others, Evangelism. Sharing the saving message of the Gospel with others is not only the job of the Pastor. All Christians are called to witness to Christ. Always look for (and create) opportunities to witness. Learning a few basic strategies and key Bible verses will help you be able to share a Biblical Law and Gospel message. Gospel tracts are a good way to get the Word out as well. It is not always a pleasant thing to think about, but the fact is that people are dying without Christ everyday and will go to hell. The loving thing to do is for us to faithfully share the Gospel. We “believe therefore we speak” (2 Corinthians 4:13). Our role is to share the message and the Holy Spirit does the work of converting the lost (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

8. Giving to God’s work with your time, talent, and treasure. God is a giving God and His people are to be a giving people. Of course, this involves giving a portion of the money that God has blessed you with to your local church and other ministries. God does not focus on the amount of money we give (remember the Widow’s Mite) as different people have different amounts of financial resources. It is best to commit to a percentage of your income in regular giving to your congregation’s general fund, and then give to various special projects and ministries as the Lord provides and leads. But giving is about more than money. God has gifted us each with unique talents and abilities to use for His Kingdom. There are many opportunities to serve in the Church that make use of these talents. Give with a generous heart, not out of compulsion as, “God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Challenges

Being a Christian is not always easy. In fact, Jesus promises us that there will be those who oppose you and even hate you and persecute you (John 15:8). Our society is becoming less god-fearing and more secular. Christians who stand on the truth of God’s Word will not always be popular. You will no doubt be faced with decisions that will test your faith. We should desire to please God, not the sinful world. Sometimes the right decision is very clear, other times it requires some wrestling with the issue through the study of the Bible and prayer. As Christians we are to be good citizens (Romans 13), but we are not to do things that violate God’s Law (Acts 5:29). What is legal is not always what is morally right in God’s eyes. Pray for wisdom and the strength to hold fast to the faith. We pray that God will protect us from all manner of evil and at the same time hold the conviction that we would suffer all, even death, rather than deny our Christian faith in the Lord Jesus.