

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO FOLLOW CHRIST? (DISCIPLESHIP)

Matthew 16:24 (NLT) - Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. ²⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Luke 14:26-27 (NLT) - “If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

PRE-THOUGHT: WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?? (CHRIST, CHRISTIANITY, ETC.)

I. Denying Oneself

1) How many of us stumble here (step 1), and why?

- a) Why is it so easy to deny others, yet so difficult to deny ourselves?
- b) Is our God given free will and choice a factor?
- c) What does it really mean to deny oneself? And why did Jesus say this is the FIRST thing we must do?
- d) When we learn to deny ourselves, what type of people do we become? Not necessarily spiritually, but in general.

2) Our nature.

- a) Have we ever said, or felt this statement, “This is just who I am.”
- b) What are we saying to ourselves and to God when we make this statement?

3) Our World.

a) Our society and culture. American wealth and greed. (Indulge, deny yourself nothing, you only live once, there is never enough, there is no such thing as too much, etc.)

b) Satan's influence in the world.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NLT) - If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. ⁴ Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

c) Minimalizing the seriousness of sin. We justify our sins. We begin to get "technical." We ultimately abuse the Grace of God.

II. Taking Up Our Cross

1) What does it mean to take up a cross? Why is it necessary?

2 Timothy 3:12 (NLT) - Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution.

2) Is there a difference between persecution and suffering?

3) Shame.

Luke 9:26 (NLT) - If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels.

III. Attitude and Approach

1) The ultimate goal.

a) **Perfection.** Is anyone perfect?

Philippians 3:12 (NLT) - I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

d) Oneness with Christ.

John 17:20-21 (NLT) - "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

2) True worship.

3) A nomad and sojourner.

4) Improper Attitudes

IV. How Close to Follow?

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT) - "Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³ But I will reply, '***I never knew you.*** Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT) - "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell^[f] is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴ But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, ***and only a few ever find it.***

1) Just enough.

2) Grading on a curve.

3) What standard do we use.

4) Growth???