

Real Discipleship

As a boy, Michelangelo presented himself to a master sculptor to be his pupil. The old man said, “This will take all your life.” Michelangelo replied, “What else is life for?”

Michelangelo knew that for life to have real meaning one must be committed to something. A person who is not committed to something or someone will live an empty, miserable life. However, the happiest people in the world are those who have committed their lives to something.

The New Testament calls those who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ disciples. Traditionally, the word disciple has been defined as “student” or “learner.” However, our English word disciple comes from a Greek word (MATHĒTĒS, math-ay-tees’), which is from the root word math and means “thought accompanied by endeavor.”

Therefore, the word disciple in the New Testament does not refer merely to a student or learner who goes to a teacher or classroom and sits down to listen and accumulate knowledge. Real New Testament discipleship is much more than that, as we shall see in this lesson. Let’s look at five things involved in real discipleship, beginning with ...

I. Taking on Jesus’ Yoke

In Matthew 11:29a, Jesus says, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.*” The word learn comes from the Greek word that is often translated disciple. It could be translated, “Team up with me, and become my disciple.” What aspect of discipleship is Jesus emphasizing in this verse (see also Matthew 16:24)?

Jesus gave us two great symbols of commitment. In His day both were made of wood. One was the cross; the other was the yoke. The cross is a symbol of submission (which we will discuss later in this lesson), and the yoke is a symbol of service.

It is only when we put the cross and the yoke together that we have a true picture of real discipleship. A real disciple of Jesus Christ must be ready for either a cross or a yoke.

Besides taking on Jesus’ yoke, a real disciple of Jesus must be ...

II. Continuing in the Word

In John 8:31 Jesus said, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”*

Becoming a real disciple of Jesus is much like getting married. It is relatively easy to go through the marriage ceremony, but there is much more to marriage than the ceremony. Marriage is a commitment for life, followed by a continuing relationship.

How does real discipleship compare to marriage?

What does it mean to continue in Jesus’ Word? It means we continue to learn and live the Word of God as long as we have breath. You see, the purpose of the Word of God is not to fill our heads with knowledge so we can impress people with how much we know. The real purpose of Bible study is to change our lives.

If we are continuing in the Word, the next aspect of real discipleship will be much easier ...

III. Choosing To Love

In John 13:34–35, we are commanded to love one another. Each one of us can choose to hate, ignore, or love anyone. All three of these actions are volitional. We choose to do them or not to do them. We are not helpless victims of our emotions. We are commanded to love because it is something we decide to do.

The church we attend, what we believe, how moral we are, etc., is not what reveals to the world that we are disciples of Jesus. These things are very important, but what does Jesus say will let the world know we are His disciples in John 13:35?

Francis Shaeffer said, *“When Jesus said, By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples ..., He gave the world the right to judge us by our love.”*

However, there is even more to real discipleship than taking on Jesus’ yoke, continuing in the Word, and choosing to love. Let’s continue by looking at ...

IV. Living a Cleansed Life

God will not use or bless a disciple who has unconfessed sin in his or her life. According to the Bible, there are two kinds of Christians—spiritual and carnal. Read the following references, and describe them:

Carnal (worldly) Christian (1 Corinthians 3:1–3)

Spiritual Christian (Galatians 6:1–2 & Ephesians 4:32)

There are only two options in the Christian life. You choose to be either a spiritual disciple of Jesus Christ or a carnal one. If you are not living a victorious, abundant Christian life, it is because you are a carnal, or worldly, Christian. Real discipleship takes the believer out of the carnal and into the spiritual.

Real discipleship involves taking on Jesus' yoke, continuing in the Word, choosing to love, living a cleansed life, and finally ...

V. Surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

One of Jesus' key teachings on real discipleship is found in Luke 14:25–35. Three times in this passage Jesus uses the phrase he cannot be my disciple. In each instance, it is preceded by one of the demands of real discipleship (see verses 26, 27 & 33).

His first demand, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children ... he cannot be my disciple,"* (Lk 14:26) is shocking, even staggering. It was Jesus' intention to shock us with the word hate. In this verse, hate is used as a hyperbole. "Hyperbole" (hy-per'-boh-lee) is a transliteration of a Greek word that means "exaggeration for effect, not to be taken literally." Jesus is not teaching we are to despise, or "hate," our families, but our love for Him in comparison to our love for our families must be so much greater it would almost be like the difference between love and hate. Jesus must be Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

Another demand of real discipleship is found in verse 27, *"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."* When the Romans crucified a criminal, the victim was often forced to carry his cross to the site of crucifixion. In so doing he was led through the most populous part of the city as a public admission of submission to the authority and laws of Rome. Notice that Jesus did not say *"be nailed to your cross"* but *bear*, or take up, your cross. Your "cross" is whatever makes it difficult for you to follow Jesus.

In Luke 14:28–33, Jesus uses two illustrations to point out that real discipleship must include planning and sacrifice. The first illustration was about a person who decided to build a tower (verses 28–30). The builder did not begin to build until he had considered the cost to see if he could complete it. The second illustration concerned a king planning to go into battle, but who did not foolhardily rush into conflict without first counting the cost (verses 31–32). Moreover, it cost the king the victory to initiate terms of peace, but it would have cost him his life to go into battle. Jesus says, *"... whosoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple"* (vs. 33). Thus, discipleship is costly, but not to follow Christ is even more costly. How (see John 3:36)?

Jesus concludes His long passage on real discipleship with a profound illustration in Luke 14:34–35, “*Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. . .*”

How does this illustration of salt fit into the area of discipleship? What is the distinctive quality of salt that makes it different from all other substances? It is not its color because many things are white. It is not its texture because many things are granulated. The distinctive quality of salt is its taste. If it loses that, it is worthless. It ceases to be salt. What is the distinctive quality of discipleship, without which we cannot call ourselves disciples (see Luke 9:62)?

Lack of commitment to Jesus Christ is like salt without its flavor; without it you cannot be a real disciple. It will take a commitment for you to finish this “journey.” It is a decision you will have to make because of your desire for a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. Commit yourself now to finish this study and memorize all the memory verses.

MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 11:29