# River of Life Christian Centre, Felixstowe

**Bible School 2019**

Studies in Discipleship

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# Module 1: Discipleship—the call to follow christ

* Believers are called to FOLLOW Christ
* Following Christ is the sign, the seal and the certificate of Christian discipleship
* Believers follow Christ’s example—not just his teachings
* Following Christ is a life-long challenge
* What does following Christ, look and feel like?

# Key Verses

*Mat 16:24-27: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and* ***follow me****.  (25)  For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.  (26)  What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?  (27)  For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*

* Discipleship begins with DESIRE: “Whoever wants to be my disciple”
* Discipleship involves SELF-DENIAL: *“must deny themselves”*
* Discipleship spells DEATH to selfish living: *“Take up their cross”*
* Discipleship is about FOLLOWING CHRIST: *“and follow me.*
* Discipleship brings ETERNAL REWARDS: *“he will reward each person according to what they have done”.*

*Luke 9:57-62: “As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "****I will follow you*** *wherever you go."  (58)  Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."  (59)  He said to another man, "****Follow me.****" But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."  (60)  Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."  (61)  Still another said, "****I will follow you****, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."  (62)  Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

* Discipleship is not for the AMBITIOUS: *“the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”.*
* Discipleship is not for the HALF-HEARTED: *“Lord, first let me go and bury my father”.*
* Discipleship takes PRECEDENCE over family loyalties: *“but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family”*
* Discipleship demands an unswerving COMMITMENT: *“No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God”.*

*John 10:27-30: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and* ***they follow me****.  (28)  I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.  (29)  My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.  (30)  I and the Father are one."*

* Discipleship is not a religion, it is an intimate RELATIONSHIP: *“My sheep listen (recognize the sound of) my voice; I know them, and they follow me”.*
* Discipleship leads to ETERNAL LIFE: *“I give them eternal life and they shall never perish”.*
* Discipleship brings the blessing of DIVINE PROTECTION: *“no one will snatch them out of my hand” . . . “no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand”.*

*John 12:26: “Whoever serves me* ***must follow me****; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.”*

* Discipleship has one major non-negotiable—FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST: *“whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.*
* Discipleship has one major reward—Divine HONOUR: *“My Father will honour the one who serves me”.*

*John 21:20-22: Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")  (21)  When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"  (22)  Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?* ***You must follow me****."*

* Discipleship looks DIFFERENT in every disciple’s life: *“Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me”.*

# believers are called to follow christ

Believers are called to follow Christ. That sounds simple enough—yet it seems to have defeated so many in the church. *Many people do not realize that the greatest spiritual strongholds are often in the church, where a religious spirit prevails over the will of God.*

That fact should not surprise us, because it was the Jewish leadership that rejected the Lord Jesus. John said: *“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (Jn 1:10-11).*

A religious spirit feigns or fakes obedience to Christ, through religious practices. The prophet Isaiah said: *“The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught” (Isa 29:13).* Jesus applied Isaiah’s analysis to his own generation who found ways to cancel the will of God, by their religious interpretations of the Bible:

*Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honour your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' they are not to 'honour their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition (Mt 15:1-6).*

A religious spirit is one of the greatest challenges to following Christ. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to combat this spirit among the Jewish leaders (Lk 10:25-37). In that parable, Jesus showed that religious people have a basic paralysis to doing the will of God. The Jewish priest and the Levite totally ignored the need of the unfortunate traveller. They would not even go near him. On the other hand, the despised Samaritan risked his own life and used his own resources to rescue the man who had been attacked. Jesus told the expert in the Law to follow the Samaritan’s good example.

N.B. A religious spirit is a religious *attitude* that is more interested in external things, than internal things. The Pharisees made a big deal about handwashing and cleaning their utensils, but they did little to pursue true sanctification. Evil spirits can be at work when people have a religious attitude, but they are not always involved. Jesus never drove a demon out of the religious leaders—instead, he challenged them to meditate on God’s Word: *“"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former” (Mat 23:23).*

When Matthew the tax collector came to Christ, instead of rejoicing, the Pharisees asked Jesus disciples why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Mt 9:10-11). This is the sign of a religious spirit. If you have such a religious spirit, come to this year’s school of discipleship and get rid of it! When Jesus heard their criticism he said: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.  (13)  But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:12-13).*

The religious spirit or attitude was not just confined to the Pharisees—the disciples of John the Baptizer had it too:

*Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Mt 9:14-17).*

There is a great lesson here for those who were raised in more traditional churches, but have found a deeper spiritual life in Pentecostal or Charismatic expressions of the Faith. Be careful, that as your excitement diminishes, you do not fall into the trap of the Galatians, who tried to perfect the move and ministry of the Holy Spirit, by religious practices:

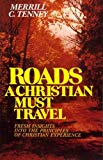
*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh (Gal 3:1-3)?*

New wine should never be poured into old, dried-up, inflexible wine skins that were meaningful in their day. John’s disciples soon discovered Jesus ministry would not be compatible with the model of John the Baptist. Indeed, it was not intended to be so. John’s ministry was in the wilderness and was forged in the fires of a radical break with society. Jesus also spent time in the desert, but his ministry was in the cities, towns and villages (Mt 9:35-36) and his disciples would later be dispatched to the entire world (Mt 28:19-20).

Matthew lets us know that even John the baptiser himself, was unprepared for the radical differences between his ministry and the ministry of Jesus. John seemed to wonder if he had made a mistake about Jesus:

*When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor (Mt 11:2-5).*

# following christ: what does it look and feel like?



In 1979, Merrill C. Tenney wrote an illuminating book on Christian experience entitled: *Roads a Christian Must Travel* (Tyndale,1979).

The book showed what following Jesus might look and feel like. Tenney led his readers to accompany Jesus to some key places in his life and ministry. Tenney’s point was that *a Christian should have a Christ-like experience.*

Using that concept we conclude this launch of the school of discipleship by following Jesus to the Jordan for his baptism, to the desert to be tempted by the devil, to Nazareth, to give his testimony to his home community and to the Garden of Gethsemane for an absolute surrender to the will of the Father.

# FOLLOWING jesus TO THE RIVER JORDAN to be baptised

*Mt 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.  (14)  But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"  (15)  Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.  (16)  As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.  (17)  And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Jesus’ baptism by John posed some problems.

* Professionally, John was not happy because he knew the Christ, or the Messiah, was more important than himself. He had already told the messengers of the Pharisees that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah (Jn 1:27). John protested when Jesus came to be baptised by him: *Ï need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” (Mt 3:15b).*
* Theologically there were problems: Jesus was *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29b),* butJohn’s baptism was a baptism of repentance: It was a baptism from sin: “*People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.  (6)  Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Mat 3:5-6).* Jesus’ baptism could have been misunderstood—people could have thought that Jesus was also a sinner.
* Ministerially there were problems: baptism was the sign of becoming someone’s disciple. By accepting John’s baptism, some people could think that Jesus was coming under the leadership of John’s ministry.

Despite the problems above, Jesus insisted that John baptise him: *“Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented (Mt 3:15).*

Many believers have their own problems with water baptism. Some think because they were christened as a baby, they do not need to be baptised now they have become believers. Others think that baptism is not really necessary. They should hear the words of Jesus: *“Whoever believes AND is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).* If you are serious about following Jesus, you should be willing to humble yourself like Jesus did, and be baptised *“to fulfil all righteousness” (Mt 3:15).*

*A good negative test of the level of your commitment to follow Christ is to recognize all the barriers that you have raised against simple obedience.* Jesus did not accept John’s argument against him being baptised. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit showed their pleasure in Jesus’ submission and obedience:

*Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:10-11).*

Heaven was opened and the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove, and God the Father testified: *“You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11).* If you would like to be an authentic follower of Jesus, check to ensure you have followed him to the Jordan, to be baptised.When Saul gave his personal testimony before the Sanhedrin Council, he spoke of his own reticence to accept baptism. Ananias told him: *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).*

# FOLLOWING CHRIST TO THE DESERT TO BE TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL (Mt 4:1-11)

The role of temptation in the life of Jesus raises some interesting questions. The chief and most significant is: *was it actually possible for Jesus to sin and fail God?* The short answer is “Yes!” The writer to the Hebrews states:

*Heb 4:14-16:  Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.  (15)  For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.  (16)  Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

If the temptation of Jesus was a sham—so was his victory over Satan. However, his victory was real and continues to this day. Paul told the Corinthian believers: *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ” (2Co 2:14a).*

Jesus came as the Second and final Adam. The first Adam was tempted and failed. The Last Adam was tempted and prevailed! The hymnwriter, John Henry Newman wrote in 1865:

*O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came. O wisest love! that flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail;*

God permits temptation in the life of a believer. Temptation is an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to Christ and his will. Thousands of believers waste time trying to bind the devil, while God in his wisdom has decided to allow the devil, limited freedom. The Bible does tell us as believers to *“bind the devil”.* Rather we must *submit ourselves to God—RESIST the devil, and he will flee from us (Jas 4:7).*  If the devil is going to flee—*he must be free!*

God’s purpose in temptation is seen in the most perfect environment that Mankind every experienced—the Garden of Eden. After making the world and stocking it with fish, reptiles, birds, animals, insects etc—God created Adam and Eve. If you are an evolutionist, your temptation might start right there—accepting that the world (not to mention the vast unchartered territories of space) is a divine creation. However, regardless of that, please note in paradise, the presence of the tree of the knowledge of *Good and Evil* together with the tree of life*.*

Just in case Adam might not have noticed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God pointed it out, and told him not to eat from it. The rest is history—Adam and Eve failed the test of temptation. If you are to be an authentic follower of Jesus, prepare yourself to be tempted. The Bible tells us that immediately following his baptism in water, and the descent and permanence of the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus was led by the same Spirit into the desert *“to be tempted by the devil” (Mt 4:1).*

On the surface, Jesus was tempted in three specific areas—food, fame, and faithfulness to God. Below the surface, food represented Jesus’ physical appetites. God gave us a body and our body needs certain things. God does not expect us to abuse our bodies, either by excess or by self-deprivation. However, unbridled, the body’s appetites can become a source of temptation. For this reason it must be disciplined:

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.  (25)  Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.  (26)  So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.  (27)  But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1Co 9:24-27).*

Fame represented Jesus’ psychological temptation—the temptation to *wow the crowd*. The devil offered Jesus a chance to impress people, by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple and having God’s angels break his fall. The Pharisees loved to impress people by their religious zeal. Jesus called them hypocrites:

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, (2) “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, (3) so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.  (4)  They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.  (5)  They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, (6) and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues (Mt 23:1-6).*

Everyone likes to impress others. We dress to impress, we speak to impress, study to impress, work to impress, and amass wealth to impress. Others may even give to charities to impress. Preachers will become performers, unless they resist the temptation in this area. Jesus resisted the temptation to impress anyone but God. Jesus told his disciples:

*And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.  (6)  But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Mt 6:5-6).*

Jesus’ third temptation was spiritual—faithfulness to God. God expects singular faithfulness: *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.  (3)  "You shall have no other gods before me (Ex 20:2-3).* The devil tempted Jesus to compromise that relationship: *"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me" (Mat 4:9).* Jesus rejected this temptation immediately: *“Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Mt 4:10).*

# FOLLOWING CHRIST TO NAZARETH TO DECLARE HIS PERSONAL TESTIMONY AT HOME

Victorious over the tempter in the wilderness, Matthew says: *“Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.* Luke observed *“he left him until an opportune time”.* Then *“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside” (Lk 4:14).* The next thing on Jesus’ agenda as he began his public ministry, was to proclaim his testimony back home in Nazareth. Home may well be the hardest place to take a stand for the Lord, but every disciple will be led by the Lord to do this.

Family and friends need to know what the Lord is doing in our lives. They may not accept our witness, but they have a right to hear. It is pointless to *“go into all the world and preach the gospel”* if we ignore our own family and circle of friends.

Jesus gave his testimony in the synagogue of Nazareth where he was brought up and educated. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus lived there after their return from Egypt. Jesus’ brothers and sisters were born there. Jesus and his siblings attended school there, and Jesus learned his carpentry skills there, in Joseph’s workshop (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). Jesus testimony that he was the promised Messiah is recorded by Luke:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:18-21).*

At first *“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked (Lk 4:22).* However, as Jesus told them of God’s love and even preference for the Gentiles, their mood soon changed:

*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way (Lk 4:28-30).*

A disciple of Jesus needs to learn to give faithful testimony to his family and friends, regardless of the outcome.

# following christ to the garden of gethsemane for an absolute surrender to the will of god (Mt 26:36-44)

We conclude this launch of the school of discipleship by following Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane.

On the surface, the first challenge from Gethsemane is for a disciple of Jesus is to be prayerful just like his master. Jesus prayed early (Mk 1:35), he prayed late (Mk 14:23), he prayed all night (Lk 6:12), he prayed alone (Mt 26:36), he prayed with his disciples (Lk 9:28), and he prayed in public (Jn 11:41-42). Jesus prayed on the mountain (Mt 14:23) and he prayed in the garden Mt 26:36).

Jesus encouraged his disciples to *always pray and not to give up”* (Lk 18:1). Filled with compassion for the multitudes he told his disciples*: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”* (Mt 9:37-38).

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, (but only when they asked him—Lk 11:1). He gave them a model for prayer which Christians have learned to call *The Lord’s Prayer—*even though Jesus never prayed it! Jesus was not teaching his disciples a prayer—he was teaching them *how to pray!* He never expected his disciples to recite the Lord’s prayer although there is nothing wrong with doing so. Jesus taught his disciples some basic topics for prayer.

Jesus also taught his disciples *how not to pray! “Do not pray like the hypocrites!” “Do not pray like the pagans who think they will be heard because of their many words!” (Mt 6:5,7).*

Below the surface, the major lesson to be learned from following Jesus to Gethsemane is that sometimes the will of God is very demanding and difficult. Jesus knew the will of God, but knowing the will of God and doing the will of God are two different things. Prayer is the only way to achieve an absolute surrender to the known will of God. As he prayed in Gethsemane, Jesus listened to *the silence of God.* That is a major lesson for every disciple.

The first time Jesus prayed in the Gethsemane, he said: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39b).* God did not speak, and that led Jesus to listen to the *silence of God.*

Based upon the silence of God, the second time Jesus prayed, he made a small but significant change in his prayer: *“My Father, if it is NOT possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*

Here is a deep lesson on prayer which every disciple needs to learn: When God does not respond to our prayers for deliverance, we should listen to the *silence of God.* Prayers for deliverance must give way to prayers of acceptance—*May your will be done!*

***QUESTION: HAVE YOU ACCEPTED THE CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST?***