

## Be Christ's Disciple (1): Put Christ First

**Matthew 6:33** New American Standard Bible

*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.*

**Luke 9:23** New American Standard Bible

<sup>23</sup> *And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must **deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.***

### Introduction

Today we begin a new sermon series titled **"Be Christ's Disciple."** Over the next six Sundays, we'll explore what it means to be a true follower of Jesus—not simply someone who attends church, but someone who walks with Christ daily.

We'll focus on six key marks of discipleship:

1. Putting Christ first
2. Separation from the world
3. Steadfastness in faith
4. Serving others
5. Practicing generous giving
6. Embracing a global vision

These themes are adapted from the Navigators Memory Card System, a tool that has long helped believers grow in Christlikeness.

Let's begin by asking: *What does it actually mean to be a disciple of Jesus?* We cannot talk about discipleship without mentioning Matthew 28:18-20, known to us, as the Great Commission. As He was ascending into Heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples this:

**Matthew 28:18–20:** *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. **Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...** teaching them to follow all that I commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

The Great Commission is the Church's primary mission: *to make disciples of all nations.* But before we can help others become disciples, we need to understand what it means to be one ourselves.

So, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

At its core, it means to **follow Jesus**—our Savior, Teacher, and Master. As He has called Peter and His disciples 2,000 years ago, He still calls us to follow Him today. But what does following look like for us today? We no longer walk with Him physically. So, is being a disciple just going to church, giving offerings, or serving on committees? Or is it something more than a well-sounding title? That's what we are going to think about this morning.

## Content

The first mark of Christ's disciples is *Put Christ first*. If you don't put Him first in your life, you are not a true disciple of Jesus. *Master comes first*. A true disciple puts Him before anything or anybody else. I cannot overemphasize it.

Two verses demand our attention. Matthew 6:33 and Luke 9:23.

First, let's take a look at Matthew 6:33: *But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.***

**Context:** In the preceding verses (that is, v. 25-v. 32), Jesus talks about daily cares and worries. He understands the common worries of daily life, yet He commands us not to get our priorities out of order. *Keep God as your number one priority in life, He says, then all will be well.* Don't chase needs; chase the Kingdom. Let's explore key phrases from this command, beginning with 'seek.'

**Seek:** This word implies more than a casual glance. It means to *desire*, to *aim at*, and to *practice*. In the original Greek, the verb is *in the present tense*, indicating that seeking is not a one-time action, but a continual, ongoing pursuit—day and night, again and again, without letting up.

The Bible says, "*Seek, and you shall find*" (Matthew 7:7). And indeed, whatever you seek—you will find. *Material things?* You'll find them. *Status?* That too. *God?* You will find Him as well. But before we begin the pursuit, we must ask: *What are we truly seeking?* Jesus calls us to seek *God's Kingdom and His righteousness* above all else.

**God's Kingdom:** is the kingdom where God is King, not in theory but in truth. It never ends. It lasts forever. It is from generation to generation. It is the kingdom where God reigns. He calls the shots. No one else does. No one can challenge Him what He has done. He is in charge. He is in control.

Therefore, to seek God's kingdom means to desire His reign, to aim for it, and to practice it in every part of life. It means to align our life goals with the divine will and work

for the advancement of God's reign on earth (p. 39, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*). It is to **"seek those things which are above, ... to set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"** (Colossians 3:1-2, NKJV).

It means to *"fill the mind and heart with the concerns of the Kingdom of God"* (p. 967, *Abingdon Bible Commentary*). It is to pursue God's reign as *the ultimate goal* of our daily activities (p. 646, *the New Jerome Bible Commentary*).

**His Righteousness:** The Hebrew word for righteousness is 'tzedakah,' whose root means to speak the truth, be straight, perfect, just, and excellent. It is derived from the root "Tzedek" which means *"rightness of weights and measures."*

God's righteousness, then, is *"whatever is just and right in the sight of God,"* such as truth, justice, mercy, and love. It is one of God's attributes as the sovereign ruler. So, for us to

**Seek God's righteousness:** means desiring, aiming for, and practicing what is right and just in God's eyes. It means to desire what pleases God and do it such as truthfulness, love, peace, justice, mercy, and humility.

For instance, the Lord loves justice (Psalm 33:5). So should we. The Lord practices mercy. So should we. The Lord forgives. So should we. The Lord speaks the truth. So should we. Prophet Micah declares what the LORD our God expects us to do daily.

E.g. **Micah 6:8:** *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you. But to do justly, to love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"* (NKJV).

**Self-righteousness vs. God's Righteousness:** It is worth mentioning here that the opposite of God's righteousness is self-righteousness. Self-righteousness promotes and glorifies the self before God and others. It seeks to please oneself and do whatever pleases the self. Self-righteousness puffs us up. God's righteousness makes us humble. In the eyes of God, self-righteousness is unrighteousness.

**All these things:** Jesus promises that when we seek God's Kingdom and righteousness, **all these things** will be added. He doesn't mean unlimited wealth or perfect health. He means **what you truly need** instead. When we please Him, our Father in Heaven makes sure we lack nothing essential. And, He adds more.

Consider King Solomon, for instance: When God offered him anything he desired as king, Solomon asked only for wisdom to rule His people (1 Kings 3:9-13). Delighted by this request, God granted Solomon not only wisdom, but also blessings that he hadn't asked for,

such as wealth and power. In the same way, as we seek God's righteousness, God provides us with wisdom, strength, peace, confidence, and all other needs. So, here's

**My Paraphrased translation of Matthew 6:25-33:** *Don't let daily worries and anxiety overwhelm you, as they can distract you from what truly matters on your earthly journey. The remedy is to seek God's Kingdom and practice His righteousness every day—proactively, intentionally, and wholeheartedly. When you do, peace, humility, strength, and provision will follow. Live always under His leadership, seeking His wisdom daily, and you will thrive as you walk humbly with Him.*

### **Disciples Then and Now.**

I'd like to take a moment here to reflect on the difference between disciples in Jesus' day and disciples today.

**Disciples in Jesus' Day:** They lived alongside Jesus. They shared meals with Him, walked the same roads, and followed wherever He led. They witnessed His miracles with their own eyes, listened to His teachings with open ears, and learned from His daily example. They memorized His words and passed them on to others. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, they did not retreat—they proclaimed the Way of Christ boldly and faithfully to the ends of the earth.

**Disciples Today:** Today, the image of a disciple can be blurry. Many profess to follow Jesus, yet live as if He were merely a consultant rather than Lord. We often seek His blessing without yielding to His will. We still sit on the throne of our lives, asking Him to approve our plans instead of surrendering to His. Convenience too often replaces conviction.

Let's take a look at Luke 9:23 this time.

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must **deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.**

His call has three conditions:

1. Deny yourself
2. Take up your cross
3. Follow Me.

**What Is Self-Denial?** It's not just skipping dessert. It's a radical re-centering of life. It means stepping off the throne and letting Christ take His rightful place. It's about placing God's will ahead of our own.

**Example:** J.O.Y. = Jesus, Others, You.

Self-denial means saying “no” to selfishness and “yes” to God's mission.

**Derek Prince put it well:** “You can’t be a self-pleaser and a Christ-pleaser. It’s impossible” (*The Grace of Yielding*, p. 22).

**What Does It Mean to Take Up Your Cross?** Your cross is not your wife/husband/sickness. We must understand what cross meant in the first century in the Roman world. It meant a capital punishment. It meant a public humiliation and suffering. It meant death. So, when Christ said to take up your own cross, He meant to be ready for suffering of the public humiliation and ridicule for Christ and His gospel, even to death. Not everyone can do that. Only those who put Christ first can.

Consider many believers in the world today who carry the cross not metaphorically, but quite visibly. They remind us that the cross is not something to wear, but something to carry—and that true allegiance will almost always leave a mark. To them, to follow Jesus is not a lifestyle choice but a line in the sand. Here’s one example. “According to Burkinabe church leaders from two denominations, attacks on Christians by Islamist insurgents are rapidly increasing. Leaders from one denomination say that from January 2024 until the beginning of 2025, 10 pastors were murdered, 220 displaced, 7 abducted, 179 churches closed, 22 churches burned or destroyed, and 177 Christians murdered. Nearly 31,000 of the denomination’s church members have been displaced. Another denomination reports that 797 pastors (70%) have been displaced, 7 killed, and 97 churches burned or destroyed with 946 churches closed and 115 Christians killed.” <https://www.persecution.com/stories/2025/06/>

**Daily:** Taking up the cross is an ongoing process in our faith journey. It continues day in day out. It is a daily decision. We declare and practice “a daily steadfast loyalty to the master and his way of life” (p. 700, *the New Jerome Bible Commentary*). We submit ourselves to God’s will daily (p. 262, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*).

Paul the Apostle puts this way: “<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). Have you been crucified with Christ? Are you living for Christ?

## Conclusion

Are you a disciple of Christ? Here’s a check list. Ask yourself,

- Do I keep Jesus’ word (Jon 8:31)?

- Do I put Christ first and walk in His steps?
- Do I prioritize the Kingdom of God?
- Do I practice God's righteousness?
- Do I embrace self-denial?
- Do I carry my cross daily?
- Do I pursue what God pursues?
- Do I do what God blesses?

Live a life worthy of His name. Be willing to suffer for Christ. Then—and only then—are you truly His disciple. **Amen.**