



## WHAT'S A DISCIPLE TO DO?

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Last Sunday, I spoke with you about disciple-making—sharing the Gospel message about Jesus Christ with others in the course of our everyday lives. That's what disciples do.

So, what makes a person a “disciple” of Jesus? Some people suggest that “disciplehood” is a secondary decision or experience in the course of trusting in Christ. This is based on a false dichotomy: Jesus can be your Savior, but not yet your Lord.

This is false simply because Jesus is who He is—He is Savior *and* Lord. He is not who *you* choose Him to be, nor is He only what you permit Him to be. He is who He is. And it is the Lord who is the Savior; the Savior is the Lord. The titles apply to one person; He cannot be divided according to your preference.

So, either Jesus Christ is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. If you are saved, He is your Lord. Act like it.

In a similarly false dichotomy, some would suggest you may be converted without being committed. However, conversion is not a mental decision, but an inward transformation. Not the final transformation, or the complete transformation, but an initial and significant transformation nonetheless.

Conversion is the inward transformation resulting from one's faith in Jesus Christ—not a superficial mental assent, but a heart reliance and devotion. Discipleship, then, is the daily living out of that faith—however rocky the path.

Which seems to come first may be debated, because, I believe, it varies according to one's personality. For some, conversion is the gateway to discipleship—a profound inward experience leads them to embrace outward practices of faith.

For others, discipleship is the path to conversion—embracing regular faith practices leads them to that profundity of confident surrender.

Whichever the first step, the road is one—conversion is actual discipleship; discipleship is actual conversion.

## Character of a Disciple

Jesus said to those who followed Him, “If you want to be My disciple...”

The following Bible text is derived from Matthew 10, 16, Mark 8, Luke 9, 14, and John 12, and combined in a way that makes it readable as a single passage.

*A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said to them, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow Me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.*

*“If you want to be My disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple.*

*“If you love your father or mother more than you love Me, you are not worthy of being Mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than Me, you are not worthy of being Mine.*

*“If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of being Mine. You cannot be My disciple.*

*“But don’t begin until you count the cost.*

*“Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to serve Me must follow Me, because My servants must be where I am.”*

What does His invitation reveal about becoming a disciple of His?

### **Disciples give up their right to their own way.**

*“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way.”*

Your way is not the highway of holiness.

To follow is to surrender your right to choose/chart your own way through life, to commit yourself to His leadership (Lordship).

You can no longer say, “No, Lord.”

## **Disciples take up their cross every day.**

*“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily.”*

Not just on Sundays. Not just when it suits you.

Jesus committed His entire life to that day when He would carry His own cross—the instrument of His death.

That’s what the cross is—an instrument of death. Crucifixion was 100% fatal. And it was a thoroughly humiliating death.

Disciples of Jesus embrace dying and death. Not morbidly, but hopefully. They recognize that physical death is a transition from this life to the greater one to come. Just as Jesus marched to His death—with all the “little deaths” to self along the way—His disciples face the inevitability of theirs with similar confidence in the fruitfulness of a life of service to God and the resurrected life to come.

## **Disciples follow Jesus.**

*“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.”*

Disciples will not follow another. Jesus said, *“My sheep know My voice. The voice of another they will not follow.”*

By comparison, everyone else becomes second—father, mother, wife, husband, children, siblings, even (and especially) yourself.

If you love someone else more, you are not worthy to be His.

If you refuse to take up this cross, you are not worthy to be His.

## **Disciples count the cost.**

*“If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of being Mine. You cannot be My disciple. But don’t begin until you count the cost.”*

You cannot escape the cost, so prepare for it.

Consider tithing as an example—you can give it or God will take it; you choose. Give it, and receive a blessing you have no room to contain. Keep it, and lose what you have to the devourer.

Loving your life in this world (clinging to it) will bring you the pain of loss. Spending your life in this world (giving it away) will bring you gain—eternal gain.

Count the cost and be prepared.

## **Disciples are all about JESUS.**

*“Anyone who wants to serve Me must follow Me, because My servants must be where I am.”*

Discipleship is, before anything else, a relationship. A disciple is a learner—but not a book-learner or video-learner. A disciple has a Teacher, and learns from his or her Teacher. That Teacher is Jesus.

Disciples follow JESUS. Not Jesus’ teachings. Not Jesus’ ethics. Not Jesus’ acts. Not Jesus’ people. Disciples follow Jesus Himself.

They look to Jesus. They listen to Jesus. They obey Jesus. They please Jesus.

## **Acts of a Disciple**

Disciples are authorized and anointed by the Lord, *because of* their ongoing relationship with Him. (Not because of an event in their past.)

How do disciples invest themselves? In general, five ways, which I will simply list here (and reserve comments for another time):

- Worship/Prayer
- Fellowship (the brotherhood)
- Word-centered/-guided/-empowered
- Giving/serving: “Such as I have, I give...”
- Witnessing/Disciple-making

It is this last one that I will address briefly today.

## **Disciple-making**

Witnessing/disciple-making is our responsibility. But it is also the Holy Spirit’s activity.

*John 15:26 “But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about Me. <sup>27</sup> And you must also testify about Me because you have been with Me from the beginning of My ministry.*

Our responsibility means our response to His ability. This is a partnership. An interdependence. A shared experience. And a shared victory.

## **No Contest**

Last Sunday, I said to you, “People don’t need to know what you know; they need to know what Jesus means to you.” Biblical content is important, and certainly necessary for developing faith, but for awakening faith (evangelism), the Scriptures must be woven into your personal story of faith in Jesus.

Evangelism is not a contest.

Evangelism is not a contest of texts.

Evangelism is not a contest of beliefs.

Evangelism is not a contest of morality.

Evangelism is not a contest of ideologies.

Evangelism is not a contest of local churches.

Evangelism is not a contest of religious preferences.

Evangelism is not a contest.

For sure, some people will try to draw you into a contest. Your own human nature may want to go there, to win your point. Don’t.

Evangelism is not a contest.

You won’t win people to faith in Christ by loudly disagreeing with their beliefs, or insisting that they are wrong and you are right, but by showing them Christ’s love so graciously and His light so brightly that they want with all their hearts to know where it comes from.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of texts.**

If you are trained in apologetics, and familiar with ancient documents and languages and archeology, then you may be able to defeat their conjectures, but it’s unlikely you will win them to Christ.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of beliefs.**

If you attempt to show someone that your belief yields greater benefit than their belief, you will end up in a shouting match. People adopt beliefs because to them they make sense of the world; they provide some comfort or hope, or at least, security. Those are emotional positions, not intellectual ones. They are tightly held, and seldom let go long enough to test another view.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of morality.**

Moral choices and behaviors are first formed from our childhood experiences, not from our reasoning. In fact, much of our natural reasoning has been built to support those

childhood beliefs about how the world works and what values are worth preserving and protecting.

Even the Scriptures will not adjust a person's morality apart from the powerful activity of the Holy Spirit. So, you cannot preach or teach someone into moral behavior.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of ideologies.**

Ideologies are the framework of one's worldview. Ideologies depend on human ideas and logic and reasoning. But evangelism depends on the Word of truth and the power of the Holy Spirit.

A contest of ideologies is just a fruitless argument.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of local churches.**

Arguing for our denomination, our creed, our liturgy, or our local church programs is pointless. People adhere to a particular local church because of the relationships they have developed there, more than anything else.

Such a contest is misguided and misleading.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of religious preferences.**

As soon as we move to the theme of preference, we have left the realm of truth, and there is no longer an objective baseline for discussion. Only argument.

What am I saying? Evangelism/disciple-making is not a contest. Disciple-making is telling someone you care about, what your personal experience with Jesus Christ has been, as it relates to what they are dealing with in their own life.

Let me unpack that for you...

Someone you care about. (Not a project, but a person, beloved by God.)

Your personal experience with Christ. (Your actual experience is the limit of your influence.)

As it relates... what they are dealing with. (You must first listen to grasp their perspective, their need.)

Are you a disciple of Jesus? If not, why not?

Are you serving the Lord as a disciple-maker? If not, why not?