

26 May 2024

The Price and Blessings of Discipleship

Dear Sisters and Elders,

"The world is hostile to the commandments of God". This statement uttered by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland in the April 2014 General Conference has been ringing in my ears. We all know this truth. We experience it too often in the people we meet and speak with. And yet, despite the pressures of the world, God expects us to be His disciples, those who are to keep the very commandments the world mocks.

Chauncey C. Riddle, a BYU professor of philosophy explained what it means to be a disciple. *"The word disciple comes from the Latin [meaning] a learner. A disciple of Christ is one who is learning to be like Christ—learning to think, to feel, and to act [like] he does. To be a true disciple, to fulfill that learning task, is the most demanding regimen known to man. No other discipline compares ... in either requirements or rewards. It involves the total transformation of a person from the state of the natural man to that of [a] saint, one who loves the Lord and serves with all of his heart, might, mind, and strength"* ("Becoming a Disciple," Ensign, Sept. 1974, 81).

President Faust, a member of the First Presidency shared a similar definition of the word during his October 2006 conference talk. *"It is primarily obedience to the Savior. Discipleship includes many things. It is chastity. It is tithing. It is family home evening. It is keeping all the commandments. It is forsaking anything that is not good for us. Everything in life has a price. Considering the savior's great promise for peace in this life and eternal life in the life to come, discipleship is a price worth paying. It is a price we cannot afford NOT to pay. By measure, the requirements of discipleship are much, much less than the promised blessings."*

Discipleship involves taking up our cross daily as explained in Luke 9:23. *"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* And later in Luke 14:27, we are brought even greater clarity, *"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."* What does it mean to "take up his cross daily" and "bear his cross"? Elder Ulisses S. Soares in the October 2019 General Conference said, *"Through this declaration, the Savior emphasized that all those who are willing to follow Him need to deny themselves and control their desires, appetites, and passions, sacrificing everything, even life itself if necessary, being entirely submissive to the will of the Father—just as He did. This is, in fact, the price to be paid for the salvation of a soul."*

The JST Translation of Matthew 16:26 reinforces this, *"And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. "In vs 29 of that same chapter, also referencing the JST Translation it says, "Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls; for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Referencing Elder Holland's statement about the world being hostile to the commandments of God, there are many who feel that discipleship is old fashioned and out of date. Many choose to believe in a

High Love – Low Expectation God. They pattern themselves after the prophecy recorded in 2 Nephi 28:7-8. *“Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.”*

Elder Holland has a powerful response to this attitude included in the same talk mentioned above. He paraphrased a quote from Henry Fairlie, written in a book called *“The Seven Deadly Sins Today”*. I will use Elder Holland’s words, *“Sadly enough, my young friends, it is a characteristic of our age that if people want any gods at all, they want them to be gods who do not demand much, comfortable gods, smooth gods who not only don’t rock the boat but don’t even row it, gods who pat us on the head, make us giggle, then tell us to run along and pick marigolds”*. He goes on to say: *“Talk about man creating God in his own image! Sometimes—and this seems the greatest irony of all—these folks invoke the name of Jesus as one who was this kind of “comfortable” God. Really? He who said not only should we not break commandments, but we should not even think about breaking them. And if we do think about breaking them, we have already broken them in our heart. Does that sound like “comfortable” doctrine, easy on the ear and popular down at the village love-in?”*

Elder Christopherson added his voice to this concept of a “Low Expectation God” in his October 2014 conference address titled, “Free Forever to Act for Themselves”. He said, *“A God who makes no demands is the functional equivalent of a God who does not exist.”*

For us, it is clear that our God is a “High Love - High Expectation God”. There is a price to be paid for discipleship that will lead us to eventually becoming like God ... and it is a price that must be paid if this is our desire. The scriptures are filled with examples of discipleship from men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses all the way down to Nephi, Peter, and Joseph Smith. All of them paid the price. And what of those who chose not to pay the price? They are also recorded in these same scriptures. Men like King David, Ahaz, and the Sons of Eli all the way down to Laman, Amalickiah, and Judas Iscariot. Comparing the lives of disciples vs. non-disciples is instructive in understanding the impact and blessings of choosing to follow Jesus Christ. I invite you to do your own study of these men and learn for yourselves.

To help us along this path of discipleship, In October 2022, President Nelson spoke to the Saints in British Columbia, and Alberta, Canada about how to progress on this path. He identified 6 steps we can take to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. “Increase your Capacity to Receive Revelation.”
2. “Fill Your Life with Truth.”
3. “Refuse to Let Opposition to Truth Weaken Your Testimony.”
4. “Serve and Worship in the Temple as Much as You Can.”
5. “Realize Just How Vital You Are to the Gathering of Israel.”
6. “Expect Joy.”

For those who choose discipleship, Elder Holland (still the same talk) shares his insights of the journey and resultant blessings: *“The path of Christian discipleship ... is a strait path, and it is a narrow path without a great deal of latitude at some points, but it can be thrillingly and successfully traveled, “with ... steadfastness in Christ, ... a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men.” In courageously pursuing such a course, **you will forge unshakable faith, you will find safety against ill winds that blow, even shafts in the whirlwind, and you will feel the rock-like strength of our Redeemer, upon whom if you build your unflagging discipleship, you cannot fall.**”*

Ultimately, the path of discipleship will always lead to a place in the highest degree of celestial glory where God the Father dwells. This is stated clearly in D&C 76:51-54 speaking of those who receive this glory, *“They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given— That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true. They are they who are the church of the Firstborn.”*

One last quote from President Steven J. Lund, General Young Men’s President, responding to this question from a returning missionary: *“How can loving God turn into lasting discipleship?”* (October 2022 GC). His response to this question is powerful...and applicable to all of us. *“Your mission discipline and sacrifices have made you a magnificent son [or daughter] of God. Keep doing at home what has worked so powerfully for you here. You have learned to pray and to whom you pray and the language of prayer. You have studied His words and come to love the Savior by trying to be like Him. You have loved Heavenly Father like He loved His Father, served others like He served others, and lived the commandments like He lived them—and when you didn’t, you have repented. Your discipleship isn’t just a slogan on a T-shirt—it has become a part of your life purposefully lived for others. So you go home, and you do that. Be that. Carry this spiritual momentum into the rest of your life.”*

My hope is that we will each choose to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ. I invite you to ponder this important question: *“What is holding you back from deepening your discipleship?”* May we each desire to pay the price of discipleship and claim the blessings of eternal life with the Father.

All My Love,

President Kunz