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Disciplines of Discipleship

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Jesus did not call us to join the church, nor did he call us simply to believe in him. He called us to be his disciples. The word *disciple* refers to *learners* or *pupils* who accept and spread — by word and deed — the lessons of their teacher. Discipleship consists of the following disciplines:

Take Up a Cross



Jesus invites us to take up the discipline of the cross (see Luke 9:23). Taking up the cross means voluntarily accepting the teachings of Jesus as he outlined them in the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes taking up a cross means enduring suffering and death — as it did for Jesus — but it always means living the Christian life.

Confess Jesus Christ Publicly

The second discipline is the readiness to confess Jesus Christ publicly. Such a confession must spring from the heart. When we confess Jesus from the heart, our words will be put into action; and Jesus will not be ashamed of us when he comes in his glory (see Romans 10:8-11 and Luke 9:26). Neither will we be ashamed of him in this world.

Study the Scriptures

Studying the Scriptures is a vital discipline for discipleship (see 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Whether a disciple has just begun to study the Scriptures or has been at it for a lifetime, the discipline is still the same. We study the Scriptures so that we may experience the *presence* and discern the *will* of God. A lifetime of Scripture study is one of the most significant disciplines of a disciple.

Join a Small Group

Another discipline is to join a small group. Jesus called together the twelve and also the three — Peter, James, and John (see Matthew

18:20). Not just any small group will do. The small group should give group members a compass heading, support them in love, and hold them accountable for practicing their discipleship in the world.

Discover and Use Spiritual Gifts

We are to discover and use the discipline of our spiritual gifts for "building up the body of Christ" and helping the community "come to the unity of the faith" (see Ephesians 4:12-13). God gives spiritual gifts for the benefit of the congregation, but God expects those gifts to be used within the community and the wider world. Jesus warns us not to bury our spiritual gifts.

Give and Serve Joyfully

The disciplines of giving and serving are disciplines of pure joy for a disciple. The Bible emphasizes the tithe (Malachi 3:8-10), generous giving (Luke 6:38), and servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28 and Mark 10:42-45). Paul reminds the Church in Corinth — and us — that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Disciples are good stewards of their gifts and talents, and they recognize the need to share the gospel with the whole created world. They take seriously their responsibility to care for the hungry, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and the environment in which they live (see Matthew 25:31-46).

Pray and Worship

The final disciplines are private prayer and public worship. If Jesus needed to pray in private, so do we (see Matthew 14:23). Disciples recognize the practical value and benefits of both private prayer and public worship. We meet together to support one another in love and good deeds (see Hebrews 10:24-25).

Do these disciplines make up the minimum requirements of discipleship, or are they goals toward which we strive? Jesus did not prescribe the disciplines of discipleship as the conditions of salvation. Faith remains the only condition for salvation. However, the disciplines outlined above make up the minimum requirements for discipleship. Disciples may not practice them perfectly, but they will practice them because these disciplines help define Christian discipleship.

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posted 2-25-03