

Discipleship

Following Jesus and making disciples

The Call to Follow Jesus

Matthew 4:19

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Luke 9:23

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

John 8:12

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 10:27

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

Jesus' invitation to discipleship is both simple and radical: "Follow me." When He called Peter and Andrew, He didn't offer a theological course or a comfortable religious club. He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). This was a call to abandon their old life and embrace a new one centered on Him.

The Greek word for disciple (mathetes) means learner or student, but biblical discipleship goes far beyond classroom learning. It's a whole-life apprenticeship where we learn not just from Jesus' teachings but from His life, character, and example. We don't just study Him; we follow Him.

Luke 9:23 defines the terms of discipleship clearly: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." This is not an invitation to casual association but to radical commitment. Denying oneself means saying no to our own agenda, desires, and plans when they conflict with God's. Taking up our cross means embracing suffering, rejection, and sacrifice for Christ's sake. And "daily" reminds us this isn't a one-time decision but a daily re-

commitment.

Jesus distinguishes His followers from the crowd. He is the light of the world, and those who follow Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). Following is the defining mark of belonging to Christ.

This call hasn't changed in 2,000 years. Jesus still calls people to leave everything and follow Him. The cost is high—Luke 14:26-33 makes clear that discipleship may cost us our family relationships, possessions, and even our lives. But the reward is infinitely greater: eternal life, intimate relationship with God, purpose, meaning, and transformation.

Following Jesus is not one commitment among many; it's the central commitment that redefines everything else. We don't fit Jesus into our life; we fit our life into His purposes.

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:18-20

[18] And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His disciples their marching orders: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of

the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

This Great Commission is not just for apostles or missionaries; it's for all disciples. The command has four parts: go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. Making disciples is the main verb—the going, baptizing, and teaching are all part of how we make disciples.

Notice that Jesus claims "all power" in heaven and earth (verse 18). This authority is the foundation of the commission. We don't make disciples in our own power but in His. And because His authority is universal, our mission field is universal—"all nations."

The goal is not just conversions but disciples. We're to teach them to observe (obey) all that Jesus commanded. This means discipleship doesn't end at a prayer or a baptism; it's an ongoing process of teaching people to follow and obey Jesus in every area of life.

Mark 16:15 adds, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The gospel must be proclaimed—not just lived or demonstrated, but verbally declared. And it's for everyone, everywhere.

Acts 1:8 gives the geographic strategy: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Start locally (Jerusalem), expand regionally (Judaea and Samaria), and continue globally (uttermost parts of the earth).

The promise attached to the Great Commission is precious: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." We don't go alone. Jesus' presence empowers and sustains us. Making disciples is difficult, but we do it with the constant presence of the One who has all authority.

Every Christian is commissioned. The question is not whether we're called to make disciples but how and where we'll obey that call.

Counting the Cost

Luke 14:25-33

[25] And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, [26] If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. [27] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. [28] For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? [29] Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, [30] Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. [31] Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? [32] Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. [33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 16:24-26

[24] Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. [25] For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. [26] For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Philippians 3:7-8

[7] But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. [8] Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

Jesus never used deceptive advertising to recruit followers. He was brutally honest about the cost of discipleship. In Luke 14:25-33, when great multitudes followed Him, He turned and gave them three requirements for discipleship, each beginning with "If any man come to me."

First: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my

disciple" (verse 26). This shocking language of "hate" doesn't mean literal hatred but comparative love—our love for Christ must be so supreme that all other loves seem like hatred by comparison.

Second: "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (verse 27). The cross was an instrument of execution. Jesus is saying discipleship may cost us our lives. At minimum, it costs us our rights to ourselves.

Third: "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (verse 33). Everything we possess must be held loosely, available to God if He requires it.

Jesus illustrates this with two parables: a builder who must count the cost before starting, and a king who must assess his strength before going to war. The point is clear: don't begin following Jesus without understanding what you're committing to.

Matthew 16:24-26 presents the paradox of discipleship: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Trying to preserve our life—our comfort, security, autonomy—results in losing it. But losing our life for Christ's sake—surrendering control, embracing sacrifice—results in truly finding life.

Paul embodied this in Philippians 3:7-8: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ... and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." Everything he once valued—his pedigree, education, religious status—became worthless compared to knowing Christ.

The cost is high. But the treasure is worth it. Jesus doesn't promise easy discipleship, but He promises true life.

Abiding in Christ

John 15:4-5

[4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. [5] I am the vine, ye are

the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 8:31-32

[31] Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; [32] And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

1 John 2:6

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Jesus taught that the Christian life is not about trying harder but about staying connected: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4).

The word "abide" (Greek: meno) means to remain, dwell, continue, stay. It's not a momentary visit but a permanent residence. Just as a branch stays attached to the vine, constantly drawing life and nourishment, we must remain in constant connection with Christ.

Jesus makes the necessity absolute: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Notice: without Him we can do nothing of spiritual value. All our effort, talent, and activity produce nothing eternal unless we're abiding in Him.

But abiding produces abundant fruit: love, joy, peace, righteousness, good works. This fruit isn't manufactured through human effort but grows naturally from our connection to Christ. The branch doesn't strain to produce grapes; it simply stays connected to the vine, and fruit appears.

John 8:31-32 connects abiding with discipleship: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." True disciples continue—they don't follow for a season and then abandon. They abide in His word, and this abiding brings knowledge of truth and freedom.

First John 2:6 adds another dimension: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Abiding produces conformity to Christ's

character and conduct. We begin to live like Him because we're drawing life from Him.

How do we abide? Through prayer, Scripture reading, worship, obedience, fellowship with other believers, and continuous awareness of His presence. These aren't legalistic requirements but means of maintaining our connection to Christ.

The Christian life is not primarily about doing but about being—being in Christ, remaining in Him, drawing our life from Him. When we abide, fruit follows naturally.

Love as the Mark of Discipleship

John 13:34-35

[34] A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. [35] By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

1 John 4:7-8

[7] Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. [8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

[1] Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. [2] And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. [3] And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment: "That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Then He added this stunning statement: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Love is the identifying mark of Christian discipleship. Not our theology (though important), not our spiritual gifts (though valuable), not our religious activities (though necessary), but our love for one another. This is what convinces the world that we belong to Jesus.

The standard is high: "as I have loved you." Jesus loved sacrificially, serving His disciples, washing their feet, and ultimately laying down His life. This self-giving, other-centered love is what should characterize His followers.

First John 3:14 makes love essential to assurance of salvation: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Lack of love for fellow Christians should cause us to question whether we truly know God. Conversely, genuine love for believers is evidence of spiritual rebirth.

First John 4:7-8 goes further: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." Love isn't just commanded; it's the very nature of God. To know God is to love. To not love is evidence of not knowing God.

Paul's famous love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) shows that without love, everything else is worthless. Prophecy, knowledge, faith, generosity, even martyrdom—all count for nothing without love. Love never fails; it's the eternal reality that outlasts even spiritual gifts.

This love is not mere sentiment or warm feelings. Biblical love (agape) is a determined commitment to seek another's highest good, regardless of cost to ourselves. It's patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant. It bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.

In a world of division, hatred, and selfishness, the sacrificial love among Christ's disciples should stand out dramatically. When Christians genuinely love one another across racial, social, economic, and political differences, the world takes notice. This is the apologetic Jesus gave us—not primarily arguments but love.

Making Disciples of Others

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Matthew 28:19-20

[19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Acts 14:21-23

[21] And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, [22] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. [23] And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Discipleship is not just about being discipled; it's about making disciples. Paul instructed Timothy: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

Notice the multiplication: Paul taught Timothy, Timothy should teach faithful men, and those men should teach others. Four generations of disciples in one verse. This is God's plan for spreading the Gospel—disciples making disciples who make disciples.

The Great Commission commands us to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). This is active, intentional work. It's not just waiting for people to grow on their own; it's investing in their spiritual development, teaching them, modeling for them, correcting them, encouraging them.

Acts 14:21-23 shows Paul and Barnabas' strategy: "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to

continue in the faith... And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord."

Their process: preach the Gospel, teach many, confirm the new disciples, exhort them to continue, establish leadership, and entrust them to the Lord. This is discipleship—leading people to Christ and then helping them mature to the point where they can lead others.

Making disciples requires intentionality. We must identify people we can invest in, spend time with them, teach them Scripture, model godly living, involve them in ministry, give them increasing responsibility, and eventually release them to disciple others.

Jesus modeled this with the Twelve. He didn't just preach to crowds (though He did that). He invested deeply in a small group, living with them, teaching them, correcting them, sending them out, debriefing them, and preparing them to continue His mission after His departure.

Every mature Christian should be able to identify people they're actively discipling. And every Christian should be able to identify someone who is discipling them. This is how the church grows, not just in numbers but in maturity and multiplication.

The question is not just "Are you a disciple?" but "Are you making disciples?"

Perseverance in Discipleship

Luke 9:62

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

John 8:31

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

Hebrews 10:38-39

[38] Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. [39] But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Revelation 2:10

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Jesus warned against half-hearted commitment: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). A farmer plowing a straight furrow must keep his eyes forward. Looking back results in crooked rows. Similarly, disciples must not look back to their old life but press forward.

True discipleship is proven over time. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). The word "continue" is key. Many start following Jesus enthusiastically, but true disciples endure. They're still following years later, through difficulties and blessings alike.

Hebrews 10:38-39 addresses this: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Drawing back—giving up, returning to the old life—leads to destruction. But genuine believers persevere to the saving of the soul.

This doesn't mean Christians never struggle, doubt, or fail. Peter denied Jesus three times yet was restored. The point is not sinless perfection but enduring faith. True disciples may stumble, but they get back up. They may struggle, but they don't quit.

Revelation 2:10 gives Jesus' encouragement to persecuted believers: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Faithfulness "unto death" is the call—not just until it gets hard, but to the very end.

What enables perseverance? The promises of God. Jesus promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5). The Holy Spirit indwells us,

empowering us. The church surrounds us, encouraging us. The hope of eternal reward motivates us.

Perseverance is both God's work and our responsibility. Philippians 2:12-13 holds both truths: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." We work, but God is working in us.

The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon. Those who finish receive the crown. The call is to endure, to remain faithful, to keep following Jesus no matter what comes. This is the mark of true discipleship.

The Rewards of Discipleship

Matthew 19:27-29

[27] Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? [28] And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [29] And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Mark 10:29-30

[29] And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, [30] But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

[7] I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Revelation 22:12

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Peter once asked Jesus, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matthew 19:27). Jesus' answer reveals the incredible rewards of discipleship.

First, present rewards: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold" (Matthew 19:29). Mark 10:30 adds "now in this time"—houses, family, lands, with persecutions. When we sacrifice for Christ, we gain a new, larger family (the church) and provision beyond what we left.

Second, future rewards: "and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29). The ultimate reward is eternal life in God's presence. Everything we give up for Christ is temporary; what we gain is eternal.

Paul, at the end of his life, could say: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). The faithful disciple receives a reward—a crown of righteousness.

Revelation 22:12 records Jesus' promise: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Jesus is coming, and He brings rewards for His faithful servants.

These rewards aren't earned in the sense of deserving them—salvation is by grace. But Scripture consistently teaches that faithfulness will be rewarded. Our works don't save us, but they're not meaningless. What we do for Christ has eternal significance.

The rewards include: eternal life, Christ's commendation ("Well done, good and faithful servant"), crowns, authority in the coming kingdom, treasures in heaven, and the joy of seeing people we've discipled spending eternity with God.

But perhaps the greatest reward is simply being with Christ. Paul said his desire was

"to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). To see Him face to face, to fully know Him as we are known, to be forever in His presence—this is the supreme reward.

The cost of discipleship is high, but the rewards are infinitely higher. Nothing we give up for Christ compares to what we gain in Him, both now and forever.

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