

“I greet you in the glorious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Welcome again as we meditate on the words of life.”

FOUR STAGES OF JESUS' CALLING TO HIS FOLLOWERS

Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, extended different types of callings to His followers, each with increasing commitment and responsibility.

1. The General Call (*Call to Follow*)

This is the initial invitation, where Jesus invites individuals to follow Him—often without precondition. It reflects prevenient grace, where Christ meets the sinner before transformation.

John 1:43, ESV

“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

2. The Call to Discipleship (*Costly Following*)

Jesus later makes it clear that following Him has a cost. True discipleship involves self-denial, bearing the cross, and total surrender.

Luke 14:26, ESV

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children... yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:27, ESV

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

3. The Apostolic Call (*Commissioning the Twelve*)

Among many disciples, Jesus chose twelve apostles to send out. This is a formal commissioning into leadership and mission.

Luke 6:13, ESV

“And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.”

4. The Call to Be Witnesses (*Martyria*)

Just before His ascension, Christ called His apostles to be His witnesses. The Greek word “*martys*” means “witness,” but it’s also the root for “*martyr*”—signifying those who testify unto death.

Acts 1:8, ESV

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the end of the earth.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WITNESS?

To be a true witness (*martys*) is not merely to speak of Christ but to bear testimony through suffering, sacrifice, or even death. This aligns with Paul's theology of *participating in Christ's sufferings*:

Philippians 3:10, ESV

"...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

Witnesses identify with Christ not only in His resurrection but in His cross.

FOUR CATEGORIES OF CHRIST'S WITNESSES

1. Witnesses Who Suffer Physically or Die for the Gospel (Martyrs)

These are Christians who are persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, or martyred for their faith.

2 Corinthians 11:23-25, ESV

“Are they servants of Christ? ... with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.”

Paul’s account represents both literal suffering and spiritual authority, reminding us that the cost of authentic faith is often high.

Modern examples include believers in persecuted countries who endure torture or death for their faith. Their blood bears witness to Christ.

2. Witnesses Who Risk Their Lives or Comfort for the Gospel

These are believers who willingly endanger or inconvenience themselves—giving sacrificially of time, money, energy, and position for the sake of the Kingdom.

Example: David's Mighty Men

2 Samuel 23:16-17, ESV

“Then the three mighty men... broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water... and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the LORD and said, ‘Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?’”

David recognized that their sacrifice equated to *blood*. Likewise, our voluntary sacrifices for Christ are seen by God as poured-out offerings.

Example: The Poor Widow's Offering

Luke 21:3-4, ESV

“Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

This teaches us that true witness isn't measured by the size of the gift but by the cost to the giver.

3. Witnesses Who Remove Sources of Sin for Christ's Sake

These are believers who are willing to cut off people, habits, or things that hinder their walk with God.

Mark 9:43, ESV

“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off... it is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell...”

Example: King Asa

Asa removed his own mother from royal power because she promoted idolatry.

1 Kings 15:13, ESV

“He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah.”

This shows radical allegiance to God—even over family.

Christ calls us to love Him *more than* our families, jobs, or ambitions (Matthew 10:37). The emotional pain of such severing is, metaphorically, *the shedding of blood*.

4. Witnesses Who Mourn and Intercede for the Church

These are the hidden heroes: intercessors who groan in prayer, fast, and labor spiritually for the Church and for souls.

Example: Christ at Gethsemane

Luke 22:44, ESV

“And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

Example: The Prophetess Anna

Luke 2:37, ESV

“She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.”

These prayer warriors are unseen but honored by heaven. Their tears, like blood, cry out on behalf of others (*cf. Revelation 5:8*).

SELF-EXAMINATION: WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 15:31, ESV

“I die every day!”

This is not literal death, but a spiritual death to self—daily choosing the cross over comfort.

So ask yourself:

- Are you dying daily for Christ?
- Are you sacrificing anything significant?
- Are you living as a true witness?

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Revelation 2:10, ESV

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Let us be counted among the faithful witnesses—those who did not love their lives even unto death (*Revelation 12:11*). Whether your witness is visible through suffering or hidden in intercession, your reward is certain.

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