

From Four Passages of Scripture: Being a Faithful and Fruitful Disciple of Jesus

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Introduction

What does it mean to be a faithful and effective disciple of Jesus?

Many people may identify themselves as Christians, attend church, or possess knowledge about the Bible. However, Jesus calls His followers to something deeper. A disciple is not merely someone who knows about Jesus, but someone who follows Him, values Him above all else, is continually shaped by Him, and puts His words into practice.

The Scriptures show that faithful discipleship involves both the heart and the whole of life. A faithful and effective disciple counts the cost of following Jesus, treasures Christ above every earthly gain, pursues holiness, and obeys the teachings of Jesus even when doing so conflicts with personal feelings, desires, or cultural expectations.

Four passages especially help us understand this calling: Luke 14:25–35, Philippians 3:7–16, 1 Peter 1:13–16, and Luke 6:20–49.

1. A Faithful Disciple Values Jesus Above Everyone and Everything

In Luke 14:25–35, Jesus speaks clearly about the cost of discipleship. He teaches that anyone who comes to Him must value Him above father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even one's own life. A disciple must carry his own cross, renounce all that he possesses, and remain like salt that has not lost its usefulness.

These words show that Jesus must have first place in the life of His disciple.

To value Jesus above others does not mean that a disciple stops loving family members. Rather, it means that love for Jesus has the highest priority. This can create both blessings and difficulties in relationships. On the one hand, following Jesus can improve our relationships with others because Jesus teaches us to love people more deeply and genuinely. On the other hand, some relationships may become more difficult because people may discover that our highest loyalty belongs to Jesus rather than to them.

Even our closest relationships must be submitted to Christ. A faithful disciple seeks to lead and love family members according to Jesus' will rather than simply following their wishes or expectations.

Jesus also speaks about renouncing all one's possessions. This challenges the common illusion that what we possess belongs completely and exclusively to us. The reality is that our possessions are not ultimately our own. Everything belongs to God, and the disciple recognizes Jesus as the Lord over all that he possesses.

Surrendering possessions to Jesus can involve real struggle. Saying, "Jesus, everything I have is Yours," may not always come easily. Yet surrender brings peace because it places our lives and possessions in their proper relationship to God. Interestingly, surrendering everything to Jesus does not necessarily mean that one's possessions will decrease. They may even increase. The important question is not how much we possess, but whether we understand that we are only sojourners in this world and stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

Following Jesus also has a real cost in different cultural contexts. In America, faithful Christians may be labeled narrow-minded, inhumane, anti-social, or opposed to the prevailing culture. They may lose popularity because of their commitment to Christ. In China, following Jesus may mean losing opportunities in certain areas of society, remaining on the periphery, being ridiculed, or even experiencing physical persecution.

Therefore, a faithful disciple must count the cost. Yet Jesus Himself is worth more than everything we may lose.

2. A Faithful Disciple Considers Knowing Christ the Greatest Gain

Philippians 3:7–16 takes us deeper into the heart of discipleship. The Apostle Paul writes that whatever had previously been gain to him became loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

This is a radical transformation of values.

Before encountering Christ, people may define success according to achievement, status, possessions, reputation, education, or religious accomplishments. But when someone truly comes to know Jesus, the value of everything else must be reconsidered in the light of Christ.

The greatest treasure of the disciple is knowing Christ.

Paul does not simply say that Christ is one important part of life. He considers everything else to be loss compared with the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. This does not necessarily mean that all other things become useless in themselves. Rather, their value must be understood in relationship to Christ.

God continually shapes His disciples by helping them see more clearly the value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. The more clearly we see Christ, the more everything else finds its proper place.

The goal of discipleship is therefore not merely to gain more information or accomplish more religious activities. The goal is to know Christ—to know the power of His resurrection, to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, and to be conformed to His death.

This means that a faithful and effective disciple can say, "He is all."

All things are ultimately for Jesus. For His sake, a faithful disciple is ready to sacrifice former gains and to use every blessing for the glory of Christ. Success is no longer measured primarily by what we gain for ourselves, but by whether our lives increasingly reflect the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

3. A Faithful Disciple Pursues Holiness and Lives With a Mind Ready for Action

First Peter 1:13–16 describes another essential dimension of discipleship. The disciple is called to prepare his mind for action, be sober-minded, set his hope completely on the grace that will be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ, live as an obedient child, refuse to be conformed to former desires, and pursue holiness.

A faithful disciple is not spiritually passive.

His mind must be ready for action. He must remain sober-minded and spiritually alert. Discipleship requires intentionality because the Christian life is not simply a matter of drifting along with culture, personal feelings, or former desires.

Before coming to Christ, people are often shaped by ignorance and desires that do not lead them toward God. But the disciple is no longer called to be conformed to that former way of life.

Instead, the disciple lives in obedience.

This obedience is grounded in hope. The disciple does not place his ultimate hope in present circumstances, earthly security, possessions, or human approval. His hope is completely set on the grace that will be revealed in Jesus Christ.

This future hope shapes present conduct.

Holiness, therefore, is not merely following a list of external rules. It is a life increasingly shaped by the character and will of God. God is continually shaping His people to become ready for action, sober-minded, hopeful, obedient, and holy.

A faithful and effective disciple understands that discipleship is a process of being transformed. God continues His work in us, changing our thinking, desires, priorities, and conduct so that our lives increasingly reflect the One whom we follow.

4. A Faithful Disciple Hears and Obeys the Teachings of Jesus

Finally, Luke 6:20–49 brings discipleship to a very practical conclusion.

Jesus says that the person who comes to Him, hears His words, and acts upon them is like a man building a house. That man digs deep and lays the foundation on the rock.

The crucial mark of a disciple is not merely hearing Jesus' teachings. It is acting upon them.

This is especially challenging when Jesus' teachings conflict with our natural feelings and thoughts. Sometimes our first reaction, personal preference, or cultural understanding may point us in one direction, while the teaching of Jesus calls us in another.

At such moments, discipleship becomes very real.

A faithful disciple chooses to obey Jesus even when his original feelings and thoughts are different. He does not simply ask, "What do I want to do?" He asks, "What has Jesus taught me to do?"

Obedience to Jesus provides a deep foundation for life. Like a house built on the rock, the disciple who hears and acts on the words of Jesus is building his life upon something firm.

This does not mean that storms will never come. Jesus Himself teaches that storms and floods will come. The difference is found in the foundation.

The faithful disciple is not the person who never faces difficulty. He is the person whose life is firmly established on obedience to Jesus.

Conclusion: The Portrait of a Faithful and Effective Disciple

Taken together, these four passages give us a powerful picture of faithful and effective discipleship.

A faithful disciple of Jesus:

1. **Values Jesus above all people, including family and self.**
2. **Is willing to carry his cross and count the cost of following Jesus.**
3. **Recognizes that possessions ultimately belong to God and lives as a steward and sojourner in this world.**
4. **Considers knowing Christ to be more valuable than every earthly gain.**
5. **Is willing to sacrifice and use everything for the glory of Jesus.**
6. **Seeks to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.**
7. **Has a mind ready for action and remains spiritually sober-minded.**
8. **Places his complete hope in the grace of Jesus Christ.**
9. **Lives as an obedient child and refuses to return to former sinful desires.**
10. **Pursues holiness because God is holy.**
11. **Does not merely hear the teachings of Jesus but acts upon them.**
12. **Builds his life upon the solid foundation of obedience to Christ.**

Being a faithful and effective disciple does not mean that we have already reached perfection. Like Paul, we continue to press forward. God is continually shaping us and teaching us to see Christ more clearly.

The central question is therefore not simply whether we call ourselves Christians. The deeper question is:

Is Jesus truly first in our lives?

Are we willing to count the cost?

Do we consider knowing Christ more valuable than everything else?

Are our minds ready for action, our hope fixed on Christ, and our lives increasingly marked by holiness?

And when Jesus speaks, do we merely listen—or do we obey?

A faithful and effective disciple is one who continually answers these questions by following Jesus with the whole heart. Such a disciple values Christ above all, pursues Him above every earthly gain, is transformed into holiness, and builds life upon the rock of obedience to His words.

This is the lifelong calling of every follower of Jesus.