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Introduction

Christian Discipleship¹

Christians have been interested in discipleship as a subject for many hundreds of years. But for the first followers of Jesus, discipleship was so much more than just an interesting subject. For them, discipleship was the experience of following the Lord Jesus. Basically, discipleship was a relationship that changes, frees, and empowers Christians. It was true for the early Christians. So, then, it must be true for us too.

A disciple is a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. He or she has dedicated himself or herself to a growing relationship with God. With the Holy Spirit's leading, disciples bring the Lordship of Jesus into every area of daily life. Disciples become dedicated and responsible members of the church by taking an active part in mission. They are spiritually moved by God's Spirit.

Discipleship can be examined from two different levels. The first level includes what the first disciples of Jesus did. The second level of discipleship includes what His later followers did and have done. Christians need to study both levels to understand the meaning of discipleship.

Christian discipleship suggests an experience that is different from other kinds of discipleship. The first century had many disciple-gathering teachers who were well respected. Their methods (ways) of teaching were honored. But Christian discipleship speaks to a special kind of discipleship. A Christian copies the life of Jesus. A disciple follows Him. For these reasons, Christian discipleship is the kind of discipleship that means following, even copying, Jesus.

When one thinks of Christian discipleship, he or she thinks of Jesus and His followers. Then, several questions arise. What must it have been like to have Jesus call, teach, and train someone for discipleship? What must it have been like to watch Jesus in action and to learn from His example?

But some questions are more meaningful to us now. What does discipleship mean for Christ's disciples living today? What does discipleship mean for people who live in a society very different from the one Jesus and His first disciples lived in?

In this quarter's Bible study guide, we will study discipleship as an experience between Jesus and those He called to learn from Him. We will study what discipleship really means and who is truly a *disciple*. We will also examine how one can become a disciple and the important characteristics² of discipleship. We will

1. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

2. characteristics—what a person is made of; the things that make you who you are, such as patience, kindness, hope, or laziness, anger, and so on.

compare³ Jesus' methods of gathering disciples to the methods of other disciple-gathering teachers. Additionally, we will study such topics as would-be disciples, the women who followed Jesus, and disciples of different nations. And we will study steps for discipleship and learn about discipleship under pressure. In short, we will study what we need to do as modern-day disciples living before the second coming of Jesus.

Bertram Melbourne, the author of this quarter's study guide, is a native of Jamaica. At the time of this writing, he was acting dean of the Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. He is married and has three grown children.

3. compare—to show how two things are the same.