

Personal Discipleship

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Course Introduction

History: Where this has been

While in India during December 2010 and January 2011, I ministered at a large conference for Indian believers. Part of the conference involved breakout session with pastors. These studies were offered in seed form to the attending pastors. They were later developed for our group at New Life Bible Fellowship under the heading of *Staying Close*. If you are a pastor or a layperson, be assured that we are all disciples. Each of us and all of us must stay close and remain connected in the vine (John 15:1-8).

Philosophy: Why we do it

Let's target three essentials and agree from the outset to: (1) become humble under the *Master's authority*, (2) determine a path of obedience to live for the *Master's glory*, and (3) offer service that fulfills the *Master's plan*.

Description: What this is

These are intensive New Testament (primers) studies that focus on how to establish, maintain, and share a close and intimate walk with the Lord. The student will possess a biblical basis for Christian living through identified principles, word studies, and exegeted texts. Let's not confuse the basis with the simple. Laying a foundation presupposes that we intend to rest something on it for a lifetime. *The problem with broken down lives is not what we intended to build, but the lack of a solid foundation upon which to rest the structure.* Marriages fail, not because there's something wrong with the institution, but because there was never an established foundation. So much building is done...so much effort is expended...and all for naught, because the Lord is not the architect and His Spirit the source of power (Ps 127:1-5; Zech 4:6).

Rationale: What this is for

The course is built upon the central organizing principle (desire, intent, and purpose) of every follower-disciple of Christ: *To live a Christ-centered life and to lead others to live Christ-centered lives.* To succeed we must internalize lots and lots of Scripture. This is not an exercise in fact-gathering and proof-texting. The Word of God, in my life, transforms me so that I can become a kingdom builder.

Guiding Assumption: Where this is going

It is possible to possess a wide range of spiritual truth and biblical knowledge with no corresponding depth of experience. We may have a thin layer, a veneer of truth, to superficially face the issues of our day. Yet, without a depth of experience, this paper-thin surface of spirituality will be penetrated and compromised by doubts and fears. Familiar sins will return and bind us. Emotional distress will paralyze us and debilitate us. Bitterness will set in where injustice exists. Anger will explode where frustration is given aid and comfort. No! A depth of spiritual truth emerges from a depth of spiritual experience. Walking with the Master is qualitatively different from knowledge that is acquired about the Master. **We seek "To know Him...and the power"** (Phil 3:10). Paul would concur that to know Him is to know *power*. The knowledge of which Paul speaks is a personal and vibrantly intimate relationship with the living Lord Jesus, the Master.

Caveat: What to avoid

Trust can be an elusive and deceptive thing. That is, one's confidence can be easily misplaced. There can be a pronounced disparity between what one claims and what one does, what one knows and what one believes. We may say (claim) that Jesus is the center of our life and by these words sincerely mean that He alone is the resting place for our faith. Yet, at the very same time we can rely on multiple crutches and supports. We admit to selfless abandon to Jesus and then trust in our finances, or relationships (networks), our social status, talents and abilities. Like layers of an onion, God strips us down to the place of entire confidence in Him. Jesus may liken this to a pruning process (John 15:1-8). Peter may reckon this a crucible (1 Pet 1:7). Paul may call this a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7). Perhaps the most important preparation for a life of discipleship is to identify the crutches and declare dependence upon God in order to learn the discipline of complete reliance.

