

A Closer Walk With God

Are You A Disciple Of Jesus?

INTRODUCTION:

- I. This evening, I'm beginning a series of lessons I'll be preaching over the next two months that deals with what it means to truly have a closer walk with God.
 - A. And in doing so, hopefully we'll be able to better appreciate what it means to truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ – because that's what a disciple is: someone who walks with the Lord every day of their life.
 1. Therefore, to begin this series of studies together, let's start by understanding what a disciple really is.
 2. The reason this is so important is because we might be a member of the Lord's church – we might be baptized believer who has been added by the Lord to His church – but we might not actually be a disciple of the Lord.
 - a. There is a difference – a huge difference.
 4. So let's start there. Let's ask ourselves whether or not we truly are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Body:

- I. Following His resurrection from the dead, and just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples what we have come to call "The Great Commission."
 - A. This "Great Commission" is recorded twice in the gospels – in Matthew and Mark. But for our purposes I want to focus on Matthew's record.
 1. **Matthew 28:18-20** – *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
 2. I find it interesting that the Lord told His disciples to go make disciples.
 - a. But what is a disciple?
 - b. And how does one go about making a disciple?
 - B. Well, we're actually given a clue in the statement of Jesus:
 1. First, this tells me that we must be a disciple before we can make a disciple – or to put it another way:
 - a. We can't help someone else become a disciple if we're not a disciple.

2. Second, this tells me disciples are those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. That means a disciple is one who believes in Jesus, and who understands they need to be baptized so that the blood of Christ can cleanse them from their sins.
 - b. But there's a lot more to being a disciple than simply being baptized for the remission of sins.
3. Third, this tells me disciples are also those who have been taught to observe all things the Lord commanded His disciples to observe.
 - a. That seems to suggest there are things you and I must continue to do to truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Discipleship doesn't simply stop at baptism.
4. And finally, the statement of Jesus tells me that a disciple is one with whom the Lord has a relationship – meaning the Lord is "with us" in some special and unique way throughout our entire life.
 - a. That seems to suggest that if the Lord is not with us in that unique relationship, then we aren't truly a disciple of Christ.
5. All of this is helpful in understanding what a disciple is, but it doesn't answer all the questions.
 - a. So let's look at the word "disciple" because Jesus used it for a reason.

- C. The most simple definition of the word "disciple" is "a learner" or "one who follows another's teaching."
1. In that sense the word disciple suggests one who is an "adherent" – meaning a devotee, or a supporter.
 2. But the word disciple also suggests one who is an "imitator," or one who "impersonates" the qualities and character of the one they follow – namely their teacher.
 - a. Jesus said: **Luke 6:40** – *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."*
 3. So this means if we are truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, then we are much more than simply a "learner" or "one who follows another's teaching" (an "adherent"), but rather one who seeks to be like the teacher in every way.
 - a. In other words, to be a disciple of Christ, we must be like Him.
 - b. The apostle Paul says a disciple seeks: **Romans 8:29** – . . . *to be conformed to the image of His Son. . .*
- D. So, the first question we need to be asking ourselves is, are we like Jesus?
1. Do we have a desire to follow Him and be like Him – to imitate His character in our own lives?
 2. Unless we can say we are like Jesus, or have a strong desire to be like Him, we can't really call ourselves His disciple, can we.

- E. But this raises another question: If we are to be like Jesus – or imitate His character in our own lives – what are some of those characteristic marks that would distinguish us as being like Him?
- II. Fortunately, Jesus gives us several clear and concise definitions of what it means to be His disciple.
- A. First, a disciple is one who will *"abide in"* or *"continue in"* His words.
 - 1. **John 8:31** – *"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."*
 - a. Other translations say we must *"continue in"* His words.
 - b. Therefore, to be a disciple of Jesus we must not only take a stand in support of the teachings of Jesus, we must also refuse to deviate from, or in any way take a compromising position toward any of those teachings.
 - c. We must have the attitude that if Jesus said it – that settles it. There is no further room for debate.
 - B. But even more than that, being a disciple of Jesus also means doing what He says – or to put it another way, we must live by the teachings of Jesus.
 - 1. **Matthew 7:21** – *"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."*

- a. In Luke's account Jesus added: **Luke 6:46** – *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"*
2. The very definition of the word "disciple" suggests one who is a "follower" of Jesus Christ.
 - a. But how can we be a "follower" of Jesus Christ and not do the things which He says?
3. The world is literally filled with millions who call Jesus "Lord" and yet, who do not do the things which He says – including some within the Lord's church.
 - a. Maybe this is why James, the Lord's brother, admonished Christians by saying: **James 1:22** – . . . *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
4. Of course, to "abide in" or "continue in" His words, and to faithfully do what He says, implies we have a thorough understanding of His words in the first place.
 - a. How can anyone *"abide in"* or *"continue in"* His words, and live by His words, if they don't know what His words are?
 - b. Brethren, every single false teaching that has crept into the church, and every false teacher who has had success in leading brethren astray, has been successful because of the ignorance of the brethren.

c. How can you *"earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered"* (Jude 3) if you don't know what *"the faith"* is?

d. Spiritual ignorance, which is the result of Biblical ignorance, lies at the root of every apostasy since the Lord's church began some two-thousand years ago.

5. Therefore, if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you will not only *"continue in"* His words, and live by His words, you will also know His words so that you can spot false teaching and false teachers in a heart-beat.

6. If we don't have a commanding understanding of the teachings of Jesus – including His teachings through the inspired writings of His apostles – then do we really have a right to call ourselves a disciple of Christ?

III. In addition to all this, there is something else Jesus said about being His disciple.

A. We must love one another just as He has loved us.

1. **John 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."*

- a. I want to make this really clear. Jesus didn't simply say we must love one another. He said we must *"love one another as I have loved you."*
 - b. That means our love for one another is a self-sacrificing love – the kind of love where we would be willing to literally lay down our life to save the life of a brother or sister in Christ.
 - c. When our love for one another is that deep and that intense, then nothing will come between us to destroy the peace and unity the Lord demands of His people.
 - d. Even if someone deliberately walks away from the Lord, and even if they go so far as to openly denounce Christ, we still love them.
2. In case you're wondering what a self-sacrificing love implies, here's how Jesus loved us.
 - a. **Ephesians 5:1-2** – *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*
 - b. **1 John 4:9-11** – *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to*

be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- B. On the flip side, claiming to love God while at the same time having hatred in our hearts toward a brother or sister, is nothing short of a lie.
1. **1 John 4:20-21** – *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*
 2. Of course, some will say, "I don't actually hate my brother, I just don't get along with them and prefer to not be around them." If that's you, then consider the definition of the word "*hate*" used by John in this passage.
 - a. The word is "*miseo*" (miz-A-oh) and is not only translated "*hate*" but also "*detest*" or "*despise*."
 - b. "*Detest*" means to abhor, dislike intensely, to have no use for; while "*despise*" means to spurn, shun, slight, or put down.
 3. The consequences of not truly loving our brethren is very severe.
 - a. **1 John 3:10** – *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

- b. **1 John 3:14-15** – *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*
 - c. **1 John 4:7-8** – *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*
 - d. **1 John 4:20-21** – *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*
- C. So, love for one another is crucial to truly being a disciple – a true follower and imitator of Jesus Christ.
- 1. The apostle Peter put it this way: **1 Peter 1:22** – *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart...*
 - a. Why? **1 Peter 1:23** – . . . *having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. . .*

b. Our life isn't what it used to be. We've been "born again" – we have been given a totally new life – through our obedience to the word of God.

2. This is why the apostle Paul said: **2 Corinthians 5:17** – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

a. If we are truly "in Christ" – if we truly have that unique relationship with Jesus Christ as His disciple – then we are "a new creation" and "old things have passed away."

b. We no longer think, talk, or act the way we did before we became a disciple of Christ. Now, we're imitators of Jesus Christ – people are able to see Christ in us.

c. Or to put it another way, we are doing the very thing Jesus demanded of all His disciples: **Matthew 5:16** – *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

IV. But there's one more thing the Lord requires of everyone who would be His disciple – be willing to forsake all that we have.

A. During the mid-point in the ministry of Jesus He was at the pinnacle of popularity.

1. Large crowds of disciples were following Him.

2. Unfortunately, many of those followers were "disciples of convenience" – meaning they were willing to follow Jesus as long as it was convenient, and benefited them.
- B. Therefore, Jesus challenged those who followed Him with these words that must have shocked many to the core:
1. **Luke 14:25-33** – *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26 "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.*
28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see 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, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

C. Essentially Jesus said there are three things He will require of everyone who wishes to be His disciple.

1. First, we must be willing to put Jesus above everything and above everyone in our life – He must come first.

a. What disturbs many who read these verses is that Jesus used the word "hate" when talking about how we must feel about our closest family members – and this has confused many.

b. Even though the word "*hate*" here is the same word John used when he spoke about not hating our brother, this usage of the Greek word "miso" (miz-A-oh) is completely different.

c. In the context of Jesus' statement, the word "hate" simply means "to love less" or "to love to a lesser degree."

d. In other words, if we love our father or mother, our husband or wife, our children, or our brothers or sisters more than we love Jesus Christ, we cannot be His disciple.

e. He didn't simply say you cannot be a good disciple, or you cannot be a productive disciple – He said you simply cannot be His disciple. Period.

g. You are prohibited from being His disciple if you love family more than Him.

2. Second, Jesus said we must be willing to love Him more than we love our own life.
 - a. This not only implies our willingness to lay down our lives for Jesus Christ, but it also implies something far more relevant to our day and time.
 - b. How many times have you heard someone say, "It's my life, and I'll live it the way I want?" Well, those who have that kind of attitude about their life simply cannot be a disciple – a follower – of Jesus Christ.
 - c. They are determined to follow their own will rather than follow Him.
 - d. This means we must give up anything or anyone who stands in our way of being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ – anything or anyone we love more than we love Him.
3. Third, I must be willing to suffer any and all forms of persecution to be His disciple – everything from ridicule to death.
 - a. This is what Jesus meant when He said, *"whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple"* **(Luke 14:27)**.
 - b. Sometimes we hear people describe some burden they have to endure as "that's the cross I have to bear." But Jesus wasn't talking about bearing some burden.

- c. To Christians in the first three centuries, the cross was a symbol of immense suffering and the most horrifying death imaginable.
 - d. That's what Jesus meant when He said, *"whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."*
 - e. Unless we are willing to literally suffer every imaginable form of persecution and suffering – even death – to follow after Jesus, we simply cannot be His disciple.
 - f. Again, Jesus isn't saying we cannot be a good disciple, or an effective disciple – He said we simply cannot be His disciple. Period. We are disqualified from being His disciple.
- D. This is why Jesus added the examples of the man who sets out to build a house only to discover he can't complete it, or the king who goes to war without first considering whether he has enough soldiers to win.
- 1. This is Jesus' way of saying He wants us to seriously "count the cost" of what being a disciple will cost us.
 - 2. Then we must decide if we're willing to pay that price.
 - 3. I can assure you, being a follower of Jesus will Christ will cost you sooner or later.
 - a. It may cost you the loss of your family – especially if you're considered an outcast by family members who want you to love them more than you love the Lord.

- b. It may cost you the loss of friends – especially those who think you've become a religious fanatic and a narrow-minded bigot simply because you don't "run with the crowd" anymore.
 - c. It may cost you the loss of your job – especially if you tell your employer you want time off to assemble with the Lord's church on the first day of every week, or if you refuse to do things that are morally or ethically wrong.
4. Therefore, Jesus wanted everyone to sit down first and count the cost of what it will mean to truly be His disciple.
5. Every time I talk to someone about obeying the gospel, I ask them to carefully consider whether they're willing to make a life-long, life-changing commitment to Christ.
6. Why do I do this? I'll let the apostle Peter explain:
- a. **2 Peter 2:20-22** – *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb:*

"A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

E. Therefore, Jesus summed up what it means to be His disciple with these words:

1. **Luke 14:28** – *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.*

CONCLUSION:

I. We've been talking about what being a true disciple of Jesus Christ requires.

But, in conclusion, let me talk a little about the benefits of being His disciple.

A. The Lord doesn't simply ask a lot of us to be His disciple – He asks everything. But just look at what He gives us now in return.

1. First, we will be justified by His blood, and saved from the coming wrath of God (**cf. Romans 5:6-11**).
2. And second, we will receive every spiritual blessing God has reserved for those who are His children (**cf. Ephesians 1:3-6**).
3. And, if we remain faithful till death, He gives us a home in heaven (**cf. Revelation 2:10**).

B. So, the question we all need to ask ourselves is simply this, "Are we truly a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

1. Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, and been added by the Lord to His church?

2. And if you have, are you living faithfully – faithfully following Jesus every day of your life?
3. If you realize you're not a disciple of Christ, then you can become one right now by either coming to Him in complete faith and obedience, or by coming back to Him in repentance, confessing your past sins.