

Marks Of A Disciple

Lorne Sanny

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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).

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.”

Jesus came to this earth to be an example. He came here to show us the Father. He came here to take our sins in His own body on the cross and He came to destroy the works of the devil. And while He went about His ministry, along the way He also gathered up people to follow Him - called disciples.

Jesus was popular. “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus” (Luke 14:25). Yet He told them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26,27). He also said, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

He turned to the crowds that were following Him and three times He said to them, “...cannot be my disciple,” “...cannot be my disciple,” “...cannot be my disciple.” It’s as if He said, “I am not looking for crowds; I’m looking for disciples.”

In a study conducted in 1991, pollster George Gallup, Jr. found that fewer than ten percent of Americans are deeply committed disciples of Christ.

Those who are not in the ten percent don’t know the basic teachings of the faith. Their daily conduct differs little from that of nonbelievers. They are as likely as the unchurched person to engage in unethical practices. And, they are open for anything that comes along.

The deeply committed disciples, on the other hand, are a breed apart. They are different, and they make a difference.

As a friend of mine, a Christian leader, said, “Lorne, you don’t find many disciples. But when you find one, there’s almost no limit to what God can do through him.”

How do you recognize a disciple? What does he look like? What are his characteristics? Are you a disciple? Am I a disciple?

I have studied seven or eight passages in the Scriptures having to do with the characteristics of a disciple. They can conveniently be boiled down to three marks of discipleship. When you see these three, you have a disciple.

Identified With Christ

The first mark of a disciple is that he is someone who is identified with the person of Jesus Christ - someone who will openly admit that he belongs to Christ. Now whatever else you may think about baptism, it is a public identification with Jesus Christ. When you are baptized, you are saying I take my stand with, I am on the side of, and I belong to Jesus Christ.

A friend of mine told me of a Jewish man he led to Christ in Dallas. A few weeks later my friend told another Jewish man, a non-Christian, about the first one. Immediately the second man asked, "Has he been baptized yet?" When my friend said, "No, he hasn't," he replied, "Well, he'll never last." It was later, when the first Jew was baptized, that his family cut him off. He had made open identification with Jesus Christ.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9,10). An open identification with Jesus Christ. Jesus promised, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

A friend told me that when he went with Billy Graham, who was to speak to 500 men at the Jewish Rotary Club of New York City, he wondered what in the world Mr. Graham would speak on to a Jewish club. When the time came, Billy stood up and spoke on "Christ, the Fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecies." At the close they gave him a standing ovation. He had identified himself unashamedly with Jesus Christ.

On one occasion Jesus asked the disciples, "But what about you...Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, 'You are the Christ' (Mark 8:29). It seems everything in His ministry led up to this.

But the thing that strikes me is that then "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). A little later He called the multitude and His disciples to Him and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34,38).

Some years ago when I was with the Billy Graham team in a crusade, a businessman came forward one night and received Christ. The following Sunday night he went to a church that he sometimes attended. After the service he walked up to one of the leading elders in this church and told him, "I was at the Billy Graham meeting last week out at the ball park. I went forward and received Christ."

"I heard about it and I am delighted," the elder replied.

Then the businessman asked the elder, "How long have you and I been associated in

business?” “About 23 years, I think.”

“Have you known Christ as your Savior all those years?” the man asked the elder.

“Yes, I have,” he answered.

“Well, I don’t remember your ever speaking to me about Christ during those years,” the man said. The elder hung his head, and the man continued, “I have thought highly of you. In fact, I thought so highly of you that I felt if anyone could be as fine a man as you and not be a Christian, then I didn’t have to be a Christian either.”

This elder had lived a good life before his friend, but he had not taken the added step of openly identifying with the One who enabled him to live that kind of life. Here was a fine man, but he did not have this first mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus asks you to deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Him, what do you think it means? Whatever else it means, I think it means to be identified with Christ, not only when it’s popular but when it’s unpopular. Not only when it’s the thing to do, but also when it seems as if it’s not the thing to do. I like the way the New English Bible puts Revelation 1:9. John writes, “I was on the island called Patmos because I had preached God’s word and borne my testimony to Jesus.”

I once talked to the Chief of Police of Stockholm, who was a Christian, and discovered he had been a delegate to Panmunjom back when the Korean truce was first signed. He had interviewed some of the Chinese soldiers as to whether or not they wanted to be repatriated. He told me about a soldier who came through one day and gave his testimony to the interrogators concerning his faith in Jesus Christ. There in the Red Chinese army was a disciple.

Do you take an opportunity to admit that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? Why not determine that at the first opportunity this week you will quietly, graciously, but openly identify yourself with Jesus Christ? I believe this is a mark of a disciple.

One morning I spoke to the SWAP (Salesmen With A Purpose) Club in Colorado Springs. They call in various speakers to tell how selling applies to their business. I spoke on how it applies to the Gospel. In the process I explained the Gospel. After I had spoken, they introduced the guests. One of them was a friend of mine, Will Perkins, an automobile dealer. It was his first time there. When he was introduced he stood and said, “Gentlemen, two years ago I heard a presentation similar to the one you heard this noon. I bought it, and it has changed my life.” Then he sat down. I thought to myself, how many Christians would have taken that little opportunity to identify themselves with the person of Jesus Christ?

Obedient To The Word

A disciple is not only a believer who is visibly identified with the person of Christ, he is also obedient to the Word of Christ - to the Scriptures. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

“Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31). If you observe it and apply it to your life, then you are My disciple.

Luke records what happened one day when a crowd of people listened to the Lord Jesus preach. One woman in the crowd was probably middle-aged or a little beyond (I’m interpreting a little bit here). As she listened to Jesus, something welled up within her. Perhaps she had a son who was wayward, and as she looked at the Lord Jesus, she wished her son were like Him. Or maybe she had never had a son and had always wanted to have one. Anyway she spoke up - she sort of burst out - and said, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you” (Luke 11:27).

Jesus’ answer to her was significant. He said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). That’s real happiness. That’s real blessedness - to hear what God has to say and to do it.

I enjoyed reading a book by the late Sam Shoemaker, *Extraordinary Living for Ordinary Men*. In it he says that Christians who are half-committed are half-happy. But to be really happy you need to go all the way in commitment. And this means to be obedient to the Word of Christ.

Obedience is necessary also for stability. The greatest sermon ever preached was the Sermon on the Mount. And notice how Jesus concluded it. He said, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Matthew 7:24-27).

What made the difference between the wise man and the foolish man? It wasn’t knowledge, because they both heard the same sermon. They went to the same conference; they had the same knowledge. They both heard the Word. Not only that, they had the same circumstances. It says that the rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon the house of the wise man. The rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon the house of the foolish man. The circumstances were the same. One couldn’t say, “Well, you don’t know how tough it is where I come from.” “Well, you don’t know what kind of a family life I’ve got.” “You don’t know how I suffer down at work.” It wasn’t their circumstances that made the difference. One thing made the difference between wisdom and foolishness. One obeyed the Word; the other one did not.

Jesus said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21). What does that mean? It means Jesus will make Himself real to him. To whom? To the one who has His Word and keeps it.

So a disciple does more than attend meetings. He does more than take notes. (He does that, incidentally, in my opinion, though I don’t have any Scripture to prove that.) But he

finds out what the Bible says and does it. Suppose he's going through Proverbs in his morning quiet time, and he comes to Proverbs 3:9,10, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."

Early in my marriage, a Christian doctor in Seattle said, "Now let me make a suggestion about handling your family finances. Honor the Lord with your wealth, and with the firstfruits of all your crops. Set aside money for the Lord before you pay the rent. Before you buy the food. Even when you think you don't have enough money left to pay the rent and to buy the food. You watch. God will see to it that you have money for the rent and for the food."

Now will He or won't He? Well, the Word promised that He would, and He did.

A friend of mine was looking over the family bills and they looked pretty big. He and his wife prayed and decided that the first thing they ought to do to get out of debt was to increase their giving. And they are out of debt. They proved that God can fulfill His Word.

Another illustration of the truth that a disciple must be obedient to the Word of Christ is in these words of Jesus, "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23,24).

When was the last time you went and made something right with someone else? When did you admit to your wife or your children that that fit of temper was sin? It's amazing to me when couples say that neither one has ever asked forgiveness of the other. If you don't find some times when you've got to make some things right, you're about ready for heaven right now. A disciple has a conscience void of offense toward God and man.

Let's go back to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." I don't know why it is that some people think the day of missions is over. In one recent year, independent missions in America, not the denominational, just independent missions, needed 4,000 missionary candidates that they didn't get. Have you ever considered the possibility that obedience to the Word of Christ might mean leaving your business?

Bob Potter owned a supermarket down in Oklahoma City. If he and his wife hadn't sold it and gone into the Lord's work, maybe God would have used someone else. But many people have been blessed by the ministry of Bob Potter through The Navigators.

The Navigators could use double our number of representatives right now. But don't apply. We don't take applications. Many times as I've gone around with the Billy Graham Crusades, young fellows have come up and said, "Mr. Sanny, do you know of any openings in Christian work?"

"Yep, I do."

They'd ask, "Where?"

And I'd say, "Right where you live. Your neighborhood. Where you go to school." I find that God usually leads you to the next step after you take this one. That's where you start.

I'm not speaking of going to the mission field because you're so sick and tired of the office you can't stand it, or because the boss has bugged you for two years and any change would be an improvement. I'm speaking of obedience to the Word of Christ, wherever it may lead and when the going is tough. That's a mark of a disciple.

After Moses died, Joshua had the job of taking three million people into the Promised Land. That included women, children and livestock. God gave him some instructions. You'd think the Lord would say, "Now, look, here's how you'd handle this problem, here's how you do this, here's how you do that." But, no. He said, "Joshua, one thing above all else is going to take a lot of courage - and it's not leading all these people and facing all the enemies that are in the land. That isn't what's going to take courage." But, "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you" (Joshua 1:7).

You may think it doesn't take courage to be obedient to the Word of God. But I wonder how obedient we really are to the Word. We live in a Christ-rejecting world, and anyone who is going to live in obedience to this Book is going to come into conflict with it. That's how you recognize a disciple. He does more than hear the Word. He puts into practice what he's heard.

The Navigators are kind of rabid on this subject. Year after year you'll hear us beat certain drums all the time. One is that we need to come to know the Bible and apply it. That's why we publish Bible study courses and Scripture memory programs. We need to make up our minds that with God helping us in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are going to be obedient to the Word of Christ. That's a mark of a disciple. He seeks to follow the Bible and do what it says.

Fruitful for Christ

So a disciple is one who is openly identified with the person of Christ. Second, he is obedient to the Word of Christ. And third, he is bearing fruit in the work of Christ. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

Now it seems to me that there are two kinds of fruit here. First, the fruit of character, the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22,23). And second, there's fruit by way of influencing the lives of others for Christ. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

I really threw a curve ball to my Sunday School class one Sunday morning. I intended to. We were talking about Jesus sending out the twelve two by two. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. They went out and preached that men should repent. They cast out

demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them. Then I asked, “Do you think Judas did this? Do you think Judas went out and preached to people to repent? Do you think Judas cast out demons and healed the sick?”

Some feel they can prove that Judas was never saved. Let’s assume they’re right. Did Judas then preach that people should repent? Did he cast out demons? Did he heal the sick? Could he have?

Look at Jesus’ words: “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers!’” (Matthew 7:22,23).

My point was that we get so carried away with the spectacular that we think the spectacular is the supreme evidence that we are real disciples or Spirit-filled. But the real evidence is shown in our character - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We’re considering here the character of a disciple.

I’ve heard it said that the Apostle Paul before he was converted, would pray something like this every day, “God, I thank You that I am not a Gentile, that I am not a slave and that I am not a woman.” But look at how God changed his attitude. In his first letter he wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Here is evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in the way of character.

This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It includes one’s whole attitude, outlook, character and relationship to others. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you can work great miracles? No. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

When Jesus talked about His ministry and what He came to do, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1,3, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners...and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

Take this world in which we live with all of its glitter, its tinsel and its veneer. Strip all of this away, and how would you characterize the real world underneath? Brokenhearted, captive, bound, anxious, sad, depressed.

A disciple is one who gets involved in that kind of world, who is bearing fruit in the work of Christ. He shows the fruit of the Spirit in a Christlike character - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. How we need that in the world in which we live!

The Greatest Is Love

What did Jesus say was the greatest identifying mark of all in a disciple? Love. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples” - if you do what? “If you love one another.” One of the greatest illustrations of this that I have seen was on the television special “James Emory Bond.” It was an entire one-hour interview with a black man who was an ex-truck driver. He was in his seventies at the time of the interview.

Apparently he lived in Baltimore. One night he watched a panel discussion with some of the city leaders, mayor, chief of police and others on television. They discussed the race and juvenile delinquency problems in Baltimore. As he watched, his heart was really moved.

The next day he went down to the television station. He wanted to talk to somebody because he had been so moved by their discussion. He said he knew the answer, but he didn't know whom to tell. At the station they had the good sense not only to interview him, but also to videotape it. All you saw was this grey-haired gentleman as he answered questions coming from off camera.

He said, among other things, that when he was a young fellow growing up on the edge of Baltimore, the white boys would throw rocks at him as he was on his way to school. He began to hate white people. As a young man he started working as a truck driver. One morning when he saw the milk truck go by, he thought how nice it would be if he could just have a little milk before he went to work in the morning.

He stopped the milkman, who was a white man, one day and asked him if he would leave him a quart of milk. He said, “No, I don't deliver milk to niggers.”

“So,” Bond said, “I called up the milk company, and I asked the man I talked with if this was true, that they didn't give milk to black people. He said, ‘No, that's not right. We do deliver milk to black people, and we'll see that he delivers the milk.’

“So,” he said, “the milk came, a quart each morning. Several weeks went by and I realized that he wasn't leaving me a bill, and I wanted to pay for it. So I stopped him one morning and said, ‘I want you to give me a bill so I can pay for this.’ And the milkman said, ‘I don't take money from niggers.’ So I said, ‘Well, I've got to pay you, you've just got to let me pay you.’

“‘Well,’ the milkman said, ‘tell you what you do. You put the money on the fence post.’

James Emory Bond said, “I thought I'd have a little fun with him, so I said, ‘Now I won't feel like I paid you unless I put it in your hand.’”Nossir,’ he said, ‘put it on the post.’ So I said, ‘OK.’ And I put it on the post. When the milkman reached out to take the change, I just laid my hand on top of his. And he jerked it away.”

Then he said, “Later on, one of God's servants by the name of Billy Sunday came to our town, and he told how Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away man's sin and his enmity of heart toward his fellow man. As I heard that, I realized that I needed this, and I

walked the sawdust trail. And you know, God took the hate out of my heart for the white man.

He put love there.”

Apparently a few days later, unknown to him, the milkman went to hear Billy Sunday. He went forward in the meeting, received Christ, and a couple days later pulled up in front of James Emory Bond’s little place. With tears streaming down his face, he apologized for the way he had treated him. And this dear old black man said, “I have loved him, and he has loved me ever since.”

Now that’s what discipleship means. There is a mark of a disciple. Bearing fruit in the work of Christ. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” When we begin to see more disciples sprinkled around America and around the world, what a difference it will make! Real genuine disciples who will turn the world upside down. There are many already, and we ought to be praying for them.

But not only is there the fruit of Christlike character, but also the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of others. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last” (John 15:16).

Go and bring forth fruit. Paul wrote to the Romans of his desire, “That I might have a harvest among you” (Romans 1:13). I think he meant lives influenced for Christ.

Once while I was thinking about this, two events took place that drove the truth home to me. One was something I read about Dr. Charles F. McKoy of Oyster Bay, Long Island. After fifty years of fruitful ministry as a pastor and evangelist, this 71-year-old bachelor began looking around for a retirement home.

A bishop from India came to his church to plead for missionary help for India. Dr. McKoy prayed earnestly that God might lay it on the heart of someone in the congregation to respond to this call and go to India. After the third message the bishop turned to Dr. McKoy and said, “I don’t think God is looking for someone in the congregation. I think he is looking for the man in the pulpit.”

Dr. McKoy could hardly believe his ears. He said, “Bishop, are you losing your mind? I’m 71, I’ve never been overseas; I’ve never been on the ocean. The thought of flying terrifies me.” But soon a new missionary was on his way to India, green and seasick, but on his way - at age 71. Fifteen years later Dr. McKoy died. Between the ages of 71 and 86 he had gone around the world nine or ten times winning people to Christ in India and Hong Kong, in the opium dens and in the most difficult places. He was a real disciple in old age also. One reason it struck me was that I was reading in Psalm 92:14, “They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.” Your life can be fruitful to the very end.

The same week, we received word from Virginia that a young fellow named Teed Radin, 23 years of age, a graduate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, who would soon be on the Navigator staff, had been in a head-on collision. Teed was killed instantly and his fiancée

died within the hour. One of the fellows wrote that while at V.P.I. Teed had led 25-30 men to Christ. Among them, five were dedicated, trained, effective men of the Cross who, according to this person, would be willing at a moment's notice to die for the cause of Christ.

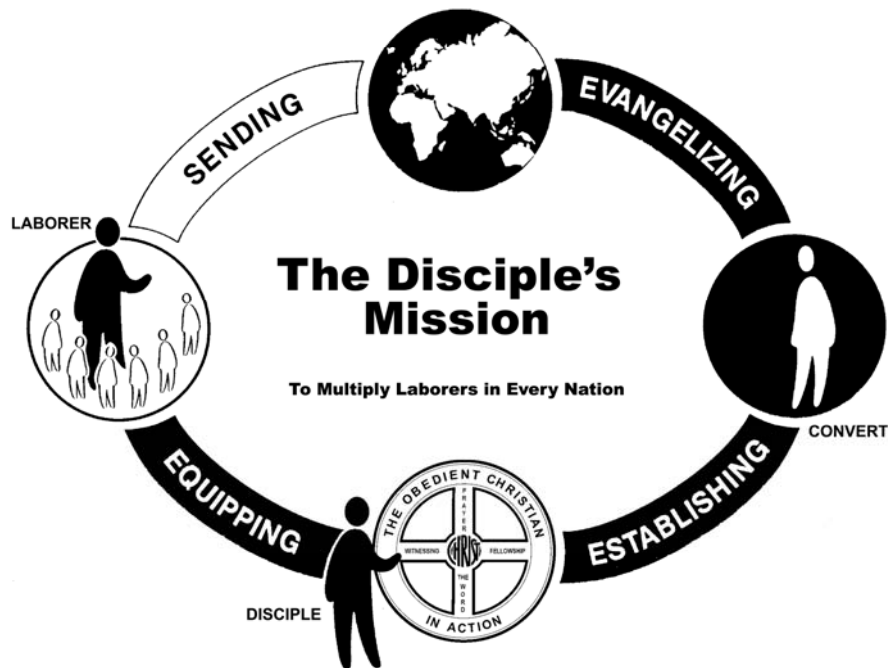
Dr. McKoy - an old man, a disciple to the end. Teed Radin - a young man, a disciple early in life. In fact, there's no better time to become a disciple than right now. But deep down in our hearts---that's where real business is done with God - we must determine that by God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be true followers of Jesus Christ.

Let's ask ourselves, Am I a true disciple?

Am I willing to be openly identified with the person of Jesus Christ?

Am I seeking to be obedient to the Word of Christ in my everyday life?

Am I bearing fruit in the work of Christ - by way of Christlike character and by influencing the lives of others?



I want to be a disciple. I want to have these marks and characteristics in my life. The only thing I'd like to do beyond that is to help make disciples and to get them to help make others. That's what Jesus wants done. ***"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."***