Discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel

The disciple follows Jesus by:
1. Listen to Jesus and obeys the commandments to love.
2. Learns from Jesus.
3. Lives a just life.
4. Puts his/her faith into action.
5. Understands there are consequences (judgment)
6. Forgive.
7. Lives in Community (the only gospel to use the word Church and emphasize Peter’s role, “the first pope.”)

1. The ideal disciple is a loyal subject, who obeys the great King and does what the King commands:
   ◦ In the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:19)
   ◦ In the Lord's Prayer: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done" (Matt 6:10; longer than in Luke 11:2)
   ◦ Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Matt 7:21)
   ◦ Jesus and a scribe dialogue about the greatest commandments: to love God and love our neighbors (Matt 22:34-40; similar in Mark 12:28-34)
   ◦ At the very end of the Gospel, the risen Jesus instructs his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19-20a)

2. The ideal disciple is a good student, who learns from the Teacher and understands what is taught:
   ◦ Jesus' disciples understand his parables (Matt 13:51; contrast Mark 4:13)
   ◦ Jesus tells his disciples to "Listen and understand" (Matt 15:10; similarly in 24:43)
When Peter asks Jesus to explain something further, Jesus challenges him, "Are you also still without understanding?" (Matt 15:16)

The disciples eventually understand when he tells them to beware the yeast of the Pharisees and Herodians (Matt 16:12; contrast Mark 8:17-21)

When Jesus speaks about Elijah, his disciples understand that he means John the Baptist (Matt 17:9-13; not in Mark 9:11-13)

Jesus admonishes his disciples: "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. (only in Matt 23:8)

3. Disciples of Jesus are expected to live in "righteousness" or be "righteous" (i.e., live in "right relationship" with God and with other people):

Greek adjective dikaios (used 17 times) and noun dikaiosyne (7 times) occur much more frequently in Matthew than in the other Gospels.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matt 5:6)

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:10)

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:20)

"Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous (Matt 10:41)

Jesus teaches about the end of the ages: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matt 13:43)


4. Authentic discipleship requires putting faith into action, as illustrated in various sayings and parables:

John the Baptist preaches, "...every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt 3:10)
Jesus teaches, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

Jesus uses analogies of trees and other plants producing good or bad fruit (Matt 7:15-20; cf. 12:33-37)

The parable of two people who build houses on rock or on sand (Matt 7:24-27)

The parable of the sower and the seed, only some of which produces a great yield (Matt 13:8, 23)

The parable of the two sons, one who first says no but then acts, the other says yes but does not act (only in Matt 21:28-32)

The parable of the ten bridesmaids (only in Matt 25:1-13)

The parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30; similar in Luke 19:11-27)

The parable of the sheep and the goats, in which the righteous are rewarded and others are punished (only in Matt 25:31-46)

5. Matthew's Gospel also stresses the reality of judgment, of the ultimate separation between good and evil:

This theme is already seen in many of the above texts that stress obeying God's commands and putting faith into action (and the consequences when people do not!)

The parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matt 13:24-30; explained only in 13:36-43)

Several short parables of the separation of good & bad, evil & righteous (only in Matt 13:47-50)

Sayings about two men in a field and two women grinding meal (Matt 24:40-41)

6. Matthew's Gospel stresses the necessity for mercy and forgiveness (both offering and receiving) and reconciliation:

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, / leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and
offer your gift. / \textit{Come to terms} quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him..." (only in Matt 5:23-25a)

○ In the Lord's Prayer: "And 	extit{forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors}" (Matt 6:12; similar in Luke 11:4)

○ Just after the Lord' Prayer: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; / but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (only in Matt 6:14-15)

○ When Peter asks, "Lord, if a brother or sister sins against me, \textit{how often should I forgive}? As many as seven times?" / Jesus replies, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." (Matt 18:21-22; shorter in Luke 17:3-4)

○ Jesus then tells the \textit{parable of the unforgiving servant} (only Matt 18:23-35)

○ Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "Drink from it, all of you / for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for \textit{many for the forgiveness of sins}.") (Matt 26:27-28; the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" is only in Matthew, not in the parallel texts in Mark and Luke!)

○ Note: Luke's Gospel also stresses the theme of forgiveness, in several pericopes not found in Matthew or Mark.

7. Discipleship is lived not just individually, but in community with other believers:

○ The discourse of Jesus in \textbf{Matthew 18} deals mostly with various aspects and problems of relationships within the community:

  ▪ Be humble, like a child, and don't cause anyone to "stumble" (18:1-10)

  ▪ Parable of a shepherd with 100 sheep (18:12-14)

  ▪ Four-step process for dealing with a community member who sins (18:15-17)

  ▪ Sayings about "binding and loosing" and "where two or three are gathered" (18:18-20)

  ▪ Peter's question about how often we must forgive (18:21-22)

  ▪ Parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23-35)
Among the four Gospels, only Matthew uses the word *ecclesia* ("church"):

- When Simon Peter tells Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus responds, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:17-19)

- Part of Jesus' teaching about how to treat a brother who sins: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matt 18:17)

- Peter's leadership role in the church is emphasized more in Matthew than in the other Gospels:
  - Peter is clearly already prominent in Mark's Gospel, but many of the episodes contain subtle differences in Matthew's versions
  - Only in Matthew does Peter attempt to walk on water (Matt 14:28-31)
  - In their dialogue at Caesarea Philippi, Peter's words about Jesus and Jesus' response to Peter (Matt 16:17-19, quoted above) are much more elaborate in Matthew than in the other Gospels.

+++ How are you a disciple of Jesus?