

# Religious studies : disciples coursework

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A Disciple is a follower, and in a Christian sense, a believer in God and Jesus. The most famous Disciples were the followers of Jesus who heard his full teaching.

Jesus told many parables on Discipleship, and other straight instructions on how they should live their lives. There are in Luke's gospel, three parables that are effectively telling the same story with different levels of depth. They are: The Parable of the Lost Sheep [Luke 15: 1-7], The Parable of the Lost Coin [Luke 15: 8-10], and The Parable of the Lost Son [Luke 15: 11-32]. If the Parable of the Lost Son is studied exclusively (as it continues further than the two others), a disciple is not just someone who has followed Christ all his or her lives. The Son from the parable takes his inheritance from his father and squanders it in foreign lands until he is so poor he has to stoop to raising pigs, breaking a Jewish taboo (and symbolising how spiritually dirty he has become).

He finally realises he has wasted his father's money and returns to him, full of guilt. But when he arrives he hasn't got time for an apology before being treated like an honoured guest by his father, and having a feast laid on for him. Yet the older brother refuses to go into the feast, and complains that his brother is rewarded for straying from the traditional past. In this, the younger brother is a gentile, or a Jew who had forsaken God, who is the father. The older, loyal, brother is an orthodox Jew who has worshipped God for his whole life. As the Gentile strays from God's path, he falls to the bottom of the pile and realises his sins, and decides to repent.

Yet God knows of his repentance, and doesn't give him time to ask for punishment before sweeping him up and rewarding him. The true Jew is jealous, as he has stayed loyal all the time the gentile had fallen, and wants a greater reward than him. From this it can be seen that a disciple is not really just one who follows because he is told and expected to, but a person who has made a conscious decision to better him or herself through God. It can be seen in the above parable that deciding to be a disciple is not an easy option. It can be seen that, a follower must be totally repentant of all their wrongs, and ready to give up everything for him.

The man above gave up his freedom, and the people in Luke 9: 57-62 are asked to loose other things dear to them. One claimed he would follow Jesus " Wherever you go", but was rebuked by Jesus, who said that " The son of man has nowhere to lay his head". A second man approached him and asked to join, but added, " First let me bury my father", and Jesus attacked another would-be disciple by calling the dead unimportant while the Word of God remained unpreached. Yet another was asked whether he wanted to join, and agreed, but only if he could say good-bye to his family, and was promptly dismissed by Jesus. These show how a disciple must not look back at his previous life, but concentrate fully on Jesus'. He must ' die' the metaphorical death before he has the right to follow him.

In this death he will be reborn, with his sins forgiven and his past, sinful, life set aside and his new one dedicated to Jesus. In Luke 14: 27-35, Jesus speaks to a crowd and elaborates on this theme. A Christian must carry their own cross and follow him, effectively to their death. A condemned man would carry his cross to his place of execution, and then be killed on it. This

symbolises how a disciple must take up the heavy weight of the faith for all to see and mock, then follow Jesus' path (his teachings), until they reach salvation (the Kingdom of God) and must suffer (giving up all sins and total adherence to God's will) to enter it.

Later, in the same passage, Jesus warns against deciding to become a disciple on a whim. He tells those that are following him to be like a king going to war – find out what you will have to lose to become a true disciple, but also know what you will gain (eternal life). Yet these are minor instructions compared to the one outlined in Luke 6: 27-37, that of Loving all those you meet with strong, agape love. Jesus shocked many of those he was speaking to by not calling for a Jewish uprising against the Romans, but a pacifistic approach to life, saying: “ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.” and telling the crowd to “ Love your enemies” The greatest rule, which appears in verse 31, is: “ Do to others as you would have them do to you” This rule appears in most major world religions, and is therefore often called the ‘ Golden Rule’.

Jesus emphasised the importance of this extra commandment by later telling them and a group of Pharisees a parable. This parable is extremely well known, but most readers fail to grasp its full context. The story of the Good Samaritan is losing some of its meaning, as our society moves on.

Samaritans were looked down on, and seen as Jews who had forsaken God by breeding outside the Jewish race. Priests were very important figures in Jewish society, and enforced the law, as well as defining it. Levites were public servants, serving in the temple and assisting the priests.

They considered themselves very important and superior to ordinary Jews. Thus the outwardly respectable people who would be expected to help their countrymen ignored the stricken man's plight, but the foreigner, looked down upon by everyone around him, stops to help. This man was a follower of God's rules, and could be considered a disciple. The other two knew God's laws off by heart, yet didn't see the practical application of his words. In full, Luke's gospel is mainly for the Gentiles and outcasts from Jewish society, and his ideas on Discipleship are reflected through this, as he concentrates on Jesus' teaching on the equality of people, the chance for forgiveness, and the ability of anyone to be saved. He also rejects the idea of the Pharisees' continuous devotion to God being more important than saving unbelievers, stating that: "...there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15: 7) This proves that Discipleship, far be it from just following the teaching of Jesus, is really about beginning a new life for God, leaving behind your old world to help Jesus save more people.