

# OpenTheo

## Who Are You Calling a Christian?



### **Genuinely Following Jesus** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into the true meaning of discipleship and how it relates to being a Christian. He explains that the word "disciple" comes from Bible times and is used repeatedly in the book of Acts. To follow Jesus and become a true disciple, one must carry a cross, forsake all possessions, and love others above oneself. Steve stresses that the daily task of discipleship is becoming more like Jesus and laying a foundation based on His teachings.

### **Transcript**

Many people have not really dealt with the things that Jesus said on the subject very seriously because some of them just sound so outrageous. Some of the things Jesus said about being a disciple are simply outrageous when you read them. I know I was raised in a church that was of the same denomination as this church, and I remember reading the Gospels when I was a child.

A youth. And I would run across these radical statements of Jesus about what it means to be His follower. And as a young person in the church, I thought, well, you know, my parents and all the people I know here at the church are followers of Christ, and this doesn't seem to describe them.

I mean, I wasn't being critical. I was just trying to figure out, you know, is this really what it means to be a Christian? And I kind of decided that maybe what Jesus said wasn't really to be taken that seriously, because if it was, then all the Christians would be taking it seriously. Well, as it turns out, some of the things that Jesus said that are very radical sounding are not quite as alarming as they sound at first glance.

But they do mean something. Even hyperbole is there for a reason. Hyperbole is an exaggeration, but it's an exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis.

And if something is being emphasized, it's because the speaker thinks it's important. So, we will look at those things that Jesus said, but we'll, first of all, ask the basic questions. What does discipleship mean? Now, the word discipleship is not found in the Bible.

However, the word discipleship obviously means being a disciple, and the word disciple is in the Bible many times. Discipleship means being a disciple, just like sponsorship means being a sponsor, or citizenship means being a citizen, proprietorship means being a proprietor. Discipleship means you are a disciple.

Disciple is a term that's kind of generic. It has, in our Western civilization, almost been reserved for reference to Christian disciples, though in biblical times, it was understood that all the rabbis had disciples. Philosophers had disciples.

Socrates had disciples, and so forth. And Jesus had disciples. So, of course, we're talking specifically about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

And we find as we read through the book of Acts, which is where we get the earliest information about what it means to be a Christian after the resurrection of Christ, because things were somewhat different for the disciples before his ascension. You know, when Jesus was on earth, they actually got to see him walk around with him and listen to him with their ears. But after he left, we have the book of Acts giving us what may be the norms or at least interesting.

Standards to measure against our modern concepts of Christianity. And we find continually as we read through the book of Acts, the word disciple or disciples, for example, in Acts six, it says, Now, in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, it says, Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples. It says, Then the word of God spread in the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

You begin to recognize that the word disciple is kind of a term that just seems to refer to everybody who responded to the gospel, everybody who was part of the church. And Acts nine says, Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. It says, And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple.

They didn't believe he was truly converted. At Joppa, there was a certain disciple named Tabitha. A certain disciple was there named Timothy.

It says in Acts 16, Acts 21, 16 says, Also, some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain man of Cyprus and early disciple. Acts 20 and verse seven says, Now, on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, obviously, the word disciple is a term that is being used for everybody who was a follower of Christ, everyone who is in the church. And then we have this definitive verse, Acts 11, 26, which says, And the disciples were first called Christians.

In Antioch. Now, we don't know who called them that. It may have been those who are

not sympathetic toward them that called them that.

We're not sure. But the disciples did not shun the term. They accepted the term Christians.

And so that is what we have come to call ourselves through the ages, Christians. And the faith of the Christians has come to be called Christianity. Actually, the Bible never uses the word Christianity, and it only uses the word Christian three times.

This is the first time, Acts 11, 26, the first time the word Christian appears in the Bible. And that's where we have the definition. What is a Christian? Well, apparently, a Christian is a disciple in the book of Acts.

All the believers were originally called disciples. And then in one location, Antioch, some people began to call those disciples Christians. So the word Christian came to be a synonym for disciple.

The only other two times that the word Christian appears in the Bible are later when Paul is talking to Agrippa and Agrippa says to him, Paul, almost you persuade me to become a Christian. Which is interesting that the term is used only in the mouth of an unbeliever in the book of Acts. But then Peter uses the term in the book of First Peter, Chapter four, he says, if any of you suffers for being a Christian, let him not be ashamed and let him glorify God on this behalf.

So we we have three times in the Bible, the word Christian, but dozens of times, of course, perhaps the word disciple or disciples. Interestingly, we don't find the word disciple or disciples after the book of Acts. None of the epistles use the term nor the book of Revelation.

But Jesus and the book of Acts use the term quite a bit. It's clear that. In talking to disciples, Paul and writing his letters and so forth, didn't didn't feel much need to use the term.

They all, I guess, took it for granted that that's what they were. But when they are being discussed in the historical narratives of the New Testament, the disciples. That's the primary term that is used for people who are who embraced Christ, who responded to the gospel.

So we might want to go to Jesus definition of a disciple, since we're talking about being disciples of Jesus. Obviously, what he thinks a disciple of his is is going to have to be our guide. And Jesus said to those Jews who believed him in John 831, if you abide a word that means continue.

You or remain in my word. You are my disciples. Indeed, John 831.

Notice he was speaking to Jews who believed him. But his comments seem to be sort of a sieve to cause those Jews who believed him to distinguish themselves as to whether they were disciples, indeed, or not. He said to those who believed him, he said, if you continue in my words, that's a conditional thing.

He said, then you are my disciples. Indeed. Now, the word indeed, there certainly suggests that there might be disciples in some other sense than indeed.

There might be disciples in name only, for example. And if we use the word disciples, as the New Testament does, we have to say there are Christians in name only. And if you are really a Christian, a Christian, indeed, a disciple, indeed, then it is because you are abiding in the words of Christ.

We'll have more to say about that later, but this simply is Jesus way of defining the word disciple for us. Also, in Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28 verses 19 through 20, Jesus said, go therefore and make disciples. Notice he didn't say make decisions.

He didn't say make converts even, although there's nothing wrong with that word. But Jesus' commission was that we go and make people into disciples. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

So in John 8, 31, we saw that if you continue in his words, if you continue Jesus' teaching, then you're really a disciple. And the way you go out and make disciples is turn more people into those who continue in his words. You teach them to observe all things that he commanded.

Now, this is the commission that Jesus left the church with. Therefore, that's what churches should do. Churches should teach people to observe all things that Jesus commanded.

And I would have to say some of the churches I've been in didn't even seem like that was their objective to teach people to observe all things. They were teaching them all kinds of other things. But the problem is, if you teach people what Jesus commanded to do it, you're going to lose people just like Jesus did.

Jesus sometimes said things that his hearers called hard sayings. And there were even those mentioned in John 6 and verse 66 who were called disciples who didn't continue beyond a certain point. Now, Jesus said, if you continue in my words, you are my disciples.

But in John 6 and verse 66, it says many of his disciples forsook him and walked no more with him. So you're a disciple as long as you're continuing. But even a disciple who's continued up to a point can forsake him and no longer be a disciple.

So this is something that not everyone wants to hear. And so we need to make sure that it doesn't get neglected because it's tempting to neglect it. Jesus made the qualifications for discipleship a little stiff.

It would seem because in Luke 14, 26, Jesus said, 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. Now, we use the word cannot sometimes when we mean may not.

But that's just because our English has become sloppy. Jesus didn't mean may not. He's not saying I forbid it.

He's saying it can't be done. You can't be a disciple. You cannot fulfill what the requirements of what discipleship lays upon you.

It's just like you can't you can't be a star athlete without training. There's certain things that just can't you can't do. And you can't be a disciple without certain things being true of you.

One of them is he says you have to hate your father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters. And yes, your own life also. Now, that's one of those hard things of Jesus.

That's one of those things I say sound kind of radical and put offish. But, you know, no surprise, Jesus put off a lot of his listeners. Those of us who are Christians read disciples are supposed to be those who have made it past these hurdles.

You know, when Jesus gave these kind of statements, a lot of people forsook him and left. The ones who stayed were the ones who are the disciples. And I guess sometimes a lot of us have identified ourselves as Christians.

Without really asking, have I gotten past these hurdles that Jesus said you have to get past if you are going to be the thought that you can't be if you don't. Now, what does it mean, though? Certainly, it can't can't make sense to say you have to hate your father and your mother and your wife and your children. And everyone knows the Bible says you shall honor your father, your mother.

And the Bible says husbands should love their wives and so forth. So is he contradicting the rest of the Bible? No, this is one of those places where we have a hyperbole. It's a common hyperbole in Scripture.

It's not uncommon at all for the Bible to use the word hate in a way differently than we do. For example, we know that Jacob in the Old Testament had two wives, Leah and Rachel. The Bible says he loved Rachel more than he loved Leah.

But the next verse says when God saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb. Well,

it explains he loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. And this was called Rachel being hated.

It means she was loved less than the other person. In Malachi chapter one, God says, Jacob, I have loved Esau, I have hated. Again, if you read on, you find that what he's saying is I have shown favor to Jacob, though I did not show to Esau.

I have I have given preferential treatment to the one over the other. Hated in our vocabulary means something like absolute disgust and anger and malice towards somebody. That's not what it means necessarily in the Scripture.

Hated means you you give somebody less preferential treatment than someone else. Jesus said no man can serve two masters. He will either love the one and hate the other or cleave to the one and despise the other.

Now, if you have two employers, do you have to really hate one of them? No, but you do have to give one preferential status over the other. What if they both want you to work the same shift? You hold two jobs. You have to decide which one your loyalty to is going to be stronger, which one is more important to you.

And when Jesus said you must love the one and hate the other, he's simply saying you must show preference to one over the other. Certainly, if you have two jobs, you have two masters. Of course, a servant, a slave couldn't have two masters because he was owned outright.

But the point is being made, you wouldn't really have to hate him in the sense that we think of that word. And even this own this statement here, you must hate your father, mother, wife and children in your own life. Or you can't be my disciple has a parallel in Matthew.

And if you read Matthew chapter 10, sometimes you'll find that while Jesus is sending out the twelve two by two, one of the things he says is he that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves wife and children more than me is not worthy of me. In other words, that's really what he means.

It's if you love your wife or children more than Jesus. Now, how would that how would that work out in practical terms? Well, obviously, if Jesus is calling you to a life of obedience and there are people in your family who are opposed to it. Well, you've got to show preferential treatment of him in a Jewish society like that of Jesus and his disciples.

I could imagine Jewish brothers saying, you hate us. Why do you hate us? Because sometimes Jewish mothers and other mothers have been known to use hyperbole. And Jesus prepared his disciples for that.

Well, they may think you hate him. You do have to prefer me to them. And it may even

seem to them that you hate them.

But it's not really that he's calling you to hate anybody. You're not allowed to hate. The Bible says in First John, he that hates his brother is a murderer.

So obviously there is a hyperbole here, but it was one of the disciples I think would understand. But as I said earlier, a hyperbole is an exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis. Once we say, well, something's a hyperbole, we might think, oh, good, we can write it off.

It's just an exaggeration. Well, wait a minute. Wait, there's a reason for that exaggeration.

There's a reason for hyperbole. It's because it's underlining something so you won't miss it. It's so that it'll drive it home.

It's extremely important that you don't put wife or children or father or mother or your own life ahead of the claims of Christ. What this certainly means is if he doesn't command your complete loyalty, then you can't be a disciple. I had a wife that was killed once and people asked me, she was killed in an accident here in the Santa Cruz area, a long time ago, 1980.

But people often ask the answer, are you angry at God for that? And there's many reasons why I wasn't angry at God. I'm not. But I mean, to me it just seems so, that's not one of the options to be angry at God.

My loyalty is to God, even more than to my wife. Fortunately, her loyalty was to God, too. So, she's actually better off since the accident than I am.

But the point is, the thought of being angry at God never crossed my mind. I thought, well, I'm devoted to God and so is she. If I had died, she wouldn't be angry at God because we knew that God and his will is all that matters.

And sure, he may take something from you, the approval or even the life of someone you love because you follow him. In her case, she didn't die because I followed Christ. But those things become a test.

Will you still love Jesus? Is there something he could take from you that would make you stop loving him, make you give up following him? What's your limit? Jesus is going to say, you're going to have no limits. You've got to be totally loyal, unconditionally, no matter who you have to, no matter what sacrifices you have to make, no matter who disapproves, even if it's the people you want the approval of more than any others. Can't do it.

Can't be my disciple without that. Okay, so far, maybe a lot of us are already eliminated.

The next verse, Luke 14, 27, he says, and whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Start to sound like a pattern here. There's things that will prevent you from being disciples. You can't do it.

You cannot follow Jesus consistently as you are required to do until death unless you meet these qualifications. You have to place him and your loyalty to him above everything else and take up a cross and follow him. This is not the only place that Jesus talked about taking up a cross.

We'll look at another place where he did later on. But what does it mean to take up a cross? He's not talking about being crucified here, although a person who takes up a cross is surely going to be crucified. But he's not talking about the cross taking you up.

He's talking about you taking up the cross. He's talking about carrying a cross on your shoulder, as Jesus did apparently briefly as he was being led out of Jerusalem. But it would appear that he was not able to continue.

So another man was forced into doing it for him. Jesus had been abused through the whole night earlier and apparently didn't have the strength to carry it all the way. But a man carrying a cross was not an uncommon sight in Israel, because the cross was the principal method of execution used by the Romans, who were the occupiers of Israel at that time.

Roman soldiers were everywhere. And when they wanted to kill somebody, make a bad example of them, they'd put them on a cross. And you didn't have to do a lot of really bad things to get the Romans angry at you.

There were a lot of criminals of various kinds who got executed that way. But what they would do is they would put the cross on the shoulder of the condemned criminal and make him carry it to the place where he was going to be crucified. The Romans didn't want to be bothered with the extra trouble of transporting the instrument of execution so that the condemned man had to do it himself.

Or he didn't really have to, because he could have said no. I mean, once you've been condemned to death, it's OK. You carry your cross to the place of execution.

If you said, what if I don't? What are you going to do to me then? You can't make me do it. Obviously, every criminal knew that no one could make him carry a cross. What punishment could they give him if he refused? He's already going to be executed in a few minutes.

It's clear that when you did find a man carrying his cross, and that was not apparently a strange sight in those days, that that man had accepted his condemnation. He had given



up all hope of redeeming or rescuing himself from his fate. And in that sense, he had given up all his rights.

He was a condemned man, and he accepted his role as a condemned man. Now, why would that be a good metaphor for following Jesus? And by the way, it was a metaphor. Jesus was not saying that his disciples all had to get crosses and carry them, though some of them actually ended up having to do so.

But that's certainly not a requirement, literally, for every disciple. People aren't executed with crosses today, and not all Christians will be executed for their faith. Some die peaceably.

So, why is this metaphor chosen? Well, it's because to become a follower of Jesus, you have to basically treat your old life like something that's condemned, something you're leaving behind permanently. You've accepted your faith that whatever you were doing when you were pursuing your own agendas is no longer going to be in your future. Not in the same way, anyway.

From now on, you're dead to your old life, and you accept that. You're not claiming any rights to it. You're resigned to, in a sense, death to self.

But of course, we know from the scriptures that death to self doesn't leave you dead. Paul said, I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live.

It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loves me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2.20. But Paul said, I've been crucified with Christ, for there's the image of the cross and death and so forth.

But I actually live. Once I've died to my old life, I receive a new life. And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God.

Now, this is the thing that is necessary to be a Christian, to be a follower of Christ. You have to die to the life of what? The life of self-will, the life of being your own boss, the life of having your own agendas. And what do you have in its place? A resurrected life, a divinely given life through regeneration, being born again.

You have a life of following his will. But it's a totally different kind of life, although many of the activities may be the same. For example, if you are a homemaker and a mother at home before you are a Christian, then you become a Christian, you might still be a mother at home.

Your activities might be very much the same as they were before. If you were a welder or a plumber or an airline pilot or a doctor or a lawyer, well, maybe not a lawyer, but you could still do your thing after you're saved, you know, politicians are out. But but there

are certain activities that people do before their followers of Christ that once they become followers, they do the same activities, but only for a different reason.

They did it before because that was their choice. That's what they wanted to do with their life. They were running things and they thought a career and they chose what they did.

And that's what they end up doing. Now, once they got there, it may turn out that they'll find out that's exactly what God wants them to do for him. Be a mother, be a plumber, be an airline pilot for him and many people who have become followers of Christ, though they're willing to give up everything God's calling is that they do the same thing they did before, only differently do it for him.

From now on. And how do you do something like that for him? You know, the Bible indicates that. When Jesus came, something really changed over the Old Testament order.

In the Old Testament, there are holy places and holy days, holy sites, holy individuals, priests and so forth that were sanctified, set apart for special things. And then there were ordinary places and ordinary days and ordinary people. There is a distinction between the sacred and the secular.

But when Jesus came for his disciples, he transformed their lives so that there's no more secular, sacred distinction. Everything is sacred. Everything is done for God.

Paul said, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God. Eating and drinking. What could be more mundane than eating and drinking? He says, well, that's what I mean.

Every little thing, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do it for the glory of God. When you become a Christian, you end the life that was for your purposes. It's condemned.

And you are living your life in a sense carrying a cross. Your life demonstrates that you have accepted that condemnation of your old way. And what you're doing now, whatever you're doing, is for the glory of God.

And of course, that will change in some ways, in some cases, the way you do things. Now, if you were an honest businessman before you were a Christian, and an honest businessman ever, your business practices might not change so much. But you'll have a different motivation for being there.

You see, you were there before to make a living. Now you're there as an agent of Christ in the world to have an impact for him in some way or another. And therefore, you've died to an old life and you've got a new life.

But it's new in terms of its motivations. It's new in terms of the whole mentality you have about it. But you might not actually be doing much different than you did before.

On the other hand, you might. There might be a lot of activities you did before you were a Christian are simply unacceptable. They're not agreeable with Christ.

In which case, you accept the condemnation of those things and put them in the past and you go forward and do the things that he wants you to do instead. Also, in Luke 14, a few verses after the last one we looked at, verse 33, Jesus said, So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple. Now, do you see a pattern here? Cannot be my disciple, cannot be my disciple, cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is definitely trying to get something across here. One is that he assumes that the people he's talking to want to be his disciples, but they can't, except on these terms. Now, I'm going to suggest you probably can't accept on these terms now either.

I don't know that he was making it harder for the first generation of disciples than for all generations afterwards. I think this is probably there's something in the nature of discipleship that makes it so. And if we want to be followers of Christ, this has to be so for us too.

What does it mean? Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple. I mentioned earlier some radical, crazy sounding stuff. I mean, there are people who've taken this absolutely literally and they've sold all their goods and they've had a yard sale or nowadays they do it on eBay.

And then when their stuff is all gone, they say, OK, God, I've forsaken all. What now? And he says, well, you better go out and buy some furniture. You're going to have to live somewhere.

You have to drive something. You're going to have to cook with something because God doesn't really call people generally to to get rid of all their things sometimes. Yes.

But even when it sounds like it, it may not always be so. It's true that he did say to the rich young rulers, sell all that you have and give to the poor and then come follow me. But he also told the disciples, Peter and James and John, when they're at their when they're fishing, he said, come and follow me.

And they are among those who are truly counted as disciples. In fact, when Jesus said to the rich young rulers, sell what you haven't given for and follow me, the man wouldn't do it. The man went away sorrowful because he had great possessions.

And Jesus made a comment about the camel and the eye of a needle. And the disciples said, well, then what shall we have? Peter said, what shall we have? We've forsaken everything. What do we have? And Jesus said, well, you'll have more.

But the interesting thing is that Peter is identified as somebody who, in fact, did forsake everything. But we know they had a house. We know he had a boat.

We know he still had fishing tackle because they still used it sometimes. How many other things he had, we don't know. And yet he said, Lord, we have forsaken everything.

And Jesus didn't say, what are you talking about, Peter? Don't you know? But you think I don't know about that stuff in your garage? I mean, clearly. Forsaking all didn't necessarily mean liquidating all your assets. I don't believe it means liquidating.

I think it means transferring the title. Because when you become a follower of Christ, you become his property. And obviously, any property that you had becomes his property, too.

And that is why the disciples could be said to have forsaken all, even though they still had stuff. And I assume you and I can still have stuff, too, and still have forsaken all. But we still have to have forsaken all.

Sometimes you say, I'm glad to hear I can still have stuff. Well, wait a minute. Why are you glad to hear that? You see, if you forsake it all, it almost doesn't matter to you if you still have stuff.

Because it's not your stuff. It's God's stuff. Now, if God wants to take his stuff, that's his business.

Why should you complain? You know, he may actually tell you to sell it all and give it to the poor and go on the mission field. But not everyone's called to do that. Probably not very many people are.

But everybody is called to be a disciple. Everybody's called to forsake what they have. That means you sign title up for everything over to Jesus.

It's now his. But he may leave it in your possession to steward it for him. Once Peter had become a disciple, his house became Jesus's house.

Jesus and the disciples used it as a headquarters for outreach and for healing ministries and so forth. Peter's boat became Jesus and the other disciples' transport. His nets, no doubt, on a few occasions they used the net to get food for them.

The point here is that he still had the same things he had before, but now it was for Jesus. Now it was really Jesus's stuff. Jesus could say, let's get in the boat and put out across the lake.

And Peter would say, no, wait a minute, I'm not sure I want to use my boat that way today. I really had other plans. No.

Even when Jesus said to him, cast your nets on the other side of the boat, we've been working all night. Can't we just go home? He said, well, he said, we have been working all night, but at your word, I'll do what you say. These are your nets, Lord.

You know, this is your boat. It's all yours. And that's that's how it has to really be.

Not just you tell yourself and others that it's that way. God needs to know that it's that way. It needs to really be so that you really have made a full surrender.

Of yourself and all else to Jesus, it says in First Corinthians, Chapter six, you're not your own. You've been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his.

So forsaking all that you have just means you're acknowledging that you don't own anything anymore because you don't even own you anymore. If you don't make these basic, at least mental steps, transitions, discipleship is going to be a failure in your case. You're not going to be able to do it.

You can't do it, he said. So obviously, being a disciple can be and apparently is often so demanding that unless you've already made this kind of a mental change, you're not going to make it. You're not gonna make it to the end of the course.

Jesus said in Luke nine, 23, if anyone desires to come after me. And the reason I bring this up is because back here, look at the look at the middle scripture there. Look, 1427, whoever does not bear his cross and come after me.

That's what you got to do. You got to come after Jesus. So Jesus said, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Now, denying oneself, that's kind of what it means. As he said, you have to hate father, mother, wife, children and your own life. Also, you basically are denying your ownership to yourself.

You're denying the rule of your own self. You're actually denying any legitimacy to the claims of your own agendas at all. You're basically saying, OK, I used to be owned by me.

At least I thought I was. Now I know I'm owned by God. And therefore, me is kind of insignificant in terms of what me wants.

What I want is not going to be a principle arbiter of what I'm going to do. What Jesus wants is what it's about. It's not I, but Christ.

Or as Jesus himself said in the garden, not my will, but your will be done. That's what denying yourself means. Myself wants this.

But if God wants that, I'm going to deny. I'm going to say no. Deny means say no.

I'm going to say no to myself and say yes to whatever God wants. You want to follow me? You're going to do that. You want to come after me? You have to deny yourself.

You got to take up a cross. We've already discussed that from the early verse. But interestingly, in Luke 9, 23, he adds the word daily.

So taking up the cross isn't just something you do at the moment of conversion and then forget about it. It's a daily thing. Daily, you live in this life as if you really don't belong to this life anymore.

A man carrying a cross to his execution, he's saying, I guess I don't belong in this world anymore. You know, I'm here for a little while more, but it's not my world. It's not my home.

Daily, we have to have that as our agenda. And he says, and follow me. So this term follow me is at the core of what it means to be a disciple, a Christian following Jesus.

We see that also in John 10, 27, where Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. So if you're one of his sheep, remember, that's the same passage where he said, no one can pluck them out of my hand. We like that one as a verse about security.

And it is an excellent verse about security. But he says, the father's give me these sheep and no one plucks them out of my hand. No one can pluck them out of my father's hand.

Great. If you're one of his sheep, how's that? What's that look like? Well, you follow him. OK, you're a disciple.

A sheep is a disciple. And there is security in being a disciple as long as you're abiding in him. In John 12, 26, he said, if anyone serves me, let him follow me.

I think there's a lot of people who want to be in ministry or want to do something for God. But following him day by day is asking a little much. They want to follow their own agendas, their own lives for the most part, and put in some volunteer time serving God for whatever reason.

But you said you're going to serve me. You're going to be one of my followers. I don't want people serve me who aren't my disciples.

We have examples of men who apparently did not follow Jesus, though some of them actually seem to want to initially. Counting the cost was something that may have weeded some of these guys out in Luke 9. Actually, Luke 9, 57 through 62. We're going to look at all those verses.

We're going to look at them in three parts because we have three examples here of persons who we could say would have been disciples, if not for perhaps what Jesus said

to them to try to put them off. And we try to do everything to convince people to follow Jesus. We'll even make bargains with them.

If someone says, I don't want to give up sleep with my girlfriend. Well, why don't you just come to Christ now and eventually you can give up sleep with your girlfriend. Let's make it easy on you here.

Jesus wasn't the type to make it easy. In fact, sometimes people were eager and he wanted to make it harder than they were expecting. It happened as they journeyed on the road, Jesus and his other disciples, that someone said to him, Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.

That sounds like he's going to be a disciple for sure. But Jesus said to him, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. You're going to go with me where I go.

My disciples might sleep out under the sky. We don't have as many creature comforts as some animals have. Come on board if you'd like.

Now, we don't know if this guy did. This is the last we hear of the guy. He may have actually come on those terms or not.

I suspect he did not since we don't hear of him again. But he was, he is a little, he's eager. Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go.

When we give altar calls for people to come to Christ, we try to persuade them to come to the point this man was at where they say, Lord, where he leads me, I will follow. I'll become a follower of Jesus. But this man was already at the place we want people to get to with our altar calls.

And Jesus said, I don't know if you're really where I want you yet. Are you sure you want this? Are you sure you know what you're getting into? Is this worth it to you? You better think about that. I assume the man did.

And what became of him, we don't know. The next two verses, Luke 9, 59 through 60, another man. Then he said to another, follow me.

This time Jesus initiated the call. The first guy just came up and said, Lord, I'll follow you. This time Jesus comes to a man and says, follow me.

Just like he had said to Matthew at the tax collector's booth or to the fisherman at the Sea of Galilee. He says, follow me. This guy was in the position to be a disciple at the direct call of Christ.

But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. That sounds like a reasonable request. I mean, if your father's dead and rotting there and, you know, in the bedroom,

you've got to get him under the ground.

That's kind of urgent, though. Most commentators feel that this is a situation where the man was probably didn't have a dead father yet. Many people talk about, you know, when I buried my father, when I buried my mother or when, you know, that means when they're dead, when they're dead and out of sight, then I'll then I'll have some other options.

Open to me and say, wait till I bury my father does not necessarily mean his father had already died, but rather, you know, I've got commitments to my father when he's dead, when he's buried, then I can come and follow you. If the man was already dead. It's hard to know why this man wasn't going about the business of burying him already.

You know, I mean, they didn't keep bodies out of the ground more than about a day once they died because they couldn't. They didn't embalm them. They didn't have any way to keep them from rotting quickly in the Middle Eastern heat and so forth.

They used to put him in the ground right forthwith. And this guy, unless he was on his way to the funeral parlor, his dad probably wasn't dead yet. But he was suggesting that maybe he has obligations to his father.

And after all, there is a command on your father and mother. But remember, Jesus said, if you love father and mother more than me, you're not worthy of me. And so Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead.

But you go and preach the kingdom of God. Now, this man is actually called to be a preacher. Not all Christians are preachers.

I know sometimes we're taught that we are, but that's simply not what we find in the Bible, the book of Acts. Not all the believers were preachers. But Jesus gave this man a call to preach like he did with his disciples or an evangelist.

And maybe he answered that call. We don't know. We don't ever read what the man did.

But we do know that Jesus was not willing to take him on his own terms. That is, the man wanted to come. He wanted to come on his terms and in his own time.

And you said, well, actually, that's not what had mine. I want you to come now. And what was your dad? Well, dead people can bury dead people, even spiritually dead people can do that kind of job.

It doesn't take a Christian to dig a hole. There's a lot of work that non-Christians can do that people who are spiritually dead can do as well as a person who is a Christian. If God calls you away from that activity to preach, that's something spiritually dead people can't do or shouldn't do.



Some spiritually dead people do, but that's not something God wants them to do. God wants when he calls him to preach, that's something that's only people who have been born again are supposed to do. People who are alive, dead people can't, spiritually dead can't do that.

Let dead people do what they can do. You do what they can't do. And hopefully the man followed.

But it's interesting that Jesus was saying, I've got a higher call for you than that which ordinary people might see as obligatory in their lives. But ordinary people can do a lot of things. My people have a higher calling in some cases, but we have higher activities that other people can't do.

You need to put those activities first, even if it offends your dad. And then another also said, Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. Now, again, this seems like a reasonable request, but Jesus said to him, no one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

Now, putting his hand to the plow and looking back. Maybe this man had already followed Jesus for a day or so, and since he had put his hand to the plow, and when he got a chance to sit down and talk to Jesus, he said, I'm planning to do this for the rest of my life. I'm going to follow you wherever you go.

But I do need to go back and say goodbye to my family. And Jesus said, I think you're looking back over your shoulder. I think you're having second thoughts.

This is probably the passage from which the song was inspired. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

No turning back. There's nothing really wrong with going and saying goodbye to your parents. If that's what the call of God allows, if there's no more urgency than that.

But I think Jesus suspected that this man's parents might not let him go with their approval and that this guy might be more bound in his own heart to the approval of his family than to following Jesus. I don't think Jesus would forbid anyone to go back and say goodbye to their family unless he felt like that was going to be something that was going to take them off course. And sometimes it can.

On the other hand, he didn't even say here that the man can't go back. He just said, if you look back, you're not fit for the kingdom of God. He could be saying, well, OK, you can go say goodbye to them, but realize they may put some doubts in your mind.

They may have you looking back. They may say, you know, we're going to write you out of the will. You're going to leave an inheritance behind that you're not ever going to get.

It happened a lot to Jewish people who followed Christ. They got disowned by their parents. And, you know, to look back like lots of life, you know, when she was leaving Sodom, she's going, where am I going to go living? I live in the wilderness.

I had a nice home back there. Oops. You know, looking back at what's what following God has cost you, what what you're leaving behind.

You look back like that. You're not fit for the kingdom. Now, those last two guys of the three had something in common.

The first one said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. The other one said, Lord, I'll follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. The common denominator is me first, which is, of course, our natural inclination.

We might want to follow Jesus as long as my life can still be about me first. Let me first do what I want to do, and then I'll follow you. And Jesus said that doesn't work right.

That's not how this plan works. It's going to be Jesus first or you're not going to be a disciple. So I will follow you.

I will follow you. Follow me. Follow me.

This terminology, if anyone can actually let him take up his cross and follow me, what does it mean to follow Christ? After all, in those days, following Christ would apparently mean he's moving that direction. You start moving the same direction. So you stay close to him.

If somebody's in motion and you follow them, you're in motion to geographically. And the men who followed Jesus around and the women to move from town to town with him. So they could stay with him because he wasn't everywhere at once.

As we understand it, he is everywhere at once now. And now he's ascended through his spirit. He's universally present.

He's with us here and he's with us ever. So following him today, is it the same thing? I mean, we don't necessarily have to move geographically, do we, to be a follower of Christ today? No, not necessarily geographically, because as I said, Jesus is now not in one place moving to another place where you have to move around to get near him or to stay near him. He's everywhere.

So following Christ doesn't mean geographical movement necessarily, although it certainly does if he is leading you to change your geography. You have to do that whether you like it or not. But it may not be.

Many of the people who were lovers of Christ in the first century were people who didn't move around a lot. He had his friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus. They were

certainly disciples of his.

They would be called his followers in whatever sense is important. But they lived in a house in Bethany and we don't ever read that they followed him geographically. When Lazarus got sick, Mary and Martha had to send servants from where they were to wherever Jesus was to give him the message.

They weren't with him. They weren't traveling with him, although, of course, their house was his whenever he was in town. It's clear that even then being a disciple and following him didn't always mean that you move around.

In fact, in John 19, 38, we read about Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. Now, he could have kept it a secret if he was walking around with Jesus all the time in the company of the disciples. Yet he's called a disciple.

But he wasn't traveling with Jesus. So obviously, following Jesus doesn't necessarily mean the geographical movement around that many of the disciples actually did have the luxury of doing. But the idea actually has its origins in the idea of disciples of rabbis or of the prophets, like Elisha was a disciple of Elijah or Joshua, apparently the disciple of Moses or of other philosophers and moral teachers.

I mentioned, you know, Socrates had disciples and so forth. There are people who are not even religious leaders, so disciples. And to be a disciple of Jesus is related to that.

To be a follower of Socrates, to be a follower of Moses or whatever is different. In Mark 2, 18, it talks about the disciples of John and of the Pharisees. There were disciples of John the Baptist, there were disciples of the Pharisees and there were disciples of Jesus.

In fact, on the occasion that Mark's talking about, the disciples of John and the Pharisees were challenging the disciples of Jesus because they didn't fast like the others did. That's because the disciples of Jesus were following Jesus and the others were following these other teachers. The man that Jesus cured of blindness, the man who was born blind in John chapter nine, when he was called to give an account for what had happened because the Sabbath had been broken.

And Jesus had cured him on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees thought was illegal, shouldn't be done. And at one point he said they kept interviewing him, trying to get him to incriminate himself because the story he told didn't really have anything incriminating in it. So they kept saying, tell us the story again, you know, hoping he'd slip up on something.

And the last time they said, tell us again how he made you well. The man says, I've already told you. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be one of his disciples too? And they reviled him and said, you are his disciple.

We are Moses' disciples. What's it mean to be Moses' disciples? Well, what's it mean to be a disciple at all of anyone, of any teacher? What means a number of things? Let me tell you what they are quickly. One is that it means becoming a student of that teacher.

It means you identify yourself as one of his students. That means you're learning from him. Jesus said in Matthew 11, 28 through 30, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

We always like to hear that one. But it's not the end of the passage. He says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

Taking the yoke of a teacher on you was meant that you come under his control. You are controlled by his teaching. A yoke, of course, was a bar of wood that was placed over the necks of two oxen or some other beasts of burden.

And it bound them together so that they could not go where they wanted to go. Their necks were in the yoke. And the owner of the yoke used it to steer them, to pull his cart or to pull his plow.

Well, if you wore someone's yoke, you were his slave. You were not going to determine where you're going anymore. The owner, the one who put the yoke on you, is determining where you're going.

You are now totally at his service. Now, when someone became a disciple of one of the Pharisees or of John the Baptist, they took his yoke on them. That meant that their life was now going to be determined by the teachings of that person.

That's how they spoke of it. And Jesus says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me. This is what it means to be a student.

You become a student of a teacher. You take up his yoke of tutorship and you begin to learn from him. And he says, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Now, as a side note, it's kind of interesting that Justin Martyr, one of the early church fathers, said that when Jesus was young and working in the carpenter shop, that he actually had a shingle out in front of his shop, as all the tradesmen did, with sort of a slogan on it, like a business motto. And that Jesus, as a carpenter, specialized in making ox yokes. And Justin Martyr said that Jesus' motto that was on his shingle was, he said, my yokes fit well.

Now, I don't know if Justin Martyr made that up, but he told it as if it's historically true. And he was not so far from the source that he might not have actually known. Jesus might have had a sign in front of his carpenter shop saying, my yokes fit well.

And in making this comment, my yoke is easy and my burden is light, reflects that idea

that he knows how to make the yoke fit well. He knows how to fit the yoke to the animal. And he knows how to make it not chafe.

It is an easy yoke if it's fitted properly. Now, some people say that the reason the yoke is easy is because Jesus is in the other side of the yoke. You know, you got your heads in one of the holes in the yoke and his is in the other.

His strength is pulling the whole cart. But, he said, my yoke, I don't think he meant to say, you're in one side and I'm in the other. I think he meant to say, I'm steering.

I'm the one who owns the plow and you're going to be plowing for me. And you're going to have to be my servant. I'm going to steer you.

I'm going to control you. But it won't be hard. And why isn't it hard? Because true disciples can only really make it if they love Jesus.

Remember those hard things we look at? You have to hate your father and mother and your own life also. You have to take up your cross. You have to forsake all you have.

That's a hard thing. Not if you love him. You ever been in love with anyone? If you're really in love, I mean, you will impoverish yourself and think you're doing yourself a favor for that person.

You're looking for every opportunity to serve that person. And you don't think you're doing anything great. It's what love makes you want to.

You almost can't not do it. When you fall out of love, if you still have the commitment to do all those things for him, it can be a drudgery, but not when you love him. You see what's lying behind those hard things is he doesn't say it in that place, though, of course, instead of any other places.

If you love him supremely, as a disciple should, then you will prefer him to your father, mother, wife, children, and your own life also. You will be willing to take a cross cheerfully daily and follow him. All of this depends on love.

There's no legalism in discipleship. If there is, you might as well become a disciple of the Pharisees. They were legalists.

Jesus was not a legalist. Jesus was walking in the spirit. He was led by his father because he loved his father.

And to be his disciple, you have to love him. And of course, he gives his spirit and the fruit of the spirit is love. That's why he gives his spirit so you can love as he does and love him.

Well, once you have that love, then the yoke is easy. It can be a heavy one. It can even

kill you.

But it's easy and light if you're swelling with love for him. And that's what is underlying all of this. All these things that sound hard and difficult, they're not difficult when you're in love.

So, following a teacher and following Jesus, first of all, means becoming a student of that teacher. Secondly, it's accepting the teachings of that teacher as authoritative. Jesus said to those Jews who believe him, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples.

Indeed, as you keep under my teaching, if you, of course, accept my teaching and recognize its authority in your life, if you continue in it, then you are my disciples. Indeed. So you don't just become a student, but you accept the teacher's teachings.

For example, if Jesus believed the Old Testament was inspired, then I have to. If Jesus believed there's a devil, then I have to. If Jesus believed that Job was a historical character, then I have to.

If he believed there's a worldwide flood, then I have to. Why? Because I'm his disciple. He's my teacher.

I accept his teaching. That goes with the territory. When I attach myself to him as his disciple, whatever he says is gospel.

No pun intended. It's true. And I accept it because he said it.

And then there comes obeying the instructions of the teacher. When the Pharisees said to the man who'd been healed of blindness, we are Moses' disciples. You are Jesus' disciples.

What they're saying is your Jesus breaks the Sabbath. We don't because we follow Moses and we're his disciples and we don't violate that. We obey what Moses said.

You are disobeying what Moses said. You're doing what Jesus said. Well, that's what being a disciple is.

You do what your teacher says. And of course, we know. We saw this already in Matthew 28, 19 through 20, Jesus said, make disciples, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

That's how people are made into disciples by being trained to obey Jesus. In Luke 6, 46, Jesus said, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you don't do the things which I say? It's clear that Jesus didn't just give teachings and commands in order to amuse people. He expected them to be followed.

And his disciples do follow him forth, following a teacher, following Jesus in this case

means becoming a duplicate of the teacher. You become a little version of the same teacher because you've accepted his teachings. You've obeyed his commands.

In a sense, you're following his example. So that Jesus says in Luke 6, 40, a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone that is, every disciple who is perfectly trained or whose training is complete will be like his teacher. To me, this is one of the most exciting statements in the Bible about discipleship.

A disciple is being trained. A disciple has a teacher and a fully trained disciple will be like his teacher. There's nothing more exciting that I can imagine for a human being than to the prospect of really being like Jesus.

But that comes with training and only the perfectly trained disciple will finally be just like his teacher. But that's what's out there. That's what being a disciple involves.

You're becoming more like him. You're changing. Because you're following his teachings and stuff like you are changing little by little and to be more like him.

What is the true mark of a disciple, then? Well, we know this passage, at least if you came to my earlier classes, we've covered this before. But in Matthew 7, verses 22 through 23, we can see what isn't the mark of a true disciple. Jesus said many will say to me in that day, and I assume he means the day of judgment.

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name and in your name have cast out devils and in your name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity. Now, these guys apparently weren't the real deal, but they thought they were.

They thought they were disciples. They thought he'd recognized them at the judgment day, but he didn't. I said, I don't think I know you.

I never knew you. You're not even familiar to me. You'd get out of here.

You don't belong here. Depart from me. You're a worker of iniquity.

A worker of iniquity casting out demons in Jesus' name, prophesying, doing mighty works in Jesus' name. How could that person be a worker of iniquity? Well, apparently it's possible. In fact, if you're familiar with the lives of television evangelists, it's not even unfamiliar.

But the fact of the matter is there are people who think that the proof of the pudding is that they have signs and wonders or they cast out demons or they prophesy. Or in other words, they have phenomena that they are identifying as the proof that they are Christians. But this is the wrong phenomena.

These are the wrong indicators. Do you know prophesying is done by a donkey once?

Prophecy does make a Christian do that. Caiaphas prophesied once in John chapter 11.

He wasn't even he was not only not saved. He was plotting to kill Jesus. King Saul prophesied when he was pursuing David.

He fell in among prophets and he fell down and prophesied. And I mean prophesying, apparently even casting out demons and doing mighty works. It's not always of God.

And therefore that's not the mark of a true disciple. What is? Well, Jesus said in John 13, 34 and 35, A new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples and those men could include yourself.

How do I know if I'm a disciple? Well, one way that everyone can know, including yourself, is if you have love one for another. What kind of love for another? As I have loved you. Well, how did he love us? Well, rather sacrificially, certainly.

We have to say that. And there was already a command that the Jews had, which was not as this one is said to be a new commandment. The old commandment was love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Now, very few people really did that very well. But Jesus said, now I've got a new commandment for you. And that's that you love another as I have loved you, that you love one another.

Now, what's the difference between loving your neighbor as you love yourself and loving somebody as Jesus loved you? Well, love your neighbor as yourself means if you have two coats, you give one to him who has none. His need is as important to you as yours is. You keep one for yourself.

You give him one. It's equal. You're on an equal footing with the other.

You love him as much as you love you, but no more. But of course, how did Jesus love us? He gave his life for us. Greater love has no man than this, than that he laid down his life.

And it says in 1 John, Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. This is how the love of Jesus is seen. And laying down your life for the brethren doesn't always mean that you go to the martyrdom.

If being a martyr is the only way to lay down your life for the brethren, then only a few people relatively will ever do it. But because frankly, not all of us have the opportunity to become martyrs. But we do have the opportunity to lay down our lives daily in terms of



putting our prerogatives below those of someone else.

Our preferences, our wishes, even our own well-being. Putting somebody else's above ourselves. That's laying down your life for someone else.

And of course, ultimately even dying for someone else, if that happens to be an opportunity that comes your way. But that's loving as Jesus loved. And that's Jesus said, By this all men will know that you are my disciples.

If you have this kind of love. That is the true mark. If you don't have it, you're not at one.

Therefore, in conclusion, a disciple of Jesus has come to Christ in order to learn from him. Embraces the authoritative teaching of Christ. Is committed to keeping his commandments.

And I'd put it that way, rather than saying keeps his commandments. I said is committed to keeping his commandments. Because as you read the scriptures, even Jesus himself and certainly Paul indicates that while it is true that every Christian is determined to obey Jesus, every Christian falls short.

I mean, even the best disciples, Peter, James, and John, when Jesus said stay awake for an hour, they fell asleep. They didn't keep his commandments. Was he angry at them? Did he say, Oh, you're not real disciples.

He said, No. He said the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He recognized that they wanted to obey.

They just were they were too tired to stay awake. And he said the spirit is willing. The flesh is weak.

That's that's really the explanation for when a true disciple fails to obey Christ. A true disciple, their spirit is willing. Their spirit does want to obey him.

And that's why when they fail, they repent. Because they really wanted to obey. Christians are not perfect people.

They do fail. They do sin. They fall.

They have weaknesses and so forth. The flesh is weak, but a true Christian spirit is determined, committed to obey. And so we although we can't say without without some further explanation that a Christian is one who obeys Jesus.

Because they say, well, all Christians sometimes don't obey perfectly. But every Christian, if they're a disciple, and that's that's what a Christian is, is committed to keeping his commandments. That's how they define their tasks.

When they wake up in the morning, they realize that the the only agenda item is obey what Jesus said. A disciple of Jesus is loyal to Christ above all other loyalties. Wife, children, father, mother, country, denominations, whatever.

Any other loyalties. Christ trumps them. And that's not just temporary.

That's for life. You become a follower of Christ for life. Your loyalty to him is above your loyalty to anything else.

And a disciple of Jesus is becoming like Jesus. In the process, 2 Corinthians 3, 18 says, all we with open faces beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are being changed from glory to glory into that same image, even as by the spirit of the Lord. As we look at the image of Jesus, Paul said, as we're keeping our eyes on Jesus, we are being changed from glory to glory into that image.

That means that we're not just looking forward to the day he comes back so that instantly we'll be like him, but rather we're becoming like him. We're in the process of becoming like him. We're not just waiting till he shows up to change.

We're changing all the time. We're being transformed by the renewing of our minds, Paul said. So the disciple is changing and becoming like Christ.

And, of course, a disciple of Jesus exhibits the love of Christ to others. Now, that's the ABCs so far of discipleship. That's our first installment.

We've got seven other sessions here. I'm going to be talking in depth about, I suppose, the nuts and bolts of what it means to follow Jesus in daily life. But in order to get to those points, we have to first lay a foundation.

This is what discipleship means. And I dare say before you leave, you might just want to ask yourself, is that what I am? Is that even what I want to be? Because some people have gone forward, even gotten baptized and joined the church. And when they see these things, they think, I'm not sure I really want that.

Better find out before you waste your life thinking you're saved. The last thing I want to do is get a judgment, say, Lord, I taught all these Bible studies for you in your name, and I must certainly be saved. And they say, I never knew you.

If I don't want to be a disciple, I want to know yesterday so I can do something else. But if you do want to be a disciple, then you have to take what Jesus said about it seriously. Obviously, being a disciple means taking him seriously as a teacher and following his teachings.

So these are the basics that we can say about discipleship. We will have other opportunities to talk about the cost of discipleship, perhaps a little more detail, as well as

the benefits and then, of course, what particularly is involved day by day. Maybe only half of you will be here next time.

Who knows? Maybe that's optimistic.