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**A PRAYER FOR SURRENDER:**

**"FATHER, I WANT TO KNOW THEE, BUT MY COWARD HEART FEARS TO GIVE UP ITS TOYS. I CANNOT LOVE THEE AS I SHOULD TILL THOU HAST RENT THE CAUL OF MY BEING AND SET ME AFLAME WITH THY LOVE. BREAK ME, O LORD, AND MAKE ME CHILDLIKE. DELIVER ME FROM THE URGE TO COMPETE WITH ANOTHER FOR PLACE OR PRESTIGE OR POSITION. I WOULD BE SIMPLE AND ARTLESS AS A LITTLE CHILD. HELP ME TO FORGET MYSELF AND FIND MY TRUE PEACE IN BEHOLDING THEE."  
(A.W. TOZER – "THE PURSUIT OF GOD")**

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***JESUS CALLS EVERYONE TO FOLLOW HIM AND BE HIS DISCIPLE. SOME WILL ANSWER THE CALL BUT WILL FOLLOW HIM IN THEIR OWN WAY. OTHERS WILL ANSWER THE CALL AND FOLLOW HIM IN HIS WAY. HOWEVER, MOST WILL SCOFF AT THE CALL AND CONTINUE IN THEIR WAY.***

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# The Crisis of Discipleship

In their book *“Kingdom Ethics,”* Glen Stassen and David Gushee argue that Christian churches across the theological and confessional range, and Christian ethics as an academic discipline, are often guilty of avoiding Jesus.

They confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and God incarnate. They profess Him as Savior, Lord of the church and the world.

Jesus is not only the Center of the Christian faith but of all creation through whom all things were made. Scripture asserts that He *“is before all things and in Him all things hold together”* Col 1:17).

Without Jesus, Christianity is a superficial enterprise because He is its central figure, its source, foundation, authority, and destiny. Yet the church routinely ignores and misinterprets the teachings of Jesus and His Word. Most explicitly, His teachings and practices, especially His Sermon on the Mount.

The result is not good: *“This evasion of the concrete teachings of Jesus has seriously malformed Christian moral practices, moral beliefs, and moral witness. Jesus taught that the test of our discipleship is whether we act on His teachings, whether we ‘put into practice’ His words”* (Gushee & Glen Harold Stassen, 2016). Putting Jesus’ words into practice is what *“it means to build on rock”* (Matt 7:24).

Jesus meant what He said, and the evasion of His teachings constitutes a crisis of Christian identity. The question must be asked: Who, then, is exactly functioning as the Lord of the church?

When Christians and the church marginalize, avoid, or water down Jesus’ way of discipleship, they lose their resistance against infiltration by secular ideologies. These ideologies manipulate Christians into serving other gods, causing them to lose their authority, testimony, and credibility. (Gushee & Glen Harold Stassen, 2016)

The church was commanded to *“come out from among their midst and be separate”* (Is 52:11, 2 Cor 6:17), yet it is now part of the world. The church has become an extension of the world and a proxy for the values, systems, and influences of the broader secular culture. It has lost its focus and intended purpose as a distinct spiritual community.

It has become a secular institution, adopting worldly values such as materialism, individualism, and moral relativism, thereby diluting its mission as a beacon of light to the world and a witness for God.

The church is a social movement that promotes cultural and social trends and fashions. It aligns with political ideologies and populist agendas instead of standing as a bulwark against the flood of depravity and ungodliness.

In functioning as just another human organization, prioritizing power, wealth, and influence over its role as a divine community, it fails to fulfill God's intended purpose of revealing His Son to the world.

By blending with the world, it acts as a proxy for a watered-down version of faith where Biblical Principles are subordinated to societal norms.

The world has no more regard for the church, God's Word, and God's commandments because the church is the cause of blasphemy against God's name (Rom 2:24 NIV – "*As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'*"). No longer true to God and His Word, there is no difference between the world and the church.

Satan has overcome the church and put it to a deep sleep. He has achieved his goal in causing tremendous harm to the plans and purposes of God in the reaching of the lost souls on their way to hell. The church has become a whoremonger and adulterer and is unable and unfit to accomplish its mission.

As is stated by Stassen and Gushee, "*The Christian life consists of following Jesus, obeying His teachings, and practicing the way of life He taught and modeled*" (Gushee & Stassen, 2016, p. 2).

## Study Questions: The Crisis of Discipleship

### Study Questions: The Crisis of Discipleship

#### 1. The Centrality of Jesus in Christianity

According to the text, why is Jesus considered the center of the Christian faith? How does Colossians 1:17 support this view?

*Answer:*

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#### 2. Evasion of Jesus' Teachings

The text argues that churches often avoid or misinterpret Jesus' teachings, particularly those in the Sermon on the Mount. What are some specific ways this evasion might manifest in modern churches?

*Answer:*

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#### 3. Consequences of Ignoring Jesus' Teachings

According to the text, what are the consequences of Christians and churches marginalizing Jesus' teachings? Refer to Matthew 7:24 in your response.

*Answer:*

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#### 4. Infiltration of Secular Ideologies

The text claims that avoiding Jesus' way of discipleship allows secular ideologies to infiltrate the church. What are some examples of secular ideologies that might influence churches today?

*Answer:*

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**5. The Church's Role as a Distinct Community**

The text references Isaiah 52:11 and 2 Corinthians 6:17 to emphasize the church's call to be separate from the world. How has the church failed to maintain this distinction, according to the text?

*Answer:*

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**6. Worldly Values in the Church**

The text lists materialism, individualism, and moral relativism as worldly values adopted by the church. Provide an example of how each of these values might appear in a church setting.

*Answer:*

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**7. The Church as a Social Movement**

How does the text describe the church's alignment with cultural, social, or political trends? Why does this alignment undermine its mission?

*Answer:*

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### 8. Blasphemy Against God’s Name

According to Romans 2:24, how does the church’s behavior lead to God’s name being blasphemed? Provide a modern example of this issue.

*Answer:*

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### 9. Satan’s Influence on the Church

The text uses strong language, describing the church as a “whoremonger and adulterer” under Satan’s influence. What does this metaphor suggest about the church’s current state, and how does it impact its mission?

*Answer:*

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### 10. Following Jesus as Discipleship

Stassen and Gushee state, “The Christian life consists of following Jesus, obeying His teachings, and practicing the way of life He taught and modelled.” How can Christians and churches practically apply this principle to address the crisis of discipleship?

*Answer:*

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## The Call to Follow Jesus

In the New Testament, the word *follow* is exclusively used in reference to the relationship with the earthly Jesus. The word *following*, as used in the Greek cultural context in reference to a deity, meant that man should become like the deity. (Schweizer, 1960)

In Judaism, there are two viewpoints regarding the word “*follow*.” The first viewpoint implies a concrete following in the literal sense. The Old Testament speaks of those who forsook God to *follow* Baal and signifies the idea of a servant who belongs to his lord (*baal*).

In Rabbinical literature, the same viewpoint is expressed, signifying the act of the disciples who walk at a respectful distance behind their master. (Schweizer, 1960)

Another viewpoint, also expressed in the Rabbinical literature, points to the influence of Greek thought on the term. The Rabbis declared that since it is impossible to literally walk behind God, it rather means to *follow the virtues* of God.

This notion implies the *imitation* of God, as in the Greek concept, with the requirement that *ethical effort (obedience to the law)* has a more central place. (Schweizer, 1960)

Since the expression “*following God*” is not found in the New Testament, we should take our lead from the **first viewpoint** of the Rabbis and not the second viewpoint.

When Jesus calls, “*Follow Me*,” this is meant **in the first Jewish sense of “literal, concrete sense of following”** and not in the latter Greek-influenced idea of ***just imitating virtues***. Following Jesus implies **actual obedience to Him in daily life** rather than only inward belief or abstract commitment.

Though the disciples could **physically walk** with Jesus during His earthly ministry, they could not do so after His ascension; yet the call to **concrete following** continues.

The *following* shifts from literally **walking behind Jesus' body to obeying the risen Lord's Word**. The essence has not changed and still means **actually doing what He commands and organizing one's whole life around Him**.

The form changes (not physical steps anymore), but the reality is still concrete. It involves real choices, real actions, and real sacrifice of possessions, priorities, and securities. It still involves renouncing the old claims on their lives and living as people owned by Jesus. They are still His servants, which echoes the Old Testament sense of following and belonging to a master.

According to Schweizer (1960) following must not be reduced to just copying Jesus' character traits or moral example. That would be abstract and comes from the Greek-influenced view. Real discipleship is relational obedience to a living Lord, not just moral admiration. Discipleship is **always concrete, embodied obedience** to the Lord.

Obedience to the call entails three points: 1. Jesus called them to follow Him. That is the beginning of discipleship. 2. The call is a call to serve. 3. Obedience entails forsaking old ties.

## The Jesus Movement

According to Wilkins (2010), a movement starts when a perceived need within a group of people is addressed by someone who offers a solution. As the movement continues to grow and people with various needs and expectations are included, the diversity of the followers grows.

The leader then must clarify the solution, and it is at this stage that people within the movement either affirm their commitment to the leader and the solution or leave the movement. Those who leave the movement do so because the leader's solution does not meet their expectations.

Wilkins (2010) states that the first disciples of Jesus participated in a Jesus movement and were challenged with something they had never experienced before they began to follow Jesus. The call to people to follow Jesus led to the first Jesus movement, which changed the course of history.

In the development of the first Jesus movement, several stages can be discerned. These stages shed important light on what it meant to follow Jesus in the first century.

## Stages of the Jesus Movement

### *Stage 1: People Followed Jesus Out of Their Own Initiative*

The first stage was characterized by people who followed Jesus voluntarily of their own will. In Matthew 4:24-25, we read that many people from all of Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan followed Him.

Some who followed Jesus did so because they recognized His Messianic identity.

Two of John's disciples followed Jesus after John the Baptist told them that Jesus was the Lamb of God.

When Jesus saw them, He asked: <sup>38</sup> "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" <sup>39</sup> He \*said to them, "Come, and you will see." So, they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour". (Jn 1:38-39, NASB -1995).

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, one of the two who followed Jesus, went to find his brother, and told him, *"We have found the Messiah."*

Phillip, called by Jesus to follow Him, brought Nathaniel to Jesus. <sup>45</sup> *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

<sup>46</sup> *Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see. <sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and \*said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"*

<sup>48</sup> *Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. <sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." (Jn 1:45 – 49, NASB -1995)*

However, not all of those who followed Jesus did so for the same reason. They had different backgrounds and understandings of who Jesus was. Many who witnessed Jesus' healings and heard His teachings became *"believers,"* but their *"faith"* was deficient. (Wilkins, 2010)

Some came to Jesus out of curiosity and to question Jesus, like Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who was drawn to Jesus because of His miracles and teachings. Nicodemus became one of Jesus' disciples because he asked for Jesus' body after the crucifixion.

Another individual who approached Jesus out of curiosity and to question Him about eternal life was the rich young ruler. He did not become a disciple of Jesus, as seen in Lk 18:18-27, because of his riches.

In the first stage of the Jesus movement, it was the people who took the initiative to follow Jesus. As His disciples, they were not much different from the other types of disciples who followed other masters in Israel. (Wilkins, 2010)

### *Stage 2: Jesus' Call*

According to Wilkins (2010), it was at this point that Jesus established a pattern that governed entrance to true discipleship. This change of approach happened when Jesus called the two brothers, Matthew and Mark, to follow Him. They were already familiar with Jesus because they were the disciples who left John to follow Jesus.

The movement gained momentum as news of Jesus spread through social relationships in Galilee. Great crowds from far-flung areas flocked to Jesus, and a multitude began to follow Him. News about Jesus spread to Syria, resulting in people bringing to Him all who were ill from various diseases, suffering from pain, the demon-possessed, epileptic people, and the paralyzed to be healed.

During this period, while the movement of Jesus' followers grew, "His call established the high-tide mark of His form of discipleship". (Wilkins, 2010)

This call challenged people to make a lifetime personal commitment to Jesus and demanded unreserved faith in Him. For some, it also included accompanying Jesus in His journeys to announce the coming of God's kingdom.

The pattern Jesus used in His call is divided into three stages. **1.** Jesus went about the countryside and chose the ones He would call. **2.** He summoned them, and **3.** Those who responded immediately followed Him.

This pattern reveals four crucial facts regarding the call to follow Jesus.

- 1.** It emphasizes the great authority of Jesus' call to people to become His disciples.
- 2.** It reveals the absolute obedience and commitment of those called in answer to the call.
- 3.** It shows the initiative lies entirely with Jesus.
- 4.** It is only by virtue of the call of Jesus alone that a person can embark upon the life of discipleship and sustain it. (Wilkins, 2010)

### 2.1 Jesus Initiates the Call

Until now, people came to Jesus on their own initiative, but now He extends a kind and empowering invitation. Those who hear and obey His call become His disciples.

In the first century, discipleship was a person's voluntary choice. A Person who wanted to be a disciple of a master would examine various masters and then enlist himself with the master of his choice. An example of this is the scribe who approached Jesus and told Him he would follow Him wherever He went. (Matt 8:19)

Jesus now took the initiative and called all of those who would be His disciples. At the beginning of the movement, it was not easy to know the difference between a true disciple and a false disciple. However, the true disciple always responded with true faith to the call of Jesus. (Wilkins, 2010)

### 2.2 Breaking Through the Religious Barriers

Jesus did not call His disciples based on their merit or abilities, but solely on God's grace. Jesus' call was an act of grace, extending an invitation to unworthy sinners to follow Him. He broke the barriers that separated those who were unclean from those who were not. Think of the people with leprosy, prostitutes, and tax collectors whom He called to follow Him.

### 2.3 The Pivotal Response

When there is a call, there must be an answer. Those whom Jesus called had to respond to His call. They either became His disciple or turned away from Him. It was a

pivoting point for those who heard the call, and they had to choose to be *with Jesus* or *against Him* (Lk 11:23a).

The response to Jesus' call required knowing and believing in His Messianic identity (Jn 2:11; 6:68–69), obeying His call (Mk 1:18, 20), and committing oneself to Him with full consciousness of the cost of such commitment (Mt 19:23–30; Lk 14:25–33).

The person who decided to follow Jesus had to understand that it was the beginning of a new life; the old life had to come to an end, and he had to live in obedience to the Father's will. (Wilkins, 2010)

#### 2.4 Coming Out from Among the Multitudes

Jesus attracted large crowds who acted as spectators to all His miracles and teachings. However, Jesus did not want people to remain spectators but wanted them to be disciples. Therefore, He called individuals from the crowds to follow Him as His disciples.

The multitudes followed Jesus in a literal sense but did not commit themselves to the cost and commitment of discipleship. They were neutral and uncommitted in their relationship with Him and did not realize Jesus wanted all of them to become His disciples. (Wilkins, 2010)

#### 2.5 Counting the Cost

Jesus frequently warned those who wanted to be His disciples about the cost involved in following Him. He demanded unconditional surrender and allegiance to Him alone. (Lk 14:24, 27, 33)

<sup>26</sup> ***"If anyone** comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple".* <sup>27</sup> *"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple".* <sup>33</sup> *"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions".* (NASB 1995)

Wilkins (2010) claims that the same cost as stated by Jesus in the above verses is not demanded of everyone. *"Yet the same cost of discipleship is not demanded for all. Jesus personalizes the cost of discipleship according to what he knows are the priorities of a person's heart."*

I strongly disagree with Wilkins on this and suggest that an **erroneous statement** like this, which he makes, is the reason churches are filled with **uncommitted Christians**. His reasoning acts as a **scapegoat** for the uncommitted and will be detrimental to them and their relationship with Jesus.

The conditional *"If anyone"* excludes no one and includes everyone, regardless of their heart's priorities. The Greek word τῆς (*tis*) is an indefinite pronoun and refers to

some or *any person* or *object*. It means whose ([-soever]), whom ([-soever]), and as an interrogative pronoun, ask the question, *what manner of man?*

The answer is **any man, woman, or child** who wants to follow Jesus and be His disciple. There is no distinction between who needs to fulfill the conditions set out in Lk 14:26 – 35 and who does not.

The word “*anyone* refers to *any person or individual, without specifying any particular characteristic, background, or requirement. It is a pronoun used to indicate inclusiveness and the possibility for anyone, regardless of their identity or circumstances, to be involved or included in a particular situation, task, or group*”. (Definitions.net, 2025)

## 2.6 The Call to Discipleship

Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to salvation, a call to become part of God's Kingdom, and to believe in Jesus for eternal life. He called His disciples to be a witness for Him (Acts 1:8), to make disciples of the nations, and to teach them everything He taught them (Matt 28:19). (Wilkins, 2010)

The disciples of Jesus were a diverse group coming from all walks of life. There was a tax collector, some fishers, and religious leaders. There were women and men with various backgrounds, like Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus healed, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna, one of the women Jesus healed.

These women travelled with Jesus, witnessed His miracles, and supported His work financially. They remained faithful to Jesus during His crucifixion and were the first witnesses of His resurrection.

## 2.7 The Call to Leadership

From the broader group of disciples, Jesus chose a core of twelve disciples for leadership positions. They received an additional call that designated them as “apostles,” and the circumstances of their lives were considerably different from the rest.

Their call not only included a call to follow Jesus, but it was also a call to service. around and joined Him in His ministry to the people of Israel. They were not only Jesus' disciples but were also trained by Him to become apostles. (Wilkins, 2010)

### *Stage 3: Jesus Tests His Followers*

The Jesus movement expanded rapidly as new followers joined the growing crowds. However, the expectations of many of these followers were not in line with Jesus' expectations.

After Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowd regarded Him as the prophet foretold by Moses and sought to make Him king by force. The Messianic expectation of the Jews in Jesus' time was that a king would arise to set them free from Roman oppression.

However, Jesus used the feeding of the five thousand to reveal to the crowds the true nature of his mission. He taught them that He is the bread of life, and if they want to have eternal life, they must *eat of His flesh and drink His blood.* (Wilkins, 2010)

Jesus used this bold imagery “*to picture spiritual appropriation of himself, who is to give his lifeblood for the life of the world.*” (Robertson, 1931)

As a result of Jesus' statements, many of His disciples turned away from Him. Though these individuals followed Jesus, their expectations did not align with Jesus' goals and expectations.

This episode marked a watershed in the Jesus movement, exposing those driven by earthly expectations while confirming the genuine faith of those who aligned with his mission.

#### *Stage 4: The Narrow Band of Followers*

As His earthly ministry drew to a close, Jesus more clearly revealed its true purpose—to proclaim the good news of salvation and to die on the cross. At this point, the number of Jesus' disciples had declined severely, and only a few remained with Him.

Jesus had issued His call and stipulated His expectations of His disciples. There was no more confusion about what it means to be His disciples. He taught them what it meant to be His true followers. This set the stage for Jesus' declaration of the Great Commission. (Wilkins, 2010)

Jesus could now declare that the disciples must dedicate themselves to making disciples of all the nations. *A disciple is a person who comes out of the crowd of unbelievers (the nations) to claim Jesus as Savior and Master and to lead the way down the discipleship road.* (Wilkins, 2010)

#### *Stage 5: The First Church*

When the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, it brought about the birth of the church. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit marked a completely new period in the Jesus movement. From the beginning, the church expanded rapidly to the rest of Judea and Samaria. Jews and Gentiles were added to the church, and though persecuted, the church could not be destroyed. (Wilkins, 2010)

Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling in believers, all the disciples were now able to dwell continually in the presence of the Lord. He empowered them to go into the world in obedience to the Great Commission.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is essential to discipleship, affecting the conviction of unbelievers, the regeneration of believers, and ongoing spiritual growth.

The growth of the church resulted from the direct fulfilment of the Great Commission. The disciples went and made disciples of the unbelievers. They baptized them and taught the new converts to obey Jesus' teachings.

Everything Jesus taught *“the original disciples was now to be taught to new believers so that new converts could be obedient disciples following the ever-present Jesus”*. (Wilkins, 2010)

## Study Questions: The Call to Follow Jesus

### 1. The Meaning of "Follow" in the New Testament

According to the text, how is the word "follow" used exclusively in the New Testament? How does the Greek cultural context differ from the Jewish understanding? (Reference Schweizer, 1960)

*Answer:*

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### 2. Jewish Viewpoints on "Following"

Describe the two viewpoints in Judaism regarding the term "follow," as expressed in the Old Testament and Rabbinical literature. Why does the text advocate for the first viewpoint over the second when interpreting Jesus' call?

*Answer:*

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### 3. Literal vs. Abstract Following

The text emphasizes that Jesus' call to "Follow Me" is in the literal, concrete sense rather than the Greek-influenced idea of imitating virtues. What does this mean for discipleship today, especially after Jesus' ascension?

*Answer:*

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#### 4. Elements of Obedience to the Call

The text outlines three points entailed in obedience to Jesus' call: (1) following Him, (2) serving, and (3) forsaking old ties. Provide a brief explanation of each, drawing from the Old Testament sense of belonging to a master.

*Answer:*

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#### 5. The Jesus Movement: Definition and Growth

According to Wilkins (2010), what starts a movement, and how did the Jesus movement begin? How did the diversity of followers affect the leader's need to clarify the solution?

*Answer:*

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#### 6. Stage 1: Voluntary Following

Describe Stage 1 of the Jesus Movement, including examples from Matthew 4:24-25 and John 1:38-39, 45-49. Why were some followers' faith "deficient," and how does this stage compare to discipleship under other masters in Israel?

*Answer:*

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**7. Stage 2: Jesus' Call – The Pattern and Facts**

Outline the three-step pattern Jesus used in calling disciples (e.g., as seen with the brothers in Matthew and Mark). What are the four crucial facts this pattern reveals about discipleship? (Reference Wilkins, 2010)

*Answer:*

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**8. Jesus Initiates the Call and Breaks Barriers**

How did Jesus shift the initiative in discipleship from voluntary choice to His own call? Discuss how this call was an act of grace, breaking religious barriers (e.g., calling lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors).

*Answer:*

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**9. The Pivotal Response and Counting the Cost**

What does the text say is required in responding to Jesus' call (e.g., believing in His Messianic identity, obeying, committing fully)? Explain the cost of discipleship from Luke 14:26–27, 33, and address the disagreement with Wilkins (2010) regarding whether this cost is personalized.

*Answer:*

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### 10. Coming Out from the Multitudes and the Call to Discipleship

How did Jesus distinguish true disciples from the crowds of spectators? What is the broader purpose of Jesus' call to discipleship, including references to salvation, the Kingdom of God, and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8)?

*Answer:*

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### 11. The Call to Leadership and Diversity of Disciples

Describe the additional call to the twelve apostles and how it differed from general discipleship. Give examples of the diverse group of disciples, including women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, and their roles.

*Answer:*

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### 12. Stage 3: Jesus Tests His Followers

Using the example of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6), explain how Jesus tested His followers and revealed the true nature of His mission. What happened to those whose expectations did not align with His? (Reference Wilkins, 2010, and Robertson, 1931)

*Answer:*

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### 13. Stage 4: The Narrow Band of Followers

As Jesus' ministry progressed, how did the number of followers change, and why? How did this stage prepare for the Great Commission, and what is the definition of a disciple in this context?

*Answer:*

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### 14. Stage 5: The First Church and the Holy Spirit

Describe how the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost marked Stage 5 and the birth of the church. How did the Holy Spirit empower discipleship and fulfill the Great Commission? (Reference Wilkins, 2010)

*Answer:*

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### 15. Application to Modern Discipleship

Reflecting on all stages of the Jesus Movement, what lessons can modern Christians learn about true discipleship? How can churches avoid the pitfalls of uncommitted followers today?

*Answer:*

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# What is Discipleship?

Biblical Discipleship has a two-prong approach. The **first** is the *process of being conformed* into the image of the Master, Jesus. The **second** has to do with *the fulfillment of the Great Commission* in obedience to Jesus' command to go out and make disciples.

## Becoming Like Jesus

The English terms *discipleship* and *discipline* are derived from the word *disciple*. (Wilkins, 2010)

*The word 'disciple' carries profound spiritual and educational connotations while reflecting an enduring bond between a mentor and a learner. It was an integral part of Roman and Greek culture, characterizing a learner or follower devoted to a teacher or philosophy. Through the ages, the term disciple "has been a powerful symbol of dedication, learning, and transformation. (The Origin of Disciple: From Past to Present – Wordpandit, 2024)*

With the rise of Christianity, the term “*disciple*” became strongly associated with the followers of Christ the Lord. According to Rao, discipleship in the context of Christianity implies a *deep, committed relationship with Jesus Christ, exemplifying His teachings, and modelling one's life after His example.* (Rao, 2025)

The Greek root word for “disciple” is “*μανθάνω*” (*manthanō*), which means “*learn.*” When Jesus commanded His disciples on the mountain in Galilee to make disciples (Mt 28:19), the word used there is “*μαθητεῦω*,” (*mathêteuō*), which means “*be a learner (disciple).*”

According to Wilkins (2010), *discipleship* is the ongoing process of growth as a disciple, and *discipline* relates to the responsibility of disciples to help one another to grow. However, *discipline* also relates to the *self-discipline* of the individual disciple.

Discipleship and discipling refer to the process of growing as a Christian in every area of life. It means living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus and growing in conformity to His image. (Rom 8:29 – “*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to **become conformed** to the image of His Son...*”)

When Jesus said, “*A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher,*” He articulated a principle common to all master-disciple relationships. A disciple is involved in a natural process that will bring him or her to be like the master.

That is the central principle of Biblical Discipleship: a disciple is always in the discipleship process of becoming like the Master, Jesus. (Wilkins, 2010)

## **Fulfillment of the Great Commission**

According to Montefiore (1930), Jesus created a unique form of discipleship that was not patterned after other forms of discipleship found in Palestine at that time. *“Discipleship such as Jesus demanded and inspired (a following, not for study but for service—to help the Master in his mission, to carry out his instructions and so on) was apparently a new thing, at all events, something that did not fit in, or was not on all-fours, with usual Rabbinic customs or with customary Rabbinic phenomena.”*

After His resurrection, Jesus spent important time with His disciples to prepare them to continue the work of carrying the good news of salvation to the whole world. He told them to go and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus' purpose in teaching and training His disciples was therefore two-fold: to be conformed into His image, and to continue with the work of proclaiming the Gospel message of salvation.

## Part 1: Discipleship Demands Commitment

<sup>25</sup>*“Now large crowds were going along with him, **and** he turned around **and** said to them...*

The word “Now” is a keyword indicating either **Time** or **Explanation**. In this instance, it points to an **explanation** of why Jesus turned around; He turned around to speak to the multitudes following Him.

Matthew writes that Jesus was traveling through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

As a result of this, a report about Jesus went throughout Syria (modern-day Iran), and people brought all those sick with various diseases, afflicted by torments, demon-possessed, people with epilepsy, and paralytics to Jesus for healing.

Luke wrote of large crowds from Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and across the Jordan who were following Jesus.

The people who followed Jesus had a motive in doing so. Matthew gives us two in Matthew 4:23, 24.

The first motive revolves around His teaching and proclamation of the good news of God’s kingdom. The people of Israel considered Jesus to be a prophet, like the Old Testament prophets. His teachings about the Kingdom of God would have resonated with them.

The second motive is Jesus’ willingness and renown for healing all those who needed His healing power. Jesus could do what no doctor could do, and this drew those desperate for healing and deliverance to Him.

These two motives indicate that the crowds followed Jesus because of His teachings and the miracles He performed. He, therefore, turned around to the crowds and addressed them.

### **The Conditions of True Discipleship**

He started His address with an “*if*,” which indicates a conditional “*if... then...*” statement. The “*if*” makes the statement that a certain condition is to be met, *then*” something else will happen. It shows a **cause-and-effect** relationship between two statements.

Jesus proceeded to give three “*if...*” conditions that needed to be met if any of those who followed Him wanted to be His disciples. All three conditions contain in some form the “*if a condition is not met, **then** he cannot be my disciple*” statement.

1. <sup>26</sup>**If anyone** comes to Me and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife, children, brothers, and sisters, and furthermore, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
2. <sup>27</sup>**(If– added for clarity) whoever** does **not carry his own cross** and **follow Me** cannot be My disciple.
3. <sup>33</sup>**(If – added for clarity) every one** of you who does not **renounce all his own possessions** cannot be My disciple.”

The word “*If*” in this context confronts a person with a choice that needs to be made between two options. It leads to an introspective examination of the seriousness of the intent of a person in becoming a disciple of Christ. “*If*” requires a lifelong commitment of true dedication, self-denial, submission, and death to self.

It cannot be a *superficial* or *emotional* commitment, but must be a “*willful, conscious choice, decision, and intention.*”

“*Willful*” is defined as: “*the power of using one's will; the cognitive process by which an individual **decides on** and **commits** to a particular course of action. It is often associated with terms like intention, decision, choice, and free will.*” (*What Does Volition Mean?*, 2025)

In his newspaper column called “Market Report,” Bill Barnhart once explained the difference between investors and traders in the stock market.

“*A trader in a stock,*” writes Barnhart, “*is making decisions minute-by-minute in the hope of shaving off profits measured in fractions of a dollar.*”

“*An investor, on the other hand, typically buys or sells a stock based on views about the company and the economy at large.*” In other words, traders are wheelers and dealers. They pursue short-term profits.

*Traders may have no confidence whatsoever in the companies in which they buy stock, but they buy, smelling an immediate payoff. By contrast, investors are in it for the long haul. They ‘chain themselves to the mast.’*

*Investors commit their money to a stock, believing that over the years and even decades, the stock will pay strong dividends and steadily grow in value. Investors are not flustered by the typical ups and downs of the market because they believe in the quality of the company, its leaders, and its product.*

*In the kingdom of God, there are also investors and traders. They come to Christ with vastly different goals. Traders in the kingdom want God to improve their lot in this world. If following Christ means pain or hardship, they sell out.*

*But investors in the kingdom stay true to Christ no matter what happens in this world, knowing that eternal dividends await them.*” (Craig Brian Larson, 2007)

The term “*chain themselves to the mast*” comes from Homer’s novel “*Odyssey*,” a Greek Mythological Tale, and refers to **total commitment**. It refers to a going all-out and holding nothing back type of commitment.

The central figure in Homer’s epic tale is a human hero, Odysseus, a sympathetic and complex man. He tries to do the right thing and usually pays attention to what the gods tell him.

He especially heeds advice from the goddess Circe, who warns him about the “Sirens.” These two monsters, who pretend to be beautiful women with amazing voices, try to assure sailors who pass their island that they want to entertain them with beautiful melodies.

What they want, however, is to kill them. Circe warns Odysseus that his men must fill their ears with wax, so they do not hear the Sirens’ beguiling songs:

*“First, you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song.” (Warble means to sing in a trilling manner or with many turns and variations.)*

*“There is a great heap of dead men’s bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore pass these Sirens by, and stop your men’s ears with wax that none of them may hear; but if you like you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a cross-piece halfway up the mast, and they must lash the rope’s ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster.” (Homer & Rieu, 1974)*

This warning triggers fear in Odysseus. He heeds Circe’s warning, taking care to completely block his men’s ears with bees’ wax. The good ship glides across a calm and grey sea toward an island of sloping meadows, golden in the sun. The crew wants to land, but Odysseus knows better. He tells them:

*“That is the Island of the Sirens. Circe warned me to steer clear of it, for the Sirens are beautiful but deadly. They sit beside the ocean, combing their long, golden hair and singing to passing sailors. But anyone who hears their song is bewitched by its sweetness, and they are drawn to that island like iron to a magnet. And their ship smashes upon rocks as sharp as spears. And those sailors join the many victims of the Sirens in a meadow filled with skeletons.” (Homer & Rieu, 1974)*

Taking a large block of beeswax, a gift from Circe, Odysseus breaks it into small pieces and gives one to each of his men. He tells them to soften it and put it into their ears. In this way, they will not hear the song of the Sirens.

But Odysseus wants to hear that famous song and still survive. Circe has told him how to do it. He orders his sailors to tie him firmly to the ship's mast. When he is firmly tied and his men have the beeswax in their ears, they row their ship alongside the island.

Then Odysseus hears the magical song of the Sirens as it floats over the summertime waters:

*“Odysseus, bravest of heroes,  
Draw near to us, on our green island,  
Odysseus, we will teach you wisdom,  
We will give you love, sweeter than honey.  
The songs we sing soothe away sorrow,  
And in our arms, you will be happy.  
Odysseus, bravest of heroes,  
The songs we sing will bring you peace.”* (Homer & Rieu, 1974)

When he hears the words and the music, the song enchants Odysseus' heart. He longs to plunge into the waves and swim to the island. He wants to embrace the Sirens. He strains against the bonds that hold him to the ship's mast. He strains so hard that the bonds cut deeply into the flesh of his back and arms. Nodding and scowling at his earplugged men, he urges them to free him.

Expecting this reaction, the men row harder with their oars. To Odysseus, who is bewitched by the song, the Sirens look as beautiful as Helen of Troy. To his crew, made deaf with beeswax, the Sirens seem like hungry monsters with vicious, crooked claws. The ship speeds forward, and soon the song of the Sirens is an echo of an echo. Only then do the crew members stop rowing and unplug their ears.

Eurylochus unbinds his grateful captain, Odysseus, who has now come to his senses. By heeding the advice of the goddess Circe, Odysseus has avoided a catastrophe. He will face many more trials and temptations before he reaches his home and family.

In an article on commitment: *To the Mast: A Lesson in Commitment* - Monica McCarthy explains what the Ulysses Pact is:

*“Today, we refer to a Ulysses Pact as any freely made decision that is designed and intended to bind oneself in the future and is synonymous with the concept of a ‘living will.’ We recognize that there may be times when we must tie ourselves to a proverbial mast to honor our commitments.*

*Ulysses knew what he wanted and was ready to commit. He also knew his limitations. Sheer willpower was not going to see him through. To accomplish his goal, he had to do the opposite of leaping without a net...*

*He had tied himself down.*

*We make commitments because we know we cannot be trusted to always do the right thing when we are called upon. This is not because we are bad, but because we are human. Goals and passions are not just about what we are going towards, but what we are sacrificing to get there. When we commit, we have to choose this and not that. Possibly for now, or possibly forever, whenever.*

*Commitment prevents the ship from steering off course or sinking into the murky depths below. Commitment is the key to achieving what we want in our work, creative endeavors, wellness, and relationships.*

*To take it a step further, all these aspects of your life come down to your core values and beliefs. What is one surefire way to know what those are and to make sure you do not forget them when the time comes to make difficult choices?*

*Apart from introducing the requirement of a deliberate and willful decision, the two words “If indeed...” also introduce the subject of the failure and incapability of man to maintain his decision.” (McCarthy, 2015)*

Ulysses knew what he wanted, and he was ready to commit, but he also knew his limitations. He knew that sheer willpower was not going to see him through.

The decision to be a disciple of Christ the Lord cannot be maintained by sheer willpower. Neither can it be maintained through emotions and past experiences. It cannot be maintained through any human effort. It can only be maintained by the Lord Jesus, and He knows this very well, for He sets the tone of man’s utter dependence upon Him in Matthew 5:3.

## Study Questions: Discipleship Demands Commitment

### 1. The Context of Jesus' Address

What does the keyword “Now” indicate in Luke 14:25, and why did Jesus turn to address the crowds? Describe the two primary motives for the crowds following Jesus, according to Matthew 4:23–24.

*Answer:*

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### 2. Significance of the Conditional “If”

How does the word “If” in Luke 14:26, 27, and 33 function as a conditional statement? What does it reveal about the nature of the choice required to become a disciple of Jesus?

*Answer:*

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### 3. Three Conditions of Discipleship

List and explain the three conditions Jesus sets for discipleship in Luke 14:26, 27, and 33. Why does the text emphasize that these conditions require a “wilful, conscious choice”?

*Answer:*

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### 4. Investors vs. Traders Analogy

Using Bill Barnhart’s analogy from the “Market Report” (Larson, 2007), explain the difference between “investors” and “traders” in the context of following Jesus. How

does this illustrate the level of commitment required for Discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### **5. The Ulysses Pact and Commitment**

How does the story of Odysseus and the Sirens (Homer & Rieu, 1974) illustrate the concept of commitment in discipleship? According to McCarthy (2015), why is sheer willpower insufficient for sustaining commitment to Jesus?

*Answer:*

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### **6. The Role of Dependence on Jesus**

The text references Matthew 5:3 to highlight human dependence on Jesus for maintaining commitment. How does this verse underscore the limitations of human effort in discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### **7. Motives of the Crowds**

The text identifies two motives for the crowds following Jesus: His teachings about the Kingdom of God and His healing miracles. How might these motives lead to superficial commitment, and how does Jesus address this in His conditions for discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### **8. The Cost of Discipleship**

Why does Jesus emphasize the need for a lifelong commitment involving self-denial, submission, and death to self? How do these requirements challenge modern Christians in their pursuit of discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### **9. Application of the Sirens Metaphor**

In the story of Odysseus, the Sirens represent temptations that could derail commitment. What are some modern “Sirens” that might tempt Christians away from true discipleship, and how can they “tie themselves to the mast” to remain committed?  
*Answer:*

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### **10. Practical Steps for Commitment**

Reflecting on the text, what are three practical steps modern disciples can take to ensure their commitment to Jesus is not superficial but a “willful, conscious choice” that endures challenges?

*Answer:*

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## Part 2: Discipleship Divides

<sup>26</sup>*If anyone comes to me **and** does not hate his own father **and** mother **and** wife, children, brothers, **and** sisters, **and** furthermore, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”*

In His invitation, the Lord Jesus does not put a full stop after the word “me” but adds the keyword “and” indicating a continuation of thought and instruction. The “and” also expresses a condition which follows; “**and** does not **hate** his own father **and** mother **and** wife **and** children **and** brothers **and** sisters, **and** furthermore, even his own life...” The condition is that he must **hate** his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and his own life.

The word *hate* (μισέω, *miseō*) is a verb which implies action and means: ‘To strongly dislike or have aversion toward someone or something that usually results in separation between the one who hates, and the thing hated.’ (Lexham Theological Wordbook, 2025)

It is the usual Septuagint (*Greek Old Testament*) translation of the Hebrew word *שָׂנֵא* (*śānē*, “to hate”). In the New Testament, (*hate, miseō*) is often contrasted with love (*ἀγαπάω, agapaō*); Matt 5:43; Rom 9:13; Heb 1:9; 1 John 2:9–11; and (*φιλέω, phileō*); John 12:25; 15:19)

In general, it implies a separation of oneself from that which is hated, either by physical separation (Luke 19:14) or cessation of actions, thoughts, or ideas (Rev 2:6). (Lexham Theological Wordbook, 2025)

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### **NOT EVERYONE WHO FOLLOWED GOD THROUGH THE DESERT WAS FOR GOD.**

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#### The Tribe of Levi:

A perfect example of what it means to separate oneself from family in absolute dedication to God and obedience to His commands can be found in Ex. 32:25-29. The people of Israel sinned against God in the wilderness when they worshipped the golden calf. Moses knew they had sinned and went down to their encampment. <sup>25</sup>*And when Moses saw that the people were broken loose, for Aaron had let them loose for a derision among their enemies.*

<sup>26</sup> *And Moses stood at the entrance of the camp, and he said, “Whoever is for Yahweh, to me.” And all the sons of Levi were gathered to him. (Ex.32:25-29 Tanakh, 2024 - Some other translations: “Whoever is on the Lord’s side”)*

The word *whoever* excludes no one and includes “*anyone, without limitation or exception*” (Definitions, 2025). However, those who boldly proclaimed the golden calf as their god could not answer the call. They could not even pretend to be on the Lord’s side because their idolatry and rebellion were open defiance against God.

Aaron was of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 17:8), and he, along with many Levites and Israelites, could not claim to be on the Lord’s side. The only ones who could respond to Moses’ call were all the sons of Levi who did not participate in the worship of the golden calf.

It was one thing for these Levites to decide to be on the Lord’s side, but that decision was put to the penultimate test with the next command.

<sup>27</sup>And he said to them, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Put each his sword on his side. Go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill, each his brother and each his friend and each his close relative.’” <sup>28</sup>And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and from the people on that day about three thousand persons fell. (Ex. 32:25-29 Tanakh, 2024 - Some other translations: “*neighbour instead of close relative*”)

This command tested the Levites' commitment and steadfastness in their decision to be on the Lord’s side. When they chose to stand at Moses’ side, they could not have foreseen what would be expected of them next. Yet, without hesitation, they obeyed the command of the Lord *and killed, each his brother and each his friend and each his close relative*. The sons of Levi showed their absolute loyalty to Moses and Yahweh, even to the point of slaying their neighbors, near relations, or kin. (Carpenter, 2017)

<sup>29</sup>And Moses said, “You are ordained today for Yahweh, because each has been against his son and against his brother, and so bringing on you today a blessing.” (Ex. 32:25-29 Tanakh, 2024) According to Driver, S. R. (1911), the zeal of the sons of Levi displayed on Jehovah’s behalf awarded them the priesthood.

<sup>8</sup>And of Levi he said: Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one, whom Thou didst prove at Massah, with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; <sup>9</sup>Who said of his father, and of his mother: ‘I have not seen him’; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew he his own children; for they have observed Thy word, and keep Thy covenant. <sup>10</sup>They shall teach Jacob Thine ordinances, and Israel Thy law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt offering upon Thine altar. (Deut.33:8-10 Tanakh, 2024)

Meaning and Application:  
Commitment to God:

The Levites did not lack love for their family, but during the critical moment of the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, the Levites answered Moses' call, even if it meant standing up against their relatives to uphold God's law. The tribe of Levi distinguished itself by acting zealously for God during the Golden Calf crisis, even over powerful family loyalties.

Disciples of Christ must stand up against their relatives to uphold God's law and in obedience to His commands. They must choose to stand on God's side and act zealously for God instead of their relatives.

#### **Moral Courage:**

Levi teaches that sometimes, faithfulness to higher ideals or truth may put us in tension with social pressures, even from those close to us.

#### **Prioritizing service to God:**

The Levites' loyalty to Hashem (God) and the Torah came even before the powerful bonds of family—a supreme form of dedication. They were willing to obey God's command and put to death the relatives, friends, and neighbours who worshipped the golden calf.

The disciples of Jesus should have a similar loyalty to God and the Word of God. Though not commanded to kill our relatives, we must be willing to put to death any relationship that exists between us and a relative who lives in defiant open rebellion against God and His commands. We must be willing to part from them as one parts from something hated with the utmost hate. Jesus does not encourage actual hatred towards family, but the principle of separation.

#### ***Application and Contemporary Relevance:***

##### **1. Moral Integrity and Courage:**

Situations often arise where doing what is right may go against what is popular or even what family or friends prefer. The Levites' example teaches us to act with integrity, staying loyal to Biblical principles even under pressure.

##### **2. Standing Up for Values:**

In a world with many competing pressures, these passages urge us to uphold our values—in the workplace, with friends, and sometimes even when family or society disagrees. Commitment to ethical and spiritual ideals sometimes demands sacrifice.

##### **3. Balancing Family and Values:**

Jewish life does prioritize family! But, when a conflict arises between what is right and family wishes, the Torah encourages respectful honesty and faithfulness to Jewish values (see Leviticus 19:17, Proverbs 3:6). Jesus' disciples should follow the same principle regarding family and friends.

#### 4. Learning From the Past:

Remembering the consequences of the Golden Calf and the self-correction led by the Levites reminds us to reflect honestly, repent when needed, and continually strive for greater integrity.

##### In Summary:

1. The Levites' unwavering dedication reminds us to stay true to our spiritual commitments, even in challenging circumstances.
2. Our role is not just personal piety, but also communal teaching and example, inspired by Levi's legacy.

## Study Questions: Discipleship Divides

### 1. The Condition of “Hate” in Discipleship

What does Jesus mean by the term “hate” (miseō) in Luke 14:26, according to the Lexham Theological Wordbook (2025)? How does the keyword “and” indicate a continuation of thought in His instruction?

*Answer:*

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### 2. Biblical Context of “Hate”

How is the Greek word “miseō” (hate) contrasted with love (agapaō and phileō) in the New Testament, according to passages like Matthew 5:43 and John 12:25? What does this contrast imply about the nature of separation in discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### 3. The Levites’ Example in Exodus

Describe the events of Exodus 32:25–29 involving the Levites during the Golden Calf incident. How does their response to Moses’ call (“Whoever is for Yahweh, to me”) illustrate the principle of separation required in discipleship?

*Answer:*

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#### 4. The Levites' Commitment

Why was the Levites' decision to obey God's command, even to the point of slaying relatives, considered a test of their commitment? How did this act lead to their ordination as priests? (Reference Deuteronomy 33:8–10; Driver, 1911)

*Answer:*

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#### 5. Prioritizing God Over Family

The text clarifies that Jesus does not encourage literal hatred toward family but a principle of separation. How did the Levites demonstrate this principle, and how should disciples of Jesus apply it today?

*Answer:*

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#### 6. Moral Courage in Discipleship

How does the Levites' example teach moral courage in the face of social pressures, including those from family? Provide a modern example where a Christian might need to prioritize God's commands over family expectations.

*Answer:*

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### 7. The Role of “Whoever”

The text notes that the word “whoever” in Exodus 32:26 excludes no one and includes anyone willing to stand for God. How does this universal call align with Jesus’ inclusive condition in Luke 14:26 (“If anyone comes to Me”)?

*Answer:*

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### 8. Balancing Family and Faith

The text references Leviticus 19:17 and Proverbs 3:6 to emphasize balancing family loyalty with faithfulness to God’s values. How can disciples maintain respect for family while prioritizing obedience to God?

*Answer:*

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### 9. Learning from the Golden Calf Incident

What lessons can modern disciples learn from the consequences of the Golden Calf incident and the Levites’ self-correction? How does this encourage repentance and integrity in discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### 10. Contemporary Application

Reflecting on the text, what are three practical ways modern Christians can demonstrate the kind of commitment shown by the Levites, particularly in situations requiring separation from worldly or familial influences?

*Answer:*

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### Part 3: Discipleship Demands the Cross

<sup>27</sup>**Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.** (NASB 1995) The phrase *cannot be my disciple* means *is not able to be my disciple*.

The person who wants to be a disciple of Jesus must face the reality of the cross, for without the cross, no one is *able* to be Jesus' disciple. Jesus never mentioned the fact of the cross until a certain event.

In Matthew 16:16,21-23, we read:

<sup>16</sup> "Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

<sup>21</sup>From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day." <sup>22</sup>Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, [God forbid], Lord! This shall never happen to You!" <sup>23</sup>But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (NASB 1995, Matt. 16:16,21-23)

The first teaching about the cross was in the context of Jesus telling the disciples of His suffering and crucifixion, Peter's rebuke, and Christ's reprimand.

<sup>24</sup> **Then** Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' <sup>25</sup>For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." The keyword **then** points to the time immediately after the events mentioned in Matthew 16:16,21-23.

Jesus' statement was not out of context, given His reprimand of Peter. The keyword *but* shows a contrast between Peter's view and God's view of accomplishing God's purposes. It shows a contrast between Peter's intent and God's intent and reveals the *carnal man* in Peter.

The words He *turned around* in verse 23 give us an indication of Jesus' thoughts about Peter's words and actions. It implies a quick and swift action where Jesus turned away from Peter toward the other disciples in revulsion. (Robertson, 1930) Jesus' statement to His disciples was to the point: "If anyone wants to follow Me, then he must deny himself, take up his cross, and only then can He follow Me".

If you look at the definition of discipleship, it makes sense that Jesus, at this point, should make this demand. He needed to expose and correct any misconceptions the

disciples had about following Jesus and discipleship, and this was the right time and place.

The word *wants* might be considered similar to the emotion *desire*. The disciples might have had the desire to follow Jesus and be His disciples, but they had to realize and understand the conditions. The *first condition* outlined in the context of Jesus' teaching is self-denial.

The word *self-denial* is defined as:

- i. *Trait of practicing self-discipline*
  - ii. *The act of denying yourself; controlling your impulses*
  - iii. *Taking action that sacrifices one's own benefit for the good of others*
  - iv. *Renunciation of your own interests in favor of the interests of others*
- (Definitions. Net, n.d.).

The disciples had to learn to be self-disciplined. According to (Definitions. Net, n.d.), self-discipline is *a personal attribute that enables an individual to control and regulate their behaviors, emotions, and actions, often to improve oneself, achieve personal objectives, or maintain a particular standard of behavior. It involves the ability to persist with tasks, make healthy choices, and resist temptations or distractions that prevent progress* (Definitions. Net, n.d.).

They had to learn to *control* their *impulses*. Peter's impulsive act of rebuking the Lord is one clear example of the self-centred nature still active in the disciples. They had to learn to *actively sacrifice* their *own benefits* for the *good of others* and *renounce* their *own interests* in *favour of others'* interests. They had to make the act of self-denial a *deliberate, resolute act of the will*, and learn to deny themselves, just as the Lord Jesus had denied Himself.

<sup>5</sup>*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup>*who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup>*but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* <sup>8</sup>*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8, NASB 1995, 2020)*

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*"He humbled Himself—not by losing what He was, but by taking on what He was not."*

*—Augustine of Hippo*

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The *second condition* Jesus sets forth is the *crucifixion of the self*. The word cross primarily indicates an upright stake or beam, and secondarily, a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution. (Wiseman et al., 1996)

Crucifixion was extensively used by the Romans when slaves, provincials, and the lowest type of criminal were given the death penalty. After a criminal's condemnation, he was scourged and forced to carry the crossbeam to the place of his torture and death. At the scene of the crucifixion, the condemned man was stripped naked, laid on the cross, and his arms or hands tied or nailed to the cross.

The cross was an instrument of pain, suffering, humiliation, punishment, and death. The verb form of the Greek word cross “σταυρός” (*stauros*) is σταυρώω (*stauroō*) and means ‘I fasten to a cross.’

The sin of Adam brought about a profound shift in man's mindset and attitude towards God. According to Wiseman (1996), the thrust of the demonic temptation in the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 lies in its subtle suggestion to man that he could be equal to his Maker (*‘you will be like God ... ‘*). According to Reinhold Niebuhr (1953), man's sin lies in his pretension to be God.

In the act of snatching at equality with God, man attempted to assert his independence of God and call into question the nature and order of his existence as a creature *in utter dependence upon the grace and provision of His Creator* (Wiseman, 1996). In this state of “self-declared god” and animosity, man is not able and cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Man, and his carnal nature, *must die if* he wants to be a disciple of Jesus.

### The Carnal Man:

1. Is an Emissary of Satan:

*“He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ ”*

According to (Mounce, 1995/2011, p. 6), Jesus' calling Peter a Satan was a strong rebuke, because he was opposing the will and plan of God, and was therefore an *emissary of Satan*.

Romans 8:5: *For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit* (NASB, 2020).

Peter, in his carnal reasoning and action, played the part of Satan in tempting Jesus not to go to the cross as Satan had done in the wilderness. Well-meaning friends, relatives, and the carnal self are emissaries of Satan who seek to oppose the will and plans of God in a person's own life and the lives of others. Peter was a friend and disciple of Jesus, but he acted and reasoned from a carnal perspective.

*“None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character” (Robertson, 1933).*

2. Is a Stumbling Block to God:

*“You are a stumbling block to Me.”*

According to Robertson (1933), Peter acted as Satan's catspaw, albeit in ignorance, nonetheless. He had set a trap for Jesus that would undo all His mission to earth. He was like a stone out of its proper place, lying right across the road that Jesus had to travel on, as a stumbling stone.

By acting according to the dictates of the carnal man, Peter became the catspaw of Satan and tried to prevent God from fulfilling His plan.

***Acting as a catspaw:***

*Being used as a tool or pawn by someone else to achieve their goals, often without realizing it. It comes from an old fable where a monkey tricks a cat into pulling chestnuts from a fire, burning the cat's paw while the monkey benefits.*

*So, if someone is "acting as a catspaw," they're unwittingly doing someone else's dirty work or taking risks for another's gain. For example, a politician might use a junior aide as a catspaw to leak sensitive information, keeping their own hands clean.*

3. Is Not Set on God's Interests:

*“for you are not setting your mind on God's interests.”*

Paul teaches in Rom. 8:7 that *“the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.”* This means *“that the thinking of the natural man is conditioned and governed by enmity directed against God”* (Wiseman, 1996, p. 1107).

4. Is Set on Man's Interests:

*“but man's interests.”*

In his pretension to be God, man *“pays homage to the enemy of God and his own foul ambitions”* (Wiseman, 1996). Peter's interests were not those of God but of Satan and himself. Though he would never have worshipped Satan consciously, he was an emissary and catspaw of Satan and his own ambitions. Under the impression that he was acting and speaking in the best interest of Jesus, he was acting in hostility against God's plan and will in his *own interests*.

Jesus was telling the disciples that unless each one *denied himself* with lethal determination, took up *the cross of death*, and *fastened himself* to that cross, he could not be a disciple of Jesus. The old self of the disciples had to die, because it is an *emissary* of Satan, a *stumbling block to God*, and *not set on the interests of God*, but of *man's*.

The *death to self* was to be affected in Jesus through His crucifixion by God the Father. At that moment, that still needed to happen for the disciples at the crucifixion, but was accomplished for all disciples in the future.

<sup>30</sup> “*But by His doing (of Him), you are in Christ Jesus.*” <sup>6</sup> “**Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him.**” <sup>8</sup> “**Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.**” (NASB 1995, 1 Co 1:30, Rom 6:6,8)

The phrase ἐξ αὐτοῦ (ex autou, of Him) expresses both the source and the cause of the being in Christ. It is through God that you and your old self were placed into Christ on the cross. It is through God that the cross of Christ brought about the crucifixion of yourself to the world and the world to you. It is the cross of Christ that brings about death to self.

“*But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **through which** the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*” (NASB 1995, Gal 6:14).

The word *knowing* implies understanding. *It refers to the act or state of possessing information, understanding, or awareness about a particular fact, concept, event, or situation. It involves having a mental grasp, certainty, or confidence regarding something based on personal experience, observation, study, or evidence.* (Definitions.Net, n.d.)

Knowing refers to the fact that: <sup>6</sup> “**that our old self was crucified with Him.**”

Paul writes of this in Gal 2:20: “***I have been crucified with Christ...***” The Greek word *συσταυρόω* (*sustaurōō* – *to impale in company with*) bears witness to this act of God that was accomplished in the past.

Paul appropriated this for himself, and he lived according to that accomplished reality “***...and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.***” Paul’s identification with Christ has become so complete that his separate personality is merged into that of Christ. (Robertson, 1933)

*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.*”  
(NASB 1995, 2020, 1 Co 1:30, Rom 6:6,8, Gal. 2:20)

Similarly, it is something that each person who wants to follow Christ must also appropriate for themselves in the same way Paul did. Their identification with Jesus must become so complete that their separate personalities are merged into that of Christ.

It is impossible to exemplify the teachings of Jesus and model one's life after His example if the old self, the *I, Me, and Myself* with all its ambitions and desires, are not fastened to the cross and crucified with Christ.

## Study Questions: Discipleship Demands the Cross

### 1. The Necessity of the Cross

According to Luke 14:27, why is carrying one's cross essential for being a disciple of Jesus? What does the phrase "cannot be my disciple" imply about the role of the cross in discipleship?

Answer:

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### 2. Context of Jesus' Teaching on the Cross

How does the context of Matthew 16:16, 21–23 (Peter's confession, Jesus' prediction of His death, and Peter's rebuke) set the stage for Jesus' teaching about the cross in Matthew 16:24–25? Why was this the right moment to introduce this concept?

Answer:

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### 3. Peter's Rebuke and Jesus' Response

Why did Jesus rebuke Peter as "Satan" in Matthew 16:23, according to Mounce (1995/2011)? How does the keyword "but" highlight the contrast between Peter's perspective and God's purposes?

Answer:

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### 4. Self-Denial as a Condition

The text defines self-denial with four aspects (trait of self-discipline, controlling impulses, sacrificing personal benefit, and renouncing personal interests). Explain each element and

how it relates to Jesus' call to deny oneself in Matthew 16:24.

Answer:

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### 5. The Cross as a Symbol

What does the text mean by describing the cross as an “instrument of pain, suffering, humiliation, punishment, and death”? How does the Greek word “stauroō” (to fasten to a cross) deepen the understanding of this requirement? (Reference Wiseman et al., 1996)

Answer:

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### 6. The Carnal Man's Obstacles

The text lists four characteristics of the carnal man that prevent discipleship (emissary of Satan, stumbling block, not set on God's interests, set on man's interests). Explain each and provide an example of how they might manifest in a modern context. (Reference Romans 8:5–7)

Answer:

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### 7. Jesus' Example of Self-Denial

How does Philippians 2:5–8 illustrate Jesus' own self-denial, and why is this a model for disciples? How does Augustine of Hippo's quote clarify this act of humility?

Answer:

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### 8. Crucifixion of the Old Self

According to Romans 6:6 and Galatians 2:20, how is the disciple's old self crucified with Christ? Why is this identification with Christ's death essential for following Jesus? (Reference Robertson, 1933)

Answer:

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### 9. The Role of God in Crucifixion

The text emphasizes that the crucifixion of the self is "by His doing" (1 Corinthians 1:30). How does the phrase "ex autou" (of Him) underscore God's role in enabling disciples to die to self?

Answer:

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### 10. Application to Modern Discipleship

Reflecting on the text, what are three practical ways modern Christians can "take up their cross" daily to live out the call to self-denial and follow Jesus? Provide examples of how these practices counter the carnal man's tendencies.

Answer:

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## Part 4: Discipleship is Costly

### *Building a Tower*

The Lord Jesus many times used everyday examples in His teachings to drive home His points. In His illustrations of building a tower and a king going to war, He emphasized one crucial aspect in the decision to follow Him.

<sup>28</sup>“For which of you would not **first sit down and count the cost**”

<sup>31</sup>“Or what king, as he goeth to encounter another king in war, will not **sit down first and take counsel?**”

**The rationale is:** <sup>25</sup>For whoever **wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.**”

In the decision to follow Jesus, a person must deliberate and understand that he must give up his life and everything else in this world to be able to follow Jesus.

Therefore, Jesus emphasizes the crucial aspect of first sitting down to count the cost and to take counsel before deciding. The realization must always be *that to lose is to keep and to keep is to lose*.

Whatever a person wants to save will result in a loss, and whatever he chooses to lose will be saved.

Most people who follow Jesus choose to hold onto their lives and possessions. They expect Him to accept their decision, bless them, and allow them to serve Him as they dictate.

Jesus told the crowds around him to calculate the cost, to consider the two options, and decide which one is the best.

The keyword “*for*” points to a further explanation of the cost of discipleship, and the word “*you*” makes it relevant and personal. The word “*desiring*” means a person *wants to do or longs to do* something.

The question is asked, which one of them (the crowds) who wished to build a tower “*would not **first sit down and count the cost, whether he has wherewith to complete it?***”

There are always expenses involved in a building project. The Greek word δαπάνη (dapanē - expense) used in this context is from δάπτω (daptō), which means *to devour*.

The implication is that the person who wants to build a tower should realize that it is expensive to build a tower.

Therefore, he *must first sit down and calculate the cost to decide if he has enough money available and if he is willing to part with the required amount of money to complete the whole project.*

If he starts building without enough resources, he will not be able to complete the tower and will become a mockery among the people.

Likewise, if he has all the funds available but at a certain point decides the cost is too high to continue the project, he will become a mockery to the people.

<sup>29</sup>*“Lest haply, **when** he hath laid a foundation, **and** is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup>saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish”.*

Like a person who wants to build a tower must first sit down to calculate the cost required to complete it, a person who wants to follow Jesus must also first sit down and calculate the cost required.

The one who builds a tower *must be willing to part with some of his money to complete it, but the one who wants to follow Jesus must be willing to give up everything to follow Him.*

The following story illustrates giving up everything for the sake of following Jesus.

#### *The Merchant's Call*

*In a bustling coastal city, there lived a merchant named Eliam, renowned for his wealth and shrewd dealings. His warehouses brimmed with silks, spices, and rare jewels, and his name was spoken with respect in every marketplace. Yet, despite his riches, Eliam's heart was restless, yearning for a purpose his gold could not buy.*

*One evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon, “Follow me,” Jesus said, his voice gentle but unyielding. “Leave your nets, your wares, your worries—bring only your heart.” Eliam's hands trembled. His entire life—his trade routes, his contracts, his comfortable home—flashed before him. To follow meant to abandon it all.*

*That night, Eliam could not sleep. He thought of his workers who depended on him, the deals he had spent years securing, the respect he had earned. But Jesus' words burned brighter than his fears. By dawn, he made his choice.*

*Eliam sold his warehouses, distributed his wealth to the poor, and freed his servants with generous provisions. With nothing but a cloak and staff, he followed Jesus. The city whispered of his madness, but Eliam felt a peace he had never known. Each step with Jesus brought joy that no treasure could match.*

*Years later when Eliam's old friends saw him—simple, weathered, but radiant—they marveled. “Why give up everything?” they asked. Eliam smiled and said, “I did not*

give up anything. I gained everything—life, purpose, and a kingdom worth more than all my gold.”

### *Going to War*

<sup>31</sup>**Or what king, as he goeth to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?**

<sup>32</sup>**Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and asketh conditions of peace.**

The keyword *or* indicates a continuation in the same vein as the previous discourse. This time, Jesus used the illustration of a king going off to war against another king.

The same principle of deliberation is applied in this illustration. A king who plans to go to war will first sit down and consult with his advisors and generals to decide if he can defeat his enemy.

If he is unable to defeat the enemy, he will send ambassadors to ask for a peace treaty; otherwise, his whole kingdom will be destroyed.

<sup>33</sup>*In the same way, therefore, everyone of you who does not renounce all his own possessions cannot be my disciple.”*

“*In the same way*” is a comparison to the one who wanted to build a tower and the king who had to conduct a war. They both had to determine the costs involved; for one, it was his money, and for the other, his kingdom.

After they had determined what was required to obtain the desired outcome, they acted accordingly and decisively.

The one gave money to build his tower, and the king surrendered his kingdom. He sent an ambassador to the invading king to ask for peace.

The word “*therefore*” is a keyword pointing to what has previously been said or written. In this instance, it points to everything Jesus said from the start of His address to the crowds.

“Therefore” is also a keyword of **Result**, and the result is that no one can be Jesus’ disciple unless he is willing to part with everything he owns.

### **The Young King's Dilemma**

*In a fertile valley cradled by mountains, there ruled a young king named Arion, newly crowned and eager to prove his strength. His kingdom, though prosperous, was*

*small, with an army of ten thousand loyal soldiers. Across the river, a rival king, Darius, commanded a vast empire with twenty thousand battle-hardened warriors.*

*One spring, rumors spread that Darius planned to invade Arion's lands to seize its rich fields. Arion's advisors urged him to rally his troops and meet Darius in battle, their pride stoked by tales of past victories. But Arion, though young, was not reckless. That night, he retreated to his chambers, lit a single lamp, and sat in silence, pondering.*

*He summoned his generals and asked, "Can our ten thousand stand against Darius's twenty thousand?" The generals boasted of courage and strategy, but Arion pressed them for numbers, supplies, and outcomes. The truth emerged: victory was uncertain, and defeat could cost everything—his people, his lands, his legacy.*

*Arion thought of his father's teachings: a wise king counts the cost before acting. As dawn broke, he made his decision. While Darius's army was still days away, Arion sent a delegation of trusted emissaries, carrying gifts and a message of peace. "Let us share the valley's bounty," Arion proposed, "and avoid the bloodshed that benefits neither of us."*

*Darius, impressed by Arion's humility and foresight, agreed to a treaty. The two kings met, not as foes, but as allies, forging a peace that enriched both kingdoms. Arion's people praised him, not for the glory of battle, but for the wisdom to seek peace when the cost of war was too great.*

## Study Questions: Discipleship is Costly

### 1. The Principle of Counting the Cost

How do Jesus' parables of building a tower and a king going to war (Luke 14:28–31) emphasize the importance of counting the cost of discipleship? What does the keyword “for” in Luke 14:28 indicate about the explanation of this principle?

*Answer:*

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### 2. The Rationale of Losing and Gaining

Explain the rationale given in Luke 14:25, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” How does this principle apply to the decision to follow Jesus?

*Answer:*

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### 3. The Illustration of Building a Tower

What does the parable of building a tower (Luke 14:28–30) teach about the cost of discipleship? How does the Greek word “dapanē” (expense) and its root “daptō” (to devour) deepen the understanding of this cost?

*Answer:*

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### 4. Consequences of Not Counting the Cost

According to Luke 14:29–30, what happens to the person who begins building a tower but cannot finish it? How does this consequence parallel the risks of following Jesus without full commitment?

*Answer:*

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**5. The Merchant’s Call**

How does the story of Eliam the Merchant illustrate the cost of discipleship? What did Eliam gain by giving up everything to follow Jesus, and how does this reflect the principle of losing to find life?

*Answer:*

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**6. The Illustration of the King Going to War**

In the illustration of the king going to war (Luke 14:31–32), what does the king’s decision to seek peace illustrate about counting the cost of discipleship? How does the keyword “or” connect this parable to the previous one?

*Answer:*

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**7. The Young King’s Dilemma**

How does the story of King Arion demonstrate the wisdom of counting the cost before acting? What lessons can disciples learn from Arion’s choice to pursue peace rather than risk everything in war?

*Answer:*

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**8. Renouncing All Possessions**

Why does Jesus conclude in Luke 14:33 that “everyone of you who does not renounce all his own possessions cannot be my disciple”? How does the keyword “therefore” tie this conclusion to the preceding parables?

*Answer:*

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### 9. The Role of Deliberation

The text emphasizes the need to “sit down and count the cost” or “take counsel” before deciding to follow Jesus. Why is deliberate decision-making critical for discipleship, and how does it differ from impulsive or emotional commitment?

*Answer:*

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### 10. Contemporary Application

Reflecting on the text, what are three practical ways modern Christians can “count the cost” of discipleship in their daily lives? Provide examples of what they might need to renounce to follow Jesus fully.

*Answer:*

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## Part 5: Uncommitted Discipleship is Dangerous

<sup>34</sup>“**Therefore**, salt is good, **but if** even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup>“It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (NASB 1995, n.d.)

In the article “Never Read a Bible Verse,” Greg Koukl writes that a person must always read the “*paragraph, not just the verse.*” One must always “*take stock of the relevant material above and below since the context frames the verse and gives it specific meaning*”. (Never Read a Bible Verse, n.d.)

Most often, if not almost always, people tend to take one verse, interpret it in a way that fits their ideas, and apply it out of context. They ignore certain keywords that indicate a continuation of a statement or a reference to a previous statement.

The keyword “*therefore*” points to the previous statements Jesus made before the *statement about salt*. Additionally, it also indicates *Purpose* or *Result*, and in this verse, to both.

The *purpose* is linked to the first reference Jesus made to salt during the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:13: “*You are the salt of the earth...*” (NASB 1995, n.d.) Paraphrased to put it into context, it will read: <sup>13</sup>“*You are the salt of the earth...* <sup>34</sup>*salt is good, **but...***”

The followers of Jesus are the *salt of the earth*, **but** they can only be *good salt* if they live according to Jesus' teachings; **otherwise**, they become “tasteless” and useless.

Very often, preachers preach that the followers of Jesus are the salt of the earth, but they purposefully neglect the conditions that must be met to be **good salt**.

The keyword **but** indicates a contrast between *good salt* and salt that *has lost its flavor*. In Mark 9:50, we read that salt can be deprived of its salt content. (NASB 1995, n.d.)

From a scientific perspective, pure sodium chloride (salt) cannot just lose its salty taste on its own. However, in certain situations, salt can effectively **lose its saltiness through:**

### 1. Contamination or Adulteration

- In ancient times, salt was often not pure salt because it was mixed with gypsum, sand, or other minerals from salt deposits or the Dead Sea. If the salt were exposed to moisture, the actual salt could dissolve and leach away, leaving behind the tasteless impurities. What remained looked like salt but no longer tasted like salt.

## 2. Chemical Reaction

- Salt can react with certain chemicals to form other compounds that do not taste salty.

## 3. Dilution

- If a small amount of salt is dissolved in a large amount of water or mixed into a large bulk of material, its salty taste may no longer be detected.

## 4. Absorbing Moisture

- Salt can clump and harden by absorbing water from the air. In some instances, this alters its texture and usability. If the soluble part dissolves and drains away, the residue would be tasteless.

### Salt's Purpose

- **Flavor:** Salt gives a distinct taste to food.
- **Preservation:** Salt prevents decay
- **Purify:** Salt was used in sacrifices as an emblem of incorruption and purity. (Lev 2:13)

Just as impure salt in the ancient world lost its distinct salty taste, a disciple can lose their distinctiveness in the world:

- **Half-hearted commitment and surrender** → lead to compromise and unfaithfulness.
- **Compromise with the world** → Mixing with the impurities of the world dilutes holiness and destroys witness.
- **Neglect of spiritual life** → Prayer, Scripture, fellowship, and obedience keep a disciple "salty." Without these, the flavor fades.
- **Dilution of God's Word** → If disciples hide their testimony or water down the Word of God, their impact is lost.
- **Absorbing the wrong influences** → Just as salt can absorb moisture and become useless, disciples can absorb worldly values and lose their kingdom effectiveness.

Disciples who are not fully committed to obeying the conditions Jesus set for those who want to follow Him are like useless salt. Jesus warns that they are good for nothing and will be cast out where they will be trampled upon (Matt 5:13). He emphasizes this with a phrase that He often repeated when teaching those with Him. "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

In Matt 7:21, Jesus says: "*Not everyone who **says to Me**, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will** of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*"

## Study Questions: Uncommitted Discipleship is Dangerous

### 1. Contextual Importance of Scripture

According to Greg Koukl’s article “Never Read a Bible Verse,” why is it critical to read a verse in its broader context? How does the keyword “therefore” in Luke 14:34 connect to Jesus’ previous statements?

*Answer:*

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### 2. The Salt Metaphor in Context

How does the text connect Jesus’ statement in Luke 14:34–35 to His earlier teaching in Matthew 5:13 (“You are the salt of the earth”)? What does it mean for disciples to be “good salt”?

*Answer:*

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### 3. Conditions for Being Good Salt

The text states that preachers often neglect the conditions required to be “good salt.” Based on the broader context of Jesus’ teachings (e.g., Luke 14:26–33), what are some of these conditions for true discipleship?

*Answer:*

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#### 4. How Salt Loses Its Saltiness

List and explain the four ways the text describes how salt can lose its saltiness (contamination, chemical reaction, dilution, absorbing moisture). How do these correspond to ways disciples can lose their distinctiveness?

*Answer:*

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#### 5. Purpose of Salt

The text outlines three purposes of salt: flavour, preservation, and purification (Leviticus 2:13). How do these purposes reflect the role of a disciple in the world? Provide an example for each purpose.

*Answer:*

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#### 6. Consequences of Uncommitted Discipleship

According to the text, what happens to disciples who are like “tasteless” salt (Luke 14:34–35; Matthew 5:13)? How does Jesus’ warning in Matthew 7:21 reinforce this consequence?

*Answer:*

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### 7. Ways Disciples Lose Distinctiveness

The text lists five ways disciples can lose their distinctiveness (half-hearted commitment, compromise with the world, neglect of spiritual life, dilution of God’s Word, absorbing wrong influences). Explain each and suggest one practical way to avoid each pitfall.

*Answer:*

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### 8. The Call to Hear

What is the significance of Jesus’ phrase, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”? How does this challenge modern Christians to respond to the teaching on uncommitted discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### 9. Application to Modern Discipleship

Reflecting on the metaphor of tasteless salt, how can modern Christians ensure they remain “salty” in their faith? Provide three practical steps based on the text’s warnings about uncommitted discipleship.

*Answer:*

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## 10. Personal Reflection

In light of Jesus' teaching on the dangers of uncommitted discipleship, evaluate your own commitment to following Jesus. What areas of your life might be at risk of becoming "tasteless," and how can you address them?

*Answer:*

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## The Disciple and the Bible

<sup>16</sup> **"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16, NASB 1995 - Lockman Foundation, 2025)**

*"The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that **to disbelieve** or **disobey** any word of Scripture is to **disbelieve** or **disobey** God."* (Grudem, 1994)

### *God is the Author of the Bible*

**All the words in Scripture spoken by God, either directly or indirectly through a prophet or scribe, are God's words.** Reports of other people's words included in Scripture are God's report of what they said and come to us by His authority if they are rightly interpreted in context. (Grudem, 1994)

In the Old Testament, the prophet's introductory phrase *"Thus says the Lord..."* was identical in form to: *"Thus says the king..."* In ancient times, this phrase was used as a prelude to the decrees given by kings to their subjects and could not be ignored or disobeyed.

In using the prelude *"Thus says the Lord..."*, the prophets declared themselves ambassadors of God speaking His words to the nations. Every word a prophet spoke had to be from God; otherwise, the prophet would be considered a false prophet.

The New Testament bears witness to the writings of the Old Testament as God's words. 2 Timothy 3:16 declares that **all Scripture** is *inspired* by God. The word *"inspired"* means *"God-breathed"* from the Greek word Θεόπνευστος (thēōpneustōs – divinely breathed) and must be understood as a metaphor for *speaking the words of Scripture*. (Grudem, 1994)

The New Testament writings are part of **all the Scripture** that was *God-breathed*. Peter classifies Paul's epistles in 2 Peter 3:16 as part of Scripture, and in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes Jesus' words in Luke 10:7 and calls them Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gave instructions to the Corinthian church, and in verse 37 writes: *"...the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment"*. (NASB 1995 - Lockman Foundation, 2025)

In John 14:26 and 16:13, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would remind the disciples of all He had said and would guide them in all truth. The Holy Spirit was superintending everything and helped the disciples to remember and record everything Jesus told without error.

### *Scripture Authenticates Itself*

The Divine authority of Scripture cannot be established through appeal to any authority higher than itself. Appealing to a higher authority to prove the Bible as God's Word would nullify its claim as our highest authority. Scripture's authority would be rendered subordinate to the standard appealed to for its endorsement as God's Word.

If Scripture's divine authority is grounded in human reason, logic, historical accuracy, or scientific truth, then these become the higher standard, deemed more reliable than God's Word itself. Every argument for ultimate authority must be made to that authority; therefore, the burden of proof lies with the authority claiming that it is the highest authority. (*Grudem, 1994*)

The truthfulness of Scripture commends itself as being authentic and authoritative because it is fully in accord with all that we know about the world, ourselves, and God. It commends itself as being far more convincing than any other intellectual creation of the human mind.

Sin caused our perception of God and creation to become warped, causing us to think erroneously about God and creation. In a sinless world, the Bible would commend itself perfectly to all people, but because of sin, people's perception of reality is distorted. Therefore, they do not recognize the validity and authority of God's Word.

The Holy Spirit, through His overcoming the effect of sin in our lives, enables us to be persuaded that the Bible is the actual Word of God. Therefore, to disbelieve and disobey Scripture is to disbelieve and disobey God. (*Grudem, 1994*)

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*"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (Jn 14:15 - NASB 1995)*

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### *The Necessity of the Bible*

The Bible is essential for understanding the Gospel, maintaining a spiritual life, and discerning God's will.

#### *1. Knowledge of the Gospel*

<sup>13</sup> for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" <sup>16</sup> However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah

says, “Lord, who has believed our report?”<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Rom 10:13-17 – NASB 1995)

The keyword “for” indicates that something previously said is relevant to what follows. Paul was speaking about confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised Him from the dead, and now he addressed the issue of hearing God’s Word.

The following line of reasoning can be assumed from the above statement. (i) A person must call on the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved. (ii) People must believe in Him to be able to be saved. (iii) People cannot believe in Him if they have not heard of Him. (iv) They cannot hear of Him unless someone tells them about Him. (v) The conclusion is that saving faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God, and hearing the Gospel comes through the preaching of the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

Various passages of Scripture clearly state that salvation only comes through faith in the Lord Jesus alone. John 3:18 states: “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (NASB:1995)

According to Grudem (1994), the exclusiveness of salvation through Christ alone is because He alone could die for our sins. Paul says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...” (1 Tim. 2:5–6 – NASB 1995).

Reconciliation with God can only occur through Christ. The Bible is necessary for salvation, for it is through the hearing of the Gospel message or the reading of it in the Bible that people are saved.

## 2. Maintaining a Spiritual Life

In Matthew 4:4, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (NASB 1995).

With this statement, He indicated that through the reading and studying of the Word of God, our spiritual lives are maintained. Reading God’s Word daily for our spiritual nourishment is as vital and even more so than the physical nourishment of our bodies.

According to Grudem (1994), neglecting regular reading of God’s Word is as detrimental to the health of our souls as neglecting physical food is to the health of our bodies.

Moses warned the people of Israel about the importance of obeying God’s word.<sup>45</sup> When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel,<sup>46</sup> he said to them, “Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law.”<sup>47</sup> “For it is not an idle word

*for you; indeed, it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.” (NASB: 1995, Dt 32:45–47)*

Although we are not Israelites and we did not cross the Jordan into the promised land, this also applies to us. He warned the Israelites *to take his words and all the words of the law to heart.*

The phrase *take to heart* means *to take something seriously, deeply, or personally, often with an emotional impact. It suggests that a person internalize advice, criticism, or a sentiment, letting it affect their feelings, thoughts, or actions.* (Definitions.net)

The word *take* comes from Old English **tacan**, meaning *"to grasp, seize, or receive,"* borrowed from Old Norse **taka**. In the context of *"take to heart,"* it implies actively receiving or absorbing something into one's emotional or moral core. In religious or moral contexts, it means to make that which was learned part of one's nature.

The phrase *"to observe carefully"* means to *"pay close attention to detail and take precautions to avoid harm or mistakes. It implies a sense of caution, thoroughness, diligence, and precision in performing a particular task."* (Definitions.net)

*Idle words* generally refer to words that are spoken without any substantial purpose, meaningful content, or impact. Moses was warning the people of Israel not to take his words and the words of the Law as meaningless and without purpose because it is *life to them.*

Before these words Moses spoke to the people of Israel he also warned them: *"...by loving the Lord your God, by **obeying** His voice, and by holding fast to Him; **for this is your life and the length of your days**, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."* (NASB: 1995, Dt 30:20)

Reading and studying God's Word is not only about nourishment for the spiritual life but also about obeying the commands of God, for it is life.

The Bible is therefore necessary for maintaining spiritual life and for growth in the Christian life.

### 3. The Bible is Necessary for Certain Knowledge of God's Will

According to Grudem (1994), all the people ever born have some knowledge of God's will through their conscience. This knowledge is often indistinct and cannot give certainty.

Grudem continues to state that *"if there were no written Word of God, we could not be certain about God's will through other means, such as conscience, advice from*

*others, an internal witness of the Holy Spirit, changed circumstances, and the use of sanctified reasoning and common sense.”*

These all might give an approximation of God’s will in more or less reliable ways, but from these means alone, no certainty about God’s will could ever be attained, at least in a fallen world where sin distorts our perception of right and wrong, brings faulty reasoning into our thinking processes, and causes us to suppress from time to time the testimony of our consciences. (Grudem 1994)

In the Bible, we do have clear and definite statements about God’s will. God has not revealed everything to us, but what He has revealed is enough for us to know His will.

As in the time of Moses, God has revealed His Word to us that we might walk in His ways and do His will. *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever that we may do all the words of this law” (NASB: 1995, Dt 29:29).*

If we want to have a certain knowledge about God’s will, we must study the Bible, for it is through the Bible that God reveals His will.

## Study Questions: The Disciple and the Bible

### 1. Authority of Scripture

According to Grudem (1994), what does it mean that all words in Scripture are God’s words? How does disbelieving or disobeying Scripture equate to disbelieving or disobeying God? (Reference 2 Timothy 3:16)

*Answer:*

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### 2. God as the Author of Scripture

How does the text describe God’s authorship of the Bible, including both direct and indirect words? Explain the significance of the Old Testament phrase “Thus says the Lord...” in establishing prophetic authority.

*Answer:*

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### 3. Inspiration of Scripture

What does the term “inspired” (Theopneustos) mean in 2 Timothy 3:16, and how does it apply to both Old and New Testament writings? Provide examples from 2 Peter 3:16 and 1 Timothy 5:18.

*Answer:*

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#### 4. Role of the Holy Spirit in Scripture

How did the Holy Spirit ensure the accuracy of the New Testament writings, according to John 14:26 and 16:13? Why is this significant for the disciple's trust in Scripture?

*Answer:*

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#### 5. Self-Authentication of Scripture

Why can't Scripture's divine authority be established by appealing to a higher authority, according to Grudem (1994)? How does the truthfulness of Scripture commend itself despite human sinfulness?

*Answer:*

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#### 6. Impact of Sin on Perceiving Scripture

The text states that sin warps human perception of God and creation, affecting recognition of Scripture's authority. How does the Holy Spirit overcome this barrier? (Reference Grudem, 1994)

*Answer:*

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#### 7. Necessity of the Bible for the Gospel

Using Romans 10:13–17, explain why the Bible is essential for knowledge of the Gospel. Outline Paul's line of reasoning about how faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ.

Answer:

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### 8. Maintaining a Spiritual Life

How does Matthew 4:4 (quoting Deuteronomy 8:3) emphasize the necessity of Scripture for spiritual nourishment? Why does Grudem (1994) compare neglecting Scripture to neglecting physical food?

Answer:

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### 9. Taking Scripture to Heart

The text references Deuteronomy 32:45–47, where Moses urges Israel to “take to heart” God’s words. What does the phrase “take to heart” mean, and how does it apply to a disciple’s approach to Scripture?

Answer:

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### 10. Scripture and God’s Will

According to Grudem (1994), why is the Bible necessary for certain knowledge of God’s will? How does Deuteronomy 29:29 support the idea that God reveals enough for us to know His will?

Answer:

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### 11. Obedience to Scripture

How does John 14:15 (“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”) connect the disciples’ love for Jesus with obedience to Scripture? Why is this obedience critical for discipleship?

*Answer:*

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### 12. Application to Modern Discipleship

Reflecting on the text, how can modern disciples ensure they treat Scripture as authoritative and necessary in their daily lives? Provide three practical steps to engage with the Bible for spiritual growth and obedience.

*Answer:*

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# The Praying Disciple

<sup>1</sup> “Now He was telling them a parable to show that **at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.**” (NASB: 1995, Lk 18:1).

Private prayer is one of the most neglected duties among the disciples of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Yet, prayer is to faith what breath is to the body. A person cannot live without breath, and likewise, a person cannot live without prayer. For many disciples of Christ, prayer is a mere formality. They utter a few short sentences in the morning and maybe at night, and that is the extent of it.

John Bunyan describes prayer as “*a sincere, sensible, affectionate outpouring of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit.*” (Bunyan, 1965)

EM Bounds states prayer is “*simply faith, claiming its natural yet marvellous prerogatives — faith taking possession of its illimitable inheritance.*” (Bounds, 2013)

According to Ryle (2018), prayer is vital to a person’s salvation. Certain things are indispensable for the health and well-being of a person’s soul, and each person must attend to these things themselves. Every person must repent for themselves, and every person must personally speak to God in prayer.

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*To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without Heaven. It is to be on the road to Hell. (J C Ryle)*

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Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897 – 1963) viewed prayer not as a ritual or a means to an end but as the *very essence of the Christian life*. It is a *continual communion* with the Divine that transforms the soul and aligns it with God's purposes. He defined prayer as *the primary means of coming into God's presence*, a lifeline that counters the “*barrenness of busyness*” in modern life.

In today's fast-paced world of industrialization, relentless performance demands, and instant solutions, Christians often overlook the vital importance of nurturing their personal relationship with God. Prayer, to the disciples of Christ, should be a habitual discipline practiced every day. It should permeate all of their lives, all the time.

In a letter addressed to a nun, Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite monk, wrote: “*We should establish ourselves in a sense of God's Presence, by continually conversing with Him.*” He stated that “*it is a shameful thing to quit His conversation and think of trifles and fooleries.*” (Brother Lawrence, 1981)

According to Ryle (2018), a common mark of disciples of the Lord Jesus is that they pray to Him day and night. They realise their utter dependence upon Him to sustain them in their walk with Him as His disciples. They recognize their need for mercy and grace and feel their own emptiness and weakness. Therefore, they pray to Him continuously for help and guidance.

**"PRAYER AMONG EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IS ALWAYS IN DANGER OF DEGENERATING INTO A GLORIFIED GOLD RUSH." A.W. TOZER**

## A. Why Should We Pray?

### *(i) Prayer is an expression of trust in God*

A true disciple of the Lord Jesus is a person who lives in prayer. Prayer is an expression of trust in God and a means whereby our trust can increase. The Bible teaches that we must pray with faith, which means with trust and in dependence upon God.

When a person prays in humble dependence on God, he indicates his conviction of God's wisdom, love, goodness, and power. When we truly pray as persons, in the wholeness of our character, we relate to God as a person, in the wholeness of his character. (Grudem, 1994)

The Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:9 starts with: "Our Father Who art in heaven." This acknowledges our dependence upon God as a loving and wise Father and recognises Him as ruling over all from His heavenly throne.

Scripture often emphasizes the importance of trusting God when we pray. As children look to their earthly fathers for provision, so God expects us to look to Him in faith.

### *(ii) Prayer brings us into deeper fellowship with God*

God does not want us to only trust Him but live in a relationship with Him. Prayer then brings us into deeper fellowship with God.

### *(iii) Prayer advances God's Kingdom work*

God also wants us to be involved in eternally important activities, and prayer gives us that opportunity. Through prayer, the work of God's Kingdom is advanced. (Grudem, 1994)

## B. The Effectiveness of Prayer

### *(i) Prayer Changes the Way God Works*

In James 4:2, we are told we do not have because we do not ask. According to Grudem (1994), our failure to ask deprives us of what God otherwise would have given

us. In Luke 11:9, 10, Jesus makes a clear connection between seeking things from God and receiving them.

The prayers of God's people affect how God acts. There are numerous passages of Scripture confirming this. God wanted to destroy the nation of Israel after the Golden Calf incident, but relented due to Moses' intercession. (Exodus 32: 11, 12)

In 2 Chron. 7:14 God says if His people who are called by His name will humble themselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from their evil ways, He will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land. The condition for forgiveness and the healing of the land was clearly defined. *If and when* God's people pray (with humility and repentance), *then* He will *hear and* forgive them.

The prayers of God's people clearly affect how God acts. We confess our sins, and then God forgives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. (Grudem, 1994)

If the children of God truly believe that their prayers change the way God acts and that God brings about remarkable changes in the world as a result of prayer, they would be much more active in prayer. However, most Christians pray very little, and that may be because they do not believe that prayer accomplishes much.

### *ii. Effective Prayer is Made Possible by Jesus Christ*

Man is sinful and God is holy; therefore, we do not have the right to enter into God's presence. We need someone to act as a mediator and bring us into God's presence. 1 Tim. 2:5 states that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.

Since Christ died as our mediational High Priest, we have confidence to enter into the very presence of God and approach His throne of grace by the blood of Christ. (Heb. 7: 27, 27; 10:19) By a new and living way which Christ inaugurated for us, we can boldly draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith. (Heb. 10: 20 – 22)

With Christ as our Mediator, we enter into the true sanctuary, into "*heaven itself*" where Christ has gone "*to appear in the presence of God on our behalf*". (Grudem, 1994)

## **C. Important Considerations in Effective Prayer**

### *(i) Praying According to God's Will*

The apostle John wrote: <sup>14</sup> "*This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* <sup>15</sup> *And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*" (NASB 1995)

Jesus teaches us to pray, “*Your will be done.*” (Matt. 6:10) and gives us the example by praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, “...yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:39)

How do we know God’s will when we pray? According to Grudem (1994), if a passage of Scripture contains a command or a clear statement of God's will, then determining the answer to this question is straightforward. His will is that His Word be obeyed and that His commands be kept. We must seek for perfect obedience to God’s will on earth so that His will may be done “on earth as it is in heaven.”

We can have confidence that God will answer our prayers when we ask Him for something that is according to His commands or a specific promise in Scripture.

There are many situations in life where we do not know God’s specific will because Scripture does not address them directly. An example might be applying for a new job or moving to another country or city.

In such instances, we should bring to bear “*as much of Scripture as we understand, perhaps to give us some general principles within which our prayer can be made.*” (Grudem, 1994) We should ask God to lead us through His Holy Spirit and give us a deeper understanding. Proverbs 3:6 states: “*In all your ways (acknowledge – [recognize His authority]) Him, and He will make your paths straight.*”

It is important to speak to God about our request and wait on Him to answer us. In those times of waiting, God might bring to mind a passage of Scripture. He might impart a sense of assurance of what His will is or greatly increase our faith so that we pray with more confidence.

#### *(ii) Praying with Faith*

Jesus says when we pray, we must pray with the faith that we have already received it. (Mark 11: 24) With this statement, Jesus is saying that faith that portrays a settled assurance of receiving what we ask for will be granted by God.

However, faith is something we receive from Christ, who is the Author and Perfector of our faith. The assured faith will often come when we ask God for something and then wait upon Him to answer. (Grudem, 1994)

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***PRAYER IS NEVER WISHFUL THINKING, FOR IT SPRINGS FROM TRUST IN  
A PERSONAL GOD WHO WANTS US TO TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD.***

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### *(iii) Obedience*

Prayer is a relationship with God, and anything in our lives that displeases Him will be a hindrance to prayer. In John 14:15 and 21, Jesus says, <sup>14</sup> *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* <sup>15</sup> *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."* (NASB 1995)

A child who says to his parents, *"I love you,"* yet does not do what the parents tell him to do, is a hypocrite. Love is an abstract emotion, and the only way it can truly be visibly expressed is through action. The child will prove his love through obedience to the parents.

Similarly, our love towards God is evident through our obedience to His Word. *"We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him."* (Jn 9:31) *"If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear."* (Ps 66:18 NASB 1995)

Disobedience to God's will as revealed in His Word will hinder God from hearing the prayers of those who pray to Him. He is not favorably disposed to those who reject his laws: *"If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination"* (Prov. 28:9).

Peter quoted from Psalm 34 and affirms that *"the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer"* (1 Peter 3:12). Proverbs 15: 8 gives two contrasts: *"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,"* by contrast, *"the prayer of the upright is his delight."* God is not favorably disposed to those who disobey His commands: *"If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination"* (Prov. 28:9 NASB 1995).

In 1 John 3: 21, 22, John states: <sup>21</sup> *"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."*

Disobedience to God's commands will prevent God from answering our prayers.

**"PRAYER WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE WHEN WE STOP USING IT AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR OBEDIENCE." A.W. TOZER**

### *(iv) Unconfessed Sin*

<sup>1</sup> *Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. <sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. (Is. 59:1, 2)*

Unconfessed sin is a barrier to spiritual growth and communion with God. It hinders the free flow of God's presence and power in our lives. When we refuse to acknowledge our sin before God, we build a wall that obstructs His grace.

The confession of sin is vital to receive God's forgiveness and to live in a continual, harmonious relationship with Him. We must confess all known sin to God and trust Him to bring to memory all forgotten sins.

The confession of sin is not something strange in the Bible. Leviticus 5 deals with various laws that God gave the Israelites. This is the context of Lev. 5:5, where we read: *"So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned."*

The sinner must take ownership of his sin and call it for what it is. He must call a spade a spade and not just a generalized garden tool. Most Christians generalize their sins and do not deal with each sin individually.

The Israelite who sinned had to tell the high priest in what he sinned, for the priest to make the sin offering. James 5:16 states that we have to confess our sins to one another, and even though this verse is in the context of praying for the sick, the principle of confession to another is found throughout the Bible. In Matt. 3: 6 we read how people confessed their sin: *"...and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."*

The Jews and Greeks in Ephesus confessed and disclosed their evil and sinful practices. Acts 19:18 *"Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices."*

The word *disclosed* means *to make something that was secret and concealed known*. The word *confessed* means *to admit to the truth, particularly in the context of sins or crimes committed*. (Definitions.net)

Confession of sin brings about an assurance of forgiveness and encouragement. It opens the way to fellowship with God and an open ear where He will hear our prayers and answer them according to His will.

#### *(v) Forgiving Others*

*"If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt. 6:14–15).

*"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses"* (Mark 11:25).

Prayer presumes a relationship with God, and if we have unforgiven sin in our lives, that relationship is marred. It interrupts our relationship with God. Until the sin is forgiven and the relationship is restored, prayer will be difficult.

If we have unforgiveness towards someone else, our sins will not be forgiven, and our prayers will not be answered. God distances Himself from us until we have forgiven others.

#### *(vi) Humility*

True humility before God is necessary for effective prayer. In James 4: 6 we read that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple illustrates this.

The Pharisee stood to pray, and he was boastful. He said: *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get”* (Luke 18:11–12). The tax collector, by contrast, *“would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”* (Luke 18:13).

Jesus said the tax collector went home justified, and not the Pharisee, because everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. The one who exalts himself, on the other hand, will be humbled.

## Study Questions: The Praying Disciple

### 1. The Necessity of Prayer

According to Luke 18:1 and the text, why is prayer essential for disciples, and how is it compared to breath for the body? Why does J.C. Ryle (2018) describe a prayerless disciple as being without God and on the road to Hell?

*Answer:*

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### 2. Definitions of Prayer

How do John Bunyan (1965), E.M. Bounds (2013), and A.W. Tozer define prayer? How do these definitions emphasize the relational and transformative aspects of prayer for a disciple?

*Answer:*

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### 3. Prayer as a Habitual Discipline

Brother Lawrence (1981) and Ryle (2018) emphasize that prayer should permeate a disciple's life. What does it mean to "continually converse" with God, and why is this vital in today's fast-paced world?

*Answer:*

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#### 4. Why Disciples Should Pray

The text outlines three reasons for prayer: expressing trust in God, deepening fellowship with God, and advancing God’s Kingdom work. Explain each reason and provide a biblical example for each (e.g., Matthew 6:9, Exodus 32:11–12).

*Answer:*

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#### 5. Prayer’s Effect on God’s Actions

How does the text, referencing James 4:2 and 2 Chronicles 7:14, demonstrate that prayer changes the way God works? Provide an example from Exodus 32:11–12 to illustrate this principle.

*Answer:*

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#### 6. Jesus as Mediator

Why is Jesus’ role as mediator (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 10:19–22) essential for effective prayer? How does His sacrifice enable disciples to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence?

*Answer:*

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#### 7. Praying According to God’s Will

According to 1 John 3:14–15 and Matthew 6:10, why is praying according to God’s will critical? How can disciples discern God’s will in situations not directly addressed by Scripture, per Grudem (1994)?

Answer:

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### 8. Praying with Faith

How does Jesus' teaching in Mark 11:24 emphasize the importance of praying with faith? Why does the text state that faith is received from Christ, and how does waiting on God contribute to this?

Answer:

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### 9. Obedience and Prayer

Using John 14:15, 21, and Proverbs 28:9, explain how obedience to God's commands affects the effectiveness of prayer. How does A.W. Tozer's quote about prayer and obedience reinforce this principle?

Answer:

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### 10. Barriers to Effective Prayer

The text identifies unconfessed sin (Isaiah 59:1–2), unforgiveness (Matthew 6:14–15), and pride (James 4:6) as barriers to prayer. Discuss each barrier and suggest one practical way to address each in a disciple's life.

*Answer:*

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### **11. Confession of Sin**

Why is confessing specific sins, as described in Leviticus 5:5 and Acts 19:18, vital for maintaining communion with God? How does the text differentiate between generalizing sins and calling a “spade a spade”?

*Answer:*

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### **12. Contemporary Application**

Reflecting on the text, what are three practical steps modern disciples can take to cultivate a vibrant prayer life that avoids the pitfalls of formality, disobedience, or pride? Provide examples of how these steps can be applied daily.

*Answer:*

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