



What Is a Disciple?

“I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.” (Philippians 3:14, NLT)

Paul has compared the Christian life to running a race. It is also a little like being on a football team. As in football, you are chosen and invited. Jesus invited some fishermen, a tax collector, and a political activist, etc. *“Jesus called out to them, ‘Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people.’” (Matthew 4:19, NLT)* He later reminded them, *“You didn’t choose me. I chose you.” (John 15:16a, NLT)* God also chose you. Isn’t it a great feeling to be chosen?

The calling of disciples

Jesus prayed all night before choosing his original twelve players for his team. He called them disciples. What is a disciple? In Greek the word means “pupil,” “follower” or “learner.” Other believers, including his mother Mary and his friends Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, were also called disciples. If you accepted Jesus’ invitation to be on his team, he wants you to be disciple, too.

The commitment of a disciple

Like a football player, a disciple of Jesus has to learn to wear the uniform (see “The Armor of God”), to know the rules and playbook (the Bible), and to obey the Coach (Jesus). He has to learn to play on a team, be alert and watch out for the blocks and tackles of his opponents (Satan and his demons). Although the Christian disciple receives great encouragement from his cheerleaders and fans – pastor, priest, youth minister or other Christians, he has to learn that his ultimate power and encouragement to play the game comes from Coach Jesus. His ultimate goal is to become like him.

The training of a disciple

How are disciples trained? Watch how Jesus did it. For his disciples there was spring, summer, fall and winter training. For three years! These new recruits, just ordinary men, had real problems and often were slow learners. Doesn’t that give you hope? Peter was always fumbling the ball and putting his foot in his mouth and telling Jesus what to do. James and John were more interested in what position they’d get on the team than in being team players. Philip questioned. Thomas doubted. In the end, Judas, a treacherous and greedy thief, betrayed his Owner and Master. Sometimes Jesus just looked at them and said, “O, you of little faith!”

Intimate fellowship with the Coach

Over time, they developed a deep relationship with Jesus. They hung on his every word as he taught them the rules of the game of life and how to play. They watched in awe as he calmed the storm in the Sea of Galilee, raised the dead, confronted the religious leaders, cast out demons and healed the sick. Imagine their thrill when they participated in feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. What a picnic! Life was never dull with Jesus. Most of all they listened as he spoke the truth in love. They watched as he lived a holy life in obedience to his Father, never missing a play. One day the truth hit them – their Coach, with whom they lived, slept, talked, prayed and ate, was the promised Messiah. Simon Peter said it: *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16, NLT) God himself had come to earth! Have you fully understood your relationship with God? This same Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, lives in you. He can’t get any closer than that!

Practice sessions

There came the day when Jesus decided the original twelve were ready to scrimmage. He sent them out by pairs to the villages to share the Good News about Jesus. He gave them authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness. They were not to take any money or extra clothing but depend totally on God for their provisions. He warned them that they would be like little lambs wandering into a pack of wolves. Is that scary or what? (Luke 9:1-6)

Another time, he sent out seventy disciples. They came back so excited and joyful you would have thought they had won the Super Bowl. They reported their “touchdowns”: *“Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!”* (Luke 10:17b, NLT) Jesus said, “Don’t get so excited about that, be excited your name is registered with the heavenly team!”

Disaster turns to joy

As Jesus neared the time of his death, he tried to prepare his disciples. He told them he would be “handed over to the Romans, mocked, spit upon, whipped and killed, but on the third day he would rise again.” (Luke 18:32, 33) They didn’t understand a thing he said. It just rolled right over their heads. When the Romans arrested and crucified their beloved Coach, they fled and hid. None of what they had remembered from their training had prepared them for such a disaster. Three days after his death some women joyfully reported, “He’s alive!” Guess what? They didn’t believe them!

However, when Jesus appeared to them, to others and to more than five hundred at one time, they did believe. They talked and ate with him, touched him, and saw the scars where nails had held him on the cross. They listened as he quoted Old Testament Scriptures, proving his death had been predicted by Moses and all the prophets hundreds of years earlier. They understood he was the Lamb to which all the sacrifices had pointed, the Lamb who took the

punishment for their sins and made them part of his team forever! Can you imagine what a joyful reunion they had?

The final game plan

Then Jesus gave them the final game plan. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for their Holy Spirit Coach to come. *“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8, NLT) They were to go into the entire world and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all the commands he had given them. (Matthew 28:19, 20) When Jesus ascended to heaven, angels assured the disciples their Coach would come back some day in the same way and reward them. What are you doing to prepare for that glorious day? Are you watching?

The kickoff

The disciples waited and prayed in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit came and the real game began. You can read all about the new team members, the plays, the opponent’s tackles, and the “touchdowns” in the book of Acts. By the power of the Spirit, they turned their world upside down from Jerusalem to most of the Roman Empire. They did it without newspapers, cell phones, televisions, e-mails, Facebook or MySpace! Out of the twelve disciples, all were martyred except John. You might say they won the Super Bowl, and their fame has been recorded forever in the heavenly Hall of Fame.

The Challenge

How willing are you to become a 21st century disciple? How eager are you to train by studying his Word and talking with him in prayer? How committed are you to allow the Holy Spirit to teach, train and empower you to do the work he already has planned for you? How willing are you to obey him? Ask, and he will even give you the desire to cooperate! Why not suit up in your uniform and show up for practice every today? Why not bow your knee to your Master and Coach and say, “Here I am. Take my life and make me the player you want me to be.” You cannot imagine the final rewards!

Attitude Check:

- What attitude do you think is most necessary to be a true disciple of Jesus?

Explore:

- Read “Study the Bible,” (A25) “Pray,” (A26), “Obey God,” (A27) and “A Disciple Abides in Christ.” (John 15:1-17)
- Record in your journal steps of commitment you plan to take to become a true disciple.

Talking with God:

- Father, how I love you for choosing me to be on your Son’s team. Thank you for the discipline needed to be the player you want me to be.