

# Being a Disciple of Jesus

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The word *disciple* is related to the Greek word *mathetes*, which means a learner or a follower. It implies devotion, commitment, and submission to a master. Anyone claiming to be a Christian needs to realize that implied in the very word Christian is the idea of discipleship—for it was the disciples at Antioch who were first called Christians. By putting together various statements from the Gospels, we can get a clear picture of what Jesus had in mind when He used the term disciple.

## The Cost of Discipleship

*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. ... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”* Luke 14:25-27, 33

These are hard words. I am sure people struggled with what Jesus said. But He knew that a lot of people had been following Him for the wrong reasons. We’re told in the Gospel of John that many in the crowd followed Him because they saw the miracles. They ate the loaves and were filled. So in the Scripture passage above, Jesus was laying out the qualifications for discipleship.

Likewise today, people struggle with and are confused by this teaching. Is Jesus saying that we are to hate, in a malicious sense, our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters? Of course not. His message is one of love. So why does Jesus use such strong wording? He wants us to understand that our love for, devotion to, and commitment to Him must be superior to our love for, devotion to, and commitment to anyone and everyone else—our families and ourselves included.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him, ‘Come and die.’” That’s the invitation; that’s the cost. We are to die to ourselves, our plans for life, our agendas, and our priorities. When we come to Christ to be His disciple, we are putting all of those things aside and yielding ourselves to Him.

Notice also: Jesus said that if we are not willing to do this, we cannot be His disciples. He sets the terms. And it’s important for us to remember that—especially in our day and age. We are not in charge. We’re not calling the shots. Many people today want the Lord, but they want Him on their terms or under their conditions. However, Jesus does not compromise or negotiate. He has already stated His requirements clearly.

## A Primary Characteristic of a Disciple

Disciples have many characteristics, but I want to focus here on one in particular. Jesus said in John 8:31b, “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*” A disciple of Jesus takes God’s Word seriously—His Word is absolute and final.

Let’s be clear about this: You cannot be a true follower of Jesus and at the same time reject the Bible’s teaching. Now, why do I say that? Because there are people today who think that you can. I have talked to people who say they are Christians and believe in Jesus; they just don’t like what the Bible says about Him. But the reality is, there is no Jesus different from the Bible’s description.

As disciples, we don’t get to pick and choose what passages we like in the Bible. We can’t come to a particular passage and reject it simply because it’s hard. Instead, true followers of Jesus are devoted to God’s Word, submit to God’s Word, and recognize the authority of God’s Word.

Frankly, there are passages in the Bible that I wish weren’t there. I don’t like this stuff

about hell; it’s not a pleasant thought. But it’s a reality. Just because it grates against my human nature doesn’t mean I can dismiss it. As a disciple, I must take it to heart and pray, “Lord, even though my nature chafes against this heavy truth, I submit to it. I accept it; it’s Your Word.”

How does this devotion work itself out practically? Through diligent study of, and meditation on, Scripture. A person who claims to be a Christian but has no place for the Bible in their daily living is not a

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disciple. We see a picture of a disciple in Psalm 1—he delights in the Lord’s law and meditates on it day and night. Disciples seek to know God better, ask to hear His voice, and long for Him to change their hearts through His Word.

Finally, disciples are doers of the Word. If we’re just hearing it, but not doing it, James 1:22 says we’re deceiving ourselves.

Disciples saturate their lives with God’s Word—submitting to it, obeying it, following it, and living according to it. So that’s a primary characteristic of a disciple. In the next issue, we will continue by looking at the marks of a disciple. ✍️