

TUSCULUM HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sermon title: The Challenges of Discipleship

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INTRODUCTION: Becoming a disciple of Christ means entering a lifetime commitment of discipleship. Discipleship means following; it doesn't mean leading. All Christian leaders should also be good followers...of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of Christ means you are willing to follow him the rest of your life.

There are five main points of my message today. They are:

1. Being a disciple of Christ means following his teaching.
2. Being a disciple of Christ means loving others like he does.
3. Being a disciple of Christ requires forgiveness as a core value.
4. Being a disciple of Christ requires continual self-sacrifice.
5. Being a disciple of Christ results in sharing the good news.

First, BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST MEANS FOLLOWING HIS TEACHING.

Jesus said in John 8:31 *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”* The Scriptures give us lots of homework. The teachings of Jesus give us a lifetime of instruction on how to relate to God and how to relate to people. He tells us about faith, fear, and peace. If you ever feel like you are behind in your Bible reading, just open your Bible to the words of Jesus. Some older Bibles have the words of Jesus in red so they are easier to find. I don't think this is common in newer Bibles. For those who may not know, the words of Jesus are contained in the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the book of Acts.

Listen to some of the key teachings of Jesus:

- God will help us not to give into temptation
- Repent
- Follow him

- Be sincere, not a hypocrite
- Jesus and God are one
- Take your cross, and follow him
- Compassion demonstrated and taught: by caring for the helpless, the poor, those who were hated, the outcasts
- He taught us that he is like a new wineskin, which meant he was bringing in a new way altogether – salvation through the cross
- Jesus comes before family
- You must come as a child
- After the resurrection, he taught us that he would go to heaven, and it is up to us tell everyone else
- He tells us he will be with us forever

Second, BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST MEANS LOVING OTHERS LIKE HE DOES.

If you follow Jesus' teaching, you'll learn about his love for all people. Jesus was not a discriminator. He loved all people; he argued with the religious people of his day, but he did not hate them. He loved the rich, the poor, the children, the sick and helpless, and he spent time with women in a unique way during a time in history when women were treated as second class citizens.

SCRIPTURE: John 13:34-35a *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,*

EXPLANATION: As a disciple, your love for others should be broad and all encompassing. When you are unloving, you should feel a sense of conviction that hate is wrong.

Jesus went out of his way to spend time with the prostitute, the tax collector, and people, who, because of their diseases, were ostracized by others.

Because he loved people, he healed them, he cast out demons and ultimately, he died on the cross – all because he loved us.

Frederick Lehman wrote the song *The Love of God* in 1917. Listen to verse three.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Lehman said verse 3 “had been found penciled on the wall of a patient’s room in an insane asylum after he had been carried to his grave.”

Third, BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST REQUIRES FORGIVENESS AS A CORE VALUE.

If you follow Jesus’ teaching, you’ll know that forgiveness is at the core of who Jesus is. Forgiveness is why Jesus came in the first place. Jesus had hard things to say about forgiveness.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:14-15 *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:3-4 *“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”*

The person who claims to be a Christian yet harbors un-forgiveness needs to have an attitude check because I do believe it is possible to deceive yourself into believing you are a Christian. As a disciple, living a life of forgiving others – letting go— should be a top priority.

ILLUSTRATION: When I served a church in Kentucky, there was a man who was active the church, yet he was unkind and angry. He was angry about what some pastor in his past did to him, and he said these words: “I will never forgive him.”

Whew! Since he believed he was a disciple of Jesus, I always wondered how he justified this attitude.

When I first came here, I preached numerous messages on forgiveness because I believe harboring bitterness is not only the soul-killer of individuals, but the soul-killer of churches.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine was excited about pastoring his first church. The congregation had dwindled to less than ten. They welcomed him, but he soon learned why they had dwindled. They were bitter. Think of it, a handful of bitter people come together as a church. In the Bible, we read of the anti-Christ, a man who will be the opposite of Christ. In this case, the bitter church was really an anti-church standing against everything the church should be, while at the same time completely deceiving itself into thinking they were God's church. Why would anyone want to be a part of it? As you might guess, my friend didn't make it there very long.

Yes, forgiveness is the core reason Jesus Christ came. And becoming forgiving people should be a core value of disciples of Jesus.

Fourth, BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST REQUIRES CONTINUAL SELF-SACRIFICE.

A follower of Christ will observe his self-sacrificing nature. Jesus came to serve others and to lay down his life for us. Jesus did not do even one selfish act when he was on this earth.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:28 [Jesus did not come] *to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

EXPLANATION:

The disciple of Christ, who is growing in "Christlikeness" must develop and live out a life of self-sacrifice. We must not think of being served but of serving others. A life of putting others first requires discipline because we are prone toward self-preservation. A life of putting others first requires faith. Nothing will test your faith like making yourself available for God to use however he sees fit. Nothing will test your faith like tithing and giving beyond the tithe. I heard of a church which sets

aside July as “double portion month” to push people’s faith to new levels and to make up the deficit in which many churches find themselves during the mid-year.

Self-sacrifice means: putting it all out there for the Lord to use however he wants. There’s an old camp song with the words *I’m yours Lord, with everything I’ve got, everything I am, everything I’m not, I’m yours Lord, try me now and see, see if I can be completely yours.*

God will never use you for anything until you take a step of faith. That’s a strong statement, so I will say it again. Please write this one down: God will never use you for anything until you take a step of faith. If you’ve viewed Jesus as merely your ticket to heaven, then there’s never been salvation.

Fifth, BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST RESULTS IN SHARING THE GOOD NEWS.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 16:15 *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”*

APPLICATION: Jesus is not exclusive to us! He is not a treasure we hide in the back of a cabinet so no one will find him. Jesus is for all who will believe. I am amazed at how people aren’t sure how to share the Good News of Jesus with others. What is this all about? If you are struggling with this, I challenge you in your prayer time to ask God to help you. He will, *if you are willing.* If you are not willing, then once again, you must ask yourself whether you are truly a follower.

You might share a Scripture with someone. You might tell someone you’ll say a prayer for them. In whatever, God will help you if you ask him and step out in faith and just do it.

“But thinking about what to say makes me nervous!” Well, so did the first time you held hands with that special person you liked when you were a kid, but you did it. At times, I’ve been nervous at the doctor’s office or the dentist’s office, but I went anyway.

In all the times I've shared the Lord in some way with others, I've never had one person to say, "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard; don't ever bring it up again."

ILLUSTRATION: Last week when I was doing chaplain duty, numerous people came to speak to the three chaplains who were on duty. One of the things I do is ask whether someone has any type of faith background. I do this for several reasons. One woman told me no; she had not faith background at all, and her parents never mentioned the subject while she was growing up. What a travesty! We talked for over an hour, and before she left, I asked if I could pray for her. She hesitated and said okay. She could have said no, but she would have indicated she didn't really need any faith in her life. Again, I've never had one person to say, "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard; please don't bring it up again."

If you are hesitant about sharing the Lord with others, start with fellow believers! God will make a way for you to witness for him. Witnessing with actions and words are important.

CONCLUSION: None of us will ever attain 100% "Christlikeness"; however, we are to strive to be like him. He should be our model; his teachings our guide. The scripture tells us no one is righteous. Jesus is our righteousness; he is the one who reconciles us with God.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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