

## 5 Identifying Signs of TRUE DISCIPLES of Jesus Christ

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Abstract: The early disciples of Jesus Christ changed the world. How would you – male or female-- like to be a disciple, or was that only for people like Peter, James and John? Learn the 5 signs Jesus gave to clearly identify His *true* disciples from false ones. Also learn the responsibilities, opportunities and rewards of this high calling.

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*We're near the Pentecost season* as I start this – and we know Pentecost pictures the smaller harvest, the small group of people God has called at this time as firstfruits of His spiritual harvest. *When I say “firstfruits” – I could also say “disciples”, for that’s what we’re being called to be!*

*How would you like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? You CAN be if He’s called you to be a disciple, if you answer the call, and fulfill the roles of a disciple. We can be a true disciple or a false disciple. You decide which you are, after this message.*

**When we talk about Jesus' “disciples”, whom do we normally think of? Peter,** James, John, Matthew, Judas, and the ones we read of in the Bible. I think MOST of us, when we think of it more carefully, realize that there were also OTHER disciples besides the 12 -- in fact one time Jesus sent out 70, AS A PICTURE OF going to all the world (remember the 70 nations of Genesis 10?). Acts 1:15 says Peter stood up and spoke to 120 disciples of Christ.

**And we know there were many FEMALE disciples** also -- Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Martha, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and others, like Timothy’s mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois; Lydia, Euodia and Syntyche – the first converts in Philippi; Acts 9:36 calls Tabitha—or Dorcas – a “disciple” also, as were Priscilla, and Phoebe – the deaconess who delivered the epistle of Romans to the church there, etc.

In **Acts 1:14** it says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *with the WOMEN and Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with His brothers”. It’s the next verse that talks about Peter addressing the 120 DISCIPLES, which included many women disciples as well. So if you’re a man, and somehow think all the disciples were men, get over it. It’s not true. Many of the *best* disciples were women. Other than John, all the men deserted Jesus on the cross. The women disciples were the ones who hung in there with Him at His darkest hour. So you WOMEN are absolutely DISCIPLES too.

The earliest disciples in the strictest sense of the word meant people who FOLLOWED Christ. He calls them, they drop what they’re doing, and they follow Him with NO reservation, no pause, no delay. **They begin following a new Master. We can’t serve two masters.**

**They’re not called anything else but “disciples” in the gospel accounts. They’re not referred to as anything else. That’s it: “disciples”. They’re not called “Christians” til many years later in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The words “disciple” and “disciples” (plural) are**

**used a total of 290 times in the New Testament – so it seems the topic must be important!**

Are *you* a follower, a disciple, of Christ? Are you sure? Are you sure you KNOW what it means to be a disciple of Christ? Do you know the COST, the accountability?

They are FOLLOWERS of Christ. By the way, in the earlier going, the early disciples were very human: they slept when Jesus asked them to watch and pray; they flee from the armed band who come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:56), instead of sticking with Him. So they weren't perfect, but they were disciples, nonetheless. But still, they CHANGED the world forever. If WE learn from them, we too can be a force that changes the world today, for eternity. Or we can end up being disciples in name only.

FEW actually accept the call to be disciples! That's part of the meaning of the Pentecost season: many are called, few are chosen. Jesus prayed all night before choosing the 12 disciples. ALL NIGHT (Luke 6:12-13).

*And now YOU have been chosen as a modern day disciple.* That's VERY special. Out of BILLIONS who have ever been born, YOU were chosen by God our Father in heaven to be a DISCIPLE, a CHILD of God today, and to be part of the BRIDE of Christ, part of the FIRST FRUITS. THE CREATOR Himself, the great "I AM WHO I AM", Yahweh in heaven, has put YOUR name in the ETERNAL DREAM TEAM of heaven. Your name is written in the Book of Life. It's an opportunity FEW have been offered, one that will never be repeated. We must not treat it lightly.

*Twelve of those early disciples became the 12 APOSTLES* -- whose NAMES will be engraved FOR ALL ETERNITY on the 12 foundations of the WALL of the NEW JERUSALEM. What an honor!

**Are YOU a disciple? Does God know you, as a disciple? A true disciple?**

Don't be a SECRET disciple like Joseph of Arimathea – where it says in John 19:38 that he was a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews. But at least he seems to have overcome that by offering his burial tomb or plot. Nicodemus also appears to have been a secret disciple.

Don't be ashamed to be a follower of Christ! In fact, Jesus said, "Whoever is ashamed of me, I'll be ashamed of Him too in front of my Father and the angels!" - **Luke 9:26**. I want us to really THINK about this topic as we go through it - and determine if we need to come out of the closet more and be an OPEN, TRUE disciple of our KING and Master, Jesus Christ.

***THERE WERE also DISCIPLES WHO WERE FALSE DISCIPLES.*** We don't want that! They were disciples in name only - but didn't fulfill the roles of true disciples. They were there to see the miracles, to get free food, to follow a man they thought would free them from the ROMANS. MANY OF THESE LEFT when the times were tough, or when Jesus disappointed them in some way.

***JESUS GAVE SIGNS OF WHAT A DISCIPLE would be like***, conduct others could SEE, feelings one could FEEL, signs you'd RECOGNIZE, if you were looking for modern-day

disciples of the Christ! Just being able to preach, being able to even do signs and wonders would not be ENOUGH. REMEMBER Matt 7:14-- many will come saying they prophesied and did miracles IN MY NAME, and Jesus will say He never knew them. Its not enough just to SAY or CLAIM you're a disciple.

***TODAY THAT IS WHAT I WANT TO TALK ABOUT -- THE 5 CLEAR SIGNS JESUS GAVE TO RECOGNIZE HIS TRUE MODERN DAY DISCIPLES AND FOLLOWERS. And of course you can immediately begin to discern with these points whether or not you and others are disciples too. There wasn't just one sign – but MANY. We'll look at 5 where Jesus said clearly "this makes you a disciple"***

*I hope you find this to be thought provoking, motivating and encouraging – not DIScouraging. Some messages, including some of mine, CAN leave one with a feeling of "I'll never be able to do that, woe is me, I fall so far short, God must be so unhappy with me". I don't want this message to leave you feeling that way. If it does, let me know and I'll re-do it somehow. Having said that, I must still speak what the Bible has to SAY on this topic.*

Once again – you can **download** this message or the TRANSCRIPTS off the web transcripts, if that makes it easier to follow along. This was a Bible study I did for my *own* correction and learning, and I felt others may get as much out of it as I did.

*So here goes!*

***1. Luke 6:40*** “A DISCIPLE is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will BE LIKE his teacher”. *There you have it! (also Matthew 10:25). A DISCIPLE IS A LEARNER AND FOLLOWER, BECOMING JUST LIKE HIS TEACHER/MASTER. It's a RELATIONSHIP where we become one with the Master in every way.*

**“DISCIPLE” MEANS “LEARNER. A REAL disciple is learning about His Master in every way. He knows the DETAILS about his Master and follows him implicitly. A true disciple wants to be like his master in every way.**

There is only ONE teacher. We cannot serve 2 masters – we'll hate the one and love the other (Luke 16:13).

### **Quoting from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia for Adisciple”:**

The GREEK means (mathetes), "*a learner*," from manthano, "*to learn*"): The word is found in the Bible only in the Gospels and Acts. But it is good Greek, in use from Herodotus down, and *always means the pupil of someone*, in contrast to the master or teacher (didaskalos). See Matt 10:24; Luke 6:40. *In all cases it implies that the person not only accepts the views of the teacher, but that he is also in practice an adherent. The word has several applications. In the widest sense it refers to those who ACCEPT the teachings of anyone, not only in belief but in LIFE. [we would say today, they not only talk the talk, but walk the walk] It is the ONLY name used for Christ's followers in the Gospels."*

Our English word “disciple” comes from the Latin word “discipulus” -- a scholar. From this word we get the word “discipline”. Many of us think of “discipline” as punishment. But

its full meaning is so much more than keeping people in line. We ask today, “what DISCIPLINE are you following?”, meaning what form of TEACHING are you a part of.

How can we WALK as someone walked unless we constantly walk with Him and study His every move, every thought, every belief, and make it a part of us.

Even in military affairs, when one wants to know his *opponent* intimately, he reads everything he can about that person. In the movie APatton”, when Patton defeats Rommel, he exults, “Rommel, *I read your BOOK!*” In other words, Patton is saying, “I know all about you, your strategies, your thinking, because I’ve studied YOU”. How much more should we be studying the MASTER we serve!?

We **ARE CALLED to be professional BIBLE students!** This means constant learning! As we grow in LOVE with our Master, it will become easier and easier to WANT to learn every nuance about Him, His preferences, His thoughts, His way. ***Just like a young woman in love with her fiancé*** – that’s where we are in the scheme of things. We learn what he likes to eat, where he likes to go, what pleases him and what is not pleasing to him. We should be the same way – becoming LEARNERS.

As **Rommel** wrote a book, so did our Master. We *have* His book! Are we reading it? And HE’S our MASTER – not a rival. That book – the Bible – tells us all He wants us to know and learn about Him. Please hear my message about “daily manna” and you’ll see what I mean.

The early *disciples—who became the 12 apostles* - had learned so much from Jesus, that the learned men of their time were AMAZED at how much they knew.

**Acts 4:13** “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and *perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.*”

***Would people say that about you and me in the same circumstance? Would they realize WE “had been with Jesus” - or with “the Word of God”, after a conversation with us?***

***The early disciples were so EAGER to learn that they would ASK Jesus to teach them*** various things: like asking Him to **explain certain parables** (Matthew 13:10,36), to teach them **how to PRAY** (Luke 11:1), and so on (John 14:8). Have YOU been asking Jesus to teach YOU and show you His truth? WE can show God we are just as eager to learn, by sticking our noses into His book every chance we get. **Turn please to Matthew 11:28-29.**

***I recommend we get in the habit – while praying – to SAY the actual words, “FATHER, TEACH ME, help me have an open, teachable, humble mind; let me please sit at your feet and learn of You....”*** – and then be specific about the areas you know you need to learn more about. You may not like the WAY He teaches you though, or the circumstances He uses to teach us, so be prepared for an answer. ***But true disciples are TEACHABLE, and WANT to learn. Now don’t confuse “teachable” with just swallowing anything that is presented to you!*** True disciples are like the noble BEREANS – checking out what is said against scripture before accepting it as truth.

**Matt 11:28-29** “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you *and learn from Me*, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”.

ARE we learning? ARE we growing in grace AND KNOWLEDGE of our Lord Jesus Christ? As we do, we LET His mind be in us, as Paul urges in Philippians 2:5. Now turn to Luke 10:39.

Of course WOMEN are supposed to be LEARNERS too, not just the men. In Jesus’ day, the women were kept separate. A good woman did not even TRY to learn. She did the women’s chores and served the men. But there’s a story where Jesus ENCOURAGES women to learn:

**Luke 10:39-42** “And she had a sister called *Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word*. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 *But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part*, which will not be taken away from her."

***WE can sit at the MASTER’S FEET ANY TIME WE WISH – JUST OPEN HIS BOOK! LET HIM SPEAK TO YOU. WE CAN, LIKE MARY, HEAR HIS WORDS TODAY JUST AS CLEARLY!***

Mary is the one we remember for the good here! Incidentally, another scene with the 2 sisters is found in John 12:1-3, when Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. THIS time though, Martha seems to have learned not to interfere with her more passionate sister’s desire to honor and revere her Master

***The MAIN way we learn is by daily Bible study. Think about this: The Old Testament “disciples” were the children of Israel. They were FORCED to gather their manna FIRST THING, every day because they couldn't store it up. Couldn't do it later, couldn't skip days or weeks.... it melted. If you didn't gather, you starved to death.***

***Our manna today is JESUS - HE said so. I am the BREAD from heaven. He was born in Bethlehem that meant “HOUSE OF BREAD”. EAT OF ME, He said. The Bible is Jesus in PRINT. The lesson is CLEAR: WE BETTER be eating of Jesus first thing EVERY day -- or we become malnourished. And we eventually become subject to INFECTION from wrong doctrine and DIE spiritually.***

**So our priority is to be REGULARLY, OFTEN into GOD'S WORD DIRECTLY -- not just sermon tapes, not just articles, not just what men say about God's word--- but have your mind directly IN GOD'S WORD day by day. There's a difference. One way you can AUGMENT this is with BIBLE TAPES you can play in the car as you drive around.**

SO the first point is: **WE'RE LEARNING**, because **we're LEARNERS** of God, followers of God. ACTIVELY. We know more today than yesterday. We ENJOY Bible studies, we WANT to learn more, we ASK God to teach us, we're followers, we're TEACHABLE.

***That's point #1. DISCIPLES ARE FOLLOWERS AND LEARNERS OF CHRIST.***  
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**LET'S READ JOHN 8:30-32 NEXT, FOR 2nd SIGN OF GOD'S TRUE DISCIPLES, which actually follows RIGHT ON THE HEELS of the first point:**

**John 8:30-32--** As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. 31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ***"IF YOU ABIDE IN MY WORD, you are My disciples indeed.*** 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

**2. TRUE DISCIPLES Obey and DO what their MASTER SAYS to do. JESUS IS LORD of their lives. We don't just talk the talk – but we now WALK the walk. Being one with Him, its becoming instinctive to do His will, trusting it to be the good for all involved.**

*Another translation says: John 8:31-32--*Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples *if you KEEP OBEYING my teachings.* 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." THERE WE HAVE ANOTHER DEFINITION OF "DISCIPLE".

**1 John 2:3-6** *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.* 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. *By this we know that we are in Him.* 6 *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"*

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Are we seeing GROWTH in our DESIRE to obey God-- in the areas especially that are PET sins? WHAT COMMAND are we still refusing to obey? What SIN do we coddle and hide? What is our bowl of lentils for which we could give up everything? We all have them... and need to understand in the end, true disciples are OBEDIENT, they are OBEYERS. *Yes we stumble. Yes we still fail to walk the walk from time to time.* I have, you have. But a true disciple keeps getting back on the right path and back in tune with the Master after we have failed. Thanks be to God that He's patient with us.

Sometimes some have minimized the need to obey. Those focus on just having a love for God and He'll do everything else. They label those of us who believe we must obey – "LEGALISTS". But we *know* we're not *saved* by obedience, we're saved by grace. But we've been CALLED to obey once we've been called to salvation. We are His workmanship called to do good works, called to obey, Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10, after we've been saved by grace. **There are just too many verses that speak of the need to now OBEY God. Jesus even said that "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).**

**1 John 5:1-3** *"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."*

Remember when Jesus was being tempted by Satan? He said we need to ‘LIVE BY every word of God’ (Matthew 4:4). EVERY word. By the WHOLE Bible. We don’t just *believe* the doctrine of the Bible – but we *LIVE by* the things in the word of God. Even the HARD STUFF to live by. Things like truly LOVING our wife, showing her we TRUST her. Things like overcoming our pride, our lack of submission to one another. Things like finally overcoming alcoholism, gluttony, covetousness. For some its sexual lust. For others it’s a grasping for materialism. For still others – they love the world. Its hard to come out of it. ARE we going to obey or not?

You and I can CLAIM to be disciples because we may claim superior knowledge of “the truths” of God – and yet if we aren’t WALKING this walk, LIVING this way –will anybody CARE about the fact we may have correct doctrine? And that walk is ALL INCLUSIVE. It means we’re OBEYING the verses about being GENTLE with one another, about HONORING the king (the President) and ALL people, esteeming others better than ourselves, praying FOR those who hate us and despise us, truly FORGIVING from the heart those who have badly hurt us or others we care about – THESE are some of the harder things for some of us.

LIVING by every word means to be REPENTING of sin that is ROOTED in parts of our lives. YOU know where those sins are and what they are. We can’t go on living a LIFESTYLE of sin and call ourselves disciples of THE HOLY ONE!

And how can we LIVE by every word if we don’t KNOW every word? If we’re not STUDYING every word? If we’re not LEARNING every word – which was SIGN #1, REMEMBER?

**Matt 7:15-16, 21-23** -- "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing (LOOK LIKE good people, good ministers), but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. **16 You will know them by their fruits.** 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, **but HE WHO DOES the will of My Father in heaven.** 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and *done many wonders in Your name?*' 23 "And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**'"

**THIS IS VERY SERIOUS. IF WE'RE HARBORING and practicing UNREPENTED SIN, GOD COULD SAY HE NEVER KNEW US....** OR, if we are LEARNING constantly, APPLYING what we hear, LOVING even our enemies, and Keeping God's commandments -- then He could well say He does know us. “Well done, good and faithful servant”

**Luke 6:46-49** OUR LEARNING MUST PRODUCE A LIFE BUILT ON JESUS CHRIST "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? 47 **Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and DOES them,** I will show you whom he is like: 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, **for it was founded on the rock.** 49 But he who **heard and did nothing** is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

In the end, the early disciples were to MAKE MORE disciples as they went teaching all nations: **Matt 28:19-20** “Go therefore *and make disciples (KJV: teach) of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *20 teaching* them to *observe* all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

So notice that they were DISCIPLE the nations and TEACH them the WAY, and teach them to DO, to OBSERVE the things Jesus commanded them. So true disciples HAVE LEARNED the way, DO the way, and OBSERVE the same things.

ONE KEY I’ve found in my life that helps me be a doer - whether its spiritual things or physical things - is when I hear a good idea , if I don’t do it immediately, I’ll probably NEVER do it. So when we hear a sermon, or pick up something we need to do during our own Bible Studies, and there’s even ONE point we can take and apply immediately, IF WE DO APPLY it immediately, it becomes a part of us. You can read that in James 1:21-25, about being DOERS.

***So the 2<sup>ND</sup> SIGN: DISCIPLES DO what their master says to do. When they fail, they see and admit that setback, and get back up and start following again.***

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***FOR 3rd sign of true disciples -- turn to JOHN 13:34-35.*** This is the sign many automatically think of as a sign of a true disciple. But as you’ll see in this message today, there are MANY signs where Jesus says just as clearly as this one, that THIS IS A SIGN you’re my disciples.

**John 13:34-35** -- A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another. 35 ***By this all will know that you are My disciples, IF you have LOVE for one another.***

### **3. True disciples have a DEEP Love for one another, a love that is just like the love Jesus has for us.**

Isn’t it WONDERFUL to visit a home where you can FEEL the love the husband and wife have for each other, where the children and parents LOVE to be with each other? God’s household MUST be the same – or those who aren’t that way are probably NOT part of that household.

The love disciples have becomes so obvious and evident to onlookers that they may even want to find out how we have that deep concern and caring for one another. (Story of sister of a disciple. “I want you to do for me what you did for her” – and I assured her that it was what JESUS did for her, not what I did for her. But the sister was impressed by the change she saw in the loving nature of her sister now that she had become a disciple)

In some denominations or individual church groups we see what? FIGHTING, BICKERING, GOSSIPING, BACKBITING, HURT FEELINGS, JEALOUSIES, POLITICKING, STRIVING FOR POSITION, THESE THINGS MAKE ONLOOKERS WANT



NOTHING TO DO WITH A GROUP LIKE THAT.

***But when others see and FEEL our JOY, LOVE, PEACE, GETTING ALONG, SERVING, MEEKNESS, HUMOR, LAUGHTER, CAMARADERIE, SERVING, TENDERNESS, FORGIVING one another -- SAYING GOOD THINGS about one another, not gossip, GIVING UP OUR TIME to SERVE and HELP one another;.....AHH, THESE, THESE MUST BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.***

*Frankly, lately, God's people have not been demonstrating this kind of agape love to one another in recent years as we split up and go our different directions with different denominations. We urge brethren NOT to attend "over there", NOT to go to their feast sites. It's not a happy scene lately. YOU can decide to be one who won't let man-made walls and barriers keep you from reaching out to your brethren in other flocks.*

***Jesus said this was a new sign. This commandment on the surface, was nothing new. We can find it in the OLD Testament. Lev 19:18 says to love your neighbor as yourself. But Jesus CALLED IT "new"! WHY? Because of one phrase He added: "AS I HAVE LOVED YOU". THAT is what made it new. We are to love one another IN THE SAME WAY, same manner, same attitude as Jesus Himself loves us.***

***THAT PUTS AN ENTIRELY NEW LIGHT ON IT!! It's EASY TO love those who love you. But Jesus loved us while we were yet sinners. Jesus was asking Father to NOT charge his murderers with their sin, before they even repented. THIS is the kind of LOVE Jesus speaks of here! We must also love those who don't love us. Forgive those who hate us. Pray for those who despitely use us.***

***THE LOVE spoken here is AGAPE in the Greek – unconditional, spiritual love that had nothing to do with the person DESERVING the love or not.***

One of the best ways we can show our love is to **FORGIVE** one another. (*Related to this is the message I have on "Forgiving others AS Christ has forgiven us". You may wish to hear it.* LET GO of the grudges.

***JESUS LOVE is TIRELESS. UNCONDITIONAL. PERPETUAL. STEADY. DEPENDABLE.***

***LOVE IS NOT JUST A FEELING.*** LOVE IS PROVEN BY WHAT WE **DO**. *Love* is a verb in many cases. Put another way: our love is proven by what we *do* to and for one another.

**John 15:12-13**—*"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends".*

Laying down lives can mean giving up what is so important to us. It can mean so many things. Life includes our time. We can give it up by serving others. Life is also giving up our demands to be **RIGHT** all the time. I heard someone speaking the other day who talked about how so many – me included – have to be **RIGHT**. So there are arguments, and people being corrected, because they said something that isn't quite 100% right – so we feel we must correct it. That doesn't end in love brethren. I've been guilty of that too. I'm talking about **TRIVIAL**

things, not life-and-death issues about right and wrong.

Giving in to what is important to someone else - - not insisting on what WE want...(that's harder than we realize and we all are SO MUCH MORE SELFISH than we see in ourselves.)

Of course, we can't say we love someone and go **gossiping** about them. NO, we PROTECT that person and her honor. We don't accuse or repeat their sins - for that is of the devil. HE is the accuser of the brethren. We're told in James that true disciples will SPEAK EVIL OF NO ONE. Boy, how often we do that.

**We know God must love us - because He FORGIVES US our failings and sins, even the super bad unspeakable sins we've committed -- that we've repented of, but can't undo by ourselves. The bell has been rung. We can't unring the bell of our sins, and we need GOD to forgive and understand that -- and we need HIS people to forgive and understand that. I need people to understand that about me. And I need to understand that about YOU. You are what you are, your history can't be relived. It's happened. I have to live with it. And so do you.**

We can show we love our brothers and sisters by *forgiving* THEIR failings, letting GOD be their judge. Are you *known* as a FORGIVER.... or a repeater of sins, a whisperer, a person who can't forgive someone some evil you've heard about them?

GOD IS LOVE. His body - the church - is LOVE. God forgives and forgets. His body, the church, forgives and forgets. God gives people another chance - many times, in fact. God's body- you and I - give people another crack at a good reputation too. God's body remembers the words of our LORD - "Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone." (John 8:1-10, especially verse 7).

***But so many who CLAIM to be Christians, are stone throwers. Finger pointers.*** Whisperers, separating the body from others who have repented. SATAN is the accuser, the ultimate finger pointer, and God's true people have nothing of Satan's hateful attitude in them.

SOMETIMES THIS COMMAND TO LOVE IS HARDEST AT HOME! We can be TOUGH, gruff, UNLOVING, unserving sometimes MOST OF ALL TO OUR SPOUSES.... we'll bend over backwards IF A BROTHER needs help..but can't do something simple for our spouse?

***THAT LOVE, THAT IS A HALLMARK OF BEING A DISCIPLE, GOES BEYOND THOSE WE KNOW AND BEYOND THOSE WHO ARE A PART OF OUR GROUP:***

**Matt 5:44-46 --But I say to you, *love your enemies*, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and *PRAY FOR* those who spitefully use you and persecute you (obviously asking for prayers for people NOT IN THE CHURCH), *45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven*; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.**

***Part of the trademark of having deep love for one another is a ONENESS THAT GOES TO THE VERY SOUL of the group: we are ONE, one with GOD, one with CHRIST, one with***

***EACH OTHER. We have a ways to go here. I do, you do.***

Turn to John 17 please. This is where Jesus is praying at the end of introducing the bread and wine and footwashing, He now prays to God in heaven, His Father and our Father. He starts with a prayer about Himself and His role, then about the disciples right in front of Him, and then He prays for US - for the believers who would follow for centuries beyond. Did you know Jesus prayed for YOU on that meaningful night? He did!

### **John 17:20-23**

"I do not pray for these alone, but *also for those who will believe in Me through their word*; 21 *that they all may be ONE*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; *that they also may be one in Us*, that *the world may believe* that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that *they may be ONE just as We are one*: [hold it, hold it just for a minute: ONE JUST AS JESUS AND FATHER ARE ONE! HOW AWESOME IS THAT!?!]

23 I in them, and You in Me; *that they may be made perfect in one*, and *that the world may know* that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

**Then in verses 25-26**, where this ONENESS is evidenced - once again - by a PROFOUND LOVE, A DEEP CARING for one another:

25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, *that the LOVE with which You loved Me MAY BE IN THEM, and I in them.*"

GOD IS LOVE. If God is in you, LOVE is in you as a TRUE DISCIPLE. Its that simple. This love is evidenced in an obedience for God - which we ALREADY saw in point 2 - but its also the kind of love that's described in ***1 Cor 13 - the LOVE chapter: AGAPE love does not envy, is not proud, does not delight in evil, keeps no score of wrongs!***

***Let's put this point #3 into everyday practice now.***

Reviewing this point was CORRECTION to me. I realize as I make this message that I need to be more loving, show more love, be the embodiment of love

Here are a couple examples:

LOVE is PROVEN by our **conduct** to one another. Love shows RESPECT for the feelings and thoughts and needs of one another: even our CHILDREN. We consider one another's weaknesses, one another's personal situations, a non-judgmental way of interacting. We HELP one another, we PROVE it by supporting, propping up one another – not by tearing each other down.

Another way is with our words. Our **words** are powerful. They can tear down or lift up. Paul tells us to EDIFY – build up – one another. How many times do we actively THINK ABOUT lifting up, edifying, building up other people? I'm going to put that much more into practice in the coming months and years.

Find your wife, your husband, your son or daughter **DOING SOMETHING RIGHT** – and say so. **TELL THEM**, while you can, while you have them, what they **MEAN** to you. Write the people you **INTERACT** with notes appreciating and noticing the many thousands of little things they do **RIGHT**. This will motivate **FAR MORE GOOD ACTIONS** than pointing out the wrong all the time. Boy, do I have to do better on **THIS** one. I hope I'm not too late.

**VERBALIZE** your love also. **TELL** your wife you love her – and why. Tell your son with a hug that you're proud of him. **GOD DID** to **HIS** Son, remember? **PAUL** did, as God's emissary to several of the churches -- read some time the first few verses of 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and other books, where Paul says "your faith is spoken of everywhere I go" – things like that.

**TURN YOUR HEART** to your children. Get up from the TV and go do play a round of basketball with them, or pray with them as you tuck them in bed and let him hear you say you're proud of him. Hug your daughter. Turn your heart to her. Show her kindness. A true disciple **OOZES** positive **AGAPE**, love, a **JOY**, A **FEELING OF BEING EDIFIED** when in the presence of a true disciple!

Why are so many who think they are God's people so often **SO DOUR**? What's up with **THAT**?

Brethren, do you want something? **GIVE IT AWAY** – and it will come back to you in spades.

Do we want to be loved? Let's **GIVE LOVE** away – let's be loving, let's be kind, be so upbeat that when we as God's disciples walk into a room, our energy of love can be felt by others.

Do we want to be encouraged? **GIVE** encouragement to others, and it will come back to you in spades.

Do you want to have a **SPRING** in your step? Say something to someone – starting with your husband or wife or children – that will make them **KNOW** you appreciate them so much. Its so much easier to **GROW**, so much easier to **BE UP**, so much easier to fight depression, so much easier to feel **GOOD AND HEALTHY** – when we know our husband **TRUSTS US**, loves us; when we know **DAD** thinks you're special, because he's not always finding something **WRONG** with you.

Don't forget, God so loved the world – **SINFUL** world – that He sent His only Son to die for it and give Himself for it. That's unconditional love! That's **AGAPE**. God's people can be such an **UPBEAT** force if we let **GOD'S LOVE** shine in us! We are the people with smiles on our faces – we're the **CHILDREN OF GOD**, why shouldn't we be upbeat?

**BE** A **BLESSING** wherever you go. Let people **KNOW** by your **BRIGHT CONDUCT** that there is a **LIGHT** in you unlike anything they've ever encountered, for indeed **JESUS CHRIST** lives in us and let's **LET HIM SHINE BRIGHTLY** through us in a world that needs an upbeat light.

**LET JESUS SHINE** in your demeanor. And by doing so, **YOU** will make a *difference* in people's lives and **YOU** will be brightening up your part of the world. And **YOU** will be showing people what the **DISCIPLES OF JESUS ARE LIKE**! **START RIGHT NOW**. Be a light of

LOVE at church, at home, at work, EVERYWHERE!

***SO SIGN #3 – DISCIPLES LOVE ONE ANOTHER IN THE SAME UNCONDITIONAL AGAPE WAY THAT JESUS LOVES PEOPLE.***

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**FOR 4th PT -- READ JOHN 15:7-8**

**4. John 15:7-8** – “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear MUCH fruit; SO YOU WILL BE MY DISCIPLES*”.

**The New Living translation says: John 15:8** -- “*MY TRUE DISCIPLES PRODUCE MUCH FRUIT*. This brings great glory to my Father”

REALIZE what its saying -- true disciples don't just bear fruit, but BEAR ***MUCH*** FRUIT.

And if we don't bear ANY fruit, we're going to be PRUNED DOWN PRETTY SEVERELY -- down to what IS decent and strong: the ROOTS and main trunk of the Vine -WHICH IS CHRIST. We recently did a tour of some wineries – and we learned a lot about VINEYARDS and grapevines. ONE thing we learned is that TOO MUCH sun and water produces a lot of FRUIT, but not GOOD fruit. The Vine dresser told us that GRAPE VINES put down the deepest and strongest roots when it is experiencing some HARDSHIP - - maybe a LACK of rain for a time. I immediately thought of TRIALS God allows us to go thru KNOWING we will SEND DOWN STRONG ROOTS during that time period of trial....and we will BEAR GOOD FRUIT at the end of it all.

***Fruit is not the same as growth. Bearing fruit is NOT the same thing as GROWING.***  
GROWTH -- spiritual growth -- IS GOOD, IS needed. ***GROWTH COMES BEFORE FRUIT.***  
But if ALL we have is growth -- that won't be enough. REMEMBER THE FIG TREE that was cursed? It had LOTS OF GROWTH -- but no fruit!

**What is fruit?** Of course there is the “fruit of the Spirit” described in Galatians 5. The fruit is the EVIDENCE we are the body of Christ. The fruit is shown in productive ways in our lives – ways that help, build up, serve and feed people's needs. *Fruit is something the tree GIVES to others and for others.* Fruit gives. Fruit sustains. Fruit nourishes, strengthens and gives life. Our LIVES need to become lives that do all the above: giving, sharing, sustaining others, feeding, building up, strengthening, as we serve and share what God has done so bountifully for us.

**SO HOW do we bear much fruit?** Its amazing to me how these all DOVETAIL back to points 1 and 2:

**John 15:1-5** "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; *and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can

you, unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. *He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*" – *anymore than a branch by itself can bear fruit by itself.*

Did you notice the "ABIDING in me" – the importance again of daily BIBLE STUDY and prayer and hanging on to our Master. In another message, I'd like to do a study on Lessons from the Vine or something like that.

**Turn next to Matthew 13. The parable of the sower for another tip on fruit-bearing.** The good seed are the children of the kingdom. Different FRUIT BEARING possibilities are offered and described.

### **Matt 13:18-23**

"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the **wayside**. 20 But he who received the seed on **stony** places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 Now he who received seed **among the thorns** is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 But he who received seed on the **good ground** is he who *hears the word and understands it*, who indeed *bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*"

THAT'S A LOT OF FRUIT. The key was being OPEN to God's implanted word that is sown in us. Being RECEPTIVE to it. But did you notice that different kinds of GROUND are described in the parable: rocky ground, thorny ground,

**The wayside ground**, a fraction perhaps representing the seed that is blown off course, or gets thrown on the hard footpaths – those are people who have hard hearts, probably hardened by sin.

**The stony-ground** are people who are SHALLOW, no place for the root to go. They like church for the socials, for the friends, for the good times. But when hardships come, when trials and sorrows come, they stumble and don't produce. They quit and get embittered. Probably 1/4 of attendees are these people – who need some help.

**The thorny-ground crowd are those** – and again its perhaps 1/4 of us again, many of us – who either are pursuing the better things in life, riches and a better income – OR WORRY about the CARES of this life – and boy I think that applies to many of us. I know I need to grow in this, or the time we spend with DISTRACTIONS of life will TAKE US AWAY from producing FRUIT for God! Thorns don't grow up quickly – but gradually.

**But think about this: Ground is what it is, until someone works with it. Ground can't change all by itself.** Outside influence usually makes a ground better or worse. In the same way, we are what we are – until God works in us. If we're **thorny** ground, or rocky ground, or barren ground

or any kind of ground but ‘GOOD ground’ - - we better recognize it. Ground can’t change ITSELF. Here’s a point we need to consider:

When we recognize we’re not bearing fruit, perhaps our GROUND – our reception – IS THORNY or rocky or shallow. *We need to pray for the GROUNDSMAN, the Sower, to come break up the rocks in our ground, to rip out the thorns in our lives SO we can have fruit.* But beware! God likes to answer prayer! But we must become GOOD ground – people who RECEIVE God’s word, UNDERSTAND it, want to learn, want to grasp it, and let it sink in.

A person who is full of godly fruit is HUMBLE -- like an apple branch heavy with fruit, its branches full of apples HANG DOWN LOW TO THE GROUND. *Remember too, that FRUIT is for the benefit for OTHERS -- and its effects can be felt AROUND THE WORLD. An apple tree bearing fruit is GIVING of itself to people who want to eat its apples, to passing deer, to so MANY life forms that APPRECIATE the apple tree!*

***BUT I ASK THIS QUESTION: look at your harvest basket of fruit from your branch.*** IS THE BASKET brimming with GOOD FRUIT.... or are there just 2-3 fruit in there..... or is it EMPTY? IF IT'S EMPTY -- WE NEED TO BE SURE WE ARE ATTACHED TO THE VINE.... for if we ARE, we shall bear MUCH fruit.

GOES RIGHT BACK TO POINT 1 -- BEING A SCHOLAR OF JESUS....ATTACHED TO HIM, WATCHING HIM, hanging on his every word..... “IF YE ABIDE IN ME, **AND IF MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU**.... YOU WILL BEAR **MUCH** FRUIT, AND SO GLORIFY YOUR FATHER.”

**5. A TRUE DISCIPLE TAKES UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOWS CHRIST TO THE END – NEVER GIVING UP. Being a disciple entails carrying your cross. Luke 14. Many have turned being a disciple into a cakewalk, a party, a social get-together.**

#### **Luke 14:26-33**

26 *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less than Christ] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.* 27 And whoever does not **bear his cross and come after Me** cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, **whether he has enough to finish it** -- 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33 *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has [and in context: endure to the end] cannot be My disciple.*

*Sometimes Jesus said things that offended some of his early disciples and they left Him. We mustn't do that!*

**John 6:66-68** “From that time *many* of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

*I remember a verse where Jesus says, whoever puts his hand to the plow, and LOOKS BACK, is not fit for the kingdom (Luke 9:62). We must not keep looking back! We must focus on the one goal of the kingdom, and walking with our Master til we're there!*

**Matt 16:24** – Jesus reminds us “if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must DENY HIMSELF, take up his cross and FOLLOW ME”

**What does “carrying your cross” represent?** That’s worthy of a whole sermon by itself:

\* excruciating pain    \*death    \* suffering    \* shame    \* sacrifice    \* SELF DENIAL  
\* GIVING for others    \* SUPREME LOVE for others

Crosses are not very convenient, not very nice, not very beautiful. Didn’t feel good, or make us look good. I speak as a fool. The early disciples were often KILLED. Remember James was beheaded. So was Paul. We can read in Acts 8 that there was STRONG PERSECUTION after Stephen’s martyrdom.

It says in **Acts 8:1-4** “Now Saul was consenting to his death. *At that time a great persecution* arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they *were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he *made havoc of the church*, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to **prison**. 4Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

GREAT persecution. That time is coming again. If it were ILLEGAL to be a disciple of Christ, would there be enough OBVIOUS EVIDENCE to convict you? I hope so!

It says they were SCATTERED. That means they lost their jobs, their homes, their families. Are you READY FOR IT? It’s coming again. GET ready. Are you ready for JAIL TIME because you are a TRUE BELIEVER? It says in Acts 8:3 that they were being committed to PRISON for their beliefs.

Don’t think we’ll always have it this easy. And if you and I are not STRONG disciples now, we won’t last!! If we ARE strong disciples, we WILL, by the grace of God.

**Acts 14:21-22** “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, *exhorting them to CONTINUE in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

The time IS coming when it will get harder and harder to be a disciple. If your very LIFE was imperiled by being a follower of the Way, would you still be a true disciple?

There are Muslims in the Sudan who are killing, raping, pillaging the Christian black population, for example. In many countries, especially Muslim countries, it’s DANGEROUS to be a



Christian. You can be beheaded for it. Your church or meeting place can be bombed. You can be JAILED for bringing in a Bible into the country. But there are people who DO THAT very thing - to get God's word to people who have never seen or heard of it.

If that kind of condition started over here, where you and I could be TORTURED for professing Christ, WOULD WE endure to the end? I want us to really think about it!

Take up your cross, DAILY – and let's follow, be disciples of the Christ.

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### **SO WHAT ARE THE PROOFS, THE SIGNS OF A TRUE, MODERN DISCIPLE:**

**1. They are BIBLE STUDENTS, FOLLOWERS of the Word....** and students of the word JESUS himself. They pray and study regularly. They eat, sleep, talk God's word. They want to follow HIM – not the world. We can't serve 2 masters. We can't eat from HIS table and the table of demons.

**2. Disciples OBEY their Master,** and LOOK more and more JUST LIKE HIM in their conduct of their lives. HE IS LORD OF THEIR LIVES.

**3. Disciples are loving, forgiving, people --** to each other, their families, their spouse, and to even their enemies. There is a ONENESS in the group that goes to the very SOUL of the group.

**4. Disciples ARE BEARING much FRUIT --** much fruit. They are growing, and producing something for the BENEFIT of others.

**5. TRUE DISCIPLES PICK UP THEIR CROSS AND STICK WITH THE MASTER** - right to the very end. Never quit.

**WE'VE BEEN CALLED BY JESUS TO BE HIS DISCIPLES....** what an honor. Its very special. VERY FEW are being called right now. YOU have been. CHERISH that calling. In fact, I may follow this up with a study on ACHERISHING OUR HIGH CALLING”.

NOW LET'S BE SURE WE ACT AND LOOK LIKE, and ARE, THOSE DISCIPLES..... just as IDENTIFIABLE TODAY AS THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE DAYS Of the book of ACTS. With God's help – and helping each other grow – we CAN be disciples God is well pleased with today. We've slipped a ways in the last few years – but we can wake up and get back in the life of being a disciple.

What an AWESOME REWARD you and I will have, if we will RESPOND to this call to become TRUE disciples of Jesus Christ.

All for now, have a wonderful day – modern-day disciples! It's an honored calling!

This is Philip Shields, saying “til next time, God be with you always”.

