

# General Introduction to Discipleship

By Pastor Jim Park, Ph.D.

I became personally interested in discipleship after reading the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9 shortly after my conversion as a young adult. I had grown up as a very devout Catholic but had wandered away from God a time. After reading the Bible and being led by His Providence, I became reconverted and began to study His Word in earnest.

The parable of the sower is basically a story about how the seed as the Word of God is affected by four different types of soil. Three of the four soils are hostile to long-term growth and the seed eventually withers after a short time. It is only seed that finds the “good” soil that is able to produce a bountiful crop.

Upon reading this story, I clearly saw myself as one of the unfruitful seeds that had allowed the thorns of life to choke out my spirituality. I earnestly determined to make my first backsliding experience my last and began to earnestly seek the principles which would ensure the continual and long-term growth of my Christian faith.

I did not know it at the time, but the area which was to become my life-study was called “discipleship.” Discipleship is basically learning how to become like that fruitful plant in the parable of the sower. While nobody can explain either the mystery of life in a seed or how people grow spiritually, there are some principles that can greatly contribute to the potential for growth in both the natural and spiritual worlds.

This book is designed to teach and help you put into practice ten important principles of discipleship over a ten week period. Each of the ten sections begins with a short introduction about a discipleship principle which is then followed by seven devotional readings about that topic. The book is setup to be used as a daily devotional, which in itself is a foundational discipleship principle.

The ten principles of discipleship are further divided into two sections—the first section deals with the five disciplines of discipleship and the second section covers the five spiritual principles of being a disciple.

The five disciplines of discipleship dealt with in the first section cover the daily abiding with the Lord through the Word, prayer and ministry to others and the weekly gathering together with others in small groups and worship. The five principles of spirituality in the second section attempts to show how the converted life affects the will, faith and the production of fruit along with the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the Sabbath in discipleship.

It is my hope and prayer that the seeds in this book will produce a wondrous harvest in your life — “a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:8).

## Introduction to the Daily Disciplines

God grows the church by growing people. This principle was introduced early into the very life and culture of the children of Israel by means of the sanctuary service. After their apostasy with the golden calf at Mount Sinai, the Lord instructed Moses to “Let them make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them” (*Exodus 25:8*).

Having mercy on their ignorance, the Lord in a sense gets down in the sand on His hands and knees and begins to show His children how they are to abide and grow in His presence through the sanctuary services.

The Lord first shows Moses the pattern of the sanctuary which he and the Israelites are to build. According to Scripture, the earthly sanctuary was patterned after the heavenly sanctuary and contains many important spiritual and prophetic truths (*Exodus 25:9; Hebrews 8:5, Daniel 8:14*).

While the second chapter on prayer focuses on the sanctuary in general, this introduction to the daily disciplines will concentrate on the Holy Place which contained the table of showbread, the altar of incense and the seven-branched candlestick. Each of these articles of furniture in the Holy Place were part of the “daily” ministrations of the priest and gives a beautiful illustration of the three concrete things we can do each day to grow in our Christian life.

As the priest would enter the Holy Place, the table of showbread (or the Bread of the Presence *Exodus 39:36*) was on the right-hand side of the room. The bread was made out of the manna which the Lord daily gave the children of Israel. The manna was baked by the priests and placed in the Holy Place every Sabbath.

Jesus stated that He Himself was the true bread which came down from heaven. The words which He spoke were the bread of life which His growing disciples were to feed upon on a daily basis (*John 6:32ff*). Thus the table of showbread represented in a very real sense, feeding on the Bread of Life, listening to the Word of the Lord in order to gain strength and wisdom for daily living. The daily devotional reading and feeding upon God’s Word is the first and most foundational element of the growth of the disciple. And it is this daily feeding upon God’s Word that the table of showbread was to primarily teach.

The second foundational discipline of discipleship taught by the Holy Place was illustrated by the altar of incense. This golden altar stood directly in front of the curtain which separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place. That curtain did not go to the top of the ceiling and as the fragrant incense arose from the altar, it would fill both compartments of the sanctuary.

In Revelation 8:3-4 John writes that he saw an angel standing before the golden altar of incense offering up the prayers of the saints before the throne of God. In addition, Hebrews 7:25 states that Jesus our High Priest, “always lives to intercede for them.” After eating at the table of showbread, the Holy Place taught us to offer up our petitions to our loving Savior whose full-time job is to bring all our cares and wants to the Father above. Prayer then is the second daily devotional discipline.

On the left hand side of the Holy Place, opposite the table of showbread, was the seven-branched candlestick which reflected its warm light throughout the sanctuary. Jesus instructed His disciples that they were not to hide their lights under a basket but let it shine so that everyone could be blessed through the sharing of God’s love to others (Matthew 5:14-16).

Thus the Holy Place taught a very wholistic approach to discipleship and the Christian life. In addition to the devotional exercises of study and prayer we are to go forth to actively share with others the blessings God has given to us. Maximum health can only be maintained in both our physical and spiritual lives by a balanced regimen of diet and exercise. We cannot work for long without food and eating without exercise leads to a decline in health.

In the first three sections are taught these same three foundational disciplines which should be consistently and thoroughly integrated into the life of all those who desire to be daily disciples. May the daily study and practice of these principles help you to produce mature fruit for the Kingdom until He comes.

## Fallingwater

All that the Kaufmann family wanted was a simple summer weekend cottage by their favorite stream called Bear Run some seventy miles southeast of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. What they got was a masterpiece, designed by the capricious and eccentric architect Frank Lloyd Wright and aptly named “Fallingwater.”

Edgar J. Kaufmann owned a department store in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania during the Great depression of the 1930s. For many years Bear Run had provided a rustic place for the Kaufmann family and their employees to get away from the city and spend time embraced in the quiet fortunes of nature. The family in particular enjoyed picnicking beside a twenty foot waterfall which sang its tireless song throughout the beautiful wooded area. And it was beside this waterfall that Edgar Kaufmann engaged the noted, but mostly unemployed sixty-seven year old architect from Wisconsin, to build a weekend home for his family.

Wright was always long on vision but short on money and execution. After several months of delay, Kauffman informed Wright that he would be driving from Milwaukee to the architect’s studio that day in order to see plans for the house. Wright’s apprentices afterwards noted that the client’s imminent arrival did not seem to bother their noted teacher at all. With topological map in hand, the ever confident Wright made some preliminary sketches and warmly greeted Kauffman.

After explaining how the house would be cantilevered over the waterfall, the very pragmatic Kaufmann remarked, “I thought that you would place the house near the waterfall, not over it.” To this Wright replied, “E.J., I want you to live with the waterfall, not just to look at it, but for it to become an integral part of your lives.”

An integral part indeed. The house with its strong horizontal lines, juts out from the rock outcroppings and comes to rest directly over the falling water. Whereas the visual effect of a house stretched over a descending stream is most dramatic, the sound of the water naturally and continually reverberating through the home is a wonder to hear.

Fallingwater. The sound of life in the forest is also a metaphor for the spring of fruitfulness in the life of the believer. Three thousand years before the sound of water would fill the Kauffman home with its lilting verse, the shepherd-King David would sing that God’s faithful children were to be like trees, “planted by streams of water” (Psalms 1:3).

Just as trees need a constant supply of water in order to grow, the hearts of God’s children need a daily flow of life-giving water. According to Psalms 1:2, the stream which is to constantly enrich the Christian life flows from the Word of God: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” As Fallingwater was

transformed by the sound of the living stream, the Master Architect longs to have His Living Water constantly flowing through His believing children in blessing for others.

A couple of years ago I visited Fallingwater with my cousin Jerry Deible who lives near Pittsburg. I had gotten together with him earlier in the day in order to visit his mother who was nicknamed “Nippy.” Aunt Nippy had been my mother’s favorite sister and I wanted to see her in the convalescent home where she was staying.

After our visit with his mother I invited Jerry to go with me to see Fallingwater. Although Jerry had taken some architectural classes in college and lived only seventy miles from the world’s most famous house, he had never visited the sight!

Some places on our planet are as much a sanctuary as a church. Such is Fallingwater. Standing below the house near the stream you hardly believe what you see and hear. Both the design and the placement of the house are so unique that it constantly invites you to gaze at it again and again. And the sound of that ever-running stream fills the house with a quiet solemnity that is not soon forgotten. I was so very glad to take the time to go out and visit this architectural masterpiece which fulfilled Frank Lloyd’s Wright vision of having the waterfall become an integral part of one family’s life.

Isaiah 37:31 tells us that we are to “take root below and bear fruit above.” If we as Christian disciples truly desire to be “rooted and grounded” in the love of God (Ephesians 3:17), then we must intentionally choose day by day, moment by moment to abide by the stream of God’s Word. Our fruitfulness above will be in direct proportion to the growth of our roots below.

Let us not be like those who have only heard about the Word but have never transplanted themselves beside its rich currents. Move next to The Water. Listen to its lilting verse. Let it become an integral part of your life.

The ten devotionals in this first section not only stress the importance of God’s Word in the life of the disciple but also gives practical principles which can help make this spiritual discipline a dynamic reality.

## How to Make Manna *Tasty*

Over the last several years my wife and I have had a weekly “date” of going out and eating at a local restaurant. Although Los Angeles has no shortage of restaurants of every ethnicity and type we are often befuddled by just where to go. I often tell my wife that it really doesn’t matter where we go, just so the food is *tasty*.

Many people who have tried to persevere in a daily devotional reading of God’s Word have often become disinterested because they have found that the manna is not very tasty. In the following pages are some very practical suggestions on how to transform a bread and water experience into a real feast!

**Make a Reservation**—No reservations are ever required to eat at McDonald’s or Wendy’s. In fact, you don’t even have to get out of your car! Let’s face it. Most of our meals today resemble a pit stop at Daytona rather than a Thanksgiving feast at grandma’s house. And could it be that this same hurry up offense would be carried over to our devotional lives as well?

If we want the Water of Life to seep deeply into our lives then we must have more than a splash and go mentality. Just as you must make a reservation to eat at a fine restaurant, why not block out a daily time to feast at the table which he has daily prepared for us (Psalms 23:5)?

Now just where are you going to find the time to make this reservation? First of all we should determine to give the *best* of our time to Jesus. That means we need to find the time during the day when we are the most awake and alert. While some people have found that the morning is when they are at their best, others don’t really get started until later in the day. Make your reservation when you are most likely to be awake and not when you are most likely to rest.

**Choose a Table**—Next, you need to ask for the best seat in the restaurant. Don’t be content with a seat by that swinging door the waiters use or an open table surrounded by others. Jesus desires an intimate meal with us. How about that quiet booth over there by the window with the sun shining through? Yes, that will do. Hmm. I can already sense that this is not going to be an ordinary meal. I can hardly wait to see the menu.

## Look Over the Menu

If you have ever been to a true ethnic restaurant, you know how daunting reading the menu can be. Chinese menus are especially notorious for being extremely long. (It is really quite amazing how many different dishes can be made from a fairly limited amount of ingredients). Even with English subtitles the food you just ordered remains a mystery until it is cooked, served and now happily staring you in the face.

Many people face a similar dilemma when they look over the extensive menu the Bible has to offer. They might have determined to have a devotional time and are sitting at that spiritual table just waiting to be fed. Then they look at the Bible and it just seems to go on and on. Questions arise about where to start, how much to read and what would be the most helpful sections. Some people in frustration opt for the completely random approach and open the Bible to just anywhere and begin to read. As we all know, taking time to look over the menu is bound to enhance your culinary experience. Here are some suggestions about how to begin or enhance your devotional reading:

**Ask the Waiter:** Just as a good waiter will guide you in making your selections, the Holy Spirit has been promised to guide us in our search for truth and spiritual growth (John 16:13). Therefore ask the Heavenly Waiter in your choice of spiritual food. He certainly knows both your own heart and the menu as well. Here are some starting suggestions:

**Devotional Books:** There are many wonderful devotional books specifically written for many different groups of people (including this volume on discipleship). These books are carefully crafted to provide bite-sized daily portions of Scripture.

**Proverbs 1-31:** One menu item that I have found particularly interesting is the systematic reading of the thirty-one chapters of Proverbs. If you are wondering what to read on the sixth day of any month you can browse over to the sixth chapter of Proverbs and so forth. The book of Proverbs offers bite-sized pieces of wonderful nourishment for the soul.

**The Gospel of John:** The gospel of John is another favorite devotional reading. There are many wonderful stories here, including the Wedding Feast of Cana (John 2); the meeting with Nicodemus (John 3) and the Women at the Well (John 4). The gospel of John is written in simple language which belies its real spiritual depth.

Now that you have the time, the place and the food you are ready to be trained in the fine art of eating God's Word.

## Eat Slowly

Although we live in a modern world where fast food is ordered quickly, consumed quickly and forgotten quickly, the study of the Bible does not lend itself to such a rapid approach. The Word of God must be eaten slowly in order to give the proper nourishment for our souls. Here are some very practical tips that many people have found to be helpful in their daily study of the Bible or other devotional material.

**Copy the Text:** Before you begin to study any text of Scripture or other devotional reading, it is most helpful to print a **big** copy of the text on a piece of paper. This greatly enhances the interaction with the text which cannot be done when merely reading the words in book form. There are several different ways to enlarge the text for better study:

- The text can be enlarged through duplicating on a copy machine.
- If you have the Bible on your computer, import it into a word processor and then it can be formatted for greater ease of study.
- If you do not have the Bible on your computer, go to <http://www.tagnet.org/bible/> or <http://bible.gospelcom.net/> and get the portions of Scripture there.

**Mark the Text:** One of the best pieces of advice in studying Scripture is to use a pencil or a pen to mark the text. I prefer a writing instrument to a highlighter because it provides more flexibility as you circle, underline or make notes about your observations. The pencil not only slows down your reading but is like a second pair of eyes which helps you to observe the wonderful structure and relationships that is built into many texts.

**Meditate on the Text:** The Lord instructed Joshua to “not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (*Joshua 1:8*). The meaning of the Hebrew word for “meditate” in this verse conveys the idea of speaking to one’s self which is certainly in harmony with the instruction to not let the word “depart from your mouth.”

Anything that we can do to carry about the Word of God in our heart, our minds, our eyes or our mouth will be greatly instrumental in our being prosperous in the spiritual life.

## Tip the Waiter

We have probably all experienced both the pleasure of being waited upon by a knowledgeable and attentive person or the growing realization that the individual assigned to our table is apparently out to lunch themselves!

Well next time you sit down to feed on God's Word I would like to highly recommend the very best Waiter in the universe. He is not only the nicest person I have ever met, but is the Wisest Waiter in the whole universe.

First of all He is always so very glad to see me take the time to eat at His restaurant. He welcomes me in such a positive and gracious way that it humbles me to confess that it has been much too long since I have eaten at His table. As He leads me to a quiet and sunny place I notice that there are unfortunately many empty tables just waiting to be filled with hungry people.

I'm so glad that His restaurant is always opened and He never seems to take a break. This Waiter anticipates my every need and knows just what I am hungering for. He helps me to choose just the right thing from the very extensive menu and the food is truly out of this world. I don't see how this waiter does it, but every time I eat there, He always insists in sitting down and sharing the meal with me.

When I insist He has other, more important people to wait on, this Waiter gently tells me that I alone am His favorite customer and He is always staring out the window, anxiously anticipating my next visit. The fellowship is always better than the food and I never feel like eating desert at this restaurant because my heart is so glad and filled with joy in His presence.

The end of the meal is always my favorite time, for it is time to tip my favorite waiter. I take out my wallet, my schedule, the deed to the house and everything that I am and own and give it to Him. It is not near enough to pay for the meal but we are both so happy, sitting there in perfect peace, well fed and full of His grace.

By the way Jesus . . . could I please have a doggy bag? I know that I will want to share this great food with others during the day.

## Got Word?

When I was growing up in the 50s and 60s it became a high priority to get enough milk into the young people of America. The importance of calcium for bone development was increasingly recognized and milk became the conduit through which this mineral element was distributed.

I loved milk a lot and my mother bought special non-fat milk just for me because I was a little chubby back then. I thought the blue water was a little strange but I drank it anyway because I wanted to please my mom.

Two rather quirky milk-related products that came out back then were concentrated milk and flavored straws. I don't know how they did it, but to save room in the frig, you could buy this black carton of concentrated milk which you would then add three parts water. I think it was called three-in-one milk.

The other product was flavored straws. Millions of moms packed these strawberry or chocolate flavored straws in their kid's lunches. As the milk would go through the straw it would pickup the flavor. The straws were not very efficient and sometimes you would get a lot of flavor and sometimes none.

I really wish that as much time and effort were put into making products which delivered the Word of God into our lives. Just as we need our daily calcium, we need that daily Word.

Three-in-one milk, flavored straws were designed to get milk into life. I would like to challenge each of us today to do whatever it takes to get the precious life nourishing, life changing word into your life and the lives of others today.

## Eating Cornflakes

Several years ago I had the real privilege of discipling a very successful guitar player who lived in Los Angeles. A mutual friend had introduced us to one another and I will never forget our first meeting together. When I entered his very nice suburban home there were many gold records neatly hanging on the walls as momentos of all the hit albums he had played on. He had performed with almost every major artist and had toured the world. As I sat there in his living room, I was wondering just how I was going to reach this very talented person.

Well during the course of our conversation we did get to talk a little about the Bible and I knew the person had more than a passing interest in God's Word and the Christian life. So I suggested that every week he would mentor me in playing the guitar and I would teach him about the Bible. This seemed to hit a responsive chord and we agreed to meet on a regular basis.

We usually started our afternoons together with the guitar lesson. I felt like such a complete idiot when I dragged out my guitar in the presence of a truly awesome and knowledgeable artist. But he was always patient and kind and I really made progress under his mentorship.

When we turned the Bible I knew that the shoe was now on the other foot and I became the mentor and he the student. My inquisitive pupil almost always had an endless list of questions which I tried my best to answer. I well understood what this and any person needed was not more information but a deeper conversion so I was patient with the process.

One thing that was very apparent in this person's life was the absolute discipline that guided his whole day. He had not become a great guitar player with just intermittent practice but had spent many hours everyday training himself in the art of playing the guitar. This methodical approach to acquiring a skill also extended to teaching himself how to sing and a daily exercise program. He always backed up his hard drive and there was never a file out of place on his computer. His home was as neat as a pin and I imagine that his socks are lined up as little soldiers as well.

So I decided to challenge my friend to apply the same discipline to his devotional life as well. I told him that just as he had practiced his guitar everyday he needed to read his Bible daily in order to become better acquainted with God and His will.

So he resolved to place his Bible on the kitchen table where he would methodically read it during his breakfast (which in musician time was around 3:00 in the afternoon)! He

read God's Word faithfully everyday, rain or shine. After a few weeks in the process he would tell me that he would equate his feeding on God's Word like "eating cornflakes."

Well after several months of eating cornflakes my friend began to change. His conversion deepened and he made real progress in the spiritual life. Although all the questions have not been answered, there is an abiding peace, faith and joy in his life today.

He has become closer to me than a brother and I still consider it a great privilege to go over his home and be a part of his life. He often thanks me for helping him grow spiritually but we all know where the growth came from. It came from the cornflakes. The daily feeding on God's Word worked the miracle of life, of a new life in my friend.

Only one question remains for each of us: Have *you* had your cornflakes today?

## **Gather Up the Fragments**

If there was just one thing I could tell people about how to grow in your spiritual life it would be to come in daily contact with the Word of God. The Word is at the same time the most powerful and the most neglected spiritual discipline.

While most people would agree that a daily dose of Divine wisdom would aid them greatly, our hyper-busy lifestyles often mitigate against any ongoing attempts to study God's Word. The Spirit is willing but the amount of time is weak.

How would you like to get the Word into your life while you are driving the car, jogging or walking along with your walkman or MP3 player in tow?

Well I would like to tell you about a terrific new resource which could enhance your spiritual life. It is the dramatized NIV Bible on CD from Zondervan. This collection of 64 CDs covers the entire Bible. The dramatized version has different voices take the different speaking parts of a story and this greatly adds to the interest of the CD. Each chapter is a separate track and the whole thing comes in a very nice case.

Believe it or not, I am not a salesperson from Zondervan. (I did try to sell little \$1.00 health magazines one summer during my college years and was not the least bit successful). What I think really sells this product is the unbelievable price . . . Just \$69.00! You can take a peek at this wonderful resource at:

[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0310918634/qid=1024323862/sr=83/ref=sr\\_8\\_3/103-6540423-2247810](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0310918634/qid=1024323862/sr=83/ref=sr_8_3/103-6540423-2247810)

I have personally found this to be a great blessing in my own life. You have to listen carefully and repeatedly to get a fuller understanding of the Scripture but it is well worth the time.

In the story of the feeding of the 5000 Jesus instructed the disciples to "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost' (John 6:12). May we use the leftover free moments of our time to gather the Word of God so that we may in the end we may not be lost.