

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

We Believe...

IN
DISCIPLESHIP

"GO THEREFORE AND
MAKE DISCIPLES OF
ALL THE NATIONS...
TEACHING THEM TO
OBSERVE ALL THINGS
THAT I HAVE
COMMANDED YOU"

MATTHEW 28:19, 20

By Dr. Lester Sumrall

We Believe in Discipleship

**by
Dr. Lester Sumrall**

*All Scriptures are taken from the
King James Version of the Holy Bible*

*Study Guides, Books, CDs,
DVDs, and MP3s are available
from LeSEA Publishing*

*Copyright © All Rights Reserved
First Printing: April 2008
We Believe in Discipleship
ISBN No. 1-58568-463-5*

*LeSEA Publishing
530 E. Ireland Rd.
South Bend, Indiana 46614
www.leseapublishing.com
A Division of LeSEA, Inc.*

We Believe in Discipleship

Jesus said, “. . . If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Do we really wish to go after Jesus? Do we wish to be his disciples? Such discipleship does not come cheaply. Christ’s formula for discipleship is simple, yet costly to initiate. His three steps, His three laws, His formula for discipleship is this: Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me.

If we intend to have a lifestyle that gives credibility to our message, we must be disciples of Christ in the truest sense. From the beginning of the church there have been those who have tried to live the life in public while following their own whims in private. That approach does not

work. The church will always have Ananias and Sapphira, who tried to put on a public display of Christianity while hiding a heart of deceit; even a lost world can see through that brand of religion. The manner of life, the lifestyle, which gives a genuine ring to the message of the gospel is one that can only be ours when we know Christ in His fullness.

If we try to act like Christ without knowing the fullness of His power in our lives, the world will see us merely as actors. The manner of life that reinforces the message of the gospel is not something we can develop by our own efforts. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is a manifestation of the life of Christ in us. It is a display of the union we spoke of in earlier chapters. The manner of life that tells the world our message is true is the manner of life that declares, in a way that words cannot, that we are united with Christ. That manner of life is real discipleship, which only comes when we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ.

DENIAL

How many people do you know who are willing to deny themselves to save the world? We are speaking of immortal souls, of the eternal destiny of men and women. Do you know many who deny themselves for that cause? The principle of denying ourselves is a great equalizer. The rich man, the talented man, the man with much wealth or fame, may be called upon to deny a great deal. The poor man, the plain man, the simple man, may be called upon to deny himself of a relatively small amount. But Jesus does not measure that denial in terms of how much we have given up. He simply said, “Deny yourself.”

He did not ask us to deny a portion of ourselves. He did not ask us to give up a little of what we have. He has asked us to deny ourselves in the same way that He denied Himself. He denied Himself the privilege of heaven’s throne and the opportunity for regal splendor on earth in order to save the world. He did not give up some. He did not give up most. He gave up *all*. There are many

areas in which we, as believers, can and should deny ourselves. The goal is not, however, to see who can give up the most. The goal is not to make ourselves feel good by constantly reminding ourselves of how much we have given up for Christ. The goal is to totally lay aside all of our resources, our abilities, our ambitions, even our families, in order to know Christ in the fullest sense. When we have known Him and walked with Him, then we will be able to tell others about Him, and more effectively reach our world for Christ.

The area of finance is often a difficult one to discuss. Frankly, many of the means we employ to spread the message of Christ are very expensive. Christian broadcasting requires a great deal of money. Operating even the simplest local church takes money. Sending missionaries to foreign lands requires considerable sums of money. I do not believe this is accidental. A man's attitude toward money tells us a great deal about his attitude toward God.

It is a true principle that when men and money

come together one generally controls the other. A man who controls his money can keep it or spend it. He can give it to a worthy cause, invest it, or spend it to meet his daily needs. A man who, on the other hand, is controlled by his money is always trying to get more. He looks at financial decisions from the standpoint of personal gain and personal loss. Before he can give to a worthy cause, he must be assured that his gift is tax deductible. He often gives not so much to help the recipient as to soothe his own conscience. For him, giving is a means to an end, a way to gain favor with others or to soothe his own conscience and enhance his self-image. If he loses money through a bad investment, he grieves over the loss, never stopping to praise God for the lessons he may have learned through such an experience. In short, his money owns him to a larger extent than he owns it. Whether he wishes to admit it or not, money, not God, is his master.

I am not suggesting that God endorses an irresponsible attitude toward money. He does not. He

expects us to be faithful stewards of the financial resources He has given us. This is the key: They are resources *He* has given us. If we inherited them, they came to us from another and not from ourselves. If we received them as wages for labor, we should realize that we were only able to perform that labor because God graciously provided us with the ability to work and the opportunity to hold a job. In either case, we have the financial resources we enjoy only because God has allowed us to have them. In a real sense they are not ours at all. They are His, placed temporarily at our disposal.

To deny ourselves in the area of money means that we are willing to regard our entire income as a resource placed at our disposal by God. It is not ours. It is His. If He chooses to increase it, we praise Him. If he chooses to take it away, we praise Him still. If He tells us to give to a local church, we give. If He tells us to meet the needs of others, we meet those needs. To deny ourselves means that we are not constantly grasping for

money, not constantly scheming for gain, not constantly planning bigger and better ways to get more.

Denying ourselves means that we are responsible for what God has given us but also willing to part with every dime if He should direct us to do so. I believe that God designed money as a type of spiritual barometer. One of the easiest ways to detect whether or not a person has truly denied himself is to observe his attitude toward money. If he is bound by money and controlled by it, it is not likely that he has truly denied himself in order to seek Christ. When preachers and churches and Christ-honoring ministries are constantly forced to beg for money, it is a pretty good indication that many who have accepted Christ have not denied themselves in order to follow Him.

God has promised that if we give, it shall be given to us, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. This is a guarantee from the Lord, just as much as His guarantee of salvation. Those who give up themselves for the Lord do not lose.

God returns blessings to them until their lives overflow. Still, most Christians are so controlled by money that they cannot turn loose of it. The need, however, is not for Christians to give up their money. The need is for Christians to deny themselves. If more believers would truly deny themselves in order to seek Christ, the financial difficulties of most ministries would cease. When those believers have truly denied themselves, money would no longer control them. Money would no longer fill such an important position in their lives, and they would be more willing to give. God would bless their giving with prosperity, and they would be willing and able to give again.

There is a definite cycle to giving. We give ourselves to God. He leads us to give our finances. As we give, He gives to us again. Then we are able to give a second time, renewing the cycle. It goes on endlessly. Unfortunately, this cycle is rarely observed in today's church. Since few believers have truly denied themselves, they are still caught up in and controlled by the desire for money. They

do not give, and God does not bless. The result is that the message is not presented to those who have never heard it. Denying ourselves does not mean giving of our finances. It is certainly possible to give for the wrong reasons. However, it is not possible for a person who has truly denied himself and begun to see Christ to have a selfish and grasping attitude toward his personal finances.

We do not become a better disciple by giving money, but our attitude toward giving money can certainly reveal whether or not we are a true disciple, whether or not we have denied ourselves to follow Christ.

Jesus knew that if He were to save the world, He could not save Himself. He had to give Himself for others. He expects no less of us. In a practical sense He expects us to place ourselves totally at His disposal, to hold back nothing, to totally deny ourselves. Our financial affairs are probably the most visible area through which we can discern whether we have totally given ourselves to God.

Make a quick inventory of your personal belongings. Many who are reading these pages own their homes. But is that home really yours? Many would reply that it is more the property of the mortgage company than it is theirs. In many cases this is true, but it is not our principal concern. Even if you hold the title on your home free and clear, is it really yours? Do you regard your home as your personal property, or do you recognize it as God's property placed temporarily in your care?

What about that car you spent the past Saturday afternoon washing and waxing so carefully? Is it truly your property? Consider the television set, the stereo, the furniture, the clothes, the appliances, and the other personal items in your home. Are they really yours? Many of us, at one time or another, have experienced a time of dedication. It may have been at the altar of our church. Perhaps it was while listening to a radio or television speaker. We may have experienced this time of dedication during our personal Bible reading or devotion time. In such a moment of dedication

we may have presented ourselves totally to God. Certainly our intentions were good, but was the presentation real?

Using our finances as a barometer, let us consider how real that dedication was. Consider a typical man's wallet. If we were to open it and examine the contents we might find some money, several credit cards, a driver's license, a Social Security card, membership cards to various organizations, pictures of family and friends, and other similar items. If we lay the wallet on the table, it stands to reason that we have also laid all the contents of the wallet on the table. It is not necessary for us to remove the contents from the wallet and spread them on the tabletop. By simply placing the wallet on the table, we have placed its contents there as well. If we put the wallet in a box, seal the box, and mail it to a friend, we have mailed the wallet and all of its contents to that person. Where the wallet goes, the contents go. If we can see ourselves and our lives as that wallet, then the illustration becomes meaningful.

Our lives contain our personal possessions, our occupation and all that concerns it—our ambitions, our plans, our dreams, our goals, our children, our relatives, our husbands or wives. Where our lives go, all the things that make up our lives must go as well. Many Christians are content to give God the wallet, but only after they have emptied it of all its contents. They are willing to give God something abstract, their life. They are not willing, however, to give God something concrete, the things that make up their lives.

When we dedicated our life to Christ, did we give Him the things that make up our lives? Can we honestly say that our monthly income is God's? Is our home God's? Is our car God's? Are our personal belongings God's? What about our job? Have we given it to God? Are we willing to part with it if God should lead us to do so? Would we be willing to give up our careers, if God so required, in order to take the gospel to those who have never heard? Of course, God does not require everyone to become a missionary or a

preacher or an evangelist. He only requires that we be willing to do so if He asks. What about our ambitions? Have we truly given our plans and dreams and goals to God? Has there ever been a time when we have told Him we would be willing to lay aside all that we have ever wanted to do and all that we have ever wanted to be in order to serve Him? That is the essence of denying ourselves. It is being willing to put aside everything, if God asks. And everything includes our family, friends, and loved ones.

How many of us, who hope our children will become doctors or lawyers, would be willing to give them to God so that they might become missionaries or preachers or teachers of the gospel? Have we turned our husbands and our wives and our children and our loved ones over to Christ for His use? Have we so totally denied ourselves that God is free to take and use everything that we have?

The first step toward effective discipleship is to deny ourselves. To deny ourselves is to deny all claims on everything and everyone. To deny

ourselves is to turn our lives over to God. To deny ourselves is to allow Him to do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, with anything and everything that makes up our lives. Ourselves we cannot save. If we try to tell the world of the gospel of Christ while clinging selfishly to our financial resources, our occupational interests, our personal ambitions, and our relationships with others, our manner of life may weaken our message. If we would save the world, we cannot save ourselves. That means denying everything that we have in order to reach others. Jesus did this, and invites us to do the same.

TAKING UP THE CROSS

The second step on the road to discipleship is to take up our cross. It seems like a simple thing to take up our cross. We may put it on a chain and wear it around our neck. We may put it on top of the steeple of our church, or hang it on the wall in our home. But that cross is not our cross. That is Jesus' cross. Our cross is not silver or gold. It is

not ornamental. It is a heavy cross, a burdensome cross, a cross to be despised. The work that Jesus did on the cross has been completed. He died there and carried away forever the curse of sin. We may use the symbol of the cross to remind us of what He has done for us, but we should not mistake that symbol for our own cross.

Many are eager to take up Jesus' cross. They enjoy basking in the truth that their sins are forgiven. They enjoy standing in the shade of Jesus' cross and leaning back on the truth that He has completed the requirements for our salvation. There is nothing wrong with this, unless we become so enamored with Jesus' cross that we neglect to take up our own. Bearing our cross is a daily matter. It is a matter of living and giving and working for the Master.

We have already said that discipleship does not come cheaply. Neither does crucifixion come painlessly. In Roman times it was customary to require a condemned criminal to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Jesus was required to

carry His own cross until He became so weak from the physical abuse He had experienced that He could no longer bear the load. Bearing one's cross became an expression, which meant being condemned to death.

When Jesus said we should take up our cross, He was using the expression of His time, which meant that we should be willing to die. When He said that His disciples would be required to take up their crosses, those who were listening did not misunderstand. They did not picture someone simply picking up a wooden cross and moving it from one location to another. They clearly understood that Jesus was speaking of death.

This does not, of course, mean that in order to become a disciple of Jesus Christ we must be killed. Quite the contrary, He expects us to live for Him on a daily basis. Still, there is death. When we spoke of Saul of Tarsus in an earlier chapter, we said that he died on the road to Damascus. All that Saul had been passed away. From that day forward there was a new man, a man born again

by the grace of God. He was a new creature; the old had died. The new man, Paul, later wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul was recognizing the fact that when Jesus died, Paul died with Him. We should all recognize this as truth.

When we accept Christ we accept His death as our own. Our old man is passed away. A new man is born. The Crucifixion happened once, and only once. It cannot and will not be repeated. Still, there is a sense in which we must take up our cross daily. We must be sentenced to death daily. Those parts of us which are still very much like the world must die daily. If we are to reach the world for Christ we must, on a daily basis, allow God to crucify those things which link us to the old life.

Do you recall the three crosses we spoke of earlier? Do you recall that Paul said he had been

crucified to the world and the world crucified to him? That concept applies here as well. Our cross is the cross upon which those things which link us to our old way of life are to be nailed. Sometimes it can be painful. Sometimes we will see things that we once enjoyed, and are not quite ready to give up, being nailed to the cross. Sometimes the ambitions, hopes, ideas, and financial resources which we gave to God will be openly nailed to the cross. Often it is unpleasant, but it is God's way. And God's way is always best.

There is another sense in which it can be painful. Bearing the cross of Jesus may mean that we will also experience the ridicule He experienced. Jesus was laughed at; we may be laughed at. Jesus was mocked; we may be mocked. The people with whom we work at the shop or office may call us "preacher." They may turn up their noses at us and say we are prudish or puritanical. They may ridicule us for refusing to engage in sin. They may abuse us. They may give us a taste of what Jesus experienced on our behalf. But Jesus

experienced it and survived. If we depend upon Him for strength we will be able to survive it as well. And when we do, people will see in our manner of life a testimony that proves to them the reality of the message we preach.

If we buckle under their ridicule, they may conclude that our message is just as shaky as we are. It is important for us to bear our cross on a daily basis, without complaint, so that others might be brought to Christ by our testimony. If we would save the world, we cannot save ourselves. If we would reach others for Christ, if we would be His disciple, we must be willing to bear our own cross daily.

FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS

Finally, if we would be effective disciples, we must follow Jesus. We must be willing to go where He tells us to go, and do what He tells us to do. If we have not denied ourselves, when He calls we may be too busy with our own affairs to follow. Therefore we must deny ourselves, lay our own

affairs aside. If we are not willing to take up our cross, when He calls we may feel that the task is too difficult. We may not feel that we can complete it. It is important that we pick up our cross, and bear whatever pain is necessary to reach others. When we have put aside our own affairs and have shown ourselves ready and willing to suffer for Christ, He will lead. When He leads, we will be able to follow. We will not be bound by the affairs of the world or discouraged by the difficulty of the task.

When we follow Him, there will be a genuine ring to our life. Our message will not be weakened by personal hypocrisy. The combination of the message of the gospel and the pure and honest life of discipleship will make it possible for us to save those around us.

To the best of my knowledge, Christians who would deny themselves and take up their crosses to follow Christ are in the minority. God has given us three steps to discipleship, but we have not obeyed. We say, “Lord, save the world,” but He

will not do it. He has chosen to work through us, and He cannot work through us until we are willing to obey Him, until we are willing to give up ourselves for others.

The church of our generation has saved itself and lost the world. The multitudes no longer attend the churches; we have lost them. There was a time when almost everyone went to church. That time is no more. Why did we lose them? Because we saved ourselves. Sinners know that many of the great denominations have large sums of money and great resources in Wall Street. They see the wealth of these great religious organizations and read of their intricate plans to avoid taxation, and conclude that Christians are more concerned with themselves than with the lost. They conclude, and too often are correct, that the church is out to save itself, not the world. We have heard many Christian brothers say they are saving for a rainy day. Such an idea is certainly not from God, for He has promised to supply our every need every day. Again, I am not suggesting that Christians

become irresponsible with their money, only that they realize God is their source of supply.

It is not right for religious leaders and denominations to build up millions of dollars in assets while the world is going to hell. It is time for Christians to be willing to lose themselves in order to save the world.

As Jesus hung on the cross, the religious leaders of His day stood by and mocked. They said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” They were right. He had saved others. They were also right in saying that He could not save Himself. He could not, not if He expected to save the world. Could those who observe our lives say the same of us? Or would they conclude that we have saved ourselves and lost the world?

Prayer of Salvation

Lord Jesus I confess I am a sinner and I repent (stop sinning and turn away from my sins). Please forgive me. I accept you as my Lord, Master and Savior. I thank you for taking my judgment of death for my sin debt, by being nailed to the cross and shedding your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. I thank you for giving me your righteousness for my sins.

I promise to love you and with your help obey you all the days of my life. I will confess you before all mankind and never be ashamed of you. Please change me, and give me your grace and love for all people. Show me the plan you have for my life and help me to fulfill it.

Sign your name

(1) -Be sure to read your Bible daily, (2) -Pray daily, and (3) -Attend a Bible-believing church.

We Believe in Discipleship
originated from excerpts from the book
The Stigma of Calvary

Table of Contents from
The Stigma of Calvary Book

Introduction	9
1. The Feasts That Jesus Gave	13
2. The Lord's Supper	21
3. What Mean Ye by This Sacrifice?	35
4. The Two Cups of Communion	41
5. Three Crosses	55
6. The Sins That Killed Jesus	71
7. Seven Saying, Seven Affirmations, Seven Words	85
8. Himself He Cannot Save	97
9. The Suffering Savior	121
10. The Stigma of the Cross	139
11. Brokenness Is Strength	155
12. The Sacrifice Bound to the Altar	163
13. Memorials	173

Dr. Lester Sumrall

1913~1996

The voice of Dr. Lester Sumrall remains prominent in the Christian world today. More than 65 years of ministry in over 100 nations made Dr. Sumrall a respected source of wisdom and understanding. He was an author, teacher, missionary, evangelist, and the pastor and founder of Christian Center Church in South Bend, Indiana.

Throughout his lifetime, Dr. Sumrall worked tirelessly to fulfill the Great Commission by carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In 1957 he founded LeSEA, a multi-faceted global outreach. Today, with the help of our faithful partners and friends, the ministry continues to blanket the world through television, satellite, FM and shortwave radio, LeSEA Publications, and LeSEA Global Feed the Hungry®.

www.leseapublishing.com

www.feedthehungry.org

www.familybroadcastingcorporation.com

LeSEA Publishing
530 E. Ireland Rd.
South Bend, IN 46614

www.LeSEAPublishing.com
1-888-584-4847