

THREE TYPES OF DISCIPLES

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

In the gospels, those who believed on Jesus were not called Christians like we are today. Instead the people who followed Jesus were consistently called disciples. In fact, the term “disciple” means “follower.”

John chapter six gives us a look at three different types of disciples. That's right. Three! The first two we will observe are genuine disciples and could be viewed as being at different stages in their journey of faith. The third type of disciple, as we shall sadly discover, is a disciple in name only. All of us have met people who claimed to be Christian but somehow their claim just did not ring true. Jesus Himself faced the very same type of people.

As we study this chapter together, we will follow the outline below:

- I. Disciples Whose Faith is Sincere (vv. 1-24)**
- II. Disciples Whose Faith is Strong (vv. 25-59)**
- III. Disciples Whose Faith is Shallow (vv. 60-71)**

I. Disciples Whose Faith is Sincere (vv. 1-24)

If it was dinner time and 5,000 hungry men were milling around out in the backyard, what would you do? What Jesus did is the thrilling story of a miracle which all four writers chose to record. Perhaps no other miracle displays the love of the Lord Jesus for all people as clearly as the feeding of the five thousand.

Let's begin by observing the multitude in need of bread (v. 5). A great multitude had followed Jesus across the Sea of Galilee. This scene should not be viewed as exclusively a first century one. We live in a world of hungry people today, do we not? Millions of children die of hunger before they can even cry “mama.” In fact, if you want to find countries where there is little poverty, where beggars do not clutter the streets, and where people get three meals a day, you have to go to Christian countries.

The multitudes speak to us of those who have soul hungerers. People are hungry for many things—acceptance, identity, love, and understanding. The most acute hunger in our world is a spiritual hunger that no one can satisfy but Jesus.

In addition, note that the multitude did not deserve to be fed (v. 2). They were following Jesus only because they saw His miracles. We should be glad God does not deal with us based on what we deserve but rather on how much He loves us.

In this miracle we see Jesus' compassion like we see in no other text. We also observe something very noticeable about the disciples—they were weak in faith. Answering Jesus' question, Phillip replied: “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little” (v. 7).

As Jesus showed Phillip the multitude of people and presented the problem (v. 5), Phillip looked at Jesus with a staggering gaze. Do we not also do the same when we observe the broken people of this world? Is this not enough to make us doubt? Phillip failed the test, unfortunately (v. 6). Scanning the crowd, it just did not add up how he was going to feed them. He made a key error in his calculation,

Reflection Connection

*What do you think is the greatest physical need people in your community suffer?
How can you assist your church in meeting that need?
Should you stop with meeting people's physical needs? Why or why not?*



Reflection Connection

Do you think people would respond differently today to a need as great as what the disciples faced knowing what they know about Jesus? Explain. Had not the disciples already experienced His power? Why then would they not simply believe in Jesus?

however. He figured his numbers without Christ! Calculating without Christ is a fundamental flaw that far too many of us possess.

The focus switches to Andrew and a young boy who had a lunch (v. 9). Barley loaves and fish was the staple diet of the poor. Andrew had the right idea—bring the boy to Jesus. Yet he spoils it all by asking a question that reflected a faith as weak as or more than Phillip's: "*But what are they among so many?*" (v. 9) He too, while sincere enough, possessed a weak, feeble faith in Jesus.

If only the disciples could have stopped to consider: little is much when placed in the hands of Jesus. Even the disciples' faith—as weak and inadequate as it was—could move mountains if only they would trust.

Here we learn that Jesus can take what we have and multiply it: "*When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets...*" (vv.12-13).

You may have a great voice. But unless your voice is placed in His hands, you will never be able to sing for Jesus. You may be able to teach, but you can only teach for Jesus when you place your ability in His hands.

Note also that Jesus uses His disciples to feed the multitudes (v. 11). This teaches us at least two important lessons. First, Jesus needs us. He could do all the work if He wanted, but He has chosen not to. We are His choice. Second, our participation in serving the bread is the means by which our faith becomes strong. The disciples in this passage were clearly sincere in following Jesus. But their weak faith, however sincere, needed a boost. Serving Jesus does just that!

II. Disciples Whose Faith is Strong (vv. 25-59)

We now come to a passage that shows a more sincere yet weak faith. Here we get a glimpse of faith that is strong and, consequently, willing to do anything to follow the Lord Jesus. This should be the goal of every believer.

John 6 could well be called the bread chapter of the Bible. At least 17 reference to bread are made here. Note also that out of seven "*I am*" statements in John, Jesus identifying Himself as the "*bread of life*" is the first one (v. 33). Jesus is the answer to your spiritual hunger. What does John say about Jesus as the bread?

First, Jesus is the bread that must be given (v. 27). He is compared with the manna in the Old Testament (v. 32). The children of Israel were in the wilderness and were in danger of starving to death. It was the Lord who gave them manna from heaven to eat.

People in this world are hungry for spiritual food. Similarly, they are in danger of starvation. Many sources have been tried to satisfy their hunger. They try material goods, sensational pleasures, and worldly prominence. These are all empty ovens (cp. Isaiah 55:1-2). The Lord must supply the bread.

Thus, Jesus is the One given who "*cometh down from heaven*" and "*giveth life unto the world*" (v. 33). God gave Jesus to this world. He saw a world, that was hungry and perishing. His heart was moved and He gave us His Son.

Jesus is sufficient bread for the soul. He gives us life—spiritual life—without which we would perish. He is suitable to all. Bread is sufficient to feed even the greatest multitudes. Jesus is the One who meets all our needs. He is sufficient.

Reflection Connection

Why would bread be such an appropriate image of Jesus? If it is so appropriate, why was it offensive?



Reflection Connection

What are some hindrances you face in giving out the “bread of life” to your community? List some ways you can help your pastor “feed” the people around you.

Second, this bread must be prepared (cp. v. 51). Grain must be crushed if bread is to be made. Think of Jesus’ sorrows. He was rejected by His own hometown, His own family, and by the religious leaders. In a real way, Jesus was being crushed—prepared so He could be consumed. In fact, Jesus fully realized He could not feed a hungry world unless He was crushed (cp. 12:24).

Bread must also be placed in the fire. Jesus went through the burning oven of Calvary for you and me. But even more, taken from that oven, He rose from the dead the third day. Now He stands as the living bread.

Third, this bread must be eaten. Bread is useless unless it is eaten. No matter how much bread lies around, it must be eaten to be of value. To “eat” Christ is to receive Him into your life. You partake of Christ and become part of Him. This is strong faith!

Finally, Jesus is the bread that must be shared. Those who have bread must share it with others. Strong faith is willing faith—willing to share faith with others.

What if a man had bread and refused to feed a starving man? There is enough in our Lord Jesus to meet the needs of all people. To all who are hungry for the bread of life, Jesus says, “*I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger...*” (v. 35). Won’t you take Him just now?

III. Disciples Whose Faith is Shallow (vv. 60-71)

This is one of the saddest scenes in the Jesus’ life recorded anywhere in the gospels. The question Jesus asks His disciples is heart-rending. He watches a multitude turn and walk away, to follow Him no more.

The chapter began with crowds flocking to see Jesus. It closes with only a handful left behind. As you read through the chapter, you can almost see the fickle crowd changing in their attitude toward Jesus.

Many people get an entirely wrong idea about who Jesus is and what Jesus demands. Like the crowds who first wanted to make Him a king (v. 15), they later murmur, striking to put Him down (vv. 41, 52). Here Jesus asked the disciples closest to Him: “*Will ye also go away?*” (v. 67).

The simple truth is, some people follow Jesus for a time, only to turn and walk away: “*From that time, many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him*” (v. 66). This departure serves as the occasion for Jesus to ask His disciples—the disciples that had been with Him from the beginning—will you go away too?

That question reaches to the depths of our heart and shakes our faith, making us consider whether our faith is real or phony.

As we consider the disciples that were shallow and walked away from Jesus, let’s observe several reasons why people would desert discipleship.

First, some people walk away because they really do not know Him. Note carefully what Jesus says: “*But there are some of you that believed not...*” (v. 64). Jesus knew from the beginning who they were. Some people, even though they are active in church, have never really met Jesus as their personal Savior. They

Reflection Connection

If faith is weak, does that mean that weak faith cannot be saving faith? Why or why not? What are some proven ways to strengthen weak faith?



Reflection Connection

Without revealing confidences, be prepared to offer an example of someone you knew who “walked away” from following Christ. Is there any fruit in his/her life that remains? What do you think is an appropriate means to “win” them back?

may be members of the church on the corner but they are not members of God's church. They may be baptized, but because they possess no genuine roots, they easily wither away.

There is a second reason some depart. Some depart because His teachings are too hard (v. 60). Not that they are too hard to understand; rather it is too hard to accept, too hard to take. Many want a religion that is soft, easy, and manageable. Jesus' teaching is *too* offensive.

The death of the cross is offensive. The death of self is offensive. The dedication of one's life is offensive. He demands first place in our lives. Selfishly, we want control. For some, it is just too much. They walk away.

Third, some walk away because of doubt. It may be doubts about the Bible or whether Jesus was sinless. One could doubt both heaven and hell. Another could doubt the creation of the universe or that Christianity is unique. Sooner or later faith will come under fire and if it is not real it will be consumed by the fire. The result will be desertion. One will simply go back and “walk no more with Him.”

Next, some go away because of the world's call. The Bible speaks of the “pleasures of sin.” Some people sell Jesus out for this world. Paul writes of “Demas who loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Esau sold his birthright. Many young men have sold their soul for a night of pleasure. Judas was not the last disciple to sell his Master for thirty pieces of silver (vv. 70-71).

Fifth, some people fall back from following Jesus because of procrastination. They intend to follow on with the Lord. They know their relationship is not quite right with the Lord. Yet they continue to put it off.

Procrastination is a thief that robs souls of peace with God. Who knows how many souls slip into hell who were “intending” to come to Jesus. The further question that must be considered is where do people go when they leave Jesus?

First, if they are genuine believers, sincere believers with a weak faith go into what we could refer to as “backsliding.”

Though not a very appealing term, it is accurate. This is the condition of multitudes of believers. All of us know of Christians who drift away from God. They recall what they used to be, how they were a blessing to others. Now they are cold; their hearts filled with distance from God. What a despairing, depressing existence. The only way out of this state is full surrender of one's life to Christ.

Second, if you are not a genuine believer, you go away from the Bible. Think of it. No light in life's darkest hours! No promise that God will get you through! You also go away from the testimony of friends—those you have known whose faith is real and their lives are above reproach. You may have doubts about the Bible, but you know the life of that friend was real.

Many want a religion that is soft, easy, and manageable.



You also go away from the only answer to life's greatest mysteries. No truth answers all the confusion and mysteries surrounding the universe like Christianity.

The worst thing is you go away from Jesus. Jesus said: "*Ye shall die in your sins*" (cp. v. 53). Going away from Jesus means going away from heaven. Sadly, no other place exists in eternity outside heaven's gates than hell. When one no longer looks to Jesus, a horrible future remains.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse five, Jesus asks Phillip where the multitudes would get bread to be fed. If this was all the information we possessed, we might think Jesus was expressing His concern that their obvious need would remain unmet. Fortunately, however, John interprets Jesus' words for us: "And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (v. 6). The term translated "prove" is a word that can mean either a test itself or the approval after being tested. Here, the obvious meaning is the test itself. Through this test, Jesus was "proving" the quality of Philip's faith.

Wrap Up

John 6 began with a miracle and ends with a message: you must turn to Christ. Nothing else exists to save you. No one else can deliver you. All your faith must be placed in Him. Will you not receive Him today?

