

Becoming a Disciple of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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The constellation of characteristics that result from faith in Christ are all necessary to our standing strong in these last days.

What does it mean to be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ? A disciple is one who has been baptized and is willing to take upon him or her the name of the Savior and follow Him. A disciple strives to become as He is by keeping His commandments in mortality, much the same as an apprentice seeks to become like his or her master.

Many people hear the word *disciple* and think it means only “follower.” But genuine discipleship is a state of being. This suggests more than studying and applying a list of individual attributes. Disciples live so that the characteristics of Christ are woven into the fiber of their beings, as into a spiritual tapestry.

Listen to the Apostle Peter’s invitation to become a disciple of the Savior:

“Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

“And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

“And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”¹

As you can see, weaving the spiritual tapestry of personal discipleship requires more than a single thread. In the Savior’s day, there were many who claimed to be righteous in one or another aspect of their lives. They practiced what I have called selective obedience. For example, they kept the commandment to refrain from work on the Sabbath yet criticized the Savior for healing on that holy day.² They gave alms to the poor but offered only their excess—what they did not need for themselves.³ They fasted but only with long faces.⁴ They prayed but only to be seen of men.⁵ Jesus said, “They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”⁶ Such men and women may focus on mastering a specific attribute or action but do not necessarily become as He is in their hearts.

Of these, Jesus declared:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”⁷

The attributes of the Savior, as we perceive them, are not a script to be followed or list to be checked off. They are interwoven characteristics, added one to another, which develop in us in interactive ways. In other words, we cannot obtain one Christlike characteristic without also obtaining and influencing others. As one characteristic becomes strong, so do many more.

In 2 Peter and in Doctrine and Covenants section 4, we learn that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation. We measure our faith by what it leads us to do—by our obedience. “If ye will have faith in me,” the Lord promised, “ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.”⁸ Faith is a catalyst. Without works, without virtuous living, our faith is without power to activate discipleship. Indeed, faith is dead.⁹

And so, Peter explains, “add to your faith virtue.” This virtue is more than sexual purity. It is cleanliness and holiness in mind and body. Virtue is also power. As we faithfully live the gospel, we will have power to be virtuous in every thought, feeling, and action. Our minds become more receptive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the Light of Christ.¹⁰ We embody Christ not only in what we say and do but also in who we are.

Peter continues, “Add to [your] virtue, knowledge.” As we live virtuous lives, we come to know our Heavenly Father and His Son in a special way. “If any man will do [the Father’s] will, he shall know of the doctrine.”¹¹ This knowledge is personal testimony, born from personal experience. It is knowledge that transforms us so that our “light cleaveth unto [His] light” and our “virtue loveth [His] virtue.”¹² By our virtuous living, we make the journey from “I believe” to the glorious destination of “I know.”

Peter exhorts us to add “to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience.” As temperate disciples, we live the gospel in a balanced and steady way. We do not “run faster than [we have] strength.”¹³ Day by day we move forward, undeterred by the refining challenges of mortality.

Being temperate in this way, we develop patience and trust in the Lord. We are able to rely on His design for our lives, even though we cannot see it with our own natural eyes.¹⁴ Therefore, we can “be still and know that [He is] God.”¹⁵ When faced with the storms of tribulation, we ask, “What wouldst Thou have me learn from this experience?” With His plan and purposes in our hearts, we move forward not only enduring all things but also enduring them patiently and well.¹⁶

This patience, Peter teaches, leads us to godliness. As the Father is patient with us, His children, we become patient with one another and ourselves. We delight in the agency of others and the opportunity it gives them to grow “line upon line,”¹⁷ “brighter and brighter until the perfect day.”¹⁸

From temperance to patience and from patience to godliness, our natures change. We gain the brotherly kindness that is a hallmark of all true disciples. Like the Good

Samaritan, we cross the road to minister to whoever is in need, even if they are not within the circle of our friends.¹⁹ We bless them that curse us. We do good to those who despitefully use us.²⁰ Is any attribute more godly or Christlike?

I testify that the efforts we make to become disciples of our Savior are truly added upon until we are “possessed” of His love.²¹ This love is the defining characteristic of a disciple of Christ:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”²²

It is faith, hope, and charity that qualify us for the work of God.²³ “And now abideth ... these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”²⁴

Brothers and sisters, now more than ever, we cannot be a “part-time disciple”! We cannot be a disciple on just one point of doctrine or another. The constellation of characteristics that result from faith in Christ—including the ones we have talked about today—are all necessary to our standing strong in these last days.

As we earnestly strive to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, these characteristics will be interwoven, added upon, and interactively strengthened in us. There will be no disparity between the kindness we show our enemies and the kindness we bestow on our friends. We will be as honest when no one is looking as when others are watching. We will be as devoted to God in the public square as we are in our private closet.

I testify that everyone can be a disciple of the Savior. Discipleship is not constrained by age, gender, ethnic origin, or calling. Through our individual discipleship, we, as Latter-day Saints, build up a collective strength to bless our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Now is the time to recommit ourselves to being His disciples with all diligence.

Brothers and sisters, we are all called to be disciples of our Savior. Let this conference be your opportunity to “begin as in times of old, and come unto [Him] with all your heart.”²⁵ This is His Church. I bear my special witness that He lives. May He bless us in our eternal quest to become devoted and valiant disciples. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

