



THE TEST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Course 5, *Real Christian Living*, Lesson 7

The Problem: What does it truly mean to be a disciple of Christ? Is it simply believing in Him, or does discipleship demand something deeper—something life-changing? Jesus calls His followers to more than just acknowledging His truth; He calls them into a relationship that transforms every aspect of their lives. True discipleship is not just about knowing His teachings but about living them out daily. It is about surrender, obedience, and allowing His Spirit to shape our character, desires, and purpose.

This study will explore the marks of genuine discipleship—how faith produces visible change, how reliance on Christ leads to victory, and how walking with Him brings peace, purpose, and fulfillment. Are you ready to examine the true test of discipleship and embrace the life Christ has called you to live?

Objectives:

- I. We ask how we can be certain that we are walking in Christ's will.
- II. We discover that for the fully surrendered Christian, duty and sacrifice are not burdens but joyful acts of devotion.
- III. We study the challenges and dangers new believers face, equipping ourselves to stand firm in faith.
- IV. We recognize the Bible's emphasis on Christ's righteousness as the foundation of our salvation—why living by His standard is essential.
- V. We learn what to do when we stumble. Since every believer longs to remain faithful, understanding how to rise again in Christ's strength is vital.

I. HOW WE CAN BE CERTAIN THAT WE ARE WALKING IN CHRIST'S WILL

When we truly love someone, our thoughts turn naturally toward them. We cherish their presence, delight in conversation, seek to please them, and often reflect their influence in our own character. This is the kind of relationship Christ invites us into. Through the Holy Spirit, He nurtures within us a deep and abiding love—one that transforms our thoughts, desires, and actions to reflect His life in ours.

The Word:

- 1. What are the thoughts of a heart aligned with Christ? 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 4:7-8
- 2. With whom does a believer find joy in conversation? John 16:24; Ephesians 6:18
- 3. Who did Jesus always seek to please? Can we follow his example? John 8:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:1
- 4. How does a Christian grow to reflect the character of Christ? 2 Corinthians 3:18

Explanation: Love for Christ is not merely emotional—it's transformational. When our hearts are united with His, we begin to think His thoughts, speak with Him often, seek to please Him, and reflect His character. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who draws us into deeper communion and reshapes our lives to mirror the beauty of Jesus.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

As our hearts align with Christ, our minds are shaped by peace, purity, and righteousness. Instead of dwelling on guilt or fear, we focus on what is true, honorable, and pleasing to God—trusting that our lives are guided by His will and sustained by His grace. This connection leads us into continual conversation with Him. Prayer becomes more than a duty—it becomes a cherished exchange, like speaking with a close friend. We bring our joys, struggles, and requests to Him, confident that He hears and responds with compassion.

Jesus lived to please the Father, walking in perfect obedience and devotion. As His followers, we are invited to do the same—not by striving for perfection, but through daily surrender. A believer finds purpose in honoring God, and through His strength, grows in the desire to reflect His character in every aspect of life. Transformation unfolds as we continually behold Jesus. The more we focus on Him—through prayer, Scripture, and surrender—the more His Spirit shapes us. We are changed into His likeness, becoming reflections of His love, grace, and holiness.

We walk in alignment with Christ when our thoughts are guided by His Spirit, when we delight in speaking with Him, when we find joy in living for Him, and when our hearts long to reflect His character. A committed believer receives an inner assurance from the Holy Spirit—a deep peace that confirms God's presence within. *Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts*” 1 John 5:10. This witness is not based on emotion alone, but on the living reality of Christ dwelling within.

Relevance: As a surrendered disciple of Christ, you can have full confidence that your life rests securely in His hands. His Spirit reigns within you, guiding your heart and shaping your walk in His will. There is no need to dwell constantly on your human weaknesses—Christ’s grace is greater than your shortcomings. Instead of focusing on failures, fix your eyes on Jesus, trusting that He is actively transforming you. His love and mercy sustain you, and as you follow Him, you can be assured that you are pleasing Him. Walk forward in faith, knowing that His power is at work within you.

II. DUTY AND SACRIFICE ARE JOYFUL ACTS OF DEVOTION FOR THE FULLY SURRENDERED CHRISTIAN

A life fully surrendered to Christ is one of deep joy, purpose, and adventure. Following the Lord’s leading—wherever He calls—is an experience that brings both fulfillment and peace. Yet, the key to true discipleship is allowing Him to lead, rather than moving ahead based on personal desires or assumptions.

It is easy to convince ourselves that we are walking in God’s will when, in reality, we may be following our own impulses or rationalizing decisions to suit our preferences. True surrender requires humility, patience, and trust, seeking His guidance rather than relying on our own understanding.

When we truly follow His direction, even acts of duty and sacrifice become expressions of joy—not burdens, but privileges. Walking in obedience, we experience the fulfillment that comes from serving Him, knowing that His path leads to the greatest joy and eternal reward.

The Word:

5. Did Moses regard it as a sacrifice to give up wealth and fame in Egypt? Why? Hebrews 11:24-27
6. How did Paul regard his sufferings for Christ’s sake? 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
7. Why is duty a pleasure for the dedicated Christian? 1 John 4:19.

Explanation: Moses willingly gave up the comfort and prestige of Egypt’s royal court to follow God’s calling. Though it may have seemed like sacrifice, for him, it was a privilege to walk in God’s will. Similarly, Paul endured immense suffering throughout his ministry, yet he rejoiced in sharing Christ’s sufferings, knowing that his efforts brought salvation to others. For those truly surrendered to Christ, sacrifice does not feel like loss—it becomes a joy. When the peace of Christ fills the heart, every challenge is seen through the lens of His greater purpose. What He ordains is for our good and the blessing of those we influence.

Scripture affirms these truths: Moses, already in the heavenly Kingdom, is now enjoying the rewards of faithfulness (Jude 9; Matthew 17:3). Paul, despite his earthly trials, lived with confidence and certainty that an eternal crown awaited him at Christ's return (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Their love for Christ compelled them to obedience, and their faithfulness has secured eternal joy beyond imagination.

Relevance: If Moses and Paul could trust God fully, finding joy even in sacrifice, can we not do the same? Following Christ may involve challenges, but what He offers is far greater—power, peace, and eternal joy in His presence. *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us"* Romans 8:18. Through surrender, we step into God's greater plan, discovering the deepest fulfillment and the richest blessings. His will always leads to true joy.

III. CHALLENGES AND DANGERS FOR THE NEW BELIEVER

Two significant errors often challenge new believers, and Scripture provides guidance in identifying and overcoming them: Legalism—Believing one must earn salvation, and License—Using Grace as an excuse for sin.

The Word:

8. Why is trusting in our own works to bring us into harmony with God always a mistake? Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16
9. What is the only means by which we are saved from sin and made holy? Ephesians 2:8-9
10. What is flawed about the belief that Christ has freed us from the responsibility of obeying the Ten Commandments? Romans 3:31; 7:7; John 14:15; James 2:10-12
11. How important is obedience to God's law? 1 John 2:3-6; Hebrews 10:16; James 2:17
12. Is it the Lord's intention that His people will keep His law and not sin? How? 1 John 3:4-9

Explanation: The Bible teaches clearly and consistently that salvation comes by grace through faith—not by human effort or works. When we invite Christ into our hearts, He gives us His grace and power through the Holy Spirit. Attempting to earn God's favor by our own ability to keep His law is a fundamental misunderstanding of salvation. We do not obey the law to be saved—we obey because we are already experiencing the blessings of salvation in Christ. Law-keeping is not a means of salvation but the evidence of a transformed life.

Some mistakenly believe that since grace frees us from condemnation, we no longer need to obey God's law. They often quote Romans 6:14, where Paul says, *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* However, this does not mean grace cancels obedience. Instead, Scripture teaches that grace empowers us to obey. We are not under the law as a means of salvation, nor are we under its condemnation (Romans 8:1). Rather, Christ's grace enables us to live in harmony with His commands. The apostle John makes this point unmistakable: *"Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist"* 1 John 2:4.

The relationship between grace and obedience can be compared to a loving marriage. A husband does not help his wife around the home to earn her love—he does it because he loves her and wants to bring joy to her heart. In the same way, Christians obey not to earn salvation, but because they love Christ and joyfully follow Him (John 14:15).

Relevance: You can avoid the two extreme errors—legalism (trying to earn salvation) and antinomianism (rejecting the need for obedience)—by trusting wholly in Christ for grace to do His will. Tell Him you accept His salvation as the free gift that it is. Then, express your desire to follow wherever He leads. Your obedience will not be an effort to gain favor, but a response to the Holy Spirit reigning in your heart. Through surrender, faith, and love, your walk with Christ will be joyful, fulfilling, and victorious.

IV. CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OUR SALVATION

Christ's righteousness, the standard of which is His law, is the means by which we are saved from sin and qualified for eternal life.

The Word:

13. In what words did Jeremiah identify the Lord's righteousness with that of His faithful people? Jeremiah 23:6
14. How is Christ's righteousness bestowed upon us? Romans 8:9-10; 10:6-10
15. How does Romans 8:3-4 describe the role of Christ in enabling believers to live by the Spirit rather than striving for perfection through their own efforts?

Explanation: The righteousness of Christ is both credited to the believer and bestowed upon them through the Holy Spirit, but the transformation into His likeness is a lifelong journey. Though we are declared righteous in Him, we will not perfectly reflect His character until we are glorified with Him in Heaven. Until that day, the Christian life is a progression, a continual growth in grace as we yield to His Spirit and allow Him to shape us daily.

God's law is a perfect expression of Christ's righteousness, as affirmed by the Psalmist: "*Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is the truth. Your decrees are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live*" Psalm 119:142, 144. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, "*the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" Romans 8:4. This does not mean believers achieve flawless obedience, but rather that God is at work in them, producing spiritual maturity as they continue walking in faith. A born-again believer is declared righteous in Christ, and this righteousness manifests in their life through obedience, not as instant perfection, but as a consistent pursuit of His will.

Righteousness is Christ's gift, received by faith, and worked out in our lives through a process of sanctification. As the Apostle John explains, righteous works do not create righteousness but are the result of Christ's presence within (1 John 2:29).

Relevance: Righteousness within always produces righteous actions, but no believer reaches full perfection in this life. The Christian walk is not about achieving flawlessness but about daily surrender to Christ, allowing His Spirit to shape and refine us over time. One day, when we stand before Christ in Heaven, we will be perfectly transformed into His likeness. Until then, we continue pressing forward, growing in His grace and reflecting His love as He leads us step by step.

V. WHAT SHOULD WE DO WHEN WE STUMBLE?

After accepting Christ as Savior and Lord, the desire to live wholly for Him grows stronger. We long to walk in close union with Him, leaving behind the sins and struggles that once held us captive. Yet even with sincere commitment, believers may stumble. Sometimes the fall is sudden; other times, it's the result of unmet emotional needs, weariness, or long-standing patterns that quietly erode spiritual strength. When we fall, the pain is real. We may feel confused, ashamed, or even hopeless—especially when we've resolved never to fall again. But Scripture assures us: *though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand*" Psalm 37:24. "*For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again*" Proverbs 24:16.

Stumbling does not mean we are lost. The journey of discipleship is not defined by perfection, but by persistent return—to Christ, to grace, to transformation. Instead of giving in to despair, a believer should:

- Confess the sin to God – Acknowledge the failure with humility, trusting that His mercy is greater than any mistake.

- Claim Christ's forgiveness – 1 John 1:9 assures that He is faithful to cleanse and restore us, never withholding His grace.
- Remember that growth takes time – Sanctification is a lifelong process, not an instant transformation. Falling does not mean failure; it means we must keep pressing forward in faith.
- Lean on the Holy Spirit for strength – We are never meant to overcome sin alone. His power enables us to resist and grow stronger.

Victory in the Christian life does not come from our ability to be flawless, but from our willingness to return to Christ every time we fall. The believer is not called to despair but to press forward, relying completely on God's transforming power.

The Word:

16. Does the Lord forsake us when we fall, leaving us in our hopelessness and helplessness? What does He do for us? Psalm 37:24; Proverbs 24:16.
17. What assurance do we have that the Lord will forgive us? 1 John 2:1; 1:9.
18. What provides comfort and security for the believer who has fallen into sin? John 16:27; Jeremiah 31:3.

Explanation: When we stumble, God does not abandon us. His mercy is always available, and His forgiveness is never withheld from the repentant heart. Jesus is our Advocate in the heavenly sanctuary, pleading our case with the power of His shed blood (1 John 2:1). But this assurance is not a license for willful sin—it is a call to deeper surrender.

Spiritual growth is not about striving in our own strength. It is about depending entirely on Christ—His righteousness for our justification, and His power for our sanctification. True maturity comes as we daily surrender our will and actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of transformation. God's promise is clear: He is *"able to keep you from falling"* Jude 24. He provides a way of escape in every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), and His power is greater than any force of evil. Yet recognizing and choosing that escape often requires spiritual renewal, emotional healing, and intentional support.

Some struggles—especially those rooted in trauma, addiction, or deep emotional wounds—may require professional counseling, accountability, and community care alongside spiritual surrender. Seeking help is not weakness—it is wisdom. God often works through both prayer and practical steps to bring holistic healing. Even in moments of deep regret, God's love remains unwavering. He does not turn away from the brokenhearted. Instead, He draws near, offering restoration, strength, and peace.

Relevance: Restoration is always possible. If you've fallen repeatedly, it doesn't mean God has abandoned you. It means He's inviting you to deeper restoration—where His strength meets your weakness, and His grace rewrites your story. Consider Peter: he relied on his own strength and denied his Lord. Yet he repented, and Jesus forgave him—not only restoring him, but commissioning him for ministry.

"Heaven is cheap enough." The price of surrender is small compared to the joy of restoration.

Obedience is not demanded as proof—it is offered as a response to love. This is not legalism; it is righteousness by faith. For those facing persistent struggles, God offers multiple paths to healing—spiritual renewal, professional support, and the power of community.

Will You Receive His Grace Today?

Do you desire this way of life—a life of victory, healing, and peace? It is yours for the asking.

Will you join in prayer, asking Christ to bestow His righteousness upon you through the Holy Spirit? Will you surrender your weakness to His strength, and your wounds to His healing?

He is ready. He is near. He is enough.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The Lord really doesn't care about what we think about.
 - b. We became progressively more like Christ as we learned to rely upon His power.
 - c. Good works make us righteous.
 - d. Obedience to God's law is the result of the gift of Christ's righteousness.
2. Discuss: Since our works reflect the reality of our relationship with Jesus Christ, they serve as evidence of our true union with Him. Is this why God judges all people according to their works? How does Revelation 22:12 shape our understanding of this?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 7.