

# Discipleship

[Philippians 3:10]

#1 in our LENTEN series following the themes in our own CMCC written and produced LENT Devotional – DISIPLESHIP.

## **THANK-YOU:**

- Michael, for the helpful contrasts you make between the cross as a means of torture and death, and the cross in God's purposes for our transformation...-ve → +ve is a favourite theme of mine, illustrated in the cross shaped poem.
- Joan, for illustrating with your own life story how following Jesus' call to lose our lives for His sake leads us to find LIFE.
- Peter, for showing us how we can be thankful for what seem like impossibly high standards, because this gives us a trajectory for our lives – a life purpose of growing into the family likeness of GOD himself.
- Heather, for reminding us that "The work of the LORD is not burdensome"; that God calls us to step off our treadmills of busyness and to partner with the Lord Jesus in our daily lives of service.

The word disciple means "follower", one who learns from their teacher. Christians are "followers of Jesus Christ". The New Testament of the bible is a book about disciples, written by disciples and for the disciples of Jesus Christ. The word disciple is used 269 x's in the N.T., in contrast to the word Christian which is used just 3 x's, and even then in reference to disciples.

As disciples of Jesus we are followers who are always learning!

As a church we are:

- A company of learning followers
- A fellowship of maturing students
- A discipline of developing disciples

*And that is why we are following this LENT devotional **together!***

Paul expresses his yearning for learning from Jesus in Philippians 3:10 –

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

### *1. I want to know Christ*

Today people say, "I need to find myself."  
Paul says, "I want to know Christ."

"I need to find myself" – dig deep, excavate the deep recesses of who you are and what do you find? **A heart that is desperately wicked; and a nature that is fallen and corrupted!**

"I want to know Christ" – investigate closely, examine carefully and what do you find? **Perfect love; the light to lighten your darkness; compassion and mercy; grace and truth; the fullest expression of the heart and character of God.**

Oswald Chambers writes: *"Self-realisation leads to the enthronement of work; whereas the disciple enthrones Jesus Christ in his work."* We are here on earth not to "find ourselves", but to know Jesus and to discover Jesus Christ in every set of circumstances that we find ourselves to be in!

The passion of the disciple is to know Christ – not a head knowledge of facts, but to know the living Christ, the risen Lord Jesus, the one who calls us: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my [cross shaped] yoke upon you and LEARN from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

In China a Christian was on trial for his faith having spent many years in prison. This is from the record of the trial:

*The prosecutor asked him, "Do you still believe in Christianity?"*

*"No", he replied.*

*"The prosecutor laughed, "Finally, we have reformed you."*

*But the Christian replied, "I never believed in Christianity! I believe in Christ."*

*"Don't play with words," yelled the prosecutor, "Christianity and Christ are the same."*

*"No, there's a big difference."*

*"What do you mean?" asked the judge.*

*"The difference is that Christianity is a religion. It has churches, sets of rules and regulations, ministers and other church workers. You can close down the church, dismantle the regulations, arrest the ministers, but Jesus Christ lives in my heart, He is my life. You can never take that away. He is with me, always, even today in this court room. How can I reject Him who saved me? I cannot NOT believe in Him."*

**Taken from: Bound to be Free with the Suffering Church by Jan Pitt**

Paul's greatest aim in life was expressed as, "I want to know Christ - the risen, living, Lord Jesus Christ!" **Do you?**

## **2. and the power of his resurrection**

What is the power of his resurrection? Listen to a few verses of John Updike's poem SEVEN STANZAS AT EASTER:

Make no mistake: if he rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells dissolution did not reverse, the molecules  
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
the church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,  
each soft spring recurrent;  
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled

eyes of the eleven apostles;  
it was as his flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,  
The same valved heart  
That – pierced – died, withered, paused, and then  
regathered out of eternal Might  
new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,  
analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;  
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the  
faded credulity of earlier ages:  
let us walk through the door!

The power of the resurrection is about:  
Life where there had been death  
A heartbeat where there had been no pulse  
Warmth where all had gone cold  
Movement where all had been motionless.  
The colour of life where there had been only the bleakness of death

So when someone finds a purpose to live by from their faith in the risen Lord Jesus = NEW LIFE!  
When someone faces death with the confidence of everlasting life from their faith in the risen Lord Jesus = NEW LIFE!  
When someone shares how God is slowly but surely working in her life to replace a crippling fear with an enabling strength = NEW LIFE!

The way of the disciple of Jesus Christ is not emptying yourself of all self and all desire as an end in itself, but rather: death to self to find NEW LIFE in Christ.

Hebrews 11:3 says that "Faith is believing in the creative power of God!" God who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them; God who by his mighty re-creative power raised Jesus Christ from the dead!

Paul says: "I want to know that NEW LIFE-GIVING power, that recreating energy in my life!" **Do you?**

### ***3. and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,***

Philip Yancey writes about this verse: "*suffering can gain meaning if we consider it as part of the "cross" we take up in following Jesus. We become **co-participants with Christ in the battle to expel evil from this planet, helping to accomplish God's redemptive purposes in the world.***"

God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son Jesus Christ as our saviour and sin bearer, and Jesus suffered pain and shame and died on the cross to rescue and redeem us, and Jesus calls us as his followers to partner with him in His on-going work of redemption.

As we "Embrace our world with the heart of God" we embrace some aspect of brokenness, hurt, despair; some consequence of sinfulness, waywardness, fallen-ness. But the heart of God is full of compassion, full of love, full of mercy, full of justice, and just as God embraced this fallen broken world through the suffering and death of his Son, he embraces this fallen broken world today through the disciples of Jesus who share in his sufferings – the pain that he feels and experiences for humankind whom he loves.

As we were reminded in our Advent devotions by Henri Nouwen: **"Don't be surprised by pain – be surprised by joy"!**

Paul says, "I want to partner with God in his redemptive plan for this world and so I want to embrace my share of his sufferings." **Do you?**

#### ***4. ...becoming like him in his death.***

Mt 27:46 & Mk 15:33 "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

- This is commonly understood as a cry of desolation from Jesus as he took upon himself the suffering for the sin of the world. My Hebrew scholar friend reads more into it than that. He says that when a Jew read the first line of a Psalm, he embraced all of it. In which case, Jesus was crying out to God...
- The first line – expressing life as it is to God!
- 6-8, 12-18 his situation, just as it was...everything on the line.
- 11 – Do not be far from me
- BUT ALSO he saw the purpose of his sacrifice, the purpose of his being in the centre of his Fathers will:
  - The poor will eat and be satisfied
  - Those who seek the LORD will praise Him
  - All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD
  - All the rich of the earth will feast and worship
  - They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn!

**Becoming like him in his death** = Keeping the big picture. We are Kingdom builders – His Kingdom builders!

Lk. 23:34 "Father, forgive them..."

In the summer of 2001 I was walking along the bazaar in Dubair, N.W.F.P. in Pakistan, when a boy of about 8-10 years old – carrying a handful of calendars displaying rockets, tanks and other items of war, saw me – a white man, walking along the road. He gave me a black stare and made the sign for cutting his throat, signalled that he wanted me dead. It affected me deeply and when I went home I wrote this:

## “Corruption”

Who has turned your heart to stone?  
Who has stifled your capacity to love  
putting hate and death into a mind so young?  
How many are there so corrupted?  
What will it lead to?

You broke my heart today  
your black look  
your cold stare  
your bitter words  
troubled my spirit.  
I can still see them  
and hear them too.  
My heart bleeds for you  
and the blood that you want to shed.

Lord, may your love in me overcome the darkness I see here;  
may your grace embrace his hate.  
Have mercy, Lord, on the corruption of this child.  
May the stabs of pain I feel not bleed me dry today,  
and may your shed blood keep me here tomorrow.

**Becoming like him in his death** = to live a life characterised by forgiveness

Jn. 19:26 “When Jesus saw his mother there – “Dear woman, here is your son.”; “Here is your mother.”

Jesus seeing his mother in all her pain – yet still fulfilling His Father’s will.

**Becoming like him in his death** = following Jesus’ call as he says: “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Mt. 10:37-39

Paul says, “I want to become like Christ in his death – holding onto the *BIG PICTURE*, having a heart of forgiveness and living a life and dying a death **WORTHY** of my Lord and Master.” **Do you?**

Deitrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book entitled “The Cost of Discipleship.”

*Discipleship is costly, but costly discipleship is the norm! It’s our calling!*

John Stott has just written a book entitled “The Radical Disciple”.

*Discipleship is radical, but radical discipleship is the norm! It’s our calling!*

VOM publish a book entitled "Extreme Devotion".

*Discipleship is extreme devotion, but extreme devotion is the norm! It's our calling!*

*I want to know Christ*

*and the power of his resurrection,*

*and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,*

*becoming like him in his death.*

The order is important: *it's 1,4,2,3 NOT 1,2,3,4! Why?*

We can't become like him in his death before we know him in his life;

We can't partner with God in the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings until we know the new-life giving power of God at work in us: remaking, recreating and re-energising – only then will we find the spiritual strength to "Embrace the world (with all of it's pain) with the heart of God."

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

**The total self-giving of Jesus calls for a wholehearted response from us.**