

PORTRAITS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Part I: What is a disciple?

Luke 14:25-33

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Some of the Savior's very first words spoken were "Follow Me." (Matt. 4:19; Mk. 1:17; Lk. 5:27; Jn. 1:43)
 - A. This short simple sentence sums up what being a Christian is all about.
 - B. Jesus calls all men to come and follow Him, but He is also very open and honest about the demands that requires.
 - C. He warns us we must "count the cost" if we would be his disciple (Lk. 14:25-33).
2. Those hearing Jesus' preaching could not truly claim to be His follower without meeting the demands He set forth.
 - A. The same is true today: We cannot claim to be true followers of Christ unless we too know, understand and meet the demands to be His disciple.
 - B. Jesus the Master Teacher employs vivid illustrations using common and easy to understand items to explain the spiritual realities and ramifications of being His disciple. For example:
 - ☛ Shepherd searching for his lost sheep (Lk. 15:4-7),
 - ☛ A blind man trying to lead another blind man (Lk. 6:39-40),
 - ☛ A camel going through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:23-24).
 - C. Each of these graphic illustrations are effective teaching tools we must study and apply to ourselves as we seek to follow Him.
3. At times Jesus' teaching concerning discipleship is sometimes a bit mysterious and puzzling.
 - A. We must obviously apply His clear teaching on discipleship.
 - B. But we must also strive to understand the teaching that is seemingly more ambiguous.
 - (1) Jesus intentionally spoke in vague terms (**Matt. 13:11-13**: "He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'").
 - (2) The willingness to question and dig to find the meaning of Jesus' often enigmatic illustrations separates the casual learner from the serious, committed disciple.
4. This series of lessons is designed to help us understand the various relationships and responsibilities involved in discipleship.
 - A. We must be careful as we study the various illustrations and stories the Lord uses as He teaches us about discipleship.
 - B. All the Lord's teaching tools have their limitations insofar as application is concerned.
 - C. To properly understand them we must not overextend His illustrations and try to find some "secret nugget" in every specific detail.
 - D. Let's satisfy ourselves with understanding the main points and then be sure to make the proper application to our lives.

5. **3** The beginning of understanding any subject is defining what it is about; therefore, in our first lesson let's answer the question: **What Is Discipleship?**

II. DISCUSSION:

1. **4** What is a disciple? **Lk. 9:23:** "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."
 - A. The word "disciple" appears 29 times in the New Testament and is translated from the Greek word *mathetes*; "lit., 'a learner' (from *manthano*, 'to learn,' from a root math--, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor), ...it denotes 'one who follows one's teaching'" (Vine).
 - B. ****** But, there is much more meaning than just the modern idea of pupil or student.
 - (1) The Biblical concept of disciple emphasizes the teacher-student relationship.
 - (2) A true disciple is more than a learner, he is also a devoted supporter and follower of his teacher (think the mentoring relationship).
 - (3) A disciple is one who not only learns from his teacher, but also "accepts the views of his teacher and adopts his teacher's way of life." (Rogers, p. 7).
 - (4) As disciples, we not only strive to learn Jesus' teaching, but much more deeply to be "conformed" to His very "image" (Rom. 8:29).
2. **5** The demands of discipleship:
 - A. Jesus has many "followers," but just following Jesus doesn't make one a disciples:

Lk. 14:33: "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."
Jn. 8:31: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" (cf. Matt. 7:21-23: **v. 22:** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.")
 - B. So, not everyone claiming to be Jesus' disciples is a "disciple indeed"; because a true disciple must meet certain very specific conditions.

A true disciple of Jesus...

 - (1) Must deny self:
 - (a) Self-denial is an absolute requirement since a disciple is more than a "learner," but one seeking to conform his life to the life to another.
 - (b) Very importantly, Jesus did not merely say his disciple must practice self-denial, but must deny self; there's a big difference between the two!
 - (c) Luke's gospel sheds light on this important distinction:

Lk. 9:23: "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"
Lk. 14:26-27: "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. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."
 - (d) In Matthew's record of these words of Jesus, He says "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).
 - (i) Jesus is not teaching His disciples to literally "hate" their family members.

- (ii) What He is telling us is that, by comparison, our love for Him must be far greater than it is for any other person or thing.
- (iii) “The first requirement of discipleship is that we remove from our heart everything and everyone that hinders total obedience to Christ. No one is to come between us and our loyalty to Christ, including ourselves.” (Rogers, p. 8)
- (e) We have a grand example of the level of self-denial Jesus is talking about in the case of the apostle Paul (hating one’s own life):
 - **Gal. 2:20:** *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*
 - 6 Phil. 3:7-8a:** *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...”*
- (f) We applaud Paul, we greatly admire Paul; but in reality we must invest no less!
- (g) Christ cannot occupy ANYPLACE but the center of our life He must be on the throne of our heart! He must be the highest object of our affections and aspirations!
 - 2 Cor. 5:9:** *“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”* (cf. Phil. 3:14; “press”)

A true disciple of Jesus...

(2) **7** Must be willing to suffer for Him:

- (a) The second aspect of discipleship is “cross bearing”: **Lk. 9:23:** *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*
 - (i) By “cross” Jesus doesn’t mean He expects us to literally carry a big, wooden cross as some do.
 - (ii) Remember, the cross was not a religious symbol when Jesus made this statement; but it became, as the song says, “The emblem of suffering and shame.”
 - (iii) We cannot accomplish “cross bearing” by the wearing of piece of jewelry around our neck or by hanging a cross on the wall
 - (iv) ****** This picture so vividly captures what most followers of Christ are willing to carry; a burden? In some respects, but not too much!. **Explain**
 - (v) **8** Just prior to Jesus’ statement in Luke 9:23 Jesus said, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”* (Lk. 9:22)
 - (vi) Jesus is issuing a warning: to be My disciple, you must conform your life to Mine, it’s going to require everything we have, perhaps even to the giving up of our own life. Being a disciple of Jesus is not:
 - ☛ A means of climbing the social ladder.
 - ☛ A means of achieving greatness and notoriety in the eyes of men.
 - ☛ A means of gaining material wealth and possessions.
 - (vii) Discipleship is conforming our lives to His life; of following the path He followed; a path that led to suffering and shame.” (2 Tim. 3:12)

A true disciple of Jesus...

(3) **9** Must learn from Him:

- (a) Another aspect of discipleship is Jesus' command "follow Me" (Lk. 9:23).
- (b) There is a literal aspect to this command (e.g., apostles literally followed Jesus), but it mainly concerns following His teaching (**Jn. 8:31**: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.").
- (c) **10** Thus a prime component of discipleship is "learning":
 - Matt. 28:19-20a**: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."
 - Matt. 11:29a**: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,"
- (d) We can only follow Christ by following His teaching; we can only be His "disciples indeed" if we "abide in My word."
 - (i) To claim to be a disciple and not apply ourselves diligently to learning His Word makes us a false disciple (Jn. 6:53-58).
 - (ii) To claim to be a disciple and not follow His word makes us a false disciple.
 - Lk. 6:46**: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"
- (e) Unfortunately, this is true with the majority claiming to be His disciples:
 - ☛ Denominationalists (Matt. 7:21-23),
 - ☛ Many members of the Lord's church (2 Cor. 13:5).

A true disciple of Jesus...

(4) **11** Must bear fruit:

- (a) A true disciple is intimately connected to Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; Jn. 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches").
- (b) And, because we as disciples are "branches" intimately connected to the "vine" we must bear fruit:
 - Jn. 15:5**: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."
 - Jn. 15:8**: "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."
- (c) Thus, an important "proof" of our discipleship is that we "bear...fruit"; not some "fruit," but "much fruit"!
- (d) **12** "Much" fruit bearing is not optional! **Jn. 15:4-6**: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."
- (e) ****** Fruit bearing involves:
 - ☛ Steady progress in spiritual growth (2 Pet. 1:5-11; Gal. 5:22-23),

- ☛ Good deeds (1 Jn. 1:7; Titus 2:11-13; Matt. 25:34-46; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:6),
- ☛ Increasing our talents (Matt. 25:14-30),

A true disciple of Jesus...

(5) **13** *Must love the brethren:*

- (a) Our love for our fellow Christians is one of the most prominent “badges of distinction” that set apart Jesus’ disciples from the people of the world:

Jn. 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

- (b) Note the “love” Jesus describes transcends just every day, run of the mill “love”; but “love one another as I have loved you...”
- (c) Takes our love for one another to an entirely different level!
- (d) This type of love is a major challenge!
- (e) It involves much more than liking someone a whole lot.
- (f) It requires sacrificing our wants and desires for those of others.

- (g) **14** That’s not easy! It doesn’t come naturally!

Phil. 2:2-4: *“fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

- (h) John Donne famously wrote, “No man is an island, entire of it self, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.”

- (i) **15** Never is this more true than in the case of a disciple of Christ; none of us are a “lone disciple”! True disciples don’t go it alone, they...

- ☛ ******Worship together (Heb. 10:25),
- ☛ ******Work together in the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 4:3),
- ☛ ******Rejoice with one another’s successes (Rom. 12:15),
- ☛ ******Weep in one another’s tragedies (Rom. 12:15),
- ☛ ******Bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2),
- ☛ ******Exhort and encourage one another to greater faithfulness (Heb. 3:13),
- ☛ ******Gently point out one another’s weaknesses, blind spots, sins (Gal. 6:1-2).
- ☛ ******Take care of one another’s physical needs (1 Jn. 3:17; We are tools of God’s providence!),
- ☛ ******Even, give our lives for one another (1 Jn. 3:16).

- (j) **16** Lack of mutual love, care and respect is perhaps the greatest threat to our relationship with one another and to the precious unity of the Lord’s church:

Eph. 4:2-3: *“with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

- (k) **17** This Christ-like “love” is the **glue** that holds Jesus’ disciples together!

Col. 3:14: “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” (NKJV)

Col. 3:14: “Most of all, let love guide your life, for then the whole church will stay together in perfect harmony.” (TLB)

- (l) **18** It is this “bond” of “love” that demonstrates to the world that we are truly Jesus’ disciples:

Jn. 17:23: “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

- (m) Without this “love” Paul said we may make a lot of noise and gain attention, “sounding brass” or “a clanging symbol”; without “love” we are “nothing”! 1 Cor. 13:1-2
- (n) “Jesus is no longer here in the flesh, but our love for Him is to be shown by the way we love other disciples (1 John 4:12, 20-21). When we are seen biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:14-15), the world has a hard time believing that we are truly disciples of Christ.” (Rogers, p. 10)

A true disciple of Jesus...

- (6) **19** Must be totally committed to following Christ: Matt. 22:37

- (a) We live in a society and culture where there are so many things vying for our attention (job, family, entertainment, recreation, etc.).

- (b) That being true, one thing lacking in true discipleship today is making a total commitment to follow Christ in every aspect of our life.

- (c) Discipleship isn’t a part-time job; it involves 24/7, 365 days a year devotion!

Matt. 22:37: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

- (d) Discipleship isn’t like taking up golf or tennis and occasionally going out on the weekend and playing a game; we can’t be satisfied with just a passing interest in discipleship; it’s **all** or **nothing**! Lk. 14:28-33

- (e) Being a disciple isn’t something we inherit from our parents; we surely can learn good things from them, but my connection with the “vine” (Jn. 15:1-8) is determined by me!

- (f) To be Jesus’ disciple requires a “daily” commitment. A complete, total and absolute commitment!

III. CONCLUSION: 20

1. The value of true discipleship is more valuable than all the wealth the world offers (Matt. 16:26).

2. But, Jesus warns we must “count the cost” of discipleship because the requirements are strict!

A. Requires our all: **Matt. 10:38-39:** “...he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

B. Once we begin we cannot “look back”: **Lk. 9:62:** “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

C. But, the rewards are immeasurably great! Eph. 3:8 (“unsearchable riches of Christ”; immeasurably great!)

1 Pet. 1:4: “...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,”

Phil. 3:20-21: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”; cf. Rom. 8:17*

3. To lay claim as a true disciple of Christ we must do so on His terms, not our own:

Matt. 28:19-20: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;”*

4. The rewards are incalculable, the commitment total:

Matt. 11:28-30: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

5. Invitation: **Jn. 14:2-3:** *“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*

Adapted from a workbook (*Portraits of Discipleship*) by Heath Rogers.