

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

I. What is a disciple?

A. The word *disciple* means learner/follower/apprentice

We will see as Jesus teaches about what it means to be a disciple that the goal is not merely learning knowledge, although that is involved. The goal isn't to merely obey rules, although that is involved too. The goal of being a disciple is to be formed to be like Jesus.

Think of a disciple like an apprentice, that is the basic idea of the word. For example, a medical apprentice would follow around a master surgeon and watch him care for people. Of course there is knowledge involved. You can't be good at surgery without understanding the internals of the human body. So book learning will certainly be required. But the book learning isn't enough to make you a good surgeon. You can read about technique, but you need to see it in action. You need to see how the knowledge is put into practice. So not only knowledge but also skill is involved.

In the same way, you can read the Bible and see that following Jesus involves everything from serving others, reading the Bible, praying, teaching, correcting, caring for the poor, and many other practices. But what do those look like? For example, you could read in your Bible that it is right to confront sin, but have you ever seen how someone confronts different kinds of sin and sinners? How should gentleness be combined with truth, patience with urgency? What does it actually look like?

B. Discussion: a) Where have you seen an example of hands-on learning that was really effective? b) Where have you seen head knowledge that lacked true wisdom? c) Where have you seen practical experience that lacked knowledge?

C. Making disciples (and therefore being a faithful disciple) is at the heart of the Christian mission

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up 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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Our goal, our mission, is to help everyone, believers and non-believers alike to be discipled and disciple people to be like Jesus.

To be a disciple you must count the cost and prize the kingdom

It is absolutely necessary to count the cost, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. Following and becoming like Jesus takes work, sacrifice, and faith.

Luke 9:23-26

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

No one looking back is fit for God's kingdom. You must prize the kingdom above all earthly values to follow Jesus. This isn't just about some extra bonus, this is how to be fit for God's kingdom.

Luke 9:57-62

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

D. Jesus modeled and taught what discipleship is

i. Following Jesus is value driven

Luke 6:1-12

Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?" And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored. But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus. It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

This is one of the most shocking passages because Jesus quotes David positively for actually breaking the law for the sake of the principle behind it. This shows that Jesus' point is that following God is not just about obeying rules. God cares about values and principles. The Bible not merely a rule book. It teaches us who our God is, what His values and purposes are, and how to join in His plan.

ii. Gospel values of disciples

Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

To follow Jesus you must value eternity more than anything else. If you live for the world you won't give up everything for Jesus and you won't follow and become like Him. In other words being a disciple is based on faith.

iii. Gospel practices of disciples

Luke 6:27-38

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

If you value eternity more than anything else, your life will be about sacrificial and generous love based on the gospel. It will extend even to loving our enemies. There are two key gospel motives in this passage that enable disciples to give up their lives: 1) God will reward us in eternity, and 2) we comprehend and embrace God's mercy.

When Jesus says not to judge in this context, it more or less means, “judge not worthy of mercy.” Here we see clearly that judgment cuts off compassion. This happens even in the church with believers! Husbands and wives, my wife hasn’t served me enough, I am not going to lay down my life for them, they aren’t worthy of my sacrificial care. Ultimately, when we make that determination we are saying that they aren’t worthy of ‘mercy.’

iv. Gospel fruit and follow-through of disciples

Luke 6:39-49

And He also spoke a parable to them: “A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye. For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.”

a. A true disciple must be following someone who knows the goal

Luke 6:39

And He also spoke a parable to them: “A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?”

We are all blind so we all need a guide! How will we know where we are going, what’s the goal? We all need an outside perspective!

b. A true disciple actually becomes like his teacher

Luke 6:40

A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.

True learning can never just be head knowledge. The goal of all discipleship is transformation.

- c. A true disciple is more concerned with their own sin than others' sin

Luke 6:41-42

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

We can only help others when we see sin through the lens of the gospel. The gospel causes us to hate and be sad over our own sin as offensive to God and yet see other's sin through the lens of grace.

- d. A true disciple understands that fruit can't be faked, it comes from the heart

Luke 6:43-45

For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

All of our words and actions are overflow of our heart. So true disciples focus on heart transformation not external behavior.

- e. A true disciple actually puts Jesus' words into practice

Luke 6:46-49

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."

It's easy to talk a lot about truth and values without actually making the difficult changes to live in light of them. True disciples trust Jesus' words enough to believe that living them out is life and death.

v. Following Jesus means seeing based on His values

Luke 11:33-36

“No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.”

The eye has to do with our perception. How do we see and evaluate reality? For believers, our faith affects how we see truly. Having an evil eye fills your life with darkness as negativity colors how we see the world.

See also Matthew 6 where we see that the eye is the light of the body means that we can see clearly and perceive reality and true (eternal/spiritual) value by faith instead of living for money (Matt. 6:21-24).

vi. Following Jesus means prioritizing what matters

Luke 11:42

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

It's easy to make religion about various practices and rules while missing the real heart of what those rules and laws are for. Jesus teaches that justice and love are at the heart of what He wants us to pursue, while not disregarding the rules as expressions of His values.

This means following Jesus is about internalizing His values, and then living out His principles with wisdom.

vii. Following Jesus means walking by faith

Luke 7:8-9

“For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.”

Jesus emphasizes the importance of trusting faith. Jesus' word is good enough to entrust our whole lives to.

viii. Table Discussion: Why do you think Jesus was so focused on investing in the 12 disciples and having them be his apprentices for three full years?

II. Wisdom is living by God's design in dependence on Him by faith

Trusting in the Lord means having the humility to not rely upon our own wisdom. It's only when we recognize how desperate we are for God's wisdom that we will diligently seek it out with the effort required to be wise.

Proverbs 3:5-7

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

True wisdom is the spiritual fruit of gentle peace as we rest in the truth.

James 3:13-18

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

III. Faith dependently abides and deepens in understanding grace

Faith believes God's promises and then abides and rests in reality as God defines it. This fills the believer with the love, joy, and peace in the heart that motivates and activates all of our actions. The deeper we go in understanding God's grace, His love and power for us, and rest in that identity, the more God transforms our hearts. Jesus calls this abiding in Him and His Word (John 15:7).

A. Paul prays for believers to be strong in faith of knowing who they are

I pray... that your heart may be enlightened to know hope, riches, and power...

Ephesians 1:15-23

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

I pray... that you would be strengthened for Christ to dwell in you, rooted in love to comprehend...

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

B. Fruit comes from abiding in Christ

All the fruit comes from the vitality of Christ working through us.

John 15:4-5

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

C. Faith is what pleases God

Faith is our spiritual sight that lives in light of spiritual and not physical reality. Faith lives in light of our future hope.

Hebrews 11:1-6

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

IV. Table Discussion: God clearly says that faith is what pleases Him. How should that shape what following Jesus looks like?

V. Small Group Discussion

- What stands out in the way that Jesus discipled? What should we take away about what discipleship looks like?
- Who has discipled you, whether formally or informally? How did they invest in you? In what ways did they teach you? In what ways did they model how to live?
- Do you have an ‘aha’ moment in your life where you truly learned what living out the gospel looks like (which you didn’t understand before)? What ‘clicked’ about the gospel that moved you to put Jesus’ words into practice by faith?