

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, **"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."** Mark 9:35^{NIV}



A. INTRODUCTION

True Discipleship

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Foreword

This booklet is an attempt to set forth some principles of New Testament discipleship. Some of us have seen these principles in the Word for years, but somehow concluded that they were too extreme and impractical for the complicated age in which we live. And so we surrendered to the chill of our spiritual environment.

Then we met a group of young believers who set out to demonstrate that the Saviour's terms of discipleship are not only highly practical but that they are the only terms which will ever result in the evangelization of the world.

We acknowledge our indebtedness to these young people for providing living examples of many of the truths set forth here.

To the extent that these truths are still beyond our own personal experience, we set forth as the aspirations of our heart.

—William MacDonald

Introduction

The pathway to true discipleship begins when a person is born again. It begins when the following events take place:

1. When a person realizes that he is sinful, lost, blind and naked before God.

2. When he acknowledges that he cannot save himself by good character or good works.
3. When he believes that the Lord Jesus Christ died as his Substitute on the Cross.
4. When by a definite decision of faith, he acknowledges Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Saviour.

This is how a person becomes a Christian. It is important to emphasize this at the outset. Too many people think that you become a Christian by living a Christian life. NOT at all! You must first become a Christian before you can live the Christian life.

The life of discipleship outlined in the following pages is a supernatural life. We do not have the power in ourselves to live it. We need divine power. Only when we are born again do we receive the strength to live as Jesus taught.

Before reading any further, ask yourself the question, “Have I ever been born again? Have I become a child of God by faith in the Lord Jesus?”

If you have not, receive Him now as your Lord and Saviour. Then determine to obey Him in all that He has commanded, whatever the cost may be.

—William MacDonald

The Terms of Discipleship

True Christianity is an all-out commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Saviour is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him—or their weekends—or their years of retirement. Rather

He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives. “He looks today, as He has ever looked, not for crowds drifting aimlessly in His track, but for individual men and women whose undying allegiance will spring from their having recognized that He wants those who are prepared to follow the path of self-renunciation which He trod before them”¹—H. A. Evan Hopkins.

Nothing less than unconditional surrender could ever be a fitting response to His sacrifice at Calvary. Love so amazing, so divine, could never be satisfied with less than our souls, our lives, our all.

The Lord Jesus made stringent demands on those who would be His disciples—demands that are all but overlooked in this day of luxury living. Too often we look upon Christianity as an escape from hell and a guarantee of heaven. Beyond that, we feel that we have every right to enjoy the best that this life has to offer. We know that there are those strong verses on discipleship in the Bible, but we have difficulty reconciling them with our ideas of what Christianity should be.

We can accept the fact that soldiers give their lives for patriotic reasons. We do not think it strange that Communists give their lives for political reasons. But that “blood, sweat and tears” should characterize the life of a follower of Christ somehow seems remote and hard to grasp.

And yet the words of the Lord Jesus are clear enough. There is scarcely any room for misunderstanding if we accept them at their face value. Here are the terms of discipleship as laid down by the Saviour of the world:

1. A supreme love for Jesus Christ.

“If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (**Luke 14:26**). This does not mean that we should ever have animosity or ill-will in our hearts toward our relatives, but it does mean that our love to Christ should be so great that all other loves are hatred by comparison. Actually, the most difficult clause in this passage is the expression, “yea, and his own life also.” Self-love is one of the stubbornest hindrances to discipleship. Not until we are willing to lay down our very lives for Him are we in the place where He wants us.

2. A denial of self.

“If any man will come after me, *let him deny himself...*” (**Matthew 16:24**). Denial of self is not the same as self-denial. The latter means foregoing certain foods, pleasures, or possessions. But denial of self means such complete submission to the lordship of Christ that self has no rights or authority at all. It means that self-abdicates the throne. It is expressed in the words of Henry Martyn, “Lord, let me have no will of my own, or consider my true happiness as depending in the smallest degree on anything that can befall me outwardly, but as consisting altogether in conformity to Thy will.”

My glorious Victor, Prince divine,
 Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine,
 At length my will is all thine own,
 Glad vassals of a Saviour's throne.
 H. G. C. Moule

3. A deliberate choosing of the cross.

“If any man come after me, let him deny himself and *take up his cross...*” (**Matthew 16:24**). The cross is not some physical infirmity or mental anguish; these things are common to all men. The cross is a pathway that is deliberately chosen. It is “a path which so far as this world goes is one of dishonour and reproach”—C. A. Coates. The cross symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Son of God, and which the world will heap on all who choose to stand against the tide. Any believer can avoid the cross simply by being conformed to the world and its ways.

4. A life spent in following Christ.

“If any man come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, *and follow me*” (**Matthew 16:24**). To understand what this means, one need simply ask himself, “What characterized the life of the Lord Jesus?” It was a life of obedience to the will of God. It was a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a life of unselfish service for others. It was a life of patience and longsuffering in the face of the gravest wrongs. It was a life of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, of faithfulness and of devotion (**Galatians 5:22, 23**). In order to be His disciples, we must walk as He walked. We must exhibit the fruit of Christ-likeness (**John 15:8**).

5. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, *if ye have love one to another*” (**John 13:35**). This is the love that esteems others better than oneself. It is the love that suffers long and is kind. It vaunts not itself and is not puffed up. It does not behave itself unseemly; seeks not its own, is not easily provoked; thinks no evil. It bears all things, believes all things,

hopes all things, and endures all things (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**). Without this love, discipleship would be a cold, legalistic asceticism.

6. An unswerving continuance in His Word.

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (**John 8:31**). For real discipleship there must be continuance. It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the test of reality is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for the kingdom of God (**Luke 9:62**). Spasmodic obedience to the Scriptures will not do. Christ wants those who will follow Him in constant, unquestioning obedience.

Keep me from turning back

The handles of my plough with tears are wet,

The shears with rust are spoiled, and yet, and yet,

My God! My God! Keep me from turning back.

7. A forsaking of all to follow Him.

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (**Luke 14:33**). This is perhaps the most unpopular of all Christ’s terms of discipleship, and may well prove to be the most unpopular verse in the Bible. Clever theologians can give you a thousand reasons why it does not mean what it says, but simple disciples drink it down eagerly, assuming that the Lord Jesus knew what He was saying. What is meant by forsaking all? It means an abandonment of all one’s material possessions that are not absolutely essential and that could be used in the spread of the gospel. The man who forsakes all does not become a shiftless loafer; he works hard to provide for the current necessities of his family and himself. But since the passion of his life is to advance the cause of Christ, he invests everything above current needs

in the work of the Lord and leaves the future with God. In seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he believes that he will never lack food and clothing. He cannot conscientiously hold on to surplus funds when souls are perishing for want of the gospel. He does not want to waste his life accumulating riches that will fall into the devil's hands when Christ returns for His saints. He wants to obey the Lord's injunction against laying up treasure on earth. In forsaking all, he offers what he cannot keep anyway, and what he has ceased to love.

These then are the seven terms of Christian discipleship. They are clear and unequivocal. The writer realizes that in the act of setting them forth, he has condemned himself as an unprofitable servant. But shall the truth of God be forever suppressed because of the failure of God's people? Is it not true that the message is always greater than the messenger? Is it not proper that God be true and every man a liar? Should we not say with an old worthy, "Thy will be done though in my own undoing."

Confessing our past failure, let us courageously face up to the claims of Christ upon us and seek henceforth to be true disciples of our glorious Lord.

My Master, lead me to Thy door:
Pierce this now willing ear once more,
Thy bonds are freedom; let me stay
With thee to toil, endure, obey.

H. G. C. Moule

B. JESUS TEACHES ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

(Who's the Greatest? – Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 9:33-36; Luke 9:46-47)

MARK 9

KJV	NIV
<p>33 And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?</p>	<p>33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"</p>
<p>34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who <i>should be</i> the greatest.</p>	<p>34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.</p>

Mark 9:33-34 – **JEALOUSY IN THE MINISTRY!**

3. Jesus' lessons on the meaning of discipleship (9:33-10:31)

This section has two geographical settings. First, Jesus taught His disciples in a house in Capernaum, Galilee (Mark 9:33-50). Second, Jesus resumed a public as well as a private teaching ministry in Judea and Perea (Mark 10:1-31).

a. The essence of true greatness (Mark 9:33-37); (Matt 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48)

Jesus and His disciples **came to Capernaum** for the last time after an absence of several months (cf. Mark 8:13, Mark 8:22, Mark 8:27). **When they were in the house** (cf. Mark 2:1-2; Mark 3:20; Mark 7:17) Jesus candidly **asked them what they were... arguing about on the road** (*en tē hodō*, "on the way"; cf. comments on Mark 1:2). Once again His pointed

question opened the way for additional teaching (cf. Mark 8:27, Mark 8:29).

The disciples were ashamed to admit **they had argued about who was the greatest** among them. Matters of rank were important to the Jews (cf. Luke 14:7-11) so it was natural for the disciples to be concerned about their status in the coming messianic kingdom. **Perhaps the privileges given to Peter, James, and John (cf. Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2) fuelled the argument.** Whatever its cause, it showed that the Twelve did not understand or accept what Jesus' Passion prediction (cf. Mark 9:31) meant for them.

<p>35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.</p>	<p>35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."</p>
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Mark 9:35

After **sitting down**, the recognized position of a Jewish teacher (cf. Mat 5:1; Mat 13:1), **Jesus** summoned **the Twelve**. He taught them the essence of true greatness: **If anyone wants to be first**, to have the highest position among the "great" in God's kingdom, **he must be the very last** (lit., "he shall be last of all," by deliberate, voluntary choice) **and the servant of all**. Here "servant" (*diakonos*) depicts one who attends to the needs of others freely, not one in a servile position (as a *doulos*, a slave). Jesus did not condemn the desire to improve one's position in life but **He did teach that greatness in His kingdom was not determined by status but by service** (cf. Mark 10:43-45).

Read Luke 14:8-11

"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:8-11^{NIV}

JESUS' TEACHINGS WERE, AND ARE, COUNTER-CULTURAL!

36 And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,	36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,
37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.	37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Mark 9:36-37

To illustrate servanthood Jesus set **a little child** from the home (cf. Mark 9:33, perhaps Peter's child) **among** the disciples. To be a "servant of all" included giving attention to a child, the least (cf. "the very last," Mark 9:35) significant person in Jewish as well as Greco-Roman society which idealized the mature adult (cf. TDNT, s.v. "pais," 5:639-52).

Jesus took the child **in His arms** (cf. Mark 10:13-16). To welcome, that is, to serve or show kindness to (cf. Mark 6:11; Luke 9:53) **one of these little children**, who represented the lowliest disciple (cf. Mark 9:42), **in Jesus' name** (on His behalf) is equivalent to welcoming Jesus Himself (cf. Mat 25:40 and comments on Mark 6:7). But to do this was not to **welcome** Jesus *only* but also the heavenly Father **who sent** Him to earth (cf. Joh 3:17; Joh 8:42). **This gives dignity to the task of serving others.**

<p>38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.</p>	<p>38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."</p>
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Mark 9:38

b. The rebuke of a sectarian attitude (Mark 9:38-42) (Luke 9:49-50)

Jesus' words (Mark 9:37) prompted **John** (cf. Mark 3:17; Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2), addressing Him as **Teacher** (cf. Mark 4:38; Mark 9:5), to report an attempt by the disciples **to stop** an anonymous exorcist from **driving out demons in Jesus' name** (cf. comments on 1:23-28; 5:6-7). **They did this because he was not one of them; he was a disciple but not one of the Twelve commissioned by Jesus to do this work** (cf. Mark 6:7, Mark 6:12-13). It was not the man's misuse of Jesus' name (as in Act 19:13-16) that troubled them but rather his *unauthorized* use of the name. Furthermore, he was successful (in contrast with the nine; Mark 9:14-18). **This incident revealed the Twelve's narrow exclusivism. PRIDE!**

<p>39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.</p>	<p>39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,</p>
<p>40 For he that is not against us is on our part.</p>	<p>40 for whoever is not against us is for us.</p>

Mark 9:39-40

Jesus told them to **stop** hindering this exorcist because **no one** performs **a miracle** (*dynamis*, a mighty “deed”) **in His name** and then immediately turns around and publicly speaks evil of Him.

Jesus’ acceptance of this man was reinforced by the maxim, **Whoever is not against us is for us** (cf. the reverse of this in Mat 12:30). “Against us” and “for us” leave no room for neutrality. If one is working for Jesus, in His name (cf. Mark 9:38), he cannot work against Him at the same time.

Though this man did not follow Jesus in exactly the same way as the Twelve, he nevertheless followed Him truly and stood against Satan.

<p>41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.</p>	<p>41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.</p>
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Mark 9:41

With a solemn affirmation (**I tell you the truth**; cf. Mark 3:28) Jesus broadened His words (in Mark 9:39-40) to include activity besides exorcism. **Even one who performs the smallest act of hospitality in Jesus' name (cf. Mark 9:37), such as giving a cup of water to someone because he belongs to Christ will certainly not (*ou mē*, emphatic negation) lose his reward.** He will ultimately be recompensed by participation in God's kingdom (cf. Mark 9:47; Mark 10:29-30; Mat 25:34-40), not on the basis of merit (a good deed) but because of God's gracious promise to people of faith (cf. Luke 12:31-32). Jesus' use of the title "Christ" instead of "Son of Man" is rare in the Synoptic Gospels.

42 And whosoever shall offend one of *these* little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

Mark 9:42

This verse concludes the thought in Mark 9:35-41 and sets the stage for Mark 9:43-50. Jesus sternly warned **anyone** who would deliberately turn somebody away from believing in Him. The punishment for such an offense was so severe that **it would be better for him to be drowned in the sea** before he could cause **one of these little ones who believe in Jesus** (i.e., lowly disciples, including children, who are immature in faith; cf. Mark 9:37, Mark 9:41) **to sin**.

The verb “cause to sin” (*skandalisē*; cf. Mark 9:43) must be understood from a future judgment viewpoint (cf. Mark 9:43-48). It refers to enticing or provoking a disciple to turn away from Jesus, resulting in serious spiritual damage. The undeveloped faith of the exorcist (Mark 9:38) or anyone else who acts in Jesus’ name (Mark 9:41) should be encouraged rather than ruined by harsh criticism or sectarian bias.

The **large millstone** (*mylos onikos*, lit., “donkey millstone”) was a heavy, flat stone turned by a donkey when it was grinding grain; this differed from the small hand mill (*mylos*) used by women (Mat 24:41). Punishment by drowning someone this way was no doubt familiar to Jesus’ disciples (cf. Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* 14. 15. 10).

43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:	43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out,
44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	44 [<i>where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."</i>]
45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:	45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell,
46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	46 [<i>where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."</i>]

47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:	47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,
48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	48 where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Mark 9:43-48

c. The snare of sin and the radical demands of discipleship (Mark 9:43-50) (Mat 18:7-9)

These strong words warn disciples about the danger of letting *themselves* be led astray. Jesus reinforced the demands of discipleship (cf. Mark 8:34-38; Mark 10:24-31) in hyperboles (cf. TDNT, s.v. "*melos*," 4:559-61).

If (*ean*, "whenever," indicating a real possibility) the activity of **your hand**, an instrument of inward inclinations (cf. Mark 7:20-23), **causes you to sin** (*skandalisē*, "should entice you to fall away"; cf. Mark 9:42) then **cut it off**. Jesus meant a disciple should take prompt, decisive action against whatever would draw him away from his allegiance to Him. The same is true of the **foot** and the **eye**, for temptations come through various means. Whatever *tempts* a disciple to cling to this world's life must be removed much as a surgeon amputates a gangrenous limb.

It is **better** to be a disciple and **to enter** eternal **life** (cf. Mark 10:17, Mark 10:30) in God's future **kingdom** (Mark 9:47), and to do so **maimed**, minus earthly possessions that have been renounced, **than to** be an unbeliever. An unbeliever retains his allegiance to this world, refuses eternal **life** with

God on His terms, **and** so will be **thrown into hell** (*geennan*; Mark 9:45, Mark 9:47).

The Greek word *geenna* (“Gehenna,” trans. “hell”) is transliterated from two Hebrew words meaning “Valley of Hinnom,” a place south of Jerusalem where children were once sacrificed to the pagan god Molech (2Ch 28:3; 2Ch 33:6; Jer 7:31; Jer 19:5-6; Jer 32:35). Later, during the reforms of Josiah (2Ki 23:10) the site became Jerusalem’s refuse dump where fires burned continually to consume regular deposits of worm-infested garbage. In Jewish thought the imagery of fire and worms vividly portrayed the place of future eternal punishment for the wicked (cf. the apocryphal Judith 16:17 and Ecclesiasticus 7:17). Jesus used the word *geenna* in 11 of its 12 New Testament occurrences (the one exception is Jas 3:6).

Where the fire never goes out is probably Mark’s explanation of Gehenna for his Roman readers. The **worm** (internal torment) and **the unquenchable fire** (external torment) (quoted from the LXX of Isa 66:24) vividly portray the unending, conscious punishment that awaits all who refuse God’s salvation. The essence of hell is unending torment and eternal exclusion from His presence.

49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.	49 Everyone will be salted with fire.
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Mark 9:49

This enigmatic statement, unique to Mark, is difficult to interpret. About 15 possible explanations have been suggested.

An explanatory “for” (*gar*, not trans. in the NIV) and the word “fire” link this verse to [Mark 9:43-48](#). **Everyone** may be explained in one of three ways:

(1) It could refer to every unbeliever who enters hell. They **will be salted with fire** in the sense that as salt preserves food so they will be preserved throughout an eternity of fiery judgment.

(2) “Everyone” could refer to every disciple living in this hostile world. They will be “salted with fire” in the sense that Old Testament sacrifices were seasoned with salt ([Lev 2:13](#); [Eze 43:24](#)). Disciples, living sacrifices (cf. [Rom 12:1](#)), will be seasoned with purifying fiery trials (cf. [Pro 27:21](#); [Isa 48:10](#); [1Pe 1:7](#); [1Pe 4:12](#)). The trials will purge out what is contrary to God’s will and preserve what is consistent with it.

(3) “Everyone” could refer to every person in general. All will be “salted with fire” in a time and manner appropriate to their relationship with Jesus — for nonbelievers, the preserving fire of final judgment; for disciples, the refining fire of present trials and suffering. This last view seems preferable.

50 Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Mark 9:50

“Salt” links this verse to [Mark 9:49](#). **Salt is good**, useful. Salt as a condiment and a preservative was common in the ancient world. It was a necessity of life in Palestine, so it had commercial value.

The main source of salt in Palestine was from the area southwest of the Dead (Salt) Sea. The coarse, impure salt from the saline deposits of this area was susceptible to deterioration, leaving savourless salt like crystals as residue. **If** (*ean*, “whenever”; cf. Mark 9:43) **it loses its saltiness**, its savoury quality, it cannot be regained so such salt is worthless.

Have salt in yourselves (pres. imper.) points to the disciples’ need to “have salt” which is good (not worthless) *within* themselves continually. Here “salt” depicts what distinguishes a disciple from a non-disciple (cf. Mat 5:13; Luke 14:34). **A disciple is to maintain his allegiance to Jesus at all costs and to purge out destructive influences (cf. Mark 9:43-48).**

The second command, **Be at peace** (pres. imper.) **with each other** is based on the first command and rounds out the discussion provoked by the disciples’ strife (Mark 9:33-34). In essence, Jesus said, “Be loyal to Me and then you will be able to maintain peace with one another instead of arguing about status” (cf. Rom 12:16; Rom 14:19).