

LESSON 18 - CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

What Does It Mean to be a Disciple of Jesus... According to Jesus?

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What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Does it merely mean “to follow the teachings of?” Or is there more to it than that? If you were to ask Jesus, “How can I become your disciple?” how would He respond? Jesus’s disciple needs to trust in Him as their Lord and Savior, the eternal Son of God who paid for their sins on the cross and then rose from the dead. But it’s more than just one’s beliefs, it’s also a wholehearted, lifelong pursuit to follow and become more like Him. In Mark 8:34 and Matthew 16:24 (NIV) Jesus said, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*” The heart of being a disciple of Jesus is trusting in the Gospel so much so that you: 1) deny yourself, 2) take up your cross, and 3) follow Him.

1. Deny Yourself. To be a disciple of Jesus and become like Him we need to deny ourselves. We need to stop being selfish, self-centered, and idolatrous. From the moment we’re born these are the kinds of thoughts we have: Do I like this? What do I want? How do I get what I want? How can doing this benefit me? Why isn’t that person giving me what I want? Everyone *else* is so selfish, I guess I’ll be, too. The sad truth is we love our sinful selves and the things of this sinful world. James 4:4 says, “*anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*” We were created by God for HIS glory. We selfishly love the things that satisfy our desires, and the people who love and benefit us. We must stop trying to get what we want in life and be more concerned with God getting what He wants from our lives. In Matthew 10:37 Jesus said, “*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*” Denying yourself means being willing to forsake all the things important to you to live entirely for Jesus. In Luke 14:26 Jesus says, “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even their own life--such a person cannot be my disciple.*” He doesn’t actually want us to hate ourselves or the important people in our lives. He wants us to love Him and live for Him *so much* so that by comparison it’s *like* we hate them. See your present life as temporary and fleeting. Like a breath that comes and goes. Denying yourself means giving up this earthly life. The exact way you learn to deny yourself, and lead others to do the same, isn’t as important as just making sure you’re doing it! Are you denying yourself for Jesus? What’s the Lord reminding you of, right now, to deny?

2. Take Up Your Cross. To be a disciple of Jesus and become like Him we need to take up our cross. The cross was an execution device. A heavy wooden beam you’d carry all the way to the site where you’d be executed by being nailed to it and then left to die slowly and publicly. Does Jesus actually want

us to die for Him? Well, sort of. Our physical death, for His name and glory, is a possibility. In John 21:19 Jesus told Peter he would glorify God by dying for Him. In Matthew 24:9 Jesus warned His followers, *“you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”* So determine and prepare your heart to be willing to die for Jesus. While physical death is always a possibility, it isn't necessary to be a disciple. Jesus's words aren't meant to be taken literally, as though He was asking every single disciple to just go die for Him. This same statement in Luke 9:23 includes the preposition *daily*: *“Whoever wants to be my disciple... must take up their cross DAILY and follow me.”* It's our death to other things that is necessary. We do need to die to our old lives. We need to die to our love of self and the sinful things of the world. We need to die to our old sinful nature, be spiritually born again, and crucify the sinful desires of the flesh. When we die to these things, to live for Jesus, it will create hostility with the dark and sinful forces of the world. Jesus said in John 15:19, *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own... you do not belong to the world... That is why the world hates you.”* And in Matthew 10:22, *“You will be hated by everyone because of me.”* Jesus is really asking for our daily commitment, and to die *for HIS sake*. Jesus assures His disciples in Luke 9:24, *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”* Our willingness to die for Jesus, and our evidence of a lifetime of doing this daily in these various ways IS our testimony. The entire global Church of all the resurrected saints is described in Revelation 12:11 this way: *“They triumphed over him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”* Are you willing to be killed for Jesus? How has He been calling you to die to yourself daily? Have you obeyed Him?

3. Follow Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus and become like Him we need to follow Him. Jesus said the phrase “Follow Me” to many people. We must all *actively and persistently* follow Him. This means walking with Him, talking with Him, learning from Him, and being led by Him. Are you following Him to wherever you go and whatever you do? His invitation to follow isn't just religious, it's spiritual. What He'll teach you along the journey isn't just intellectual, it's emotional. He will change your heart's desires. He's not just Savior, Lord, and King; He's also Friend and Advocate. Following Him isn't only about submission and obeying His commandments. His invitation includes a personal, intimate, loving relationship with Him. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said He will carry the heavy part of the load and His followers will receive rest for their souls. These wonderful blessings are not without sacrifice. We must count the cost of following Jesus. In Luke 9:57-62 He gave three examples of sacrifice. One man said, *“I will follow you wherever you go.”* Jesus says, *“the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* Translation: would you be homeless for Me? Another said, *“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* Jesus said, *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”* Jesus replied, *“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Let's pray. Father, help me every single day to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Your Son. Holy Spirit, empower me daily to do this. Jesus, be the Lord and King of my life. In Your name. Amen.