

The Adventure of Following Jesus

- The Way of the Disciple -

PART 1 - Know Who You Are

Planning Ahead

What are your goals in life?

- What do you want to do? What are your plans? [Write them down.]

- Once you reach these goals (or don't reach them), then what? ... then what? (Etc.)

Eventually, you have to reach the end. At some point, the answer to "Then what?" is that you will die... "Then what?" ... judgment and eternity. Are you ready?

Hebrews 9:27 - We're appointed to die and be judged for what we have done in this present life.

NOW is the time to prepare!

2 Corinthians 6:2 - Now is the day of salvation.

The way of no regrets - being a disciple of Jesus

- We are going to be looking at the way that leaves no regrets - the "adventure" of life as a disciple of Jesus.

Romans 10:11 - When we get to the end of life, we will not be ashamed: "No Regrets" for following the way of life. No disappointment in following Jesus.

2 Corinthians 7:10 - Even though there will be sorrow and repentance, when sin has been present, it is a sorrow that is temporary and leaves no regrets. This is contrasted to "worldly sorrow" - the type that non-disciples have: They may be sorry about sin in their lives (remorse), but life-changing repentance is not present in their hearts. [Repentance involves a change in both attitudes and actions. It involves a turning away from sin, to following the ways of God.]

What is a "Disciple of Jesus"? (The Bible's concept of "Christian.")

We need to know ... if we are a disciple. We must make sure we are following in the way of life.

2 Corinthians 13:5 - We need to examine ourselves.

Luke 13:24 - We must "strive" or "make every effort" to enter the way of life. Many will not succeed.

Matthew 7:15 - False teachers will try to lead us astray. (See also 2 Peter 2:1.)

What does it mean? ... to be a "Christian" or a "disciple of Jesus"?

- What are some of the ways people use (or misuse) the words "disciple" and "Christian"? [Write down various views (whether correct or not).] Contrast this with the next question.
- What does the Bible say? How does the Bible use the words "disciple" and "Christian"?

All we need to do is to look at the definitions of the words, and this will show us how the Bible uses them!

A "disciple" is someone who "follows" Jesus, so that he can learn from Jesus how to live. Hence, we could say he is a "learner."

John 8:31-32 - Those who hold to (who live by) Jesus' teachings are his real disciples.

The word "Christian" means "belonging to Christ." This is only possible (in the true sense of the word "Christian") for the person who is controlled by the Spirit (instead of being controlled by his own corrupt nature). Otherwise, he does NOT belong to Christ.

Romans 8:8-9 - If you are controlled by the Spirit of Christ, you belong to Christ. And you will NOT follow the ways of your old corrupt nature.

Note: A non-disciple - someone who is not controlled by the Spirit of Christ - might even deny that his human nature is naturally corrupt, in spite of what God's Word says about it.

These words ("disciple" and "Christian") are two different ways of describing at the same person. This person has received the Spirit of Christ, and now belongs to Christ. And because of this, he is now learning to follow Christ's example - the life controlled by the Spirit (rather than by his own desires).

- Many people misunderstand the word "Christian."

Some people think it refers to a person who holds to certain religious views or beliefs about Jesus. Others think a "Christian" is someone who goes to "church" (another word often misunderstood) or who is born into a "Christian family." Still others think it refers to someone who just lives a "good life."

The way the Bible uses this word, a "Christian" is a "disciple"; there is no such thing as a Christian who is NOT a disciple. Even though many man-made definitions exist today, the Bible's use of the word "Christian" (occurring only three times in the New Testament) is always associated with things characteristic of a disciple. These three occurrences of the word "Christian" are described below. Other verses in the context, which do not use the word "Christian," are included when they help us better understand the meaning of that word.

Acts 11:22,23,26 - In v. 26, we discover that, when the word "Christian" was first used, it was used in reference to disciples. This group of people (disciples) were described as having visible evidence of God's grace (undeserved kindness) in their lives (v. 22-23). Their lives were changed; it wasn't mere talk. (This change in one's life is characteristic of a disciple.)

Acts 26:20, 22-23,27-28 - Paul preached the necessity of a change in one's lifestyle - a change demonstrated by one's actions (v. 20). As Paul talked to King Agrippa, he said that what he preached was the same as what the Old Testament teaches (v. 22-23). These things - a change in lifestyle and acceptance of what the Old Testament says - are characteristics of a disciple; yet at the same time, the king immediately associated these characteristics with the word "Christian" (v. 27-28). [Note: Any Jew who accepted what the Old Testament said would accept what Paul said, and would become a disciple (or "Christian"). Those Jews who replaced the Old Testament teachings with man-made rules and regulations (as in Mark 7:6-8) wouldn't do so.]

1 Peter 4:12-19 - Peter associates the word "Christian" with a willingness to endure all kinds of trials for Christ's sake - a willingness to "share" in his sufferings. This suffering is caused by people who hate what is good. He also encourages the people to not give up, but to be willing to continue doing good things, even though their opponents hate it so much. These attitudes are characteristic of a disciple. [In the first chapter (v. 6-9), Peter shows them the perspective they should have when trials come: God is using the trials to purify us and to prepare us for the glory of eternity.]

How can you become a disciple (a Christian)?

- If disciples follow Jesus in order to learn something, what is it that they are learning? If they are controlled by the Spirit, what is it that they do differently than before?

Being a disciple could be summarized by the two words: "trust" and "obey" - both operating within the framework of a third word, "love." (This is explained in greater detail, in the next section..)

What a Disciple Does

TRUST

- What this means: We believe what God says; we have faith in him and in what he does.

What it isn't: The basic focus isn't in believing that God exists, for we already know he exists.

Romans 1:18-21 - All people have a knowledge of God... they just don't want to admit it. They try to suppress this awareness, instead.

What it is: It involves an admission that God can be trusted - in both what he says and what he does. It is the acknowledgment that he is our Creator, and that we owe everything to him - all that we are and have. We admit that he deserves our loyalty and attention, and we are willing to give it to him. [We also admit that we, by nature, don't have the ability to give him the loyalty and attention he deserves. So we also trust him for the power (and the new nature) that enables us to do so.]

Hebrews 11 - This chapter gives many examples of people who trusted God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 - Because of all these "witnesses" to God's faithfulness (in Hebrews 11), we ought to focus our attention on Jesus. We have every reason to do so!

- A Warning about temporary (or counterfeit) "faith."

This could be described as "skin-deep" faith, for it has not resulted in a changed heart.

Mark 7:6-8 - A person can act very religious, but not have a heart that belongs to God.

Romans 10:9-10 - Trust/faith/believing must be present in the heart. [Note that this trust, when it exists, will express itself openly to other people.]

Genuine faith demonstrates its character by what it does: It "lives-out" the type of obedience that God requires of us. (See the next section.)

OBEY

- This is the natural result of genuine "faith" or "trust" in God, and is proof that our faith is genuine. (Note: The word "natural" does NOT imply that it takes no effort, or that we can passively wait for it to happen. Obedience is something we must do!)

Illustration: We can claim that we "trust" in a chair's ability to hold us. Yet it is only when we are willing to sit in that chair, that our trust is proved genuine. As long as we are unwilling to do so, there is no evidence that our "faith" in the chair is genuine.

James 2:14-20 (+) - Faith without action is dead/worthless.

Acts 26:20 - We need to prove our repentance (our turning away from evil and to God) by our actions.

Romans 1:5 (also 16:26) - The "obedience of faith." The obedience is present because the faith is present.

Note: Obedience to God cannot be separated from trust in God (trusting him for the power to obey). Without God, we would be powerless to do anything. We would still be slaves to disobedience! (More about this elsewhere in the study.)

- We accept what God says (we trust him, or have faith in him), and allow what he says to determine the way we live (we obey him).

What it involves: A change of conduct toward God and toward people: We want to do what honors and pleases God, as well as what is good for other people. This becomes more important to us, than satisfying our own personal interests.

Matthew 22:37-40 - Love for God and love for people: These two commands summarize all the obligations a person has. [These obligations apply to all people - even to those who claim that God does not exist. (In their consciences, they know he does exist.) However, only those who trust God for the power to obey can succeed in obeying these commands in a way that honors God. Why? Because without God, there is nothing good in us - Romans 3:10-12 (+).]

Romans 12:10b and Philippians 2:3 (+) - We must be willing to love other people more than we love ourselves.

Matthew 5:43-48 and Romans 12:16b - This love must be expressed even toward people we don't like, as well as toward people we might be tempted to consider "lower" than ourselves.

What it does NOT involve: The mere practice of "religious activities," or blind obedience to religious leaders.

Matthew 7:21-23 - Your "fruit" (actions) show what is really true. (Note: This passage shows that religious activities can be done by people who do not belong to God.)

James 1:26-27 - For the disciple of Jesus, true "religion" involves one's actions toward God (here: focusing on a willingness to live a pure life) and toward people (here: focusing on one's expression of love to those who are neglected by the world).

Matthew 23 - In this chapter, Jesus had to strongly condemn the religious leaders of his day. These leaders were very "religious" in following rules invented by people, but they neglected obeying God's law. People who followed these leaders were in danger of becoming just like them, or worse, according to v. 13-15. (See also Mark 7:1-23.)

NOTE: People in the world normally use the word "religion" in reference to the practice of activities and rituals, in order to gain the favor of one's "god" (or to become "one in spirit" with it, etc.). For the disciple of Jesus, "religion" refers to what he does after God has poured out his love into his (the disciple's) heart. The people of the world do their religious activities in attempt to gain (or to maintain) "salvation" (or whatever they call the goal of their efforts); the disciple does it as an expression of gratitude, because God has already saved him! Only a disciple of Jesus can do these things in a way that pleases God.

LOVE - It's connection to Trust and Obedience

- Both of these - trust (faith) and obedience - are inseparably connected with love.

Galatians 5:6 - Faith expresses itself in love.

1 Corinthians 13:2 - Faith without love is nothing.

John 14:23-24 - If you love Jesus, you will obey him; if you don't, you won't. It is as simple as that!

1 John 5:3 - To obey God is an expression of love to him.

- This is a love that encompasses all of life. It encompasses, or fulfils, every obligation we will ever have.

Matthew 22:37-40 - The greatest command: Love God... The second greatest command: Love neighbor...

- Note: We must remember that life as a disciple involves growth and maturity. These three characteristics will exist in anyone who is a genuine disciple. However, we must also remember that one's expression of these characteristics may be weaker and have less depth, at the beginning of one's life as a disciple, than later, after he has had years of growing-up.

To Think About...

- What does it mean to "trust" God? To "distrust" him?
- What does it mean to "obey" God? To "disobey" him?
- How can we determine if our trust and obedience (and love) are genuine or if they are counterfeit (or temporary)?

PART 2 - Getting Ready for Action

As a Disciple, We Are In...

A *RACE* - It is like an Olympic race, except...

- Our race has eternal value.

1 Corinthians 9:25 - Their crown will not last; ours will.

- The way we compete is different.

From one perspective: We run the race with the goal of being in first place... as if we will be the only winner.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - From this perspective, there is only one winner. So we do everything necessary to make sure we are that winner. We make sure nothing disqualifies us.

From another perspective: We are not competing against each other, but we are working together with each other... so we all can receive the prize.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 - God has given each of us our own special gifts and abilities.

1 Corinthians 4:5 - Each of us will receive the praise we've earned.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 - An example of this is seen in Paul and Apollos: co-workers, each to receive his own reward.

A *BATTLE* - It is like a World War, except...

- It is not a physical battle; it's a spiritual battle!

It involves spiritual forces & spiritual weapons.

Ephesians 6:12 - Against spiritual forces - the powers of darkness.

It involves fighting in the realm of the heart and mind.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - Demolishing arguments and pretensions with spiritual (not physical) weapons.

- There are certain things we fight indirectly.

2 Timothy 2:22 - When it comes to temptation, don't stay around to expose yourself to it. Run away from temptation to sin. Avoid it; don't flirt with it!

**** When the enemy throws a grenade at you, it's not wise to see how close you can get to it! ****

How to Get Ready

We Must Prepare

- Being trained, having self-control, being focused.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - As an athlete - strict training and self-control; focused on the goal.

2 Timothy 2:3-5 - As a soldier - enduring trials, not getting distracted; as an athlete - following the rules!

Hebrews 12:1 - As an athlete - getting rid of anything that hinders you.

- The foundation for our survival: Communication with our leader (God).

God communicates with us through his Word, the Bible.

Matthew 4:4 - We need it in order to survive.

Hebrews 4:12-13 - It is living and powerful.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - God uses it to teach and correct us.

We communicate with God through prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 - Prayer is more than merely asking for things!

Matthew 6:9-13 - The Lord's "Model Prayer" shows some of the basic aspects of prayer.

Matthew 26:41 - Prayer is a source of strength.

If we do these things, we will be ready for success!

Psalm 1:1-3 - Such people are blessed in all they do.

Joshua 1:7-9 (+) - An example for us: The promise God made to Joshua, that if his primary focus was on God's Word, he would end-up being prosperous and successful. [This "prosperity" involved all that he would do; it did not focus on the accumulation of wealth - the way many people use that word, today.]

Being Ready in Attitude and Thought

- The basic pattern for knowing how to think:

Philippians 4:8 - A list of various types of things to think about.

- Our basic attitude about the present and the future:

Our attitude about the present:

1 Peter 1:13 - Ready for action, self-controlled.

1 Peter 3:13 (+) - Eager to do what is good, regardless of the response of others.

Our view of the future:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 - All who have faithfully run the race and fought the battle will receive their victor's crowns. We're winners!

- Remembering our new identity:

Things have changed for us.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - We are a new creation. The old is gone; the new has come! (We have neither right nor reason to live the way we used to live.)

Who we belong to:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - We were "bought" by God. (The logical conclusion of this fact: We must honor God with the way we use our bodies.)

Colossians 1:12-13 - We now belong to a different kingdom: God's kingdom.

Who we are:

1 Peter 2:11 - Since we are now part of God's kingdom, we no longer belong to this present world system (the "dominion of darkness" - Colossians 1:13). We are "aliens" (foreigners)! (The logical conclusion of this: We must not let ourselves become overtaken by the sinful ways of the world.)

2 Corinthians 5:20 - Ambassadors of Christ, encouraging and exhorting the people of this sinful world to make peace (reconciliation) with God, our ruler.

Romans 8:17 - Royalty, children of the king! Having been adopted in to his family, we now have the rights that belong to his children. (We also have the responsibilities that go along with being his children: We must learn to live like Jesus would.)

Being Ready in Action and Power

- The basic pattern for knowing how to act:

Philippians 4:9 - Follow Paul's example.

- Having the right priorities:

Being "single-focused."

Matthew 6:24 - You can have only one master, not two.

James 1:8 - Not being double-minded, not wavering between two contradictory ways of thinking.

Putting everything else in "second place"; willing to give up anything that gets in the way of our highest priority.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 - Not being preoccupied with the things of this temporary world. [Note: This passage doesn't tell us to NOT do the things mentioned; it does not say that they are sinful. Rather, it tells us that our main focus shouldn't be placed on such things.]

Luke 9:23 - You must "deny" yourself: You must be willing to "sacrifice" your own self-interests, so that you can follow the way of Christ.

Luke 14:26-27 - God must be so important in your life, that everyone else comes second. Your love for God must be so great that your love for others looks like "hate," even though it isn't hatred. (You still love them.)

NOTE that some of these things may be good, when given the right emphasis or when placed in the right context. The problem occurs when they begin to compete with our highest priority of being a disciple of Jesus.

Willing to get rid of anything that is incompatible with the priorities of a disciple.

NOTE that these things are, by nature, incompatible with being a disciple of Jesus - even though they may, at times, look "innocent," compared to other types of sins. Many things can be put in this category; the following are just a couple examples.

1 Corinthians 15:33 - You must be willing to give-up anything that hinders you or threatens your ability to follow Jesus. The specific example in this passage involves destructive friendships and close ties. Don't fool yourself into thinking that such associations have no effect on you! [See also 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.]

Ephesians 4:29; 5:4 - You must consciously choose the words that come from your mouth. Remember that what you say is an expression of your heart, and is an indication of how you will be judged (Matthew 12:34-37).

- Doing the "impossible."

2 Corinthians 6:4-12, 16; 12:9-10 - Living-out the power of God, in spite of your own great weaknesses. (Look at Paul's example!)

Philippians 4:11-13 - Able to be content in any circumstances, because of the strength that comes from God. [Note that this includes being content even in adverse circumstances.]

Ephesians 5:15-16 (+) - Wisely making the most of every opportunity, doing the Lord's will.

**** The ability to be a disciple is impossible in our own power. Salvation itself is impossible, from the human standpoint. It's only because of what God has done, that we can expect success!**

- Willing to keep on going, even when the odds seem to be against us: Perseverance / Patience:

Growth takes time; there will be "growing pains."

At times, we may "stumble" (fall into sin). When this happens, we are to get back up, rather than staying there in defeat!

James 3:2 - Everyone stumbles in many ways. It's not just you or me!

Psalm 37:24 - The Lord will hold on to us.

God will keep us from permanently falling.

Jude 1:24-25 - Him who is able to keep you from falling...

We have plenty of reasons to be encouraged.

First, we know that, in this present world, unpleasant things are going to happen. So we have no reason to be surprised about it.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - A general statement about conditions in this present world: There is a time for everything under heaven.

1 Peter 4:12-13 - Don't be surprised when you have difficult times.

These difficult times are temporary, so we should place our focus on Jesus and on what is permanent.

Hebrews 12:2-3 - We should keep our focus on Jesus and on what is eternal, rather than on the temporary problems.

John 16:21-22 - What Jesus reminded his disciples, when they were about to enter a major trial: Today's pain will be forgotten when tomorrow's joy arrives. [This is comparable to a woman forgetting the pain of childbirth, once the child is born. (It's not that she has memory loss! The pain she experienced - now an event of the past - ceases to be the focus of her attention.)]

We have a guarantee that God will use these unpleasant things - as well as everything else that may happen - to accomplish good in our lives.

Romans 8:28 (+) - In all things, God works for the good of those who love him...

Note: This guarantee cannot be used as an excuse for willful sin, such as by claiming that God will accomplish good through that sin. The good he accomplishes will come... but it may come with discipline, to teach us the folly of willful sin! And though that sin may not destroy us eternally (if our own salvation is genuine), it may have horrible consequences in this present life - both for us and for other people. It may even result in our physical death - the "ultimate discipline" - if we continue to remain unrepentant (compare to 1 Corinthians 11:30-32). Worse than that, it could have eternally devastating consequences for others - for those who are repelled from the way of life, because of our conduct.

"Hang in there; don't give-up!"

This Way of Life is Not for Some

- It is not for the lazy or cowardly: They will never make it as disciples.

Revelation 21:8 - The cowardly will have a place in the lake of fire.

Hebrews 6:12 - It's not the lazy, but those who have faith and patience, who will inherit what God has promised. [Note that, by implication, the lazy do not have genuine faith; for genuine faith will be accompanied by obedience and patience.]

Hebrews 10:39 - Those who "shrink back" (instead of having patient endurance) will be destroyed.

- It is not for the self-confident.

Ephesians 2:1-5 - We were DEAD in sin. It was GOD who saved us. We couldn't! (Trust in our own abilities will not work.)

Ephesians 2:8-10 - We credit God (not ourselves) for the works he has prepared us to do. We credit him for our faith, as well! (The self-confident person cannot have this attitude.)

Ephesians 3:20 - God's power is working in us. And what he can do far surpasses anything we can ask or imagine! (We could never accomplish as much, relying on our own strength.)

(See also the next section.)

**** The disciple of Jesus is GOD-confident, not SELF-confident. ****

REMEMBER THIS: Being a disciple is an adventure, a journey. But it is also a challenge; it is not for the lazy or for those who trust in themselves.. We must train and strengthen ourselves, using the power God gives us. (And we must admit that it is God's power, not our own.) "No pain, no gain."

To Think About...

- If you accept these things as true, how will they affect your life?
- If these things have no affect on your life, what does that tell you about yourself? What do you need to do about it?

PART 3 - Being a Hero

God Makes it Possible

He has given us heroes of the past, to learn from

Hebrews 11 - Examples of many who trusted God and proved it by their actions. [The entire Bible contains examples, both good and bad, for us to learn from.]

He has given us everything we need, to do great things

2 Peter 1:3-4 - God has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

Ephesians 2:10 - God has prepared something special for each of us.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 - He has given us the gifts and abilities to do these things.

Philippians 1:6 - He is also working in us, so that the good works he began in us will one day be completely accomplished. (He is doing many great things in us. His enabling us to do our great things is only one small part of the total!)

God Shows Us What a True Hero is (The world LIES to us.)

** The world lies to us, about what constitutes a hero. **

Characteristics of a True Hero (Contrasted to the World's False Perception of a Hero)

- Humble, not proud.

James 1:9-11; 4:6 - The humble person (the person who does not exalt himself) is in a high, exalted position, as far as God is concerned. God shows kindness to him. In contrast, God is against the proud. Those who think they have reason for being proud might as well boast about their lowliness, for they are soon going to lose all that they have... and become "nothings."

Romans 12:16 - We must be willing to associate with those who are "lowly." We must not consider ourselves "superior" to them.

- Weak, not strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - God's strength is most visible when our weakness is the greatest - when we find ourselves to be totally powerless. This is why we can be content, and can trust God in circumstances that leave us without any strength of our own.

2 Corinthians 4:7, 16 - On the "outside," we are like jars of clay: weakness. On the "inside," we have a treasure from God: strength and life. [Read the entire chapter. We are the clay, the weakness. The treasure is the good news about Christ, the source of life, along with the power (from God) to proclaim and to live this good news.]

- Last, not first; servant, not ruler.

Matthew 20:25-28 - People of the world like to rule over others; they like being called "Number 1." But you are to be different: You are to follow Jesus' example and be a servant of others, instead.

Mark 9:35 - The servant, and the one who is the "least" - God considers them to be the "first" and the most important.

- Working together, not competing against each other.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 - God has given each of us a task. We each do our part, but God brings about the results. (We are co-workers with God!)

Galatians 6:4 - Each of us should evaluate our own actions, without comparing ourselves to others.

- Hated by the world, rather than loved by it.

Luke 6:22-23, 26; Matthew 5:10-12 - The world honors false teachers (and those who are like them); it despises and mistreats people who are loyal to God. [NOTE: Their hatred is present because of our association with Jesus, not because we have committed any wrongs against them! (See also 1 Peter 4:15: We'd better make sure that their hostility isn't because of us committing sins against them!)]

Some more comments about being a servant / slave

- Everyone is a slave to something.

2 Peter 2:19 - You are a slave to whatever controls you.

- We are either a slave to righteousness or a slave to sin.

Romans 6:16-23 - The world thinks it's free when it abandons righteousness; actually, it's a slave to sin (and death). In contrast, those who become "slaves" to righteousness become free from sin's slavery, and are free to experience life eternal.

John 8:31-32, 34 - Those who sin are the real slaves; those who pay attention to Jesus and who become his disciples, are the ones who are free.

[Note that the world's idea of "freedom" is to be enslaved by sin. Our concept of "freedom" is to be free from sin's control.]

Two examples we should consider

- Jesus... the ultimate example.

Philippians 2:5-11 - Jesus had everything, but was willing to give-up all that he had for us.
(See also Isaiah 53.)

- The apostle Paul... one of the best human examples.

2 Corinthians 4:8-12; 11:22-29 - Paul endured all kinds of difficulties for the sake of others.
(See also 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: He did this willingly.)

Being a Hero Isn't Easy

We can expect opposition and difficulties

- Consider the way they treated Jesus. Since they treated our master that way, it's just natural that they would also treat us that way.

John 15:18-19 - The world hates those who are not a part of it.

1 John 3:13 - We should not be surprised when the world hates us!

- When we endure these trials, we are becoming more like Christ. And if we share in his suffering, we will also share in his glory. (This is guaranteed!)

1 Peter 4:12-16 - When we are willing to endure trials because of our loyalty to Jesus, it is evidence that we belong to God, and that God is with us.

Romans 8:16-17 - We will one day enjoy, along with Jesus, the eternal inheritance that belongs to God's children. (Jesus is God's Son by nature; we are children of God by adoption into his family - Ephesians 1:5.)

- God will use these trials as discipline, to purify us. (And when he does this, it will also show that we are his children.)

Hebrews 12:7-11 - We can consider the trials we endure to be a type of discipline, being used by God, to help us grow up. Furthermore, the very presence of discipline can be an encouragement: Since God only disciplines his own children (and only does it for their good) it proves that we are his children! [If God never disciplined us, we would have a good reason to wonder if we were his children.]

1 Peter 1:6-7 - Trials test our faith and prove whether or not it is genuine. It purifies our faith, better than a refiner's fire purifies gold.

- We may have difficulties... but the day is coming, in which the world is going to have it a lot worse.

1 Peter 4:17-18 - Things may be difficult for us now... but look at how much worse it's going to be, for the unsaved! [Salvation is not an "easy" matter. It took the death of Jesus to take away our sin. It took his resurrection to give us new life. And it takes his Spirit to give us the power to live that new life. All people will experience some type of judgment. When we (Jesus' disciples) experience "judgment" in this present life (persecution, discipline from God, etc.), we have a hope to look forward to. The unsaved, however, do not have any of this; they have nothing to hold on to, which will enable them to survive the judgment they will someday experience.]

- Focus on Jesus and eternity... and don't give-up.

Hebrews 10:25; 12:2-3 - We need to get together on a regular basis, to encourage each other. We also need to focus on Jesus: He made it triumphantly, through trials much worse than ours. And he - the one who gives us our faith, and who also builds it up - is in the process of bringing us victorious through our own trials.

We have a good reason to not give-up when trials come

- We have a power from God that is greater than any trial we may face.

God himself helps us in our journey.

Romans 8:26 - The Spirit prays for us. (He is qualified because he knows the good that God wants to accomplish in us.)

Hebrews 2:18 - Jesus helps us when we go through trials. (He is qualified because he has also endured trials.)

Come what may, the end result is guaranteed!

Romans 8:28-39 - Nothing can win over us! Nothing can separate us from God's love.

- We can expect our trials to accomplish great things.

2 Corinthians 4:7; 12:9 - God's power becomes more visible, when contrasted with our weakness.

1 Peter 5:6 - God will exalt us (lift us up) at the right time.

To Think About...

- How does God's concept of being "great" compare to the "greatness" that you often hear the world talk about?
- What are some good examples of people trying to accomplish great things? Some bad examples? For each example:
 - 1) Compare the way the world views these people's accomplishments, to the way that God views them.
 - 2) What impact do these people have on others? (For instance, do they build others up, or tear them down, as they are accomplishing their goals?)
 - 3) What is the long-term effect that these various people have on others? (This would include the consequences that may exist in this present world, as well as in eternity.)
- What are some ways you can be a hero?

PART 4 - You Must Decide

Are You Willing to Be a Hero?

Are you willing to be a disciple?

Are you willing to accomplish great things?

You must Choose the Way You Will Go

Make an Informed Decision

- You must consider the cost of being a disciple of Jesus.

Luke 14:26-35 - As a disciple, you must be willing to give-up everything. You must decide whether or not you are willing to do this.

- You must also consider the cost of NOT being a disciple.

Matthew 16:25-27 - What benefit is it, to gain the entire world, yet lose your soul? On the Day of Judgment, what will you be able to give, in exchange for your soul?

- What type of foundation do you want for your life?

Matthew 7:24-27 - The contrast between the wise and the foolish builder: An illustration showing the difference between those who hear and obey Jesus, and those who don't.

- You've heard what the Bible says. There are four ways you can respond. Jesus describes these four ways in a parable about a farmer who was planting seed: Matthew 13:1-15; Mark 4:1-12; Luke 8:4-10

Describe the 4 types of hearers. Write down the differences between:

- the one who doesn't understand.
- the one who temporarily accepts ("believes") the good news.
- the one who seems to accept the good news, but who is preoccupied with other things in life.
- the one who accepts the good news and has a fruitful life.

What is the end result for each type of hearer? Which is the disciple?

REMEMBER: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (These words were written by Jim Elliot, a missionary who was killed by headhunters in Ecuador.)

Respond God's Offer of Salvation

- The reason you have this opportunity: It is because of his kindness, love and patience.

Matthew 5:44-45 - God shows kindness even to those who choose to be his enemies.

Romans 2:4 - He does this in an attempt to lead them to salvation.

2 Peter 3:9 - He patiently offers them the opportunity to turn to him.

- The fact that this offer of salvation will not last forever.

Romans 2:5-6 - His righteous judgment will eventually result in wrath against those who reject him.

Romans 1:28-32 - When people reject God, God may "give them over" to their sins.

Acts 28:26-28 - When people hardened their hearts, they lost the ability to turn to God. And so God turned away from them, and offered the good news of salvation to others. (This theme occurs several times in the New Testament, as well in the Old Testament.)

*****Don't let this happen to you.*****

Consider the Facts: *Remembering what being a disciple is all about* (*Reviewing the things emphasized in Parts 1, 2, and 3 in this study*).

The way of the disciple has been described as an adventure.

- What does it mean to be a disciple?
- Why is it described as an adventure? (Also: Why do some people not consider it an adventure?)

The way of the disciple requires making a choice: To become one, you must choose to do so.

- How can you become one? (The focus here is on YOUR responsibility. It does not deny the role God has in accomplishing the changes.)

The way of the disciple requires a change - you have a responsibility to learn from Jesus, to be his follower.

- If you accept the way of the disciple, how will that affect your life?

The way of the disciple will require you to go against the ways (and views) of the world.

- How does the world's view of being a hero (or being a success) contradict the Bible?

To Think About - *Evaluating Yourself and Choosing Your Path*

- Which type of hearer are you?
- Having examined what it means to be a disciple, are you one, according to the Bible?

If "NO": If you are NOT a disciple, you must decide whether or not to become one.

Remember that NOT making a decision IS making a decision to say "No."

If "YES": If you are a disciple, there are also things you must decide.

Are there weaknesses or sins you need to stop yielding to?

Are there strengths you need to reinforce?

Remember that if you are not interested in becoming more like Jesus, it's possible that you might not actually be a disciple.

**** *The choice is yours.* ****

Psalm 131 reflects the heart of a disciple. As one of God's "heroes," he may accomplish great things, but these are not his consuming passion or his ultimate goal in life. His goal is to rest in God, and to trust God to accomplish through him the great things that he, by himself, could never do.

Psalm 131 The attitude of a disciple

LORD, my heart is not filled with proud ambitions;
my eyes are not lifted up in arrogance:
I do not preoccupy myself with heroic exploits
and mighty accomplishments.

But I have calmed and quieted my restless soul,
content like a child resting in its mother's arms.
My soul is like a contented, resting child.

O Israel, be content to put your hope in the LORD,
both now and forevermore.

(Dennis Hinks Translation)