
Ask Jesus your questions!

Introduction: One of the convictions I have is that after becoming a Christian we all go through a period of evaluation where we are to re-affirm the decision we made when becoming a Christian. There are many people whom I have met who are in a need to ask themselves some real important questions. Because it seems that they are not moving on in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Why not? I believe it is because they have not considered what that relationship with Jesus is all about!

When I speak with people in private about matters like discipleship and followership, it seems like the thought occurs for the first time that Jesus does expect something from someone who says he/she is wanting to follow Him.

Read: Matthew 4: 18 – 22

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

What did Simon Peter and his friends face on the Galilean shore when Jesus entered their world and invited them to another kind of life: a calling to building the kingdom of God.

What questions exploded in their minds when they heard the "follow me" challenge? What issues concerned them? Were they practical questions? Personal questions? Priority questions? Were they questions about their inadequacy? Or anxiety?

I would like to ask a number of questions today. The cost of discipleship is enormous. One mustn't take it on without checking it up.

Sooner or later each “would-be” disciple will find him/herself on the shore in a similar situation where Jesus approached Peter, James, and John with His challenge. On that shore we make a choice! So what are the questions that are part of Jesus’ challenge to follow Him!

1. Why do You want me, with all my baggage?

- **None of first disciples came to Jesus with anything of worth from their private pasts.** When checking credentials, Judas Iscariot may have looked the most promising disciple! For the most part, the Lord's candidates for apostleship were simple, rural men. The way they behaved, and their attitudes show that their earlier character formation had not been perfect! This was no all-star team. Simon Peter was addressing the "baggage" issue when he said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man" (Lk. 5:8). Jesus' response: "Don't be afraid" (v. 10).
- **Have you ever realized that Jesus did little talking about the past of His disciples?** You would think we'd have heard a lot about Matthew's way of life as a tax collector, about Simon the Zealot's

association with a political movement known for violence. If there were dark moments in the backgrounds of the twelve (and there had to be), they were not exposed, they were buried with their salvation.

- Do not look with the eyes of the past at our future and limit the working of God's power in our life! Jesus took that first group and turned them into kingdom champions. No one was beyond redemption, beyond the possibility of life change.
- Baggage has to be dealt with; a call to discipleship involves cleaning out the past. Baggage that we are carrying must be resolved--not instantly, but in time through repentance and grace. There must be openness to new disciplines, new thinking, new ways of relationship.
- But Jesus always began right where people were. Shallow character, questionable reputation, and pessimistic perspectives were no hinder to start. All that was necessary was the willingness to put that baggage at His feet. Without that willingness, a disciple is not a complete disciple.

2. What made You invite me?

- Jesus started with the attitude of the heart in every personal meeting rather than with an evaluation of outward performance. Jesus was a student of the inner person.
- Today we do our "head-hunting" on the basis of success, social skills, education, and perceived potential. Jesus looked inward and checked spiritual realness. One can assume that each of the twelve began their relationship with Jesus as part of crowds who came to hear Him teach. They began as spectators. Perhaps each time they joined a crowd they moved a bit closer to the front and stuck around to ask questions--as seekers.
- Then His invitation on the beach came: "Why don't you follow Me, share My mission?" And when they left the beach with Him, they completed the move from spectators to seekers to followers. Their hearts had been aroused.
- What would such a change look like today? It might begin with an awareness of our own spiritual darkness and a desire for life change.
- It might continue as an attraction to Jesus as Lord, to His ways and words as the only sane way to believe and live. Without such a heart, a disciple is not a complete disciple.

3. What's the most important attribute of a disciple?

- "I will make you . . ." was probably a common theme when teachers invited students into a "follow-me relationship". It was the commitment of a master to a follower.
- But the commitment expected a disciple who thirsted for learning, for a reshaping of life. This assumes submission or obedience.
- The issue of trust comes into play, too: a disciple's confidence that the discipler knows the way and is worthy to be followed.

This whole process is captured in this one word: "teachability". It expresses a passion for growth and usefulness.

- When a person is teachable, energy is not wasted in words and resistance. The discipler need not tiptoe through the truth. He or she can offer insight, correction, rebuke, and opportunity knowing that it will be joyfully received.

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- There are few teachable people today. In our culture teachability is choked. Wanna-be disciples who lack teachable spirits will not make it past the beach of the Sea of Galilee.
 - Teachability does not imply a sort of control by the discipler. The same Lord who asked for obedience washed His disciples' feet as a servant. That provides the balance some are concerned about. But the fact remains: Without teachability, a disciple is not a complete disciple.

4. Where is discipleship likely to take me?

While His disciples tended to be focused on the past and the present, Jesus focused on the future.

- He looked at every incident, conversation, and learning experience in the light of future maturity.
- His rebuke, for example, which might sting for a day or two, was not meant to humiliate. Rather it was designed to form character for harsh times ahead. His call to submission was directed at growing sensitivity for leadership.
- Jesus does not despair over today's incomplete picture of you and me. He concentrates on what's coming tomorrow. Always, on each occasion, the Lord was bringing the picture of their future into clearer focus. The picture Jesus has of us puts personality, character, habits, and ambitions on the line. It says that Christlikeness is the issue and the goal. Jesus will make every effort to reshape us into godly people.
- A would-be disciple might want to ask: Do I trust His picture more than I trust the one I have formed for myself? Without a hunger for Christlikeness, a disciple is not a complete disciple.

5. Will I be alone if I follow?

- Absolutely not! Jesus was not in the business of developing solo performers. He was in the initial stages of building a church. And the church would provide an alternative to a dominant culture marked by cruelty and injustice, exploitation and greed, and more death. There was a new community to be established; the original twelve were the prototype.
- We are not talking disciple (singular); we're talking disciples (plural). A community has a way of life, ethics and morals, disciplines, and goals. And a community, whether it realizes it or not, has something of a covenant: how it will pursue relationships in harmony and encourage the best from one another.
- Rugged individualism would not work here. These men were never sent to do anything alone. They learned to work in pairs, in teams, in groups. Interdependence was encouraged; mercy and grace in times of failure and conflict were the order of the day. By the time the Master was through with them, these 12 individuals were a community, ready to offer leadership in the shaping of a considerably larger community. Their performance in Acts proves it.

A modern disciple must ask: Am I prepared to get along with folks who are considerably different from me? Am I ready to receive appreciation, encouragement, rebuke, and correction? Will I be open to learn how to forgive, how to repent, how to submit? Will I be a welcomer of strangers of people who are different than me. People from different cultural backgrounds with different worldviews. It may be that we are not prepared for discipleship if we are not prepared to learn the lessons and disciplines of community.

There are no solo disciples in the life of the Lord. Genuine discipleship is confirmed by the way a man or woman knows how to connect with brothers and sisters. Only then does the world "know that you are [Christ's] disciples" (Jn. 13:35).

Without such a community, a disciple just isn't a complete disciple.

6. What happens when I fall flat on my face? Will You reject me?

- Looking at the many times the original disciples fell short of reasonable expectations will quickly remind any would-be disciple that the process of development includes disappointment.
- If Jesus ever grew discouraged over the twelve, we don't hear about it. It sounds as if there was some occasional anger but not impatience. He recognized what we often do not: that the way to Christian maturity is paved with a thousand mistakes. We tend to write one another off and continue on our self-righteous way. Not our Lord. He never gave up!

It might be smart to take this self-examination: Am I prepared to be stretched to the point of inadequacy? To play with pain? To seem the fool? To get in over my head? But from such experiences come champions of the kingdom variety. Tough, conditioned, wise champions.

Without the humility learned through failure and errors, a disciple isn't really a complete disciple.

7. Where will I find the power to be and do what You ask of me?

Of all the things Jesus did in the company of the twelve, this seems the most incredible: He took a group of men who showed relatively little promise and delegated to them the mission of world evangelization.

- "Jesus, do something!" One sees them scrambling to the back of the boat in the midst of a storm they were supposed to handle (at least some of them). "Do something!" is their cry to the Lord.
- "Jesus, do something!" You see them wringing their hands because they are unable to rebuke a demon in the life of a small boy. Again: "Do something!"
- But at the other end of the discipleship journey, Jesus would say, "You do something!" (Like: "disciple the nations"!).
- With that challenge (and this is the answer to the question) comes the promise of the energy of His Spirit. In this case the spirit is the Holy Spirit, and if this Spirit were upon the disciples (a storm-stilling, demon-rebuking, life-changing Spirit), then preaching to crowds on Pentecost, healing the sick, bringing the church to the nations would not be an impossibility.
- Would-be disciples of modern times need to be reminded that education, talent, and charisma have relatively little value in the kingdom. These qualities are indeed helpful to possess, but without the inner dynamic energy of the Spirit of Jesus, they are useless when it comes to doing work with an eternal purpose.
- Without the inner work of the Holy Spirit, a disciple is not a complete disciple.

8. What are the risks of following You?

- Jesus didn't tell the twelve everything at once. The deeper teaching on Christ-like growth, the implications of a worldwide mission, and ultimate martyrdom were presented in direct proportion to the maturity of the disciples.

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- He put no greater burden on them than they were prepared to bear. If He'd told them everything right at the start, my sense is that most of them would have bailed out. It took some time to go from "Follow me" to "When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (Jn. 21:18). Words like these wait until a person has done some growing up at the soul level.

But the answer to the question was always there for those who wanted to face it: How risky? You will die for Me.

It sounds like disciples are dying in Christ's name almost every day around the world. If "dying" is enlarged to include careers lost, high incomes because of other priorities, friends lost, and security seemingly uncertain, then maybe the dying has started here and there already.

Of this we can be sure, apart from the willingness to follow Him into death, a disciple isn't a complete disciple!