

Disciples of Christ

A Christian is, by definition, one who actually follows Christ in his/her everyday life and is, therefore, a Disciple.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians who are somewhat disappointed with their Christian experience and who limp along with a fair amount of frustration and a touch of cynicism. They do identify with Christ at one level, but live with only occasional seasons of peace and joy and they spend much of their lives dominated by worry, fear, or some other specific situation. This month, let us leave this “old way” of living behind and joyfully enter into a whole new way of life; which is, after all, the normal Christian life that Jesus anticipated for His Disciples.

Business people well understand the importance of “positioning themselves”; and I believe that you will come into the quality of life intended for you when you assume the mental outlook which Jesus offered. When you see yourself and your calling the way He presented it, you will find that you are “positioned” to respond to life in the way that brings freedom and joy!

For some of you, this new journey may begin by truly thinking of yourself as a Disciple. The word “Christian” implies in today’s world someone who believes; but the word “Disciple” brings us closer to the Biblical texts where Jesus established the entire framework for this new life. The Disciple is the one who, in addition to believing, also follows and is being trained by Jesus, the final Disciple of us all. The Disciple is one who does it. He is a constant learner, and he learns because he wants Jesus to make him to be the way Father intended. No one has to hound a Disciple to learn. He is a student of Christ, and therefore he is constantly growing and changing.

May I encourage you to think of yourself as a Disciple? You don’t have to stop using the word “Christian”; but begin identifying with the word “Disciple.” You are a Disciple. What’s more, you are the Disciple of Jesus Christ. This identification will lead you into discovering more and more of whom you really are, i.e. what your true identity really is. Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you ...” As you follow, He will be making you to become the person you are truly meant to be; and this is a great joy!

Lesson 1

Jesus is The World Changer; and surprisingly, He is changing the world by Shepherding people. He changes people by noticing them, caring about them, and by coming to their aid even when: (1) they do not deserve it, (2) they do not ask for it, (3) they do not always treat Him kindly for His loving concern. He came “to seek and to save,” and you see Him in Scripture seeking people whose lives were a mess.

Sheep need a lot of care, but they are incapable of seeking shepherds; and so Jesus uses this analogy of shepherd-sheep, because it so vividly portrays the relationship between Him and people.

As you read the text for today, notice how He begins to define the role of the Disciple as one who begins to do just what He is doing. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Scripture Study: Carefully read Matthew 9:36-38. Really notice the words and their meanings. Read it as if you have never read it before! (*15 minutes*)

To whom is Jesus speaking? _____

Is He saying this to you? Why? _____

What does He want you to see? _____

What does He want you to feel when you see people? _____

What is it that Jesus says people need? _____

What is He asking you to be and do? _____

What do you think this means for you? _____

How might this change the way you look at people? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to Jesus this morning and let Him Shepherd you.

Draw upon His love and His comfort for your life.

If something is troubling you and taking your focus away from Jesus, then bring the trouble to Jesus and repent for allowing this thing to dominate you!

Tell Him that you are His Disciple.

Lesson 2

Perhaps you have never noticed before that Jesus' idea of evangelism is simply about shepherding people or becoming a Care-Giver to people who have not asked you to give them this Care.

We call this "Shepherding Evangelism," and here we see it as defining the most basic calling upon every Disciple of Jesus. It is a pattern for us all. It was not just something meant for the original "special" Disciples. No, this is generic and for us all.

Jesus is defining a Disciple as: the man or woman who (1) follows Him, and (2) is being led into shepherding people.

Scripture Study: Reread Matthew 9:36-38. Read it carefully, noticing little things, and you will begin to see more here than you have previously. It may surprise you what jumps out at you. (*15 minutes*)

According to these words of Jesus, you have to _____ people with His eyes in order to feel the _____ that He feels.

Jesus describes people as sheep who are (from the Greek) "flayed" and "thrown down." Flayed refers to the cuts, bruises, beatings, and hurts of life which people carry with them; "thrown down" refers to what happens to sheep when they fall to the ground. Wool is heavy, and when they have not been recently sheared, they cannot get up by themselves. If there is no shepherd, then they lay there until some animal kills them.

Notice that Jesus changes His figure of speech from "sheep-shepherd" to "harvest-workers."

What does Jesus mean by "harvest" here?

What does He mean by "workers" here?

What are the reasons Jesus would tell His Disciples to pray to "the Lord of the Harvest" for Him to send "workers" into the "harvest"?

The expression "Lord of the Harvest" can be translated as "the Lord Who is harvesting." Why might that be a better translation?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank the Lord this morning that He came and found you when you did not know enough to go find Him.

Express your praise and worship to Him in a way that causes you to step out more than usual.

Bring people who have been a problem to you before the Lord and begin to “see” them as people without a shepherd.

Ask Jesus to send someone to shepherd them.

Lesson 3

The Christian who does not see him/herself as a Disciple may also not see him/herself as a shepherd, and then the problems begin; because Jesus puts you around people who are not obeying Him and thus they are doing many hurtful and wrong things. He is sending you to them in order for you to express the Care to them that you are receiving from Him.

If you don't "get it": if you don't look at people His way, then you will become greatly offended with all these people, because they really are a mess! They will be doing things to you which they shouldn't do; and you will react and get angry, get in the flesh, pick up resentments, worry, fall into self-pity, etc.

Scripture Study: Think "Shepherding Evangelism" as you once again slowly read and meditate upon Matthew 9:36-38. (*15 minutes*)

Read Matthew 9:35 and 10:1, and you will begin to notice that 9:36-38 is the turning point where Jesus begins the entire process of leading His Disciples into their various ministries.

If they "miss" this Call, what do you think will happen to their ministries?

How does a Disciple's ministry depend upon his/her seeing people with compassion and responding as a shepherd?

What reactions are likely to come from the Disciple who does not see him / herself as a shepherd?

Why is it likely that you will react to people rather than respond the Jesus way when you do not assume the identity of a shepherd?

Information: Every Disciple is Called into the ministry of shepherding. This is not the same as governing. Shepherds who govern are Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers; but they come into these roles by first assuming the shepherding stance, which belongs to every Disciple. Not all Disciples are called to govern the Church.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for giving you so much of His love, forgiveness, and hope so that

you have much to give others.

Wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. This is one of the ways in which you renew your strength.

Pray to Jesus to send all the brothers and sisters in your Church out as shepherds to be Care-Givers to all the hurting, broken, and sometimes ugly people that our lives intersect with.

Pray to the Lord that your Sunday meetings would become a gathering of shepherds who are becoming Care-Givers to one another as well as to the world.

Lesson 4

When a person receives the Call of God and assumes the identity of a Disciple and a shepherd, he is automatically positioned to be equipped for this ministry, and then he/she begins to really grow.

It is not unusual to see fairly new Christians who see themselves as Disciples and shepherds quickly grow past those who have been Christians for years and years.

Ultimately no one can “teach” you anything. Teachers may “throw you the ball” (teaching), but you must “catch it yourself” (learn). Learning requires a desire to be taught. Learning requires a curiosity. Learning requires a watching, an inquiring, an observing, a delving into for oneself. Passive learning is an oxymoron.

In order to learn, you must enter into the teaching by putting it into action. Until this happens, no one can teach you, and you cannot grow.

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:7-16, but pay special attention to what the function of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers is. *(15 minutes)*

The function is found in Ephesians 4:12.

If you understand that the basic ministry of the Disciple is to see people, have compassion, and shepherd them, then how can you “read” this into equipping the saints for the work of the service?

Jesus has “broken” up His anointing into five different graces or channels so that He may use these five “coaches” to train His Disciples.

Take a guess at how each of these five “coaches” is to equip you to be effective as a shepherd: The Apostles equips me

_____.

The Prophet coaches me

_____.

The Evangelist equips me

_____.

The Pastor coaches

me _____.

The Teacher equips me

_____.

Finish this sentence: I can only be equipped when I

_____.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Recognize that your Ultimate Shepherd is the One who created the world.

Worship Him as Creator, as the One who upholds all things by His power, as your personal 24/7 Shepherd!

Express your gratitude to Him!

Declare His goodness over every aspect of your life!

Thank Him for sending Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers to you in order to make you successful.

Lesson 5

Many Christians do not know what their ministry is. Many feel useless, not needed, like some misfit in the Body of Christ; and it is because they are waiting for the wrong thing. They watch some of the five “coaches” performing their ministry, and yet they do not feel equipped. Instead, they feel stagnant and stale in their walk with God. They have had some grand moments of being used; but now they feel overlooked, sidelined, benched.

The reason for this is: a failure to take up the attitude and stance of being an active Care-Giver, a shepherd to everyone with whom life (actually God) brings you into contact. This is the fundamental Call upon every Disciple. When this Calling is ignored, then the growth pattern is blocked. Further ministry does not develop in a healthy, natural way, and the individual becomes discouraged.

God has designed your Destiny to arise as a result of simply following Him into His passion, which is Caring for people who do not act right!

Scripture Study: Really look into Ephesians 4:7-16, and the Spirit will begin to bring some fresh insights to you. *(15 minutes)*

I want you to notice an order to these verses. First, in 4:7 you will notice that each Disciple has been given a unique “grace” from God. We do not all have the same function within the Body of Christ; but we do all come into our “grace” by being faithful to extend the shepherding Care we are receiving from Jesus to others.

Next, in 4:12, as the five “coaches” use their special “graces” upon the rest of the Disciples, the rest become much more effective at being godly Care-Givers. The effect of this is seen in that the Body of Christ is built up! And things begin to work in the Church so much better!

Then in Ephesians 4:13 we see a marvelous thing! Unity begins to come into the Body of Christ! When each person sees him/herself as a shepherd, then everyone becomes active in helping those with problem behavior; instead of becoming offended, the Believers actually give the responses that Jesus gives.

Also in Ephesians 4:13, you will notice that suddenly everyone begins to experience Jesus at a higher level and everyone begins to mature!

Ephesians 4:14 says that we then begin to come out of this childish stage of fussing, reacting, and triggering bad behavior from one another!

Ephesians 4:15 shows us in our active roles as shepherds, speaking truth into one another’s lives with great love and compassion!

Ephesians 4:16 reveals that as this happens, each person begins to find the place that fulfills and satisfies!

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Worship God for His Wisdom and Beauty!

Pray to the Lord Who is Harvesting that He would send you and all your fellow

Disciples into their daily rounds with the “heart-eyes” of shepherds!
Pray for the Believers in your Church to become hard to offend.
Ask God to send in the lost, hurt sheep so that they may find all the love for which
they have longed.

Lesson 6

When you don't assume the Biblical posture of being a shepherd, you will quickly become offended with the wrong things people do to you. Hopefully you will quickly forgive people as you have been "taught," but there is a higher road than being quick to forgive, which is to become hard to offend! Imagine becoming a person who is hard to offend! Can you taste the freedom and joy of living like that? Why not go there and live there?

It is so easy to "live in the wrong tree" by becoming bogged down in the keen sense of being taken for granted, ignored, treated wrongly, presumed upon, etc. Of course, you may be ever so right. You may be what I call "dead right" because you could be correct in your evaluation that someone has done you wrong, and yet instead of living in "the tree of life" (which is abiding in Christ) you may be focused upon someone's wrong action. The result is that instead of ministering the life of Christ, you have sunk to the level of adding something to their sin, which takes everyone further into bondage as opposed to the shepherding Care which you were designed to give. By becoming a Care-Giver, you aren't giving up on what is right and wrong; rather you are stepping up higher to go beyond that so that you may lovingly and compassionately encourage, forgive, bless, be patient with, and wisely give the most helpful truth which can bring this person into another level of freedom.

Scripture Study: As a Disciple-shepherd, log Romans 8:28 into your soul so that you interpret everything you experience through these eyes. *(10 minutes)*

When Paul says, "we know," he means that he is rehearsing something so fundamental, so foundational, so essential to one who knows the character of God, that the "know" is something of revelation and profound realization.

Why do you think Paul uses the plural, "we know"?

If Jesus has established the Disciple's purpose as (1) to follow Him, and (2) to go to people as a shepherd, then the purpose of Romans 8:28 becomes vividly clear!

Interpret Romans 8:28 as applied to your own life, using your purpose to follow Jesus into shepherding with Him. Begin this way: "I know that..." _____

Scripture Study: Now examine Romans 8:29; and for the moment ignore the first part of the sentence so that you can focus on what God's "good" accomplishes in your life.

(5 minutes)

How will your assuming a shepherding attitude toward people conform you to the image of Jesus?

When Jesus represents the Father's heart, He displays Him as a Shepherd. When God reveals you as His child, He wishes to display you as a

_____.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read the 23rd Psalm before the Lord and relate to Him as your Shepherd.

Let Him “make you,” “lead you,” “restore your soul,” “walk you through the hard things,” “comfort you,” “eat at His table while enemies abound,” and “anoint your head.”

Lesson 7

If you are going to be a Care-Giver, you must decide to actually live in the basic truths which you already know and believe but sometimes forget. These truths have to become your “Default mode” so that you begin to “go there” every time you are tempted to go back to some old reaction pattern. By the power of Christ living in you, you can choose to do this. You can live this way.

You will have to identify certain key Scriptures which you will re-memorize, freshly meditate upon, and hold close to your heart and mind if you are going to resist the old habit patterns which want to drag you back into operating in worry, fear, anger, frustration, impatience, etc. As you determine to live in freedom, you will begin to recognize how often you have allowed yourself to be dominated by a situation. You will begin to be jealous for the peace, freedom, joy, and well-being which comes as you dwell in these basic truths!

Scripture Meditation: Refresh your memory on Romans 8:28 and then read it slowly, letting your mind absorb it so that it sinks down into your soul. *(15 minutes)*
Is this currently how you have been interpreting the circumstances of your life?

When you do not choose to “frame” your view of life with Romans 8:28, you will see your circumstances in ways which lead you into unbelief, complaining, and feeling overwhelmed.

Write your thoughts to the Lord as you consider putting Romans 8:28 into your mental grid. Begin this way: “Lord, as I consider your word to me in Romans 8:28, I

_____.”

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Get still before the Lord this morning.

Bring your failures before Him so that He can remove the deadening influence of trying to control your life. Surrender to Him your will. Surrender to Him your so-called rights. Ask His forgiveness for your sins of worry, fear, anger, impatience, and trying to control other people.

Bow before Him and worship!

Ask Him to send you out today as one of His shepherds.

Lesson 8

As you take on the business of shepherding others, you will find yourself letting Jesus equip you on a daily basis. You will eagerly take the teachings that He has sent your way, and you will use His truths. No longer can you sit on the sidelines and wonder why something isn't working the way you heard it should. Now you are like the teen that kept a messy room until he/she moved out into a home of his/her own; and suddenly you grew up and took the lead! You owned it, and the process of owning "it" (the need to Give Care to others) brought a great change of maturity!

You just needed a Mission. A purpose, which was directly from God to you; and now you have it.

Begin to recover Biblical truths in which you have experienced life and power in the past. Dust them off. Make a list of them. These truths will transform your attitude toward all that happens to you; and you will experience the joy of serving God!

Scripture Study: Read Philippians 3:1 like you were just hearing Paul say this to you!
(5 minutes)

Paul is writing you from prison.

What do you think was bringing Paul joy?

I always chuckle when I think of the Holy Spirit reminding me over and over about something. Does this happen to you? What might this tell you to do yourself? What might it tell you to do with regard to others?

Why is "rejoicing in the Lord" a safeguard to you?

When you ignore this "safeguard" what happens to you?

Scripture Study: Read Philippians 4:4-9 in order to find a new way to live. (10 minutes)

How might you obey this command to "rejoice in the Lord"?

How can you guard your heart and mind?

Prayer Time: *(15–30 minutes)*

Begin this morning by obeying the command to “Rejoice in the Lord”!

Get still and become aware that “the Lord is near.”

Lay down your anxiety and your habit of carrying anxiety with you through the day.

Receive peace from your Savior. He is your peace.

Lesson 9

Is a wound from your past part of your identity? If so, then you are stuck in your past; and your past has not yet been given to Jesus so that He can give you His future. You cannot go into your Calling and Destiny dragging your past along with you. Maybe you were terribly hurt, abused, rejected, ridiculed, or damaged in some way; but you died with Christ and rose with Him as a “New Creature.”

Certainly your past history remains as experience and lessons learned; but the bitterness of it, the sting of it, has been removed by what Christ did when He took your place on the Cross and suffered for all your sins and wrong responses to the sins of others, as well as those you originated yourself! Forgiven is written over your past. Set free is written over your past. Accepted is written over your past. Treasured, sought after, favored is written over your past. This is your new identity, and in order to enjoy it and walk in freedom, you must reject your old identity. It’s dead. Gone. You are a “New Creature”!

Scripture Study: Read Revelation 2:16-17. *(10 minutes)*

Notice the phrase, “...the sword of My mouth.” Compare this expression with how Jesus defeated Satan in Matthew 4:4. How does God want you to use “the sword of your mouth”? _____

As you abide in Christ, as you draw from Him, you overcome (actually He overcomes in you); and as you live this way, you discover that He is feeding you with “the hidden manna” and He is opening up to you an identity (a “new name”) which is your Destiny. Journal: Finish this sentence: “As I leave my old identity and take my new identity in Christ, I _____”

Scripture Study: Review 2 Corinthians 5:17. *(5 minutes)*

Finish this sentence: “ I am ‘in Christ’, and this is what it means to me: _____”

Comment on this: “the old things passed away...” _____

What new things have come to you? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 before your God; and count your old identity as finished and gone!

Tell the Lord that you are His new creature!

Express both your gratitude and faith by praising God for all that He has ordained to accomplish in and through your life!

Ask Jesus to send you today to people who need an experience of the Father’s shepherding heart.

Lesson 10

Suppose we measure your freedom by your ability to shepherd with compassion those people who have hurt you. Reread this sentence and think about it.

Suppose we measure your maturity by how hard it is to offend you.

Scripture Study: In Matthew 11:2-6, read the story of John the Baptist when he was in prison and things were not working out the way he thought they would (and therefore should). Jesus was not following the path John felt sure that He would, and he was on the verge of giving up on Jesus. Sound familiar? *(10 minutes)*
Why does Jesus say to John the Baptist, “Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me”?

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One problem in taking offense in a person: it often means that we become offended at the Lord without truly realizing it. After all, He allowed it!

But if you see yourself as one of His very own shepherds whose function it is to follow Him into shepherding people, then you are in a much better position to overlook the “offense” and see the person with compassion as someone who is trapped in a sin pattern that is destroying their lives. This is maturity, and it is freedom. It allows you the freedom to see their wrong and still love them without condoning their sin. This is just the way Jesus has compassion on you when you are reacting to life!

Scripture Meditation: Return to Matthew 9:36-38, and read it again. *(5 minutes)*

Slowly read 9:36 and as you take these words in, let them be turned to prayer.

Let faith arise in you as you read Jesus’ words to you, for He is speaking a divine commission into you. Let His compassion and ability to care for people come in.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read Matthew 9:36 to the Lord as your prayer.

Be still before Him, and allow Him to commission you just as He did His first Disciples.

How do you need Him to shepherd you? Let Him do that. Receive from Him.

Pray and ask Him to send your brothers and sisters out today to shepherd others.

Lesson 11

One of the most common ways we Disciples lose our joy, our peace, and our sense of well being comes from having some problem crowd out the 1st place which is reserved for God Himself in our minds. We become preoccupied with some worry, some concern, or maybe an interest that is very good in itself, as long as it does not take up the space inside reserved for the Lord.

The first Commandment stakes out God's claim to have the first and undisputed place in your mind, your heart, and therefore in your affections and thinking. Even "good things" may become a snare to your soul, because they can function much the way an idol does by claiming part of you that belongs to God alone. He is jealous for His rightful place in your priority list! And well He should be, for this is both His due and your happiness!

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 6:25-34 with the eyes that are looking for your own freedom! (15 minutes)

Study Matthew 6:33.

How are your priorities? Is your job, a sport, TV, recreation, a hobby, fellowship, or any other good thing taking a place in your life that is crowding out the #1 slot reserved for the Lord? Comment on your life.

Why do you think Jesus speaks of your priorities in the context of so many statements about worry?

List the places in this passage in which Jesus directly or indirectly commands you not to commit the sin of worry. _____

Do you think that you recognize worry in your life as a sin?

How might you experience Jesus Christ as your ability to overcome the sin of worry?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring your sinful habit of worrying to the Lord and make a decision to forsake it.

Ask your Shepherd to cleanse you from the sin of having any other thing in the spot reserved just for Him alone.

Read His commands to you not to worry back to Him, and receive His grace to live in the way in which He is commanding.

Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send all your brothers and sisters out today among the people to shepherd them.

Lesson 12

One of the wonderful by-products of going out to shepherd others is the way it sets you up to be constantly shepherded by the Lord Himself. You are both sheep and shepherd; and you can only shepherd well as you receive His shepherding care into your own life.

Jesus sends out His Disciples to shepherd with these words: “Freely you received, freely give.” This is a basic principle. You are a Receiver-Giver. Jesus shepherds you as His sheep, and then He takes you with Him to all the other people to extend His encouragement, His wisdom, and His compassion into their lives.

Scripture Study: Read Romans 12:1-2 and examine these verses as you look for the principles by which the Lord frees you and equips you to effectively help others to go free. *(5 minutes)*

Notice that Paul counts on your experience with the repeated mercies of God to motivate you to surrender entirely to the Lord and to thus be constantly transformed in all your thinking patterns!

Finish this sentence: “As I read these two verses, what comes to my mind concerning my own transformation is _____.”

Scripture Study: Read Romans 12:21 for a major principle of overcoming and living in victory! *(10 minutes)*

As you receive these commands and let them into your soul, how does it affect you?

Now bring in Romans 8:37 and focus on how your ability to receive Christ’s love for yourself might affect your ability to overcome worry patterns, fear patterns, or patterns of allowing yourself to be overcome by wrongs done to you, etc. What are your thoughts?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Get your soul still before the Lord.

Now begin to remember the mercies of God that He has bestowed on you and thank Him for them!

Surrender your life, your timetables, your expectations, and your will into His hands. This is true worship.

Receive Jesus and His love into your life this morning.

Lesson 14

There are a lot of things we sheep-people need, but they can be summed up with one Biblical word: "Life." We need "Life." When we are loved, we experience Life. When we are forgiven, we experience Life. When we are comforted, we experience Life. When we are assured, guided, corrected, instructed, and encouraged by Jesus Christ, we experience what the Bible calls Life!

This Life is "the juice." It is the something that lifts us up, sustains us, changes us.

There is only one Source of this Life: God is the only Source of Life. He is the Creator and the Life Force. What you need ... what you always need ... what you cannot live without ... is Life.

Scripture Study: Read John 1: 1. (*5 minutes*)

"The Word" is the Greek "logos"; and it means the spoken Word of God, the Expression of God, the Thoughts of God, the Personality of God, and the Creative Power of God.

Translate verse one this way: "When the beginning began, the Word was already there." "The Word was face to face with God, and the Word was Himself God."

This establishes that "the Word" is uncreated and eternal. It distinguishes between "the Word" and God, yet "the Word" is co-existent with God. Then finally, "the Word" is fully declared to be God in nature and personality.

What this establishes is Jesus' right, power, and ability to be the Life Source.

Scripture Study: The entire Gospel of John is an outworking of John 1:4-5. (*10 minutes*)

"In Him was Life." Notice that the Life is in the Person of Jesus. The Gospel of John concerns whether or not you are experiencing Jesus as your Life.

"The Life was the light of men." As you experience Christ as your Life, then (and then only) will you have "light," which is the ability to see your circumstances the way God sees it. "Light" is truth, reality, or the way God knows things are. As you experience Jesus Christ as your Life, you automatically have His "light" or view of the things that confront your life.

Worry is "darkness." Fear is "darkness." Almost all anger is "darkness." All sin and all disobedience are "darkness."

When you are not experiencing Christ as your Life, then you are in "darkness," which means that you will be misinterpreting life. In other words, you will be deceived.

When you are not tasting the Life of Christ, you may have truth, but you are not seeing the light. In other words, you (even as a Christian) will not be interpreting the circumstances God's way, and you will not be able to comprehend how God sees it.

For example, if you are worrying and not coming to Jesus and receiving His Life, you will be in darkness and unable to understand why things are not working out!

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read John 1:1 before the Lord and worship Him as the Eternal One.

Read John 1:4-5 before the Lord and put aside darkness in order to receive Him as your Life!

Pray for family and friends who need God's Life this morning.

Pray to the Lord Who is harvesting that He will send you to shepherd people today.

Lesson 15

When Adam and Eve decided to make up their own minds about what was good and what was evil, they lost the ability to eat from the Tree of Life. Darkness came upon them. The darkness that came, however, was a strange type of darkness, because they thought they were seeing things the way they really were. They were deceived, for they found themselves interpreting their circumstances without God as their Source. No wonder they felt shame. No wonder there was a communication break in their marriage. No wonder they felt separated and lonely. This is what darkness produces.

Both Matthew and Luke quote Isaiah who foresaw the coming Messiah as “the Light” who would shine into this present darkness and set the captives free! “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned” - Matthew 4:16.

Scripture is Light. Truth is Light; but you need to come to Jesus Christ Himself using Scripture in order to experience Him as your Life.

Scripture Meditation: Slowly read and contemplate John 5:39-40. *(10 minutes)*

As you mull over these words of Jesus, what do you sense He is saying to you?

Scripture Meditation: Slowly read John 14:6 several times, letting the words come inside. *(5 minutes)*

What is the Spirit speaking to you as you examine these words of Jesus?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Worship Christ Jesus as The Word Himself!

Sing to Him of His Beauty and Worthiness!

Declare Him as your Life Source over every situation that concerns you!

Pray for those who are living in darkness that they will be able to see the Light and come to Him.

Lesson 16

How do you get back into the Tree of Life when you realize that you are trying to find help in the wrong Tree? Perhaps you are deciding for yourself what is good and what is evil. Perhaps you have become focused upon your “rights” or the wrongs of others: life’s unfairness and injustice. By now I hope you realize that you may be correct in your opinions and yet discover that you are not experiencing the Life of Christ. So, how do you get back to Life?

“The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” – Psalm 119:130 (KJV). By slowly reading the Scriptures which you know speak to your issues, you will be making room for God’s words to come into your present dark condition and bring His Light! As you experience His Light, you will be able to draw upon Him as your Life and oh, what a relief!

Scripture Reflection: Slowly ponder John 1:5. *(10 minutes)*

The Light will shine into your darkness. Your darkness will be unable to comprehend the Light until God’s words come into you; and your darkness will not be able to overcome the Light. Light wins!

Journal your thoughts to the Lord on this issue of your getting back into the Tree of Life/Light when you are in darkness.

Scripture Meditation: Slowly read and ponder John 8:31-32. *(5 minutes)*

What does this mean to you?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

As worship, draw God’s Word into your heart and spend a moment treasuring it. Adore Him. Lift your hands to Him and quietly adore Him.

Recite His Word back to Him: “I did not choose You but You chose me that I would go and bear fruit, and that my fruit would remain.”

Release into the Lord’s hands every circumstance that has been concerning you.

Lesson 17

We have been considering the ability to see people in the “light” so that you see them the way God sees them. They are living in the darkness. But what does Jesus mean when He speaks of them being a “harvest”? In John 4:35 He seems to further refer to these people as ones whom you might not think are ready to come into the Light and thus to Him. Here Jesus is “harvesting” a Samaritan woman who would not appear ready to “harvest,” yet He sees her in her true need and begins to shepherd her with His caring and insightful words of interest and confrontation!

Scripture Study: Briefly review the story of Jesus at the well of Jacob and focus upon John 4:34-38. (*15 minutes*)

As you look at the whole event, what do you think “the will of Him who sent Me” was? (verse 34)

How might this apply to your life?

Jesus was always abiding in the Father. How do you think that the Father’s will was feeding Jesus, and what might this mean for your life?

John 4:35b - Listen to Jesus tell you to “lift up your eyes.” Compare this with Matthew 9:36. What do you think Jesus is saying to you?

Prayer Time: (*15 - 30 minutes*)

Thank Jesus that He lifted up His eyes and saw you as ripe for harvest!

Thank Him for the various means He used to draw you to Himself.

Get still before Him and welcome Him to tend you, to comb through your wool (life) and minister His care to you.

Bring people who are troublesome to you to Him and ask Him to give you His eyes so that you see them His way.

Lesson 18

There is a relationship between compassion and authority. Compassion is not sympathy; it is feeling what God is feeling for the bondage and suffering a person is experiencing. Such compassion brings an ability to move in God's Kingdom authority on their behalf!

Jesus explained His ministry in terms of Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

He is in the process of making you His Disciple who operates in His heart of compassion and in His authority for the welfare of others.

Scripture Study: Don't be intimidated by Matthew 10:1, 7-8. Just read these verses and let them come into your soul and do whatever they do. *(15 minutes)*

Matthew 10:7 can be interpreted to mean: as you go where you go in your daily life, just naturally look for ways to represent the Kingdom of God to people who are in various stages of need.

With this thought in mind, journal what comes to you.

Matthew 10:8 - Only as you freely and lavishly receive the Life of Christ can you have it to give to others.

Journal your thoughts about this to the Lord.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read Isaiah 61:1-2 before the Lord and then follow the Spirit in prayer.

Wait upon the Lord this morning in quietness.

Don't be concerned if nothing dramatic happens, but wait quietly upon Him. Enjoy Him. Listen in an easy, simple, child-like way.

Pray for your Church this morning. Intercede for the Leaders to be effective in equipping all the Disciples!

Lesson 19

The Gospel of John draws upon many Old Testament events and figures by which God met His people and gave them powerful experiences of His provision. These experiences were carried into the corporate life of His people and provided the common language for further communicating God's ultimate and final provision in His Son.

John 1:1 draws upon God's first words to man in Genesis 1:1. Moses gives way to Jesus as fulfillment. Jesus is the final, true lamb in that He is "the Lamb of God": i.e. the Lamb that God Himself provided! He is the true, final, living water, which is better than what Jacob provided. The serpent Moses lifted up gives way to the Son of Man being lifted up in a similar fashion with saving benefits. Moses gave them bread out of heaven (manna).

Thus Jesus is the "true light," the "true bread," the "true food," the "living water," and the "true vine." The more understanding you have of the experiences God gave in the Old Testament, the more these figures of speech convey to you what God is saying. Jesus is the One that Father God has been preparing for you during all these centuries.

Scripture Study: Examine what took place in John 6:1-14. Read for the big picture.

(5 minutes)

What is the role of bread in this event?

Remember how Jesus moved the Samaritan woman from natural water to spiritual water when He began speaking to her about "living water"? He was using her natural needs in order to try to communicate to her about her more critical spiritual needs.

Scripture Study: Now read John 6:32-58. *(10 minutes)*

John 6:32 - What is the "true bread"?

John 6:33 - What does this "true bread" provide? In your own words express what Jesus is saying here.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Can you partake of Jesus Christ as your "true bread"?

Thank God for providing you with His Life in His Son.

Rejoice in Him, and experience Him in His shepherding capacity.

Confess that you are a New Creature today because of what He has done!

Lesson 20

The concept of “abiding” is a spiritual one, and we do not have that many natural experiences that make it easy for us to grasp what exactly it is “to abide.” I suspect that we do have lots of experience when it comes to “abiding” in some worry, some pressure, or some pain. It means that we are very much aware of it. We are connected to it in a vivid way, and we are dwelling in its effects. We are joined to it in our minds in such a way that we are participating in it. Of course, this describes an abiding in darkness.

The point God is making is that He wants you to be experiencing the Life of Christ in such a way that it is supplying your most essential needs. The Gospel of John is about your ability or inability to continually have Christ’s Life flowing into you. So the word, “abide” means to dwell in or to remain in; and John uses many other verbs to describe this same activity. He speaks of “receive,” “come,” “believe,” “eat,” “drink,” and each reference is one more effort to communicate to you what it means to experience the Savior as your Life Source.

Scripture Study: Read John 15:1-8. (*15 minutes*)

If you remember that Israel had been called the vine of God in the Old Testament, then what do you think Jesus is saying in John 15:1?

In John 15:2 I suggest that you re-translate by following the Greek, for every branch in Christ who is not bearing fruit, He “lifts up.” He doesn’t take it away but rather He lifts up the branch that has fallen to the ground where it cannot bear fruit. Any vinedresser knows to pick up such a branch, because a branch that is hanging down upon the ground will not bear fruit, so he carefully picks it up and ties it back to the wires that run parallel to the ground.

In John 15:3 the word, “clean” is the same Greek word as “prunes” in the previous verse. Jesus is telling us that He prunes or cleans us as we experience Him through His Word. This is a constant theme in the Gospel of John.

In John 15:4, what is Jesus saying to you?

In John 15:5, what is Jesus saying to you?

Study John 5:19 and 14:10b in the context of what you have been pondering in John 15. How is your way of living to be patterned after Jesus’ way of living?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Tell Jesus that you can do nothing apart from Him.

Use your weakness and your lack to draw upon Him.

Thank Him and praise Him out loud this day!

Pray for your family and friends to experience real Life by abiding in Christ today.

Lesson 21

Self-effort and self-dependency are part of the darkness, and yet these seem to be our default modes. Well-meaning Christians often “try” instead of abide; and the power of His life escapes them. Jesus modeled the lifestyle of abiding that He calls you to, and it takes all the pressure off of you! This is the real Christian Life, this abiding. He said, “The Father abiding in Me does His works.”

Your “job” is to abide in Him and to let Him abide in you; and the doing of this will preclude your doing “your own works.” As you stay in that dependency-faith mode, His works come forth from you in an amazing way! Wonderful things happen, and it almost seems like without any effort on your part. Yet there is some effort on your part to abide in Him instead of dwelling in your own ability, which seems so natural.

I don’t think you will be able to abide in Him and let Him produce the fruit until you are profoundly convinced in the bottom of your soul that you can do nothing without Him. This is what enables you to go past the old default modes and actively come to Him, believe in Him, draw from Him. The more you do this, the more you are tearing down the old ways and allowing His Life to reformat your soul.

Scripture Study: Dig deep by carefully examining John 15:1-8, for there is more here than a lifetime will exhaust! (*15 minutes*)

Jesus describes in John 15:4, 6 what it feels like when you aren’t abiding in Him. What is He saying this feels like?

How can you tell when you are not abiding in Christ as your Vine (Supply Source of Life)?

Since “to abide” is a verb form, what are the things you can do to make abiding in Christ more a part of your daily life?

Examine John 15:7, and you will discover Jesus’ commentary on what “I in you” means from John 15:4. The parallel phrase is found in verse 7; and it is: “...and My words abide in you.” What do you think Jesus means by letting “My words abide in you”?

Check out John 8:37b, and you will see the opposite of abiding and the deadly

effects it had upon these Jews! The KJV translates this, “My word has no room in you.”

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Take your “place” in Christ. Picture yourself like the branch of the vine and realize that you are as connected to Jesus as any branch is to its vine!

Now believe, eat, drink, draw, and receive from His Life.

Now express your love back to Him as praise or as worship!

Pray for the Shepherding Life of Christ to minister to every brother and sister in your Church!

Lesson 22

Abiding in Christ is the easiest and most satisfying thing; yet because it cuts across the grain of our old self (the flesh), it is also one of the most difficult things to learn. It's like: "Taste and see that the Lord is good..." so you taste; and you say, "This is it!" But when it comes to actually abiding in Christ as your Vine on a routine basis, well that's another matter!

I believe that failure is one of the ways that the Lord teaches us. He is developing in us a strong dislike for the darkness because it robs us of the joy, the peace, and that wonderful sense that all is well. Don't just despise your failures; use them. Let the Savior disciple you by causing you to recognize when you are in the darkness so that you can proceed immediately to abiding in Him who is Life!

Form a partnership with your mate or a close friend, and agree to exhort each other regularly to abide in Christ. In John 2 there are two places where the text says, "His disciples remembered"; I always chuckle and enjoy reading those words, since this is so often my own experience. When you remember much more often than before (to abide in Him), then you are indeed growing.

Scripture Meditation: Slowly read over John 15:1-8, letting the words come into your inner being. Just let them do their work. It isn't so much thinking as absorbing.
(5 minutes)

Thinking Through: *(10 minutes)*

How does God produce fruit in your life?

How does this differ from the way you have tried to produce fruit previously?

Who is the fruit for?

What is your Shepherd teaching you?

How do you think abiding in Christ affects your ability to extend shepherding care to others?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring your failures to abide in Christ to Him this morning, and let Him lift the burdens from you.

Ask Him to teach you to abide in Him.

Now sit still and let Him minister to you.

From this time, begin to adore Him and sing your praise to Him!

Lesson 23

People can be happy for short periods when things are going their way; but joy is a quality of life, which is something very different. Joy is like hope in that it is not dependent upon good circumstances. Joy, like hope, comes from God and can flourish in the hard times when there are no answers and no easy way out.

Jesus teaches His disciples to abide in Him, because this is how joy comes into your soul. One of the ways you recognize when you are not abiding is your loss of joy; for you are absolutely dependent upon Him for this amazing aspect of His Life called “joy.”

There is no better testimony to the reality of the Savior than your living in joy! It displays something that sustains and radiates powerfully through good times and hard times; and it glorifies the God of the Joy, Jesus Christ Himself!

It is a powerful weapon against Satan, for it is a form of the Light!

Scripture Study: First examine John 15:11, and then look back over the previous verses.
(15 minutes)

What does Jesus mean by “These things”?

What is your only source of joy?

Why does Jesus want your joy to be full?

How do you think He intends for your joy to remain full?

John 15:10 - How do you think He plans for you to keep His commandments?

How does keeping His commandments bring you into abiding in His love?

Why isn't keeping His commandments a “works religion”?

How important to Jesus was His constant need to experience His Father's love for Him?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

It is possible that you have taken your joy more in something other than the Lord Himself. If you recognize anything that has threatened the Lord's place, please bring this to the Lord Himself.

Enjoy the Lord Himself this morning. Delight yourself in Him and in His love and generous help.

Worship Him.

Pray for your friends who struggle to stay in the joy of the Lord.

Pray for your lost friends who do not know this joy.

Lesson 24

What would it be like to live with God the Father just the way Jesus lived with His Father? For one, it would be the greatest way to live; it would be the freest way to live. Secondly, it would be the way Jesus thinks is normal for every Disciple. So... why not live this way?

What would it look like? You would constantly be aware that the Father loves you, and you would constantly feel that because He loves you, that you do not have to worry. You would be aware that only what He gives you do you truly have; and what He gives you is secure. You would be secure in His timing and in His limitations on your life. You would be able to enjoy the process of living even when you are tired and worn out. You would embrace all of life as something that is flowing out of your relationship with the One who loves you and who is in control. Wow! What a way to live!

This simply describes what it is like to abide in Christ; and it was the way Jesus lived with His Father.

Scripture Study: Re-examine John 5:17, 19-20, 30. *(15 minutes)*

Read these verses carefully; then find the principles which made Jesus' life so revolutionary and which therefore apply to your life also.

- #1 _____
- #2 _____
- #3 _____
- #4 _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring these principles into your prayer time and make them part of what Jesus is developing in your life.

Consciously feed upon Jesus Christ. Partake of His Life, His righteousness, His wisdom, His patience, His courage, His love for others...

Wait upon the Lord by getting still and just being with Him.

Pray for your Church leaders.

Lesson 25

No matter how much you know, your old default modes are darkness. How quickly we can go from light and life to darkness: fixation and obsession with something that ought not be! Maturity means that you quickly realize that your mind is filled with something that is not the Lord Himself and, as a result, your joy has temporarily vanished.

Are you taking responsibility that is not yours? Probably. You can't abide in Christ and take anyone's responsibility but yours. When you step outside your boundaries, you step into the darkness, and you lose that wonderful sense of being fed by the very Life of Christ. Worry, fear, and anger all flow from stepping into the darkness.

Scripture Study: Let's locate some of the mistakes we can make by looking at certain Scriptures: *(15 minutes)*

John 5:30 - What are two mistakes you could make here and get into the darkness?

John 5:38 - What is the mistake you could be making here?

John 5:39-40 - What is the mistake you could be making here?

John 5:44 - What is the mistake you could be making here?

John 5:24-25 - What is the mistake you could be making here?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring to the One who loves you any of these mistakes that you are making so as to be forgiven and set free.

Partake of Christ as your true bread that Father has sent down to feed your soul.

Rejoice in the Lord this morning. Take your pleasure in Him.

Pray for all those you will meet today so that the Father may extend His concern to them.

Lesson 26

We tend to be driven by needs that automatically fill our screens: the checklist, the obligations of the day, the obstacles that we face, the opposition we may face, etc.

These all militantly oppose our abiding in Christ. It can almost seem that troubles seize our minds against our will.

Actually this scenario probably is revealing that our will is not surrendered to Him. Once you recognize this, if you recognize this (your unsundered will), then you can go to the Cross (Galatians 2:20) and be set free. It takes the Cross working in your life in order to abide in Christ when stuff is happening.

When you realize that your joy and faith have been traded for worry or fear or anger, then you know that you are not abiding in the Vine of Christ: you are not in the “Tree of Life” but rather you are in the wrong Tree.

Scripture Study: Reread Matthew 6:25-34. (10 minutes)

Why do you think Jesus ordered you not to worry?

Is worry robbing you of His joy?

What do you think you can do to improve this situation?

What is God teaching you about this?

Scripture Study: Read John 6:53. (5 minutes)

What do you think Jesus means in this statement?

What might Jesus be speaking to you as it relates to your worry, fear or anger?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring any darkness you see in your life to the Lord Jesus, for as you do this you are stepping into the light!

Read 1 John 1:7 before the Lord and receive His cleansing and His welcome back into the light.

Now abide in Christ and draw His life into every part of you that is needy!

Pray for the Spirit to reveal this to all your brothers and sisters in your local Church!

Lesson 27

A bad news/good news thought: how much of your Christian life has been spent not abiding in Christ? Hmmm. Well, the good news part is that you don't have to miss any more of the joy and sense of well being which comes from abiding in Him.

Pride can surely block our abiding, but by this time you probably feel so needy that you no longer are content to trust in yourself, which is the only alternative to abiding.

You have learned a great deal during your times in the wrong Tree. Now you realize that you need His life flowing into you regardless of what's happening, regardless of who has done what to whom.

Scripture Study: Let me take you to a group of Christians who were living in the wrong Tree: i.e. who were not abiding in Christ. Read Revelation 3:14-22 with this in mind.

(15 minutes)

Why do you think I say that their problem was not abiding in Christ?

In verse 20, Jesus says, "If anyone hears My voice..." Compare this with John 5:25. What does this tell you about their current Christian experience?

Jesus wants in. Explain this in terms of Christ abiding in the Christian. _____

If these Christians listen and begin to make room inside them for Christ to abide, how will this cure the ills He mentions in this passage?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read John 15:1-5 before the Lord and use this to help you abide in Christ right now.

Ask the Holy Spirit to constantly teach you to abide in Him.

Bow before the Lord this morning and listen quietly for a while.

Pray whatever He seems to be giving you to pray.

Lesson 28

As you learn to abide in your Savior, He is gaining more and more control over your soul. The fruit of this is that you live much more in joy and peace. These are the effects of abiding in the Tree of Life, which is Christ Himself.

Following Jesus means constantly dealing with people who are not doing right but need the shepherding help of God, which He sends through you.

He promises that you will have multiple difficulties to face every day, yet He promises that His peace will be flowing into you at every point.

The secret is your abiding in Him as your only Source of Life. There is no other.

Scripture Study: Review these familiar verses: John 14:1, 6, 10b, 27, and John 16:33.
(15 minutes)

- a. Write down your orders from Jesus: "My orders are: (1)
_____ (2) _____ (3)
_____ (4)
_____ (5)
_____.

What do you think the Spirit is teaching you?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Thank your Shepherd for shepherding you and teaching you to get all your needs met in Him.

Express your heart to Him in worship.

Pray for the Spirit of God to anoint every Disciple in your local Church to go into this day with the mindset of a shepherd.

Pray every Disciple to see people the way God sees them today.

Lesson 29

Who are you? You are one of the chosen ones! He has come as The Shepherd, and just like the first men He hand picked from fishing boats and tax offices, He has selected you to be His personal disciple!

He created you for this very purpose, and He carefully designed all your parts in order to specifically fulfill a destiny that was also chosen for you.

To follow Him means that you join Him in opposing sin and destroying the works of the devil. It's an exciting call that He has placed upon your life!

Scripture Meditation: Read Matthew 10:1-24 quickly. Then reread it slowly, letting it sink in. Linger over it. Let some of the words which want to stay with you have some room to trigger other thoughts. This is a form of meditation. *(10 minutes)*

Journal: What are some of your thoughts? Write what you think Jesus might be saying to you through these verses. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Close your eyes and imagine Jesus taking you with him to minister.

Yield to Him. Let your heart follow Him.

Ask Him to use you to help set someone free.

Express your faith that He will keep you and use you no matter how many obstacles you may be facing.

Lesson 30

One of the great things about being Jesus' disciple is that you aren't discipling yourself; He is discipling you! And the way you become trained is simply by following.

There are so many things you need to learn, but He is the personal Trainer. He knows you completely. He knows what you need and when.

Sometimes you will be following Him into difficult situations, and the hardest part may be not feeling His nearness. The question then will be: "Do you believe?" Will you continue to trust His character so much that you know He is with you even when you can't feel it? This is faith, and it characterizes you as a disciple.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 10:24-42 quickly. Then reread it slowly. Once again you are to let the words of Jesus come inside and have their space in your heart. Don't be in a hurry. If you get "stuck" on a verse, just stay there. *(10 minutes)*

After lingering over this passage, begin to journal your thoughts. As you begin to write your thoughts and responses to the Lord, He will give you insights; and you will probably sense that He is talking to you. This is certainly one of the ways in which He disciplines you. *(5 minutes)* _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Confess before the Lord that you are His disciple.

Ask the Lord to use you in destroying the works of the devil.

Pray for the deliverance of the people where you work.

Join Jesus in prayer for His Kingdom to come on earth.