

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Disciple Of Christ



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

A Christian Is A Disciple Of Christ

Learn that Christians are disciples of Christ and what it means to be a disciple of Christ

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. For instance, Acts 11:26 says, “...And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

Whose Disciple Are You?

It is possible to be the disciple of many different people and many different “schools of thought.” There are disciples of presidents, disciples of economists, disciples of philosophers, disciples of religious teachers, etc. But, ultimately, whose disciple are you?

What it means to be a “disciple”

A “disciple” is someone who follows the ways of another (a master, leader). But, not only does this individual adopt the teachings of the master as his/her own beliefs, he/she will also be engaged in

helping to promote that way or accomplish the same kind of work/goals that another person has had.

There are two things that are involved in being the disciple of another. The first element of discipleship is that the disciple learns from the master. Therefore, he gives himself to listen to the teaching/instruction/training that is offered by the master. A disciple is going to devote himself/herself to sitting at the feet of the master teacher – just as Saul sat “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). Or, if it is not possible to directly sit at the master’s feet, the disciple will find as much of the master’s teaching that is available (i.e. his writings). The disciple wants to know exactly what the master teaches/taught.

The second element of discipleship is that the disciple is an imitator of the master. The true disciple is not content to just learn from the master and think like the master, but the true disciple will also want to walk in the footsteps of the master. The true disciple will want to make applications of the things that the master has taught.

Evaluate the fruit of your life

As you consider these two elements involved in discipleship, whose disciple are you? Now, I’m not necessarily talking about being the disciple of a leader in your profession. For instance, in the year 2015, someone who works in the field of economics may be a disciple of Dave Ramsey (a leader in economic thought). Instead, I’m talking about who has ultimate sway in your life to guide your thinking and shape your worldview.

You can know who your master is by examining the fruit that is being produced in your life. There is a principle that is established throughout Scripture that demonstrates you can know exactly who you are living for by examining what kind of “fruit” your life is producing.

For instance, in Matthew 6:21, Jesus says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In verses 19 and 20, He presented the two options that are available. Either you will have your heart set on earthly things (things that are only temporary in nature) or you will have your heart set on heavenly things (things that are eternal in nature).

Jesus says you can know which of these two have captured your allegiance by examining where your treasure is. So, if you are living to accumulate the riches, pleasures, and relationships of this life, you can know that your heart is set on earthly things. However, if you are living to accomplish the will of God, you can know that your heart is set on heavenly things. Either way, you will know where your heart is by examining the “fruit” that is produced in your life.

Matthew 7:15-20 also illustrates this principle. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

In this warning about the danger of false religious teachers (false prophets, those who claim to be speaking the words of God but would actually be speaking lies), Jesus tells people that they can know who is a false prophet by examining the fruits they produce in their lives. Jesus says that this is exactly the same way you can tell bushes from one another. For instance, you can know an apple tree from a peach tree by the fruit each one produces. Similarly, Jesus says that a false prophet can be known by carefully examining what he/she teaches.

In the same way, you can know whose teaching and manner of life you try to follow by looking at your life and the decisions that you have made in the past. Are the things being produced in your life (the “fruit” of your life) consistent with the life and teachings of Christ? Or, are they consistent with the life and teachings of someone else?

Then, even if you are religious and you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you need to seriously evaluate the fruit of your life to make sure that you have not actually become a disciple of a false religious teacher. Jesus demonstrates that there would actually be many people who would claim to be following Him; but, they would actually not be

His disciples. In Luke 6:46, He said, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (compare also with Matthew 7:21-23).

One example of this is found in 2 Timothy 4:2-4. In this text, Paul gives instructions to Timothy (an evangelist), urging him to be faithful in preaching the word – and warning him that a time will come when many will not endure sound teaching. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”

So, it is possible for you to have a form of religion and follow someone who will tell you what you want to hear rather than telling you the absolute truth. Many people, therefore, believe they are disciples of Jesus Christ; but, they do not actually follow the teachings or imitate the life of Christ!

As you consider discipleship, please take some time to *honestly* reflect on your life and the decisions that you are making on a daily basis. Do not deceive yourself to think that you are Jesus’ disciple if you are not actually being diligent to learn from and follow Jesus Christ!

God desires for people to be disciples of Jesus Christ

Does God want you to be Jesus’ disciple? Absolutely! Consider the “Great Commission” issued by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

Notice that Jesus wanted His apostles to be focused on the work of disciple-making. The parallel account of the “Great Commission” in Mark 16:15-16 helps us to understand that the teaching of the gospel of Christ is central to this disciple-making

work. But, please notice that Jesus did not want His apostles to teach the gospel *just* so that people would mentally acknowledge the truths about Him (i.e. have faith only). Jesus also did not want His apostles to teach the gospel *just* so that people would be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

No, He wanted His apostles (those who had been with Him) to teach the gospel to others in order to “make disciples of all the nations.” Now, this would include belief and baptism (see Mark 16:16). However, Jesus says that true discipleship does not end at baptism. Instead, there is a continual teaching even after the point of baptism!

Therefore, you should want to be more in your service to Jesus Christ than just a baptized believer. You should want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ! Now, let’s begin to investigate what that should look like specifically in your life.

A Disciple Is A Student Of Jesus Christ

Remember, one of the essential components of discipleship is to be a pupil/student of the master. In the case of a Christian, you must be a student of Jesus Christ (the Master Teacher). You should desire to learn His ways.

Why learn from Christ

Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus taught the people in very effective ways. He taught through means of parables, through contrasting His laws with the Old Law or the prevailing ideas of the day, through directly rebuking those who were involved in sin, and through His own example.

But, ultimately, the reason why you should learn from Jesus Christ is not because of His ability to teach His message. There have been many people throughout the history of the world who have had the ability to effectively communicate a message to others. This, of itself, is not a reason to follow

anyone. Instead, you must only follow someone who has authority.

For instance, suppose you wanted to be trained in a particular field of expertise. As you seek to find someone to learn from and imitate (i.e. a mentor), should you just choose someone because he is well-spoken? Obviously, this criteria alone would often result in following someone who will not help you accomplish your ultimate goal. Unfortunately, there are many people who follow after false religious teachers because of their abilities to communicate in entertaining and “uplifting” ways (creating good feelings that may or may not be based in truth).

Instead of choosing to learn the teachings of the most able or captivating communicator, you need to choose to listen to Jesus Christ (if you want to be His disciple) – and you need to do so for the following reasons.

(1) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because He has all authority. You need to choose to learn from the one who has authority. With regard to following God, Jesus Christ has been given all authority by the Father. Prior to instructing His apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, consider what Jesus said in Matthew 28:18. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Authority involves the two elements of having both power and right over all things. Therefore, Jesus declares that He is the one who possesses both of these over all things. Why, then, would you learn from or follow someone who is not speaking only the message of Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ has all authority because the Father has given Him this authority and because He is the Son of God. Therefore, as Jesus taught on this earth, He did not just tell people to blindly follow Him. Instead, He demonstrated to the people that He truly did have authority and that He truly was the Son of God (primarily through the miraculous things which He did). For instance, John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus

is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

(2) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because His way is absolute truth. Jesus, as God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14; Colossians 2:9), was not just teaching His own ideas as a man. Instead, the things He taught were absolute truth!

John 8:31-32 says, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” It is Jesus’ teachings that were absolute truth and that would set people free from their sins.

In John 6, after Jesus had taught those who were following Him that He is the Bread of Life, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” because they considered this to be a “hard saying” (John 6:60-66). When Jesus proceeded to ask His twelve apostles, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:67), consider the apostle Peter’s response. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68).

Peter was absolutely correct to recognize that Jesus Christ was the only one who had the complete words of truth that would lead to eternal salvation in Heaven – because He is the one who had all authority (having demonstrated to be the Son of God). Therefore, Peter recognized that there was no one else to go to and become a disciple of who could produce the same outcome that being a disciple of Jesus Christ would produce!

(3) You must learn the teachings of Jesus Christ because His words will judge us on the Last Day. His words, being fully authoritative and containing absolute truth, will be the criteria by which we will all be judged one day (on the Day of Judgment).

In John 12:44-50, Jesus said as much. He said, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does

not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

Again, even in this statement, Jesus comes back to the matter of authority. He demonstrates that He is not just speaking His own words. Instead, the words that He spoke were the words that were fully authoritative as the words of God. Then, He identifies the consequence of rejecting Him and not receiving the words He spoke. Specifically, He says that the one who does so rejects the words which will judge him on the Last Day.

On the great Day of Judgment, God has appointed that Jesus Christ will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30). 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that everything you have ever done, thought, or said will be subject to this judgment – whether they were good or evil. The criteria for the Judgment that will determine whether you spend eternity in Hell’s punishment or be rewarded with everlasting life in Heaven will be the words of God!

How to learn from Christ

Given these three reasons, I hope you understand that you *need* to learn from Jesus Christ (if you want to have eternal salvation). But, how do you learn from Jesus Christ? Let’s investigate.

First, you understand that you cannot learn from Christ in the exact same ways that Jesus’ original disciples learned from Him. Those original disciples were able to literally sit at the feet of Jesus, hear the words from His mouth, witness the miracles He performed, and watch His perfect example. However, now that Jesus has ascended into Heaven and currently resides at the right hand of the Father, you cannot learn from Jesus in this same way. But, you can still learn from Him.

You learn from Jesus Christ through the things that have been written in the Bible. Jesus

promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come to them after He ascended into Heaven so that they would know the will of God. Consider two passages from the book of John.

John 14:25-26 says, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

John 16:12-15 says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

Therefore, the Holy Spirit would work to accomplish two things. First, He would bring to their remembrance the things Jesus had taught. And, second, He would teach them additional truths that they had not been ready to learn whenever Jesus was with them. In all of this work, the Holy Spirit would be guiding the apostles (and also the prophets, Ephesians 3:3-5) into all truth.

Now, it is when you read the words that have been written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (in the pages of the Bible) that you can know the right doctrines to believe, know the changes you need to make to your life, and know all of the ways of righteousness involved in living to please God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)! This is why Paul could say that the things he wrote were “the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Since you learn from Jesus Christ by reading all of the things written by the New Testament writers (who wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit), you need to be diligent to study the Bible! Learning the truths that are written in the pages of the New Testament is the only way you will be able to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ!

What to learn from Christ

What do you need to learn from Christ to be His disciple? The Scriptures demonstrate that you must begin by learning the basics (the “milk”) of the word of God and that you must progressively increase in your understanding of God’s word. For instance, 2 Peter 3:18 instructs you to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 5:12-14 identifies that there was a time at which you were a newborn babe in Christ Jesus (whenever you first became a disciple). At this time, you were “unskilled in the word of righteousness” and lived on the “milk” of the word (the “first principles of the oracles of God”). However, the passage implies that this should not be the permanent state of the one who desires to be Christ’s disciple. Instead, the Scriptures demonstrate that the true disciple of Christ will be increasing in his/her ability to understand the word of God and will mature to the point that he/she is able to partake of “solid food” (the more difficult aspects of God’s word).

Ultimately, the Christian can and should be learning from Christ in every area of his/her life. The Bible provides instructions that cover every aspect of Christian living that is applicable to “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). So, since God tells us everything that is necessary to know in order to please Him, we look to all of His teachings for guidance.

As we do, we find instructions pertaining to such things as prayer (Matthew 6:5-13), forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15), faith (John 8:24), judging (Matthew 7:1-6), humility (Matthew 18:1-4), serving (Matthew 20:20-28), loving our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37), our clothing (1 Timothy 2:9-10), consuming alcohol (1 Peter 4:3-4), speaking truth (Ephesians 4:25), controlling our thoughts (Matthew 5:27-30), the sinful works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), the fruit of living a life for the Lord (Galatians 5:22-23), and many other things!

Ultimately, the one who truly desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ will desire to learn from Christ in every area through the teachings of the New Testament. The disciple of Jesus Christ will desire to acknowledge whatever God teaches about any

subject as the complete standard of truth and will determine to live accordingly – regardless of his/her own personal beliefs, opinions, traditions, feelings, etc.

A Disciple Is An Imitator Of Jesus Christ

The second of the essential components of discipleship is to be an imitator of the master. In the case of a Christian, you must be an imitator of Jesus Christ. You should desire to follow all of His ways.

More than just a student of Jesus

The one who is a disciple of Jesus must be a student of Jesus Christ and learn what Jesus taught (as well as everything taught by the inspired apostles and prophets in the New Testament). However, true discipleship does not stop at gaining an understanding of the things Jesus taught. Instead, true discipleship goes even further and involves living a life that puts those truths into practice (just as Jesus did Himself).

Let's go back and look at what Jesus said in Luke 6:46 again. "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Jesus is simply not pleased with people who give lip-service to the things He taught, but do not actually put those things into practice in their lives!

Think about Jesus' own life for a few minutes. During Jesus' life, He was hated, spitefully mistreated, and eventually killed by the world because the world hated what He taught and the way He lived (John 15:18). Now, don't you suppose that Jesus' life could have been much easier if He would have just *said* what God's will was (without actually doing it)? Don't you suppose that it would have been much easier for Jesus to have just taught us to love the lost without dying for them? Don't you suppose it would have been much more convenient for Jesus to have just taught about serving others without actually giving His life as a ransom for many? However, Jesus was not hypocritical in His teaching.

In every point, He followed up His teaching with a consistent application of those truths!

This is exactly what He wants from those who will be His disciples! He wants His disciples to put His teachings into practice in their lives. Go back and consider the "Great Commission" Jesus gave to His apostles again (in Matthew 28:18-20). Notice that those who were to be made disciples through the teaching of the gospel (i.e. through learning the will of God) were also to be taught "to observe all things" that Jesus commanded.

Therefore, a working knowledge of God's will is not sufficient for discipleship. It must be put into practice. James 1:22-25 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." Again, if you only are a hearer of God's word, you deceive yourself into thinking you are Jesus' disciple when you actually are *not* a true disciple!

Why imitate Jesus

An "imitation" is something that attempts to replicate something else. It attempts to make an exact copy of an original. For instance, the original Declaration of Independence has been replicated many times by attempting to make an exact copy of the original to be displayed in other places. Merchants also often attempt to sell imitation goods of many things (i.e. women's purses, sunglasses, clothing, etc.).

Now, we have already established why you should listen to Jesus in His teachings. But, why should you actually imitate Jesus?

(1) You should imitate Jesus because God has told you to do so. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul wrote, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." Please pay close attention to the fact that Paul was *not* encouraging others only to imitate his example. Instead, others were to imitate what they saw in Paul

to the extent that what they saw in Paul was an imitation of Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 5:1 also states, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” Again, this is given in the form of a commandment. This is one of God’s expectations for His people. We must imitate what we can know about God. And, one of the best ways we can know how God would respond to the various circumstances we encounter during our lives is through the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was “God...manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

(2) You should imitate Jesus because He was not hypocritical. While Jesus lived on this earth and taught many people, Jesus condemned hypocrisy. For instance, He condemned the hypocrisy of many of the religious leaders of the time who would bind heavy burdens on others but would not live their lives accordingly (see Matthew 23).

Yet, this was not the case with Jesus. Example after example could be provided as to Jesus’ genuineness. He would teach people the will of God – *and* He lived His life according to those same teachings. For instance, Jesus taught to forgive others of their sins (i.e. Matthew 6:14-15). And, when He was hanging on the cross (being crucified by wicked men), He pleaded that His Heavenly Father would forgive them of their wickedness (Luke 23:34).

(3) You should imitate Jesus because He was sinless. Every other man you could imitate who has lived on this earth would be unsuitable for imitation because “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). Therefore, there is *some* area in everyone’s life that is spiritually dangerous for you to imitate. That is, everyone *except* for Jesus.

Consider what Hebrews 4:15 says about Jesus. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” So, when Jesus lived on this earth, He faced the same kinds of temptations that you face. For instance, you can read Matthew 4:1-11 and learn about one instance when Jesus was tempted. But, even though He was tempted in these same ways, He never sinned against God! Therefore, Jesus is truly the only perfect example of

how God wants you to live your life on earth. There is not one area in which you should not follow the example of Jesus Christ.

(4) You should imitate Jesus because He perfectly glorified God while on this earth. Because “all have sinned” and have fallen “short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), there is no other man/woman who is qualified to be the perfect model for imitation. Due to their sin, they have all (at one time or another) fallen short of glorifying God!

However, since Jesus Christ never sinned, He never fell short of His ultimate mission of bringing glory to His Heavenly Father while He lived on this earth. For instance, in John 17, as Jesus was nearing the end of His earthly life and praying to His Father, He said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:1-5).

Areas you must imitate Jesus in

We have already seen that the Bible contains a record of many of Jesus’ own teachings (as well as the teachings of the divinely inspired apostles and prophets). However, the Bible also contains a record of many things Jesus did while He lived on this earth. Thanks be to God, then, that we can look to these passages and see what God would do if He was living as man – because that’s exactly who Jesus was!

Now, we can look to Jesus’ perfect example and learn how He dealt with many situations that confronted Him during the course of His life on this earth. And, as we learn from these perfect examples, we should be able to evaluate our lives and see whether or not we are being true disciples of Jesus Christ by imitating Him.

For instance, do you respond to temptation in the same way Jesus responded to temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)? Do you serve other people like

Jesus served (John 13:1-17)? Do you love the lost like Jesus loved the lost (John 4:1-42)? Do you give of yourself like Jesus gave of Himself (2 Corinthians 8:9)?

These are only a sample of areas in which we should be imitating the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Actually, in every situation we are faced with, we should consider the question, “What did Jesus do when He was faced with the same kind of situation?” Then, “how would Jesus respond if He was faced with this decision?” But, we do not answer these questions based on our own opinions. Instead, we must look to the teachings of God’s word and find the answer there!

Will You Be A True Disciple Of Jesus?

True discipleship, then, involves these two elements of learning from and imitating Jesus Christ. And, as you consider both of these elements, you need to realize what Jesus taught in John 15:18-21. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

This passage should help you understand that true discipleship will not always be easy. Just as the world hated and persecuted Jesus, the world will hate and persecute those who follow after Him. However, Jesus wants you to realize this (He doesn’t try to conceal this truth from you) and make the conscious decision to follow Him – no matter the cost! Consider a few passages that demonstrate the cost of true discipleship and determine whether or not you will be a true disciple of Jesus.

Matthew 4:18-22

“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

On this occasion, Jesus called two groups of brothers to be His disciples – Peter and Andrew, James and John. Particularly, I want you to notice the cost of discipleship that was involved for each of them. All four were fishermen and were called to leave their livelihoods in order to enter the new occupation of being “fishers of men.” All four were called to leave their “comfort zones” of what they had always known to go into the labor fields for Jesus Christ. James and John are even said to have left their own father (Zebedee).

Luke 5:11 summarizes their sacrifice to be disciples of Jesus Christ. “So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” These men sacrificed *everything* they knew and everything they had in order to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, according to Bible teaching and secular tradition, Peter, Andrew, and James were all killed for being disciples of Jesus Christ. John also suffered during his life for being a disciple (even being exiled to an island), though he (supposedly) did not experience martyrdom.

Luke 9:23-26

“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.’”

The context of Jesus' statement (as seen from Luke 9:21-22) is Jesus foretelling His own impending suffering, death, and resurrection. Then, Jesus demonstrates that He is not the only one who must be so committed to accomplishing the will of God, when He states the things recorded in Luke 9:23-26.

Notice the three things Jesus instructs in verse 23. (1) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must deny himself. This is a denial of everything that would hinder him from following the Lord. Certainly, this includes denying himself of all sinful pleasures and treasures. (2) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must take up his cross daily. Now, the cross was an instrument used in execution. Often, part of the prisoner's execution/punishment was to carry his own cross (as Jesus also accomplished). It would be painful, humiliating, tiresome, and difficult. So, those who desire to follow Christ must be willing to do anything/everything that is required – no matter how much he is ridiculed, nor how costly it is, nor how painful it is, etc. Then, notice that this cross must be bourn *daily* (it is not something that you pick and choose when you will bear it). (3) If anyone desires to be Jesus' disciple, he must follow Christ. Wherever He leads, you must humbly follow. You must recognize that your life is not your own. Instead, you must recognize that your life belongs to the one who gave His life for you so that you can be saved (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 2:20)!

But, to what extent does Jesus intend for these things to be applied? Verses 24-26 help to understand the answer to that question. Jesus illustrates that this is not *just* a denial of your own physical desires in order to not sin. Instead, this is even a willingness to follow Jesus Christ through the point of being put to death for being His disciple (see Revelation 2:10)! Then, Jesus demonstrates that you should be willing to give yourself to Him in this way because nothing on this earth is worth losing your soul for!

Luke 9:57-62

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but

the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

Here are three examples of what is involved in being a true disciple of Jesus Christ. The first man needed to understand what he was getting in to as a disciple. He needed to realize that it was not an easy life (as demonstrated by Jesus not having a place to lay His head). The second man was rebuked for desiring to be Jesus' disciple, but not being willing to put Jesus ahead of his father. Then, the third man was rebuked for wanting to follow Jesus, but not being willing to put Jesus ahead of his family. In fact, Jesus plainly states that you cannot begin to follow Him and then not give Him your entire focus!

Luke 14:25-27, 33

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.’”

In the greater part of this passage (Luke 14:25-33), Jesus teaches the need to count the cost of true discipleship in order to determine whether you will be willing to give what He requires of you. What He requires, He states in verses 26-27 and 33 is that He must come absolutely first in your life. You must be willing to forsake everything and everyone else in order to follow whatever He says. Then, He says that if you fail to do this, you cannot be His disciple.

Will you be a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

How much are you willing to sacrifice for Jesus? How far are you willing to follow Him? How much are you willing to stand out from the world to live for Him? Are you truly willing to put Him

absolutely first in your life in order to learn from Him and imitate Him? If not, you cannot be His disciple.

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26)! You must recognize the cost of being a disciple of Christ and devote yourself to being a faithful disciple. And, if you do, the Scriptures teach that you receive the eternal reward in Heaven! These blessings will make all of the sufferings seem as those they were nothing (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)!

Study Questions

1. Whose Disciple Are You?

What does it mean to be a “disciple”?

How will evaluating the “fruit” of your life help you identify whose disciple you are?

How does the “Great Commission” help you understand that God wants you to be Jesus’ disciple?

2. A Disciple Is A Student Of Jesus Christ

Why should you learn from Christ?

How can you learn from Christ?

What can you learn from Christ?

3. A Disciple Is An Imitator Of Jesus Christ

Why must you be more than just a student of Jesus?

Why should you imitate Jesus?

What areas must you imitate Jesus in?

4. Will You Be A True Disciple Of Jesus?

What does Matthew 4:18-22 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 9:23-26 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 9:57-62 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?

What does Luke 14:25-27, 33 teach you about being a true disciple of Jesus?