

# What are disciples?

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On September the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. I was in Texas and I remember the place I was working at stopping and 200 workers staring at the TV screen. I was sad for what had happened, but I was also worried for myself. I was supposed to get married in 4 days in Guatemala. My wife had traveled to Guatemala to prepare for the wedding. My parents and I were supposed to be flying the next day. My Father in law had booked a beautiful Hacienda close to Antigua, Guatemala. The only problem was there would be no way to get his money back if we changed days. No planes were flying for the next 2 days. Finally, the airlines called to tell us to come on the 14<sup>th</sup>, that there would be a flight. We drove to the airport at 3am only to be told no planes would fly. My brother in law was with us, and he had friends who lived across the border in Mexico that told him that the planes were flying inside Mexico. So they drove me to the Bus station in Houston, Texas, only to be told that not even the buses were crossing the border into Mexico. But by God's grace, Guillermo was at the Bus station. Guillermo was traveling to Mexico City for the holiday and made a deal with me. If I would drive him to the border, he would travel with me and translate for me until I got on the plane to Guatemala. On that trip we missed a bus and a plane. My wife did not know whether I would come. I had to spend the night with a Mexican guy in Monterrey that I did not know. Finally, we arrived at Mexico City on the day of the wedding. I was able to call from the airport at 12:00 midday and tell my wife that I would be there for the wedding at 5:00pm that evening. I arrived dressed for the wedding at exactly 5:00pm.

That is a 100% true story. Could you imagine if I had went through all that only to have my wife say "I will stay here in Guatemala and I will call you once a week 3 or 4 times a month? If I need something from you I will call more often. I love you so much and you are such a great husband." What would you think of my wife if she would have done that? What do you think about a person who wants a wedding, but not a husband? What about a man who wants to have a child, but does not want to be a father? That is what many of us do with God and we did not even know were doing it. We are happy to have his love, his salvation and his help, but we do not truly give ourselves to him. Today, I want to give you a picture of what a person looks like who has given their heart and life to Jesus. You might say I am explaining what a Christian is. That is true, but I want to use the word disciple. That was the first word

the bible used for Christians. Acts 11:26 says, **“And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”** There was no difference between a disciple and a Christian in the times of the Apostles. So today if you call yourself a Christian, you are also calling yourself a disciple, and if you call yourself a disciple, you are also calling yourself a Christian. Christians are students of Jesus. Jesus did not come to make converts; He came to make disciples. Jesus did not only share the Gospel, he shared his life. He ate with his disciples, lived with his disciples and loved personally each one of his disciples, and he also taught them. If a person tells me they are discipling 500 other believers, then I will say that we are not talking about the same things. You may teach 500 people, but I would be shocked if you could disciple more than a handful of people. To Jesus, discipleship IS Christianity. His plan to change the world was to train 12 guys and a handful of others and tell them to do the same. To Jesus, discipleship is not about learning some doctrines or a few good things to do once a week for 30 minutes on Sunday, but about learning to be like him because you love him.

***“<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—<sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.***

***<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.<sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”*** (Philippians 3:8-16)

Paul is writing from prison. He is unjustly there, as the only thing he did was to preach Jesus. He cannot be physically present with the believers, but he knows that they need encouragement to continue in the correct path. Instead of giving command after command, he shares his own life as the example of how they should be. So as we read this passage I see at least 3 examples of what it means to be a true, real disciple of Jesus.

### **1. A disciple has a personal relationship with Jesus.**

As you read this passage, there is without a doubt an example of a personal relationship with Jesus. Verse 8 talks about knowing Christ MY Lord. Why didn't he say “knowing Christ Jesus THE Lord”? It is because he is showing you that Jesus is his Jesus. His Lord, his God. His teacher. To many of you a personal relationship with Jesus sounds normal. You're used to hearing it. It is like me getting excited

about a baguette or an *Aquarius limón*. Talking about a personal relationship with Jesus is so common that maybe it has lost its amazing-ness to you. Think about it though, how many of you here today would not worry about your neighbor, friend or colleague talking about having a relationship with a person who died a long time ago and who you cannot see with your eyes or touch with your hands? But this is how we speak of Jesus, isn't it? My point is that it is not common at all. It is very unique. Having a personal relationship with your religious leader is something totally unique to Christianity. I don't know any religion where the person had a relationship with their dead religious leader. What about any of those religious leaders from any religion living inside you? The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, ***“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail the test!”*** Paul does not say, “Test yourselves to see whether you go to church on Sundays! Test yourselves and see whether you keep the Ten Commandments.” Paul has a Test and it goes like this: DO you personally know Jesus? If you are a disciple, you should know that Jesus is in you. You should have a personal experience of Jesus.

Could you imagine substituting any name for Jesus in that verse? Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Wyley is in you? Do you not realize that Tim is in you? Doesn't that sound ridiculous when it is said of normal men? But Jesus is no normal man. Jesus is glorious. He is the greatest, most amazing person that has ever walked the earth. He created all things. He died and rose from the Dead. He was fearless and so loving little children would come to him. This Jesus will have a personal relationship with you today. Hear what I am saying now... The only relationship that Jesus has with his disciples is a personal relationship. It is a real relationship. If you are here today and you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, I ask you to please start one today. Call on his name. Ask him in to your heart and life. Believe in him. Be born again. Ask God to take away your heart of stone and give you a new heart, a soft heart. Ask him to forgive your sins. Even if you are a Christian, ask him for a greater awareness of him in your life. Ask him to show you himself. Try to live in all day in prayer with Jesus. Take time to read the bible with Jesus. Ask questions and let him teach you. You will get a few things wrong, but his Spirit has a special way of using the bible to talk to you

You may be saying, well that was Paul. He was special. I couldn't have a relationship like that. It is not about how great Paul is. He is not boasting about his special relationship. Paul is encouraging you and I to follow his example. Listen to what Paul says just a little bit later, in verse 17:

***“<sup>17</sup> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”***

You see he expects you to follow him. He expects that you would have a personal relationship with Jesus as well. Discipleship is about imitation and striving to imitate. Paul is striving to be like Jesus and he expects us to strive to be like Paul. So many times we have this false idea that Jesus trained his disciples in a classroom. He was their classroom. Every day and every moment, because what you say if you do not live as an example? So the first and most important quality of a disciple is that they have a personal and living relationship with Jesus. That will begin to change everything else in your life in a great way.

## 2. A disciple treasures Christ above everything else in the world.

*<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*

Paul testifies that Jesus has become his treasure. Jesus is the thing he most values. Jesus says it this way, ***“where your treasure is your heart will be also”*** (Matthew 6:21). Can you see where Paul’s heart is by seeing where his treasure is? What do you talk about? What do you enjoy? What can make you sad or mad? What do you care about and not care about? Why is this important? You will worship what you treasure. You see, the heart of idolatry is not worshipping statues but in treasuring something more than you treasure God. That is why the Bible says greed or covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). That’s why the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength. This kind of love for the invisible person of Jesus is hard for people to understand. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4:

*<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

They cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Christ is not glorious to them. So while Jesus is amazing and glorious to us, he is not to them. Jesus tells a parable about this very thing in Matthew 13:44:

***“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”***

Could you imagine a wealthy neighbor selling everything for a field? No more car or house; No more furniture; No more big TV. All would be sold for a very simple and plain field. Remember the man is the only one who knows about the treasure in the field. To everyone else it looks like a plain field. What would his wife say? What would his friends say? This is what our love for Jesus looks like. It looks like we have lost our minds to unbelievers. Who would wake up on Sundays? Who would be faithful to one person all their lives in marriage because an invisible God says to? Who would give money to a church they could spend on themselves? Who would rather spend time with Jesus than sleep in? But Jesus knows they talk like that. And you and I know that once he has come into you heart and life nothing can compare with that. What does Jesus parable say? ***“Then in his joy he sells all he has.”*** It was joy that led him to buy the field. You see, the unbeliever can’t see the joy that Jesus brings and so they don’t value him.

Jesus disciples value him as their greatest treasure, because we know what we have found. In the passage today Paul gives us a couple of reasons we should treasure Christ. First, we can rejoice in the work of Jesus. He paid all my debt of sin on the cross. Paul says in verse 9:

***“(…) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”***

One day everyone in this room will stand before God. We will have to answer for every thought, every action and every attitude that was not pleasing to God. There are only 2 possible outcomes for me or you. First, I could be convicted of committing millions of sins against the greatest being in the universe and pay according to my crimes against him. Or the second option is that I could be declared innocent, not because I never did anything wrong, not because I did a lot of good things, but because I personally placed my faith in Jesus and **do not have a righteousness of my own that comes because of my personal obedience, but have the righteousness that comes from God that depends on my faith.** That is an amazing reason to treasure Jesus. Without him we are all hopeless on judgment day. What about are you like Paul? Do you trust in Jesus to be good enough, or do you live constantly trying to earn God’s love? I am not trying to earn God’s love or his blessings by offerings, singing or going on Sundays. Disciples do all of those things out of thankfulness so as to worship him. We are not good enough people to make it to heaven on our own. We are not men drowning in the sea in need of a little help to save us. We are dead in our sin at the bottom of the sea. We don’t need a helping hand, we need a Savior to bring us back to life. It is only through a miracle that we can come alive. Jesus saves us and he gets all the praise. It will never be because of the good things you do. Our salvation in God’s eyes is by faith and not by the good things we do. Rest in Jesus and be holy and good out of worship, not to earn your salvation. Treasure Jesus because he is your righteousness.

The second reason Paul treasures Jesus is because it is possible to experience him now in our lives. Just listen to how Paul desires the kind of experience with Christ:

***“— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”***

What if I told you that you could experience Jesus’ resurrection power in your life today? I do not mean that you would be killed physically and resurrect physically. Paul is speaking mostly symbolically. He means that as you suffer doing what pleases God, you suffer a kind of death. We say things like I died to myself when I spent all day serving the needs of my family, instead of doing what I wanted to do. That is a kind of death. I shared Jesus with my friends at school and they laughed at me. That is a kind of death. Most people live avoiding these kinds of death, because they don’t understand that the real power and experience of Jesus comes after the death to self. After I die to me, I begin to experience the life giving power. To know the power of the resurrection today is to experience the promise that as I die to myself I will also experience new life by God’s power. Do you know the joy of that power? Husbands, die to yourselves and love your wives like Christ loved the church and you will experience God’s power through your death to self. Singles, don’t get sucked into the parties and the world’s ways of giving life. Die to that and share Jesus with your friends. Guess what, as you die with Jesus you will experience the resurrection power of Jesus. Unbelievers here, this is not a myth or a story. This is real and it is powerful. Come to him. I’m not asking you to just agree, I am telling you that you can experience it and know it is true. You have tried everything else. Try Jesus! Jesus created you and the universe you see. He is real.

You can walk with him. You can talk with him. You can suffer with him and you can experience new life with him. Jesus is calling this morning to you. Follow me!, he says.

So far we have said 2 main ideas about disciples:

- Disciples have a personal relationship with Christ.
- Disciples treasure Jesus above everything else.

You might guess my last point is disciples share the gospel. Or disciples love the poor, or disciples pray. But I am not so worried about any of those things. If you treasure Jesus, you WILL share him. You see, your main problem is not lack of evangelism, it is a lack of a personal relationship with Jesus and a lack of treasuring him. If you have those 2 things in place, you will share the gospel. Paul tells us the last point and it is the one that might give you the most comfort.

### **3. Disciples are moving forward to the goal of being like Jesus, even if they are not perfect today.**

*“<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”*

First, Paul is very clear that he has not become like Jesus completely, but that he is moving forward or progressing in the process of becoming like Jesus. It is a huge relief for us. If Jesus is the ultimate goal and not even Paul can reach that goal, then I am sure I will never reach it and you will never reach it on this earth. But that is a comforting thought. The true sign of Christian growth is that I can look backwards and see all that God has done in my life and I can clearly see that I'm more like Jesus today than I was. Many children put on their parents clothes and pretend to be them. We laugh and think they are cute, but in reality we all are trying to be like someone else. Maybe it is your parents or a famous football star. Maybe it is a supermodel or a scientist. Maybe it is Bill Gates or Albert Einstein. The bottom line is, if I were to go into your Facebook Page and look at your life, or if I were to look at your Instagram, what I see? A person striving to become like Jesus, or a person more interested in other things? How do you want people to see you? That is the question. As Christians we are all in a process; none of us are perfect, but being disciples of Jesus means we should be striving, fighting and praying with all of our strength to be more like Jesus. There're two main ways we can make mistakes when striving to be like Jesus. We can get stuck in past failures. We look at all of the times we attempted to serve God, or change our lives, or read the Bible in one year, or pray every day, and we see a list of failures. And instead of striving, getting up and fighting, once again we let the past determine the future. But pay close attention to the words of the apostle:

*“<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.”*

Your past is your past, and no one can change it. But your future is new every day. Look to the promises of God and not to the past.

The second mistake that we make is when we think that our past spiritual successes are enough. Many people speak of all of the great things they have done in the past, but if we are not careful we will become content with the past and passionless toward serving God in the future. No matter how many good things you have done for Christ Jesus in the past, he is calling you today to press on forward until that very day when you meet him face-to-face. Do not fall asleep, but Wake up! Let the light of Jesus shine in your hearts once again and be all that he has called you to be today. You are called to today to make disciples. That is so much more than making converts. What if everyone in this room had a personal relationship with Jesus? What if everyone in here treasured Jesus? What if everyone here kept pushing forward? We are called to this life. We are disciples. We are the salt and light.

### Discussion questions:

1. In your minds what is the difference between a disciple and a Christian?
2. What was Jesus strategy for reaching the world?
3. Has that strategy changed?
4. In what ways can you see Paul's personal relationship with Jesus in Philippians 3:8-11?
5. How do you recognize that Jesus is in you? What would that look like? How does that relate to the Holy Spirit?
6. What practical ways can you live everyday all day in a personal relationship?
7. How is Paul an example? How can we be examples to those in our house and in our work or school?
8. In what ways can you see that Paul treasures Jesus in Philippians 3:8-11?
9. Why should we treasure Jesus?
10. If Jesus were the thing we valued the most every minute of everyday, how would our life change?
11. How does it make you feel to hear that Paul is not a perfect person?
12. How do our past failures affect us?
13. How do our past successes affect us?