

Real Discipleship

(By Pastor Kelly Sensenig)

A native of the Congo prayed: “Dear Lord, You be the needle and I be the thread. You go first, and I will follow wherever You may lead.” This is what Jesus is asking of our lives today as His children. He is asking us to follow Him and the way or path that He has walked while living upon this earth. The question facing your life today is this:

“Are you willing to follow Christ?”

A simple three-by-five card was given at a mission’s conference to every prospective missionary. On the card were these words.

Anything Anywhere Any time At Any cost	
_____	_____
(date)	(signature)

Dear friend, have you ever considered giving your whole life to Jesus Christ? Many Christian young people of today make their own goals and plans but leave Jesus Christ out of them! Many Christians do not want to make Jesus Christ Lord of their lives.

Jesus asked in Luke 6:46:

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

There are many Christians who don’t want to surrender and yield themselves to Jesus Christ and give their goals, plans, and future to Him. Many decide what they want to do and pursue their dreams but fail to remember that Jesus Christ has called them to a life of unreserved commitment to Him and His cause. Christ wants to be Lord of our dreams, goals, and future. He wants us to follow His plan for our lives, which is ultimately to give Him first place in whatever we do and wherever we go in life. Jesus wants to be Lord (master) and

Leader (director) of our lives.

Have you ever totally and unreservedly surrendered your life to Jesus Christ? Are you willing to follow Him and His will for your life without reservation? Can you honestly say to Jesus Christ that you will do anything for Him, go anywhere for Him, at anytime for Him, and at any cost for Him? These are soul-searching questions. Here is another card that needs to be signed in the Christian life, which is similar to the first one.

Whatever Whenever Wherever	
_____	_____
(date)	(signature)

Jesus told His original disciples, or followers, to witness to the unsaved masses (Mark 16:15), and after they are saved, the disciples were told to teach the new converts about discipleship and what Jesus Christ expected from their lives.

Matthew 28:20 says, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The disciples needed to teach new converts the instructions necessary for their Christian living on earth and a key part to these instructions are the very words that Jesus Christ shared with them concerning discipleship. The word "teaching" means to disciple and speaks of a person who becomes a pupil, learner, and follower of the precepts and instructions of another.

When Jesus used the word "disciple" (Luke 14:26), He spoke of that person as a learner. A disciple is someone who attaches himself to a teacher, in order to learn a trade or a subject. Perhaps our nearest modern equivalent is "apprentice," one who learns by watching and by doing. A disciple is a learner or student. The term is applied to those who give devotion and obedience to Christ. The word *disciple*

was the most common name for the followers of Jesus Christ and is used 264 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus wanted other Christians to become learners and followers of the same precepts and instructions that He had handed down to the disciples (“Teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you”). The original disciples, or band of learners and followers, who were with Christ, were now instructed to reach out to others and teach them the same message that Christ had taught them concerning discipleship, or what it means to follow Him (Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-27). This is very important. If Christians are going to become disciples, or followers of Christ, they must know the teachings of Christ regarding discipleship. They must know and understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. They must understand what it means to be brought under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Floyd Barackman has said:

“The scarcity of teaching regarding discipleship may account for the little response of believers to appeals for Christian service.”

Discipleship is a spiritual discipline which is to continue throughout our lives. Each one of us is called to a life of discipleship or obedience to Jesus Christ. A disciple is someone who lovingly submits and follows the Lord’s will and way for their life. In short, a disciple is someone who learns how to follow Christ and then actively begins to follow Christ in their everyday living. A disciple is someone who learns what Jesus says and then goes out and does what Jesus tells him to do. This is real discipleship!

Vance Havner said:

“We have put the demands of discipleship in fine print for fear that we will scare away the prospects.”

In this study, we are going to learn the meaning of true discipleship. Jesus Christ informs us on what real discipleship means or what it means to follow Him. Christ’s words are powerful and to the point. So, here are Jesus’ own words regarding discipleship, or what it means to follow Christ.

Luke 9:23

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

Luke 14:26-28

“If any *man* come to me (to follow Me), and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*?”

Luke 14:33

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

These are Christ’s words staring you right in the face! They are words that we must all face sooner or later. Here is real discipleship! Jesus is the teacher wanting to make disciples and He is saying, “Come after me.” He is saying, “Follow Me!” Don’t you hear His voice today? He is calling you to follow Him.

“Jesus calls us: o’er the tumult
Of our life’s wild restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, ‘Christian, follow me.’”

A disciple is a person who is willing to learn and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the very One who loved Him dearly, and the very One who died for him upon the cross. A disciple is a person who decides to pick up the reigns of his own life and turn them over to Jesus Christ. It’s a person who is willing to obey Jesus Christ and His commands at all costs. It is a person who decides to turn around, burn his bridges behind him, and never look back. What are you going to do with Jesus Christ? What have you done with Him? Have you made Him your Lord and Master?

The real problem plaguing the church today is that many Christians want to follow Christ on their own terms. But God is not looking for your terms; He is looking for you to follow His terms. Only what Jesus

says about discipleship counts. Jesus Christ is not interested in your opinions and your plans. He is only interested in His plans and purposes for your life.

These verses deal with Christ's general call to discipleship. It's a call to Christians – not the unsaved. There is much confusion on this matter today. You do not become a disciple in order to be saved. You get saved so you can become a disciple or follower of Christ. Don't confuse *being* a Christian with *becoming* a Christian. We shouldn't talk about living the Christian life to the unsaved. We need to talk about Christ, the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4), repentance (Luke 24:47), and faith to them (Acts 16:31). However, after they have repented and are saved, they are ready to listen to Christ's words regarding discipleship (Luke 9:23; 14:26-28, 33).

These verses are a call to Christians to become Christ's followers. It's a call that consists of loving Jesus first and foremost in your life, surrendering to Him, sacrificing your entire life for His cause, and obeying Him. This is the call of Jesus to serve and follow Him with undying love and steadfast commitment within our Christian life (1 Cor. 15:58).

The verses stated by Christ are a call to His people to turn away from the world and express the need to become a dedicated follower of Him. Today Christ is saying to us: "Reread the contract! I am not rewriting the contract on discipleship, which I already gave you. I hold you accountable to the contract that I gave you! Follow Me. Love Me more than anything else and sacrifice your life for Me." This is the call to commitment! It is a call that demands a radical break from the old way of life.

Wherever our lot and placement is in life, Jesus expects us to follow and obey Him. He is to be Lord of our lives wherever we live and dwell. This is His general call for every Christian. But Christ's general call may also turn into more of a specific call that He brings upon a person's life. For you, it might be the call to serve in the context of the local church in some specific way, the call to have a special ministry with the aging, the call to serve in missions, or the call to serve in the ministry as a pastor. Whatever that specific call might be, it is ultimately a call to become a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ.

The point is this. Jesus is calling us to serve and commit ourselves to Him without reservation and hesitation.

Jesus' call to discipleship consists of four life-changing truths.

1. Surrender (“deny himself”)

Luke 9:23

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

Real discipleship means that we will surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. When Jesus says that a man must “deny himself” we can be sure that this is not an advertisement for Visa or MasterCard. Today, you can buy something and make no payments on it for three or four years. In the context of discipleship to “deny” ourselves means we must surrender to Jesus Christ and make the decision to rid ourselves of selfish ways, living, goals, and sins. It means that we will refuse to follow our own path of self-interest in life. Instead, we will make the choice to follow Christ's path for our lives and do what is right and honoring to Him.

Denial is absolute surrender! If we truly surrender to Christ we will give up all those things that get in the way of our commitment to His cause. Surrender is something you don't hear about today but Jesus brings this truth out into the light. Of course, Jesus is not talking about people denying themselves chocolate candy for Lent. Whether or not you drink coffee or eat candy will not keep you from being a follower of Christ. Jesus is talking about real surrender. Denial of self means that we are willing to give up everything and anything that gets in the way of serving Jesus Christ and doing His will. To deny self means that we will refuse to follow our path in exchange for His path. Psychology says that we are to love and pamper ourselves, or stroke our self esteem, but Jesus says that we are to deny ourselves!

Self is on the throne of many lives today. Christian psychology teaches that self is important by using the words of self-love, self-concept, self-worth, self-image, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-actualization, self-belief, self-potential, self-confidence, self-help, self-improvement, self-fulfillment, self-development, self-enrichment, self-

discovery, self-enhancement, self-identification, self-advancement, self-expression, self-importance, self-realization, self-affirmation and self-celebration. Self is written over the front covers of magazines and is the fuel or driving force for almost everything in our society. Our world is obsessed with self! Loving ourselves is at the core of our old nature, or unredeemed humanness. The world of humanism says, "Love yourself," but Jesus taught that a person must deny himself, if he wants to be a true disciple or follower of Him. When a person denies himself, he will surrender his life to Jesus Christ, by presenting his body totally and completely to the Lord.

Romans 12:1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

The word "present" speaks of a willingness to surrender our bodies to God and then use our bodies for His service. When we present ourselves to God, we are surrendering to His will for our lives. Have you ever put yourself on the altar of sacrifice and surrendered your entire life to Jesus Christ? There must be a first time when you put your life on the altar in total commitment. Give Him all there is of you. When a person truly surrenders to Jesus Christ, he places himself on the altar of sacrifice and gives himself to Jesus Christ without reservation. He places himself at Christ's disposal and says, "Whatever, whenever, wherever."

There is a problem with many Christians today. They are not willing to deny themselves! They are not willing to place themselves on the altar, surrender to Jesus Christ, and give of themselves totally and without reservation to Him and His cause. Surrender is when we deny ourselves of self-living, self-interests, selfish goals, and selfish sins. It's when we give up everything to follow Christ. Real discipleship is about surrendering to Jesus Christ. We must surrender to His will, His purpose, His goal, and His Word, and His way for our lives. Jesus Christ is looking for men and women who are tired of living self-centered lives!

The rationale of commitment to Christ is the "mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1). Since Jesus Christ died for us and showered His saving and

sanctifying mercies upon our lives, the only rational response or “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1) is to give our lives to Him. In other words, we should surrender totally and unreservedly to Him. To give up our lives for Him is the only sane and sensible thing we can do in view of His mercies.

“Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,
Savior, make us hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.”

C.T. Studd once said:

“If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

“After all He’s done for me,
After all He’s done for me.
How can I do less than give Him by best
And live for Him completely
After all He’s done for me.”

Someone else said:

“The cross of Christ will never mean anything to you until it takes your breath away and becomes the most important thing in your life.”

The cross of Jesus Christ, which is the demonstration of His mercy, love and grace, should take our breath away and shock us! It should become the focal point of our lives to give us incentive to surrender our entire lives to Jesus Christ.

“O Jesus, Lord, and Master
I give myself to Thee
For Thou in Thine atonement
Did’st give Thyself for me.
I own no other master,
My heart shall by Thy throne.
My life I give henceforth to live
O Christ, for Thee alone.”

John 12:24-26

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

The wheat analogy (vs. 24) illustrates a general paradoxical principle: death is the way to life. In Jesus’ case, His death led to glory and life, not only for Himself, but also for others. Jesus relates this principle of death and life to His own death and the new life of saved souls (“much fruit”) that would result from His death. However, He also ties this same analogy of death and life into the subject of real discipleship, or what it means to follow Him (vv. 25-26). Jesus explained that being a servant of Jesus requires following His example of death and dying.

In the case of being a disciple, or follower of Jesus Christ, the principle of death and life is similar. A true disciple will hate his life in this world (“hateth his life” – John 12:25), which becomes a manifest token of His salvation. To hate one’s life means to be committed to Christ in such a way that there is no self-centeredness and no concern for oneself. To hate one’s life means that you take self off of the throne and put Jesus Christ on the throne. To hate one’s life means that a person is willing to give up their goals, plans, sins, and ambitions in order to completely surrender to Jesus Christ.

When we want to serve Christ, we will have to apply the example of Christ’s death to ourselves. Of course, this does not mean we must literally die as Jesus did, but it does mean we must die to our own selfish ambitions, sins, goals, and own pleasures or wants in life. A person is to follow in the footsteps of the Savior, who died, and die to their own plans and desires in life. He is to completely surrender to the Father’s will and put self on the shelf.

Colossians 3:5 says:

“Mortify (put to death) therefore your members (members of your body) which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

These verses once again establish the basic principle that a true disciple or follower of Christ will surrender to Christ.

F. B. Meyer has said:

“It is the Christ-life or the self-life.”

All of the above verses point to the necessity of surrendering to God’s will and program instead of your own agenda in life. There needs to be a willing surrender of a person’s own interests in life and a replacement of God’s interests within his life. As a Christian, you must surrender your own selfish ambitions, interests, and sins and give Him first place in your heart and life. Unless you are willing to lay it all out on the table, then you cannot be a real disciple of Jesus. Go ahead! Give Him all the rooms of your heart today. You need to be willing to give Christ every area of your life.

“All of me, not a part, but all of me,
This is what I give to Thee,
I will ever live for Thee, all of me!”

Jesus taught that you must surrender unconditionally to Him! No questions asked! Years later, when someone asked General Booth the secret of his success, he said, "I told the Lord that He could have all that there is of William Booth.”

There are some of you today who need to surrender your life to God. You need to surrender your controlling habits of nicotine, alcohol, lusts, gambling, worldly music, hobbies, personal goals, and anything else that controls your life and gets in the way of keeping you from consecration to God. You need to surrender your hands, feet, ears, eyes, mouth, and physical organs to God. What has been holding you back from being the kind of disciple that God wants you to be? You need to surrender your body, time, and entire life to the Lord. When you desire to have something, which you cannot have, it becomes idolatry in your life (1 John 5:21), and needs to be surrendered to the Lord.

Jesus said in John 12:24: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” These are strong words. When a friend warned an outgoing

missionary, "Don't go, you might die," the missionary answered with these words: "I already died." Have you ever died? Have you ever died to your own selfish ambitions and goals in life and surrendered to Jesus Christ? Are you willing to surrender to Christ today and say, "Anything, anywhere, any time, at any cost? Are you willing to surrender? Only when you surrender to Christ can you bring forth much fruit.

"All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power,
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all."

Do you really have this attitude and ambition in life? Are you willing to surrender to Him without reservation and without any strings attached? If you want to be a follower, or disciple of Jesus Christ, you must take self off the throne and surrender to Him. When we surrender to Christ we will forsake those things that are not honoring to Him and make new goals and priorities for our lives.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Dear Christian friend, we are not our own! You have no rights! The Lord Jesus purchased us at the cross of Calvary at an enormous cost. He shed His blood for us. It was the purchasing price that rescued us from hell and sin's slavery. Now we belong to Him. He is to be our new Master that has freed us from hell, the power of Satan, and sin. We should relinquish all of our rights, deny ourselves, and gladly serve Him out of love and appreciation for what He has done for us. If we take our lives and use them for our own selfish goals, we become thieves! We have been bought or purchased, at too high of a price, for us to go on living the same way. *Jesus Christ has redemptive rights over our bodies.* Let us surrender to Him today. Are you ready to turn your life over to Him?

“Only one life to offer – take it, dear Lord, I pray;
Nothing from Thee withholding, Thy will I now obey.
Thou who hast freely given, Thine all in all for me.
Claim this life for Thine own to be used, my Savior,
Every moment for Thee.”

Real discipleship is surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ.

2. Sacrifice (“take up his cross” and “bear his cross”)

Luke 9:23

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

Luke 14:27-35

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. 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. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Real and radical discipleship also consists of sacrificing our lives for Jesus Christ. Let us never forget this. This is the second life-changing truth that is associated with real discipleship. The denying of oneself ultimately leads to the sacrifice of oneself for the Lord and His cause. These may be the most unpopular paragraphs in the Bible! Jesus did not put his best berries on the top of the box when He wrote about the cost or sacrifice of discipleship.

Jesus uses the figure or symbol of a “cross” to also illustrate what real discipleship means. The cross speaks of how Christ was willing to sacrifice Himself upon the old rugged tree.

John 19:17

“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.”

Luke 23:33 adds: “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him ...”

“On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.”

Jesus carried His own cross to Calvary’s hill for He was willing to be sacrificed upon it. He then was crucified on an old rugged cross. This is the message behind the cross. It is a message of willing sacrifice for Christ and His cause. Jesus carried His cross and was willing to die the sinner’s death. What a sacrifice!

If I remember correctly, during my days at the Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music, there was a man who would literally carry a cross around certain areas of the city. He was apparently trying to send a message to Grand Rapids. One must wonder if this is what Jesus really meant, when He spoke about carrying His cross. Once again, people in Jesus’ day, and even our day, misunderstand the

spiritual truth that Jesus was talking about when He spoke about carrying a cross. Jesus was talking about willingness to sacrifice one's life. The cross speaks of sacrifice. He was not talking about literally carrying a cross around.

Criminals were crucified on pieces of wood. Most of Jesus' listeners probably witnessed a crucifixion at one time or another within their lifetime. The overtones of the word "cross" were ominous and formed a lump within the throat. What might a cross mean for a follower of Christ? What are the implications behind bearing a cross? It would mean a life of sacrifice and persecution. That is what the cross meant in Jesus' day. Everybody knew it. *The cross signified great sacrifice, suffering, persecution, and even death for the sake of Christ.* For one to bear a cross, meant to experience the shame and humiliation, as well as the toil and suffering, which this form of punishment suggests. True discipleship really costs you something in life.

Jesus demonstrated His willingness to be sacrificed when He walked toward Calvary with the cross upon His own shoulders. He also went through with His sacrifice by allowing Himself to be nailed to a cross and crucified. So, the message behind the cross is a message of willing sacrifice for the Lord. When a Christian carries his cross he is saying, "I want to sacrifice my life for Christ's sake and cause."

It's interesting that when the Roman Empire crucified a criminal or captive, the victim was often forced to carry his cross part of the way to the crucifixion site. Carrying his cross through the heart of the city was Rome's way of proving its innocence. It was taught that when a person carried a cross, he was admitting his wrong, and the Roman Empire was right in the sentence of death that was imposed on him. So, when Jesus asked His followers to carry their crosses and follow Him, He was referring to this Roman public display of cross-carrying before others, and was teaching that His way was right and that His disciples were willing to follow Him and sacrifice their lives for Him, even to their deaths if necessary. The cross speaks of personal sacrifice for Jesus Christ.

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?"

No, there's a cross for everyone
And there's a cross for me."

We must be willing to take up our own personal cross of sacrifice. We must be willing to carry our cross as Jesus did or be willing to sacrifice ourselves as He did. We should be willing to sacrifice ourselves for His cause. True discipleship involves sacrificing our lives for Jesus Christ. It will cost us something.

Someone said:

"The entrance fee into discipleship is nothing but the annual subscription is everything!"

The cross that Jesus speaks about doesn't mean arthritis, a grouchy husband, a mother-in-law, or a flat tire on your Chevy. The cross speaks of personal sacrifice. It's a sacrifice that will cost you something in life – your time, talents, treasure and even torment (agony, suffering) for the cause of Christ (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus said that we should be willing to take up our cross "daily" (Luke 9:23) and follow Him. The concept of cross-bearing or sacrifice for Jesus Christ is ultimately a daily and ongoing process. It is something we should put into practice every day. Every day of our lives we are responsible and accountable to Jesus Christ. Every day of our lives we must reaffirm and readjust our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Illustrations of Sacrifice

Two examples or illustrations are given of the cross-life (sacrificial life).

1. A contractor (Luke 14:28-30) must prepare for building (consider the cost).

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

In this first parable, Jesus says that no sensible builder would ever attempt to erect a tower without first considering the cost that would be involved. You will get yourself in a heap of trouble if you fail to consider the cost of building a tower. The cost of the project must always be considered. In a similar way, the followers of Jesus must consider the cost of true discipleship. They are to be willing to pay the full price of discipleship. They must consider the cost of what it really means to follow Christ. Following Christ will mean great sacrifice on your behalf and also persecution for representing the name of Christ.

2. A conqueror (military leader – Luke 14:31-32) must prepare for battle (consider the consequences).

Luke 14:31-32

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.”

In this second parable, Jesus points to a military leader who must consider the cost of sacrifice and loss. A king must sit down, look at the odds, and count the cost of losing human life. Also, he must be willing to sacrifice a desired victory for a peace settlement, in view of the great loss of human life. In a similar fashion the follower of Christ is to count the cost of what it means to follow Him.

When we surrender to Jesus' call of discipleship, we must consider what it will cost us and what the ultimate consequences might be in serving the Lord – suffering, shame, ridicule, mockery, hardships, and even death. The cross-life or the sacrificial life of following Jesus Christ always costs us something. There is a cross of suffering, shame, and selfless living that we must endure when we follow Jesus Christ! Jesus is saying when you really want to follow Him and do His will, you need to count what it will cost you. It may cost you family, friends, fame, fortune, and your time, talents, and treasure. It will mean developing new priorities, principles, and paths to follow. Following Christ always has a certain price tag attached to it. Have you counted the cost? When you really want to live for the Lord and stand up for Him, you need to be ready for some fireworks along the

way.

Many today want to serve the Lord in their own way and in their own time. However, if serving the Lord cost them too much time or energy, or if serving the Lord conflicts with their sports, hobbies, or favorite TV programs, then they do not want to really serve the Lord and commit to Him and His way for their lives. Many Christians today *please themselves instead of pleasing the Lord*. The cross-life is not the self-life! It is a life of sacrifice to Jesus Christ. Following Jesus' call to discipleship means that we will not be conformed to the world and our wants, loves, desires, plans and ways but to His ways and Word over our lives!!

John 16:32-33 says:

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

2 Timothy 3:11-12

“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

Following Christ will cost you something in life. We get bent out of shape when we are ridiculed and mocked for living for Christ and for our witnessing for Christ. Well what do you expect? Do you expect an easy road the whole way? Jesus never said that it would be smooth sailing the whole journey. In fact, I wonder what kind of disciple we have really been if there has not been the personal sacrifice of persecution or hardship along our pathway. Discipleship will cost you your old friends in life and will bring persecution into your life as you take a new stand for Christ. Jesus never said the pathway of life would be easy! There would be the need to endure some real persecution for His cause and for His name.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27:

“Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”

Hebrews 11:35-37 also states:

“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”

John the Baptist had his head served up on a silver platter! The old song says, “No, no, it’s not an easy road!” Jesus never said the road would be easy. Discipleship always has a cost attached to it. At times it even means death. **Have you counted the cost?**

Someone has stated:

“If you don't have a cause that is worth dying for, you don't have anything worth living for.”

George Atley was killed while serving with the Central African Mission. There were no witnesses, but the evidence indicates that Atley was confronted by a band of hostile tribesmen. He was carrying a fully loaded, 10-chamber Winchester rifle and had to choose either to shoot his attackers and run the risk of negating the work of the mission in that area, or not to defend himself and be killed. When his body was later found in a stream, it was evident that he had chosen the latter. Nearby lay his rifle -- all 10 chambers still loaded. He had made the supreme sacrifice, motivated by his burden for lost souls and his answering devotion to his Savior. Like the apostle Paul, George Atley wanted Christ to be magnified in his body, “whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20).

Carrying your cross today may not mean death; however, it may mean mockery, ridicule and misunderstanding by the world and even by other uncommitted believers. There will not always be roses growing on the pathway of the disciple who wants to stand up for what is right and follow the truth of His Word. Dedication to righteousness and doing things God's way will result in a certain amount of sacrifice and hardship in life. I believe that we will experience hardship within our separated churches in these last days. I also believe that we will personally experience hardship in our own day to day walk of life. In these last days, as we personally seek to live a separated life, honor Christ and do exactly what is right; there will be an increase of persecution and hardship. I also believe that greater hardship for the church is still on the horizon.

There is a story to the effect that a certain society in South Africa once wrote to David Livingstone, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send other men to join you." Livingstone replied, "If you have men who will come ONLY if they know there is a good road, I don't want them."

Dear friend, the road is not always a good or easy road that we must travel upon in life. Sometimes we must face persecution along the road of life as we stand up for Christ and for what is right (2 Cor. 2:16; 1 John 3:13 – "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you"). The world is not going to roll the red carpet out for you. There is much sacrifice and cost attached to real discipleship. What is the cost for carrying a cross? It is sacrificial persecution for the name, cause, and Gospel of Jesus Christ. In general, real discipleship will cost you your time, energy, money, friends, personal goals, worldly amusements, selfish ambitions, and plans. It will cost you hardship and suffering as you stand up for Christ and boldly present Him before a lost world. Are you willing to take the sacrifice and become a real disciple, or follower of Christ?

The Application of Sacrifice

Luke 14:33

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

Jesus now concludes by giving an application regarding sacrifice or the high cost of discipleship. Jesus concludes that the greatest sacrifice is when a person actually gives up everything to become a real disciple or follower of His. He must forsake everything! What a cost! What a sacrifice! We give up everything to follow Him. There is no greater sacrifice than this.

Sacrifice is important in the realm of discipleship: one must count the cost and be willing to give up everything for Jesus (“forsaketh all”). Are we willing to sacrificially forsake everything (Luke 14:33) that keeps us from following Christ? There can be no halfway measures. A person must forsake all! There is no evading the meaning of the words. Jesus did not say a person must be *willing* to forsake everything. Jesus said that a real disciple *must* forsake all. It’s not enough to be willing to forsake all. We must do it. Of course, Jesus was not teaching that we must give up everything that we own and live like hermits. He was not teaching that we must live like monks in some kind of monastery, or give up all the normal comforts of society and practice asceticism. The Bible condemns asceticism (Col. 2:21; 1 Tim. 4:3).

When Jesus said that we must forsake everything in life He was teaching that we must forsake everything that He deems necessary to forsake in order to follow Him. Forsaking all means to forsake those things that would get in the way of following Christ and impede our goal of following Him wholeheartedly and without reservation. Forsaking “all” means that we will rid ourselves of everything that is keeping us from serving Christ faithfully and effectively, or bogging us down spiritually (Heb. 12:1-2 – “let us lay aside every weight”). A true follower of Christ and real disciple will forsake anything and everything that gets in the way of their commitment to Christ.

John Calvin once said:

“I gave up all for Christ, and what have I found? I have found everything in Christ.”

Someone else said:

“The entrance fee into the kingdom of heaven is nothing: the annual subscription is everything.”

Jesus forsook everything when He left the splendors of heaven.

2 Corinthians 8:9

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

Philippians 2:7-8

“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

“He left the splendor of heaven
Knowing His destiny
Twas the lonely hill on Golgotha
Where He lay down His life for me.”

We are going to have to give up many things if we want to be a real disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. We are going to have to forsake the world and leave many things behind us!

Moses is an example of a person who forsook all. William MacDonald reminds us that Moses renounced:

The fame of Egypt (Heb. 11:24)
The pleasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:25)
The treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:26)
The politics of Egypt (Heb. 11:27)
The religion of Egypt (Heb. 11:28).

The principle of forsaking is very important in the realm of discipleship. A person must give up everything for Jesus (“all that he hath”). He must forsake all that gets in the way of his discipleship.

“All for Jesus, all for Jesus!
All my being’s ransomed powers,
All my thoughts and words and doings,
All my days and all my hours.

All for Jesus, all for Jesus!
All my days and all my hours;
All for Jesus, all for Jesus!
All my days and all my hours.”

The disciples, who were following Jesus throughout the countryside of Israel, had done just this. They even gave up possessions and employment, knowing that the message Jesus was proclaiming was the most important thing on earth. As Jesus walked around the countryside, people followed Him. When Jesus moved about, there were always those disciples who stood by His side and literally followed Him, wherever He went in His earthly journeys. Jesus did call a certain band of men to literally follow Him as He walked about during His earthly ministry. In following Christ, they were to relinquish their rights and goals in life and follow Him in His earthly journey. Thus, Jesus spoke about the need for a true disciple, who would follow Him in the same way that his original disciples followed Him.

If people truly want to commit themselves to Christ and follow Him, there needs to be a certain kind of earthly commitment. There was a necessary stipulation placed upon every true disciple. They needed to give up everything that would hinder them from following Him. Jesus used the illustration of people following Him in order to convey a deeper spiritual truth, a much deeper lesson than merely following His tracks around the countryside. The poor widow and Mary, who poured the ointment on Jesus’ feet, certainly sacrificed their all for Christ, without necessarily following Christ everywhere He went (Mark 12:42; John 12:3). What Jesus was really saying is that a true disciple will forsake everything that stands in the way of loving Christ and following Christ and giving Him first place within their heart and life. This is true sacrifice and this is what the disciples did.

Jesus was not implying that a person must literally follow Him around and be His shadow in order to become a true disciple or follower of Christ. If that were the case, then none of us could meet the requirements for real discipleship, since Jesus is no longer walking upon this earth. What Jesus was implying was something far deeper. He was declaring that a true disciple must follow Him in a *similar way* as His own earthly disciples followed Him. In what way or fashion did

His original earthly disciples follow Christ? Let the Bible speak for itself.

Luke 18:28

“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.”

The disciples had forsaken all (“left all”), or all those things that hindered them from following the Lord, as He roamed the countryside. This was the real point that Peter was making. Obviously, the Twelve had not given away every last article that they owned. But they did forsake anything and everything that got in the way of their mission to follow Jesus. They submitted their entire life to Jesus. Have you ever thought of giving your whole life to Jesus Christ?

Luke 14:33

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

True discipleship is like a sacrificial cross in life, when you forsake your own selfish ways, plans, and goals. It's when you forsake all your worldly agenda and interests in life and give Christ everything! You abandon yourself to Christ and for Christ alone. What Christ was teaching, by the example of those who followed Him around the countryside, was that an individual must follow Him by forsaking their own personal desires, goals, ambitions, sinful desires, and selfish plans in life. *Disciples should be willing to sacrificially forsake all those things that stand in the way of their spiritual dedication to Christ and their spiritual progress.* As these men followed Jesus around, they demonstrated this true credential for all genuine discipleship. This credential was to forsake all those things that get in the way of our ability to really follow the will and word of Jesus for our life.

In their day, the disciples would have to leave their occupation and home, in order to be able to follow Jesus around the geographical areas that He walked. In our day, we cannot actually do this, since Jesus is no longer on earth in a physical way. So, the principle that Jesus was teaching must be applied. What we need to do is leave behind all those things that detract from our ability to follow Christ and His will for our lives. In order for the disciples of Jesus to be able to

follow Him around the countryside, they needed to “forsake” their occupation.

Today, true discipleship may not require that we give up our occupation, as the earthly disciples had to do. It may not require that we leave our home. It may not involve the similar circumstances that the original disciples were faced with. On the other hand, God may be calling you to forsake your job for full time Christian service, such as missionary work. He may also be calling you to rearrange your job circumstance, so you can follow Him in a greater way. *Although God does not call everyone to the task of giving up their personal occupation, the principle of all true discipleship does involve real sacrifice.* This is what Jesus was teaching.

Jesus was really saying that when material objects take away our time for doing His will and serving Him, then you must forsake them. When our scheduled activities and plans do not work into the Lord’s plans to follow Him and do what is right, then you must be willing to forsake your own plans and agenda in life. When our schedule does not fit into God’s schedule, guess whose schedule we must follow? When our ambitions, self interests, material things, hobbies, sports, work, time and even family members become a barrier to following Jesus and doing what is right, then we must “forsake” all these hindrances that block our path to doing God’s will. This involves real sacrifice. And real sacrifice will always cost you something. It will cost you your time, energy, friendships, money, selfish goals, worldly interests, plans and personal sins.

We all need check points in life, so we can look at the path that we have been traveling. And if need be, we need to rework the path that we are traveling upon in life. We need to shovel away those hindrances that are in the way, those blockades that are keeping us from following Christ’s will for our life, and walking with the Lord.

I have personally felt the need, at times, to simplify my life. Sometimes I have felt so stretched by all of my various commitments in life, that I concluded I was not being the kind of servant that God wanted me to really be. I felt too dedicated to everything else in life and not to the things that really mattered most in life, the eternal things such as prayer, devotional time with the Lord, and

opportunities to serve Christ. Have you ever felt this way? *In these times, we must refocus and “forsake” or relinquish those areas that are pulling us away from our discipleship to Christ.* We must learn to regulate or give up those things that are choking out our ability to follow Christ in a deeper and more fulfilling way. Remember that sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His word, and following Him (Luke 10:39; 14:25-35) is all that really matters in life. We should be ready and willing at all times to sacrifice our time and treasure to what matters most in life.

Dear friend, we need to forsake all or everything that is hindering us from following Jesus. We need to forsake our sin, our car, our time, our energy, our job, our money, our family, and even our worship if it is taking you away from truly following Christ in a righteous, holy, and dedicated manner. You need to put Christ first in everything and follow Him.

“Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus
Everywhere, anywhere, I will follow on!”

There is a cost for carrying a cross. You can be sure that genuine discipleship will cost you something. It will cost you time, material things, and fame. It will cost a certain amount of persecution and hardship. This is what it means to really follow Christ. This is real discipleship. A disciple must be willing to sacrifice or forsake anything and everything in life that may get in his way of following Christ in a committed way. You will need to learn to sacrifice your life for Jesus Christ if you want Him to be Lord of your life. You must be willing to carry your cross and give up your life for His way and will.

“Jesus I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
All I’ve sought and hoped and known;
Perish every fond ambition,
All I’ve sought and hoped and known;
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heaven are still my own.”

This is real discipleship! It involves great sacrifice! There can be no sacrifice without a cross! Real discipleship is about sacrificing our lives for Jesus Christ.

3. Submission (“follow”)

Luke 9:23:

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

Christ’s words “and follow me” points to the submissive obedience that is involved in discipleship. This is the third life-changing truth that is associated with real discipleship. When a person is a true disciple or follower of Christ they will submit to His commands and follow Him. Following Christ means a person will make new plans and develop new priorities that will enable him to effectively obey Christ. He will reshape and remold his life in a way that will conform to Christ’s standards.

Jesus said, “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19). As Jesus called His disciples, He told each one of them to follow Him. “Follow me” (John 1:43; Matt. 9:9). Any questions? What part of this don’t we understand? His words still come ringing across the pages of the Bible and make their way into our hearts today. Christ is calling us to follow Him in the place where He positioned us in society. This means we should obey the Lord completely and wholeheartedly. Let’s set the record straight and not mince words. Following Christ is obeying Christ!

“Follow Me, follow Me.
I’m the way, the truth, the life
Come follow Me.’
Like a choir of silver bells so clearly ringing,
Is the Savior’s voice, ‘Come follow Me.’”

Real discipleship involves total submission or willing obedience to what Christ commands us to do. We must remember that love is obedience!

Jesus said in John 14:15:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Someone has remarked:

“Don’t throw God the bone of your love unless there is the meat of obedience on it.”

John 8:31

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word (obedience), *then* are ye my disciples indeed.”

Jesus reminds us that all true discipleship is marked by obedience to His commands. Discipleship and obedience are inseparably bound together. You can’t have one without the other. They are like two peas in the same pod. Obedience (“if ye continue in my word”) is at the very core of discipleship. You must obey what Jesus tells you to do. *There can be no discipleship without obedience.* How can you become a follower of Jesus Christ if you don’t want to follow Him? You can’t follow Christ unless you obey Jesus Christ. Don’t fool yourself, or let the devil try to deceive you. You can’t be a disciple of Christ unless you are willing to obey what Jesus tells you to do.

Andrew Murray summed it up very well:

“What is obedience? It is giving up my will to the will of another.”

Jesus Himself told His disciples how they were to follow or obey Him. What He said to them is also true for us today. If you are serious about becoming a learner and follower of Jesus Christ then listen to what Jesus said about discipleship and start to obey what Jesus tells you to do. It can actually be the start of a whole new way of life for you!

Jesus said in John 13:17:

“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

You cannot be a real disciple, or follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, unless you do the things that Jesus tells you to do. What kind of obedience does Jesus require from your life in order to be a disciple? In short, Jesus requires complete obedience!

One day at the Bible Institute, where I attended, the school band was practicing. All the trumpets were playing a classical piece called “Mars.” The conductor was up front waving his baton and we were

just destroying this piece with sour notes and bad timing. It sounded like a piece that should have been played on Mars! Well, one of the trumpeters started laughing and that created a domino effect with the rest of the trumpeters. Before we knew what happened, the conductor threw his baton back into the trumpet section, for he realized we were a hopeless bunch of trumpet players!

What does a conductor want from musicians? What does a teacher want from students? What does a boss want from employees? What does a coach want from players? What does a parent want from children? What does a general want from soldiers? The answer to all these questions is rather obvious. All of these people expect obedience. They want people to follow their instructions and words, without argument or idleness. The same is true regarding real discipleship. Jesus was simply teaching that He wanted people to follow His instructions for their life and be obedient to all of His words, without argument and without laziness.

Christ is calling all of us to greater commitment to Him and His teachings. Maybe Jesus has been trying to call you to true discipleship and greater commitment to Him, but the cares of this world, or the grinding schedule of life may be smothering out your life of discipleship, and commitment to Jesus Christ. Dear friend, we must hear Christ's call above the cry of the world.

“Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store:
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, 'Christian, love me more.'”

1 Samuel 3:10 says:

“And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.”

Are you allowing God to speak to your heart today? Maybe you have not been yielded to the Lord in some areas of your life. It is time to say, as Samuel did, “Speak, for thy servant heareth.” Right now, yield to Him, and enjoy the blessing that comes from a surrendered and obedient life.

In Luke 6:46, Jesus spoke those soul wrenching words:
“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”
If Jesus Christ is truly Lord of your life, you will obey Him. You will give your life for Him and His cause. You will be faithful to Him and do what you know is right. You won't try and jettison your responsibility toward Him. Is He Lord of your life? Real discipleship involves submission or obedience.

4. Superiority (“hate” and “loveth”)

Jesus said in Luke 14:26:

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

A similar verse is found in Matthew 10:37

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

a. Christ comes before our family.

A final, life-changing truth, related to real discipleship, consists of possessing a superior love for Jesus Christ. It consists of a right priority of love. It's a love that is to be placed first and foremost in Jesus Christ. The expression “more than me” (Matt. 10:37) shows that Jesus is using a comparative. Jesus is not calling us to “hate” our families in a bad ethical sense. He is using the word “hate” in a comparative manner for Jesus even told us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). The point is this, many Christians love their families and themselves more than Jesus Christ. When families and self gets in the way of loving Christ first, and living for Him, as we should, then we are no longer the kind of disciple and follower that Christ speaks about in these verses.

I state it once again for emphasis. Many Christians love their families more than Jesus Christ. They have lost a sense of the priority of love that Jesus taught. Christ did not say we should not love our families. He said that we should love Him more than our families. Jesus said that we must “hate” our own families and love Him instead. This does

not mean that we show animosity or a bitter spirit toward our family members and loved ones. Jesus is saying that we must learn to love Him most in life. In other words, we must love Jesus first and before anybody or anything else in this world. Christ must reign in our heart without any other rival, even our own families! In a comparative manner, we are to love Christ supremely, above our families. We are to love our families on a lower plain than we love Christ. Jesus is to be our main focus in life. Every person that keeps you from loving Jesus more than anything else in your life must be placed on a lower level.

C.T. Studd was afraid that his fiancée might love him more than she loved Jesus, so he wrote this poem for her to repeat every day of her life:

“Jesus, I love Thee.
Thou art to me
Dearer than Charlie
Ever could be.”

Charles Spurgeon explained to his potential bride:

“Now, I am exceedingly sorry, but we had better have an understanding. I am my Masters servant first. He must always come first. I think we shall live very happily if you are willing to take the second place, but it must always be second to Him. My obligation to Him is first.”

You may think that this sounds rather harsh and unloving. However, it's not. It's to be Jesus first, others second, and you last! This is what Jesus taught concerning discipleship. We are to love Him first and foremost in our lives, which means we will put Him before our families, do what is right, and serve Him. Our problem today is that we don't love the Lord, as we should – first! This teaching of Christ about the family does not fit into the Christian family seminars of our day; it does not coincide with the times in which we live. It sounds so right and spiritual, when we conclude, or say, that we always put our families first, before anything else in life. If that is the case, then you cannot be a true disciple or follower of Jesus Christ, since Jesus said we must love Him most, even more than our families, by making the priority to serve Him and do what is right, in spite of what our families might think or do. It's Christ first! We can't afford to compromise with

our families, cooperate with our families, when they are in the wrong, and cater to our family's interests, when they take us away from doing what is right and holy. One's loyalty to Jesus must come before his loyalty to his own family.

Revelation 2:4

"Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

The fact is this, when we put our families first, we lose our first love. When we put our own interests before Christ we lose our first love. Dear friend, we can't love our families, as we should, unless we love Jesus Christ. Only when we love Christ, follow Him, and do what is right can we set the best example for our families and express a love to them that is pure, holy, and focused on spiritual things. A husband who puts Christ first and makes Jesus Lord of His life is the best kind of husband and father to live with! He is also the kind of man that can love a family in the way God intended.

Matt Costella wrote:

"Christians are often putting family time and family activities before the things of the Lord – things such as church attendance or Bible study. Yes, Satan can use the family, as important as it is, to keep the saint from faithfully following the Savior. We must be careful not to fall prey to family idolatry. Rather, we must love God above all else."

Many times we love other people more than Jesus and what He wants us to do. And when this happens, we cave in to their peer pressure, what the people think is right, and what they want us to do, and how they think we should live and act. This is true even within the family relationships. We must take sides with God today! When the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, the sons of Levi took sides with God destroying their own relatives (Ex. 32:26-29). Don't misunderstand what Christ is teaching. Christ has not told us to go out and utterly abandon our relatives. However, He has told us to love Him most, and take sides with Him, even if that means to stand against our families and relatives. Christ demands first place and preeminent love (Cpl. 1:18). When family time and family activities come before our church attendance, daily devotions, and overall commitment to God, it's then we must remember to obey Christ. We

must love Him above our families and seek to obey His plan for our lives. This is true discipleship.

b. Christ comes before ourselves.

Jesus also said that we must hate ourselves (“hate ... his own life also” - Luke 14:26). Our love for Jesus Christ is to put self out of our lives. Hating ourselves does not mean we must devalue our human life (Ps. 139:14) and think that God no longer cares about us. God loves us (Rom. 8:38-39) and wants to change our lives and make something beautiful out of them (2 Cor. 5:17). Our personal lives are important to God because He created man in His image (James 3:9), values human life (Exodus 20:13), and wants to change our lives for His glory (2 Cor. 3:18). When Christ says that a person should hate himself, it means he must come to the place where he will hate his sins, selfishness, and secular life and replace these things with a newfound love for Jesus Christ, which is demonstrated in a new way of life. Our love for Jesus Christ must be greater than our love of self (our ways, goals, ambitions, desires, wants). By nature, we are selfish and self-centered people.

Matt Costella once again writes:

“We want *what* we want, *when* we want it, *how* we want it, *where* we want it. And if anything stands in our way – including God, His Word, His church or His will – woe be to that which stands in our way!”

Psychology says that we must love ourselves. Jesus says that we must hate ourselves! Who will you believe? Christ or psychology? Psychology says we are to love ourselves first, but Jesus says we are to love Him first! He is to be our priority of love in life. The entire premise and foundation of secular psychology, Christian psychology, and humanism is faulty. It is built upon self. Unless we hate ourselves and place ourselves on a lower level in life, we cannot truly love Christ and put Him on the highest level, or first place in our lives. The pyramid of psychology is all wrong. It has self at the top where self should be out of the pyramid altogether.

When self is on the throne, it's because we love ourselves more than Jesus Christ. To be honest, many Christians love their own sins, plans, ideas, goals, ambitions, and dreams more than Jesus Christ,

what He wants them to do, and how He wants them to live. Are you in love with Jesus Christ today? We must come to the point where we hate self. We are called upon to “hate” our sins and undisciplined ways in life, and seek to turn our life around. Unless you “hate” your life, you cannot be a real disciple! You must come to the place where you hate the direction that your life is going and detest your sinful ways, so you can see your desperate need to turn your life around, and love Christ supremely.

In Luke 10:27, we read what God’s law says: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

“I love Thee Lord Jesus,
With all of my heart.
I love Thee Lord Jesus,
With all of my heart.
For dying on Calvary
For giving me victory.
I love Thee Lord Jesus
With all of my heart.”

A little girl stayed for dinner at the home of her first-grade friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli, and the mother asked if she liked it. The child replied very politely, "Oh, yes, I love it." But when the bowl of broccoli was passed she declined to take any. The hostess said, "I thought you said you loved broccoli." The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes, ma'am, I do, but not enough to eat it!" Sometimes we love Jesus, but not enough to really become His dedicated follower.

John 21:15

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”

Many times we love the fish more than the Master. We love our own ambitions, goals, plans, and sins instead of lovingly giving ourselves for the life of the Master.

“In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil, and hours of ease,

Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
'Christian, love me more than these.'

Jesus is calling us into a love relationship with Himself. He is looking for believers who are willing to love Him in a deeper and more sacrificial way. We love Jesus by giving our hearts devotion to Him. We love Jesus by giving Him our sincere worship and our will. We love Him by always putting Him first (Matt. 6:33). We love Jesus by giving Him our time, talents, and treasures. We love Christ by giving Him our hands for labor and the personal dedication of our lives to His cause. We love Jesus when we give Him our ears, eyes, minds, and bodies. Instead of using our bodies for evil purposes, sin, and our own personal pleasures, we are to keep our bodies clean, pure and dedicated for the Lord's testimony and use (Rom. 6:11-13).

"Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

"Lovest thou me, more than these my child?
What will your answer be?"

Oh precious Lord, I love Thee more than all of these;
More than fame, more than wealth, more than the world."

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

There it is. Take it or leave it! This is real discipleship! You can't get away from this statement on real discipleship! It's staring you right in the face. It puts you down in the foxhole of life and surrounds you on every side. The only way out is to face it and take the challenge to love Christ in a deeper, sacrificial, and obedient way. Obedience is love! We as believers need to hear Christ calling us to love Him more through the act of obedience. We need to desperately respond to His call by becoming the kind of disciple that Jesus wants us to be. Jesus is to be the highest priority of love in our life. Only as we love Christ in this fashion, can we really be His disciples. Real discipleship is about loving Jesus Christ more than anything or anyone else. Love is the underlying motivation for following Christ.

“I will serve Thee because I love Thee!
You have given life to me!
I was nothing until You found me,
You have given life to me.”

Now comes the soul-searching questions. Are you willing to place yourself under the authority of Jesus Christ and follow His plan for discipleship? Are you willing to be a real disciple and follower of Christ? Are you willing to make Jesus Lord of your life? Are you willing to surrender to Christ and give Him your whole life? Jesus gave us the demands of discipleship and He told us what real discipleship is. Today Jesus is saying to us: “Reread the contract. I am not rewriting the contract. I hold you accountable to the contract of discipleship that I initially gave to you! Follow Me, love Me more than anything else, surrender to Me, sacrifice your life for Me, and obey Me! Do you really want to follow Me?”

Dear friend, how much do you love Jesus? Do you love Him more than your plans, pleasures, and personal sins? Is He really Lord of your life? How much do you really want to forsake for Jesus? Some things or everything!! Make Jesus Lord of your life! Take Christ’s challenge to follow Him completely and unreservedly. You will never regret it!!

“The Master is come, and calleth for thee.”
(John 11:28)

The Master has called you!

Oswald Chambers said:

“Let him make our lives narrow; let him make them intense; let him make them absolutely his!”

Dear friend, Jesus Christ wants to bankrupt your life! Jesus is calling you today and saying: “Follow me” (Matt. 4:19). Do you hear and sense His call upon your life?

“Like a choir of silver bells so clearly ringing,
Is the Savior’s voice, ‘Come follow Me.’”

Many years ago a teenage boy played a trick on one of his friends at a Bible camp. He wanted to try and fool his friend by getting him to think that God was speaking to him. One beautiful evening he was hiding out in the distant bushes. As his friend walked by, he called out his name in a bold and angelic voice, "John, John!" Immediately his friend fell to his knees and said, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:9). It was no joke. This young man had actually thought God was calling him to ministry and service! The would-be caller behind the bushes watched his friend remain on his knees before God fully surrendered and yielded to Him. Then, very slowly and quietly, he slipped away into the dark night, so his best friend could give his life to the Lord's service.

Dear friend, the Lord is calling you today. Don't you sense His call upon your heart and life? The Master is calling you. He is calling you to greater service and commitment to Him. He is calling you to follow Him in a new loving relationship.

"There's a voice calling me
From an old rugged tree
And it whispers
'Draw closer to Me.
Leave this world far behind,
There are new heights to climb,
And a new peace in Me you will find."

Luke 9:62

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

An anonymous writer has said:

"If God has called you, don't spend time looking over your shoulder to see who is following."

Jesus is asking you to surrender and sacrifice your life for Him without ever looking back! Today, you have an obligation to turn your life completely over to Jesus Christ, for His holy use and purpose (Rom. 12:1-2). You must burn your bridges behind you and start plowing forward. Don't look back!

“The world behind me,
The cross before me!
No turning back,
No turning back!”

Luke 9:23

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

“Jesus calls us; o’er the tumult,
Of our life’s wild, restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, ‘Christian follow Me.’”

Are you ready to sign on the dotted line?

Anything Anywhere Anytime At Any cost	
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(date)	(signature)