

The Disciple's Dozen

**The Twelve Most Important Things Every
Christian Needs to Know, Understand and Live**

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1 Eternal Love. Once we have given our lives to Christ we live eternally with a loving God.

Jesus tells us that, when we give our lives to him, we are born again into eternal life; we, like his sheep, cannot be snatched out of his hand. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We have died with Christ and are alive in him, with him awake or asleep. When we give ourselves to Jesus, he gives himself back to us through the Holy Spirit who then dwells within us.

Put another way, God, in His unchanging love, invites us into a relationship of mutual love and loyalty. Once we are at one with Christ, we remain at one. Jesus never lets us go. We know that he lived eternally with the Father while he was on earth, and so do we. We are a part of Christ forever, although in a more fulfilling experience when we are with him, the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven.

How does this affect our lives here on earth? We don't have to worry about the afterlife; it is guaranteed for us. We may face some sort of judgment, but it's not one that can lead to rejection from eternal life with God. We live without fear. We give God more weight in our life than anything else. We can let our thoughts, words and deeds flow through the filter of the Holy Spirit. Free of anxiety, we can depend on God for all things, leading to joy, confidence and the inner yearning to share what we have with others. We want to extend God's heavenly love as freely as He has extended His love to us. We find ourselves seeking to live in such a way that each word we say and task we undertake is pleasing to God; while knowing, when we fail, that there is forgiveness available to us by His grace and mercy.

When we face tragedy in life, such as the loss of a loved one who was also in Christ, we grieve but we are not distraught. Although our loved one may be "there" while we are "here," we are not eternally separated...we remain spiritually as one. And we look forward to the day when we can be physically together again, a joyous anticipation in a glorious afterlife.

John 3:3, 16; 8:51; 10:28; 14:23; 17:24; 20:31; Luke 9:24; Romans 8:1; Galatians 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10

2 A Grace-filled Life. Our home is in heaven but this life we now have is a good and rich gift from God, though marred by our sin and incomplete for our deepest desires. In a real sense God intends this life as a training ground, a grace-filled life that is under God's supervision rather than our trying to do everything on our own.

According to Scripture, we who have given our lives to Christ walk in the light of his life, and it is an abundant life. It is a grace-filled life of giving of ourselves in self-sacrificing love, enabled by God. But this life on earth is just a way-station. It is not our home; our permanent home is in heaven with Christ. There is, however, a very important purpose for our time here. We have an opportunity to learn how truly to love and serve God that prepares us for life in His presence. We are to be growing in the love and knowledge of Christ through prayer, Scripture, worship and in serving others. It is a process of being sanctified (growing in the likeness of Christ), and it is a joy-filled process.

We were created by God in Christ Jesus to do the works that Jesus would be doing if he were physically present on earth today. We receive grace (God's unmerited favor) to love and serve and live this abundant life, not in our own strength but wholly dependent on God.

How do we live this out? Rather than seeking selfish goals and suffering either the problems of pride, greed and ultimate emptiness on the one hand or disappointment and defeat on the other, we simply seek the Lord's guidance one day at a time and find fulfillment in what He wants us to do. Success comes from knowing and doing what God says. We don't try to earn points with God in order to seek His favor. Instead we try to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ and let his love flow through us for the benefit of others. The bonus to us is the joy we experience from living this kind of life.

John 8:12, 10:10, 15:11; Romans 14:8; Ephesians 2:10, 19-23; Philippians 1:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2:13-15; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; James 1:12

3 Access to God. We have an intimate, approachable God with whom we can be in constant contact that we call prayer. And, through the sacramental life of the Church, we can experience the relationship with Christ at a communal level as well.

These Scriptures tell us that we Christians have an accessible God. He loves us and wants to be close to us. By His Holy Spirit He is within us. Thus, there is nothing complicated about prayer. It is simply being in relationship with God.

Keith Miller put it this way: “Finally, I began to see that prayer is not a series of requests to get God to help me do things I think need to be done. Prayer is a direction of life, a focusing of one’s most personal and deepest attention Godward. The purpose is to love God and learn to know Him so well that our wills, our actions will be more and more aligned with His, until even our unconscious reactions and purposes will have the mark of His love, His life about them. Prayer was no longer an ‘activity.’ It had become the continuing language of that relationship God designed to fulfill a human life.”

We can have formal prayers at church or in quiet times with the Lord. When we worship God we are in prayer. We can be in a prayer group or have a prayer partner. We will also be praying for others. There is no end to our opportunities to pray because we have an accessible God.

We have assurance of the accessibility of God by our faith and trust in Him. Our prayers in response to that assurance should be with boldness and confidence, believing and with thankfulness for what will happen. Faith is the basis for answered prayer.

Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, there are times when we believe our prayers have not been answered and we are disappointed. If our prayer is in accordance with the will of God (it is something He would normally want for us or for the person or situation about which we pray), God always answers. His answer may be: “Yes,” “Wait,” or “Let’s do it this way instead.”

Matthew 21:22; Luke 11:1-4; Acts 10:1-48; Romans 5:1, 2; Ephesians 2:18, 3:12; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 John 5:14, 15
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4 Information Available. We can learn how God wants us to live through His book, the Bible. We do that by reading Scripture, referring to commentary on passages that we don't understand or want greater knowledge of, receiving teachings and sermons, and sharing with others what we have learned and are learning.

Holy Scripture, as Paul's Letter to Timothy tells us, comes to us directly from God and is intended for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training us in righteousness. Simply put, the Bible helps us understand how we are to live. Once we have given our lives to Christ (John 3:3-6) the Holy Spirit within us guides us deeper into God's word. People want "how to" books to help them accomplish the many challenges they face in life. The Bible is the ultimate "how to" book, but so much more! In the Bible we can see what Jesus said and did to guide us in how we are to live. Through Paul's Letters and those of others in Scripture we can better understand Jesus' teachings. Through the Acts of the Apostles we learn how people began to carry out what Christ wanted them to do. And, in the Old Testament, we see how God brought all of this about...the framework behind the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God.

In addition to the practical ways the Bible guides us, it is also a spiritual book. We get inspiration from what we read. It can lead us into praise and worship. Sometimes it speaks directly to our prayers. There are instances in which words seem to "jump off the page" to speak to our heart on some matter or just to get our attention God-ward. In all respects it is a guidebook for living the Christian life.

By availing ourselves of commentaries on passages of Scripture we can better understand anything that would otherwise be unclear to us. By listening to teachings and sermons on Scripture we can gain insights into both the practical and spiritual aspects of the Bible. By being in a Bible study group we experience how the Christian life is being lived out by our brothers and sisters in Christ. In our private time we can use the Bible devotionally, seeking answers to our prayers, or looking for assurance that we are on the path of life Christ has in mind for us.

John 20:31; Acts 8:30-35; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
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5 Inner Presence. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit lives in us to guide us, prompting godly actions on our part as well as warning us against sin...if we are attentive to his promptings. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit provides us with gifts for ministry so that we can do the things Jesus did here on earth.

Jesus promised that, when he was no longer present on earth, the Holy Spirit would be sent to be with us and guide us. He would remind us of what Jesus said and did. In a sense, in those who have given their lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit acts like our conscience, guiding us into proper actions and warning us against improper ones. But, more than that, the Holy Spirit inspires us and leads us into God's plans for us.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is in Christ's Church...the Body of Christ in our world today. Disciples are empowered by gifts of the Holy Spirit to do on earth the things Jesus did when he was here, manifesting God's power and not our own. Thus, we are to be "living sacrifices" on the "altar of God" to be used as He would use us in loving (in selfless-*agape*-love) and serving others.

A particular joy of living in Christ is being used by God to minister through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we disciples are open to discovering the gift or gifts God is using in us at any given time, a whole new world of faithful opportunity opens to us. What we might have once thought of as our Christian duty becomes a joy. Whether it's in leading, teaching, serving, giving, encouraging, healing, praying, witnessing, or any of the other gifts listed in the Scripture passages set forth below, we can find fulfillment in ways we never imagined. It is doing the Lord's work because it is the Holy Spirit within us who is doing it and not we ourselves. There are exercises and techniques to help people find their spiritual gifts, but the simplest way is to realize God's pleasure when we are being used by God in this way.

In summary, if we are truly here for the Lord's use, the Holy Spirit is within us to guide us and use us every step of the way.

John 14:15-21, 26; Romans 8:5-6, 16, 26; 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11, 12
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6 **Forgiveness of Sin.** Yet we return to our selfish ways; it's called sin. However, when we do so, we can acknowledge that Christ died on the Cross so that we may be forgiven; and, confessing our sin, experience the depth of God's forgiving love. We can do this personally and by corporate confession and repentance through our church.

The Scripture passages show that, as the long-promised Messiah, Jesus died on the Cross so that we humans could be forgiven our sins and restored to relationship with the Father. By our nature we are separated from God. Adam and Eve laid the groundwork for that. As the Old Testament shows, down through the centuries God has wanted reconciliation with us humans. His plan was for a Messiah to come who would provide a way for us to be at one with Him. Jesus, the Messiah, the Lamb of God, died on the Cross for our sins that, with his cleansing blood for our redemption, we could be restored. Now we have a way of seeking and receiving forgiveness.

In our life in Christ, we are called to be conscious of our sins and to repent of them. As Paul makes clear in the Romans passage, "the mind is willing but the flesh is weak." We should be quick to seek forgiveness. When we are repentant, confess our sins, and make any restitution for what our sins have caused, we are to put those sins behind us and go forward in our relationship with God.

Here are the steps we follow: (1) *Sensitivity*. Living a life in consciousness of our relationships with God and others; (2) *Self-examination*. Guided by the Holy Spirit within us, discovering our sins, wherein we have failed in our relationships; (3) *Repentance*. Being truly repentant with a conviction to change the direction of our life; (4) *Confession*. Admitting those sins we have discovered and our responsibility for them; (5) *Seeking forgiveness*. Asking God to forgive our sins; (6) *Making restitution*. Sometimes God will require some act from us to show the sincerity of our confession or to bring a needed reconciliation; (7) *Accepting God's forgiveness*. Acknowledging within ourselves God's release of us from our sin.

John 1:29; Luke 24:45-47; Romans 7:15-20; Ephesians 1:7; James 5:15-20; 1 John 1:9

7 Praising God. God is worthy of our praise and worship. Both in church services and in the quiet of our own lives, we acknowledge our utter dependence on God and our great love of Him.

In living the life in Christ there arises within us a profound appreciation for a God who gave His Son for us—awe and wonder over His gracious goodness, His love and care for us. If we lay our lives on His altar as living sacrifices, we can't help but praise Him. This can come out of us spontaneously in hymns and songs. We praise and worship God not only with our fellow Christians but by our lives as witnesses to all people, as love and joy flow out of us because of God's love within us.

Tied in with our praise of God is our thankfulness for all He has done and is doing for us. We praise God for who He is; we thank Him for all He has done. We can be thankful that we don't let circumstances rule our lives; stress, anxiety and worry can be overcome by our confidence that God is in control of the universe, He loves us, and He will take care of us.

An attitude of praise in the heart causes an outpouring of sacrifice and surrender, leading to praiseworthy acts. Self-sufficiency and pride in ourselves are replaced by awe and wonder at the greatness of the One who called us out of darkness into light eternal.

Our worship services in church give us special opportunities to praise God in song. The Psalms are a treasure-house of hymns of praise. We show our devotion to God not only by formal times of praise but by some of the ways we live: quiet times with Him; being regular in our prayers, including prayers for others; and learning about Him and how He wants us to live through Scripture and loving and serving others.

If we are to live the abundant life (John 10:10), we do it with unbounded praise of God.

Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 5:19, 20; Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Peter 2:9
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8 Sharing God's Love. We can learn to love other people as God wants us to do. When they offend us in any way, we forgive them as God forgives us. We come to realize that, if we knew the circumstances of the other person's life, we could better see why God loves them as much as He loves us; and we come to find joy in reaching out in God's love to those around us. We experience this most effectively, perhaps, through the Body of Christ, the Church, as we love and serve one another and learn from one another how best to serve others. We then share that love by reaching out to others so that they can be brought to Christ.

When God fills us with His love, it compels us to share that love with others. We are to love one another as Jesus loves us. That's a challenge, because we are talking about selfless, sacrificial (*agape*) love. If we are going to love with this type of love, first of all our relationship with God needs to be right in all respects. Then we begin to see our neighbors as ourselves, giving them the same respect, kindness, empathy and support we want from others.

God is love and God within us through the Holy Spirit yearns to reach out in love to those around us. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can discern the needs of those around us and reach out to them with God's love. Family life is an especially good training ground for learning to love others; among other things, we learn the importance of forgiving one another. We cannot say we love someone if we are unwilling to forgive them, and Christ has made it clear that God forgives us only as we forgive others.

Furthermore, our love for others means we want to show them what life in Christ is all about. We are motivated to let them share the joy of belonging to Christ, and want, as disciples, to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20) of making disciples. Finally, we see that all of this has to do with how we live. We should always live in such a way that others will be drawn to the Lord not by what we say but by what we do.

Matthew 22:37-40, 28:19, 20; John 13:34; Romans 12:9-21; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Peter 3:8, 15; 1 John 4:19-21; see also Matthew 6:12-15 and Ephesians 4:32

9 Resisting Evil. We acknowledge that a force of evil—Satan, the enemy of God—moves among us through an army of demonic forces. The Holy Spirit within us can help us see Satan’s work—moral collapse, hunger for power and money, and the compromising of faith in Christ—and can help us stand against it.

In addition to our own tendency toward selfishness and sin, evil exists in our world. Satan, the devil, sees himself as the ruler of the earth, and is constant in his attempt to turn people away from God. Although not possessing the all-present, all-knowing and all-powerful characteristics of God, he works through demons to influence, confuse, and motivate people toward evil thoughts, intentions and actions. When facing times of trial and temptation we can be especially vulnerable.

Disguised as an “angel of light,” Satan is a master of deception, fooling those who either fail or refuse to accept the truth of his existence. Unless we acknowledge that this force of evil exists—it’s not just that people do bad things—we cannot successfully resist Satan’s influence. Satan is shrewd, requiring us to be careful of what we listen to and believe.

Because of his hatred of God, Satan is dedicated to the destruction of all who believe in God. Without the protection of God’s love, what we experience from living in Christ, and the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit, we cannot stand against Satan. But, by the grace of God, we can resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7).

We can begin the day by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). We can seek the Holy Spirit’s discernment so as to distinguish good from evil. By growing in our knowledge of Scripture daily and staying close to God through prayer, worship and fellowship with other Christians, we can better equip ourselves to foresee and combat Satan’s influence. And, as soon as we notice an evil thought popping into our heads, it is time to say, “Get behind me, Satan; there is no place for you in my life in Christ.”

Luke 11:14-26; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8

10 Ultimate Confidence. And, when things look bad in the world around us, we can be confident that God is still in charge, and we know how the story ends.

God created the universe and everything in it including man whom He made in His own image, male and female. God wanted to be in fellowship with His people, but Adam and Eve broke that fellowship. A savior was promised who would restore that relationship. That Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth, died for our sins, and provided a way for Christians to be in fellowship with God. We were promised eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth.

In the meantime, we live in an imperfect world. Things are constantly happening around us that bring us grief—or at least displeasure. But it is God’s world and we don’t have minds capable of knowing what He is working out in the world around us. God has an ultimate plan for those of us who give our lives to Christ and it is a glorious and eternal plan. Just as we can learn from the trials and tribulations we face in life—and become better for it—we bear with our grief and displeasure knowing that God is in control...and we know how the Book ends.

The most important thing in the building of any structure, or life, is that it be built on a firm and strong foundation. We have that in God’s written word, the Bible. And, in Scripture, we know that all the promises of God find their “Yes” in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). Christ, the living Word of God, was in the beginning of creation and is coming again for the creation of a new heaven and earth for those who have given their lives to him.

Thus we live every day with the assurance that we will be with God forever. Joyfully, we put that belief into action by loving God and those He has placed around us to love. Daily we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ through Bible study, prayer and serving others. It’s not only the life beyond that we look forward to; we rejoice in life in Christ right here on earth.

Genesis 1:1–2:3; Revelation 21:1-4; 22:12-16
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11 **Serving Others.** There is a saying that people want to know how much you care before they care how much you know. As Christ's disciples we are here to do what Christ would do if he were physically present on earth today. We are here to serve. To be effective for Christ in the world around us we must be reaching out to others in their areas of need—their need to know Christ and their physical and emotional needs—and that is what God equips us to do.

Jesus made it clear that what we Christians are here on earth for is to serve others. He did it constantly and he told parables to teach the importance of servanthood. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” James’ Letter makes it clear that we show our faith by what we do to help others.

When Jesus was in the flesh he went about teaching and healing and doing the work of the Father. He had pity on those who were sick or afflicted or who had loved ones in need of help. He attended to physical and spiritual needs. When he left the earth he told his disciples that they were to love others as he had loved them. He went so far as to tell them that they would do even greater works than he had done.

To follow Jesus’ example and instructions, we are, first of all, to be conscious of the needs around us. We are to be the eyes of Jesus to see and the hands of Jesus to reach out. We are to be generous in our giving of our funds to meet the needs of others, but we are also to be giving of ourselves. Of course our primary obligation is to our family, but we shouldn’t limit our focus so much toward family and friends that we fail to see the greater needs that others may have.

For Christ’s Church to be effective in our day it must be composed of disciples who are focused on the needs of those around them and equipped to meet those needs, whatever they may be.

Matthew 20:27, 28, 25:31-46; Luke 10:30-37, 22:27; James 2:14-17
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12 Measuring Results. This life in Christ is a growing process called sanctification. We are able to measure our growth as Christ's disciples by the extent that the fruit of the Spirit are showing forth in our lives as a result of this growth process.

From the very first, the early Christians showed us the way we are to live. As soon as the Holy Spirit came upon them, they changed completely. From fearing and doubting, they became bold followers of Jesus, loving and caring for one another and for those around them, devoting themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, fellowship, worship, sharing what they had and praying (Acts 2:42). The fruit of the Spirit manifested itself in them with love and joy. Thus, they became guiding lights to us for how we are to live.

Now that we have experienced this life in Christ and have been growing in the knowledge and love of God, the fruit of the Spirit should be maturing in us. These fruit represent the characteristics of Christ, and we are to grow in the image of Christ. This will happen if we are living as God wants us to live.

So, as we come to the twelfth of the Disciple's Dozen, we ask ourselves, "How am I doing? Do I love with Jesus' love (*agape* love)? Is there joy in my heart even when things aren't going my way? Do I experience the peace that passes understanding? How is my patience index these days? Am I showing kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?"

We are evaluators by nature. We automatically test things against how we think they should be; we keep score. Well, what's more important than keeping score of ourselves against what God wants us to be? Regularly reflecting on the fruit of the Spirit and making every effort to measure up is a godly pursuit.

Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:8, 9; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 3:1-17; 2 Peter 1:5-7
