

Luke 14:27 (ESV)

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

Do you truly understand what it means to be a disciple?

Being a disciple is more than just believing in Jesus or attending church. There are clear marks of true discipleship — without them, you’re not a disciple at all. Here are four key traits every disciple must have:

1. Being Taught

No student teaches themselves — every student needs a teacher. And to be taught by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, there is one non-negotiable condition:

You must deny yourself.

Without this, you can't receive the kind of teaching that prepares you for life's challenges — whether it's times of lack or abundance.

The Apostle Paul is a perfect example of someone who was well-trained by the Lord. He knew how to live in every situation — whether in need or in plenty.

Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

That kind of maturity doesn't come without submitting yourself to be taught by Christ.

Being willing to learn is the second mark of a true disciple. And when it comes to our faith, we must actively learn the ways of Christ — not casually, but with intention.

But here’s the truth:

*You cannot learn from Jesus without first denying yourself and taking up your cross.
There is no other way.*

Many people today struggle to understand the Bible. Even when they read it, it feels closed off. Why?

Because they haven’t surrendered themselves to Christ. They haven’t denied their own desires or picked up their cross.

Instead, they want a comfortable version of Christianity — soft, easy, without spiritual depth or cost.

But the Bible doesn’t open up to that kind of follower. It opens to disciples.

3. Being Tested

Every student must be tested. There’s no such thing as graduation without exams.

Likewise, every disciple of Jesus will face seasons of testing — and Jesus Himself allows it.

Why?

Because testing builds faith and endurance.

James 1:2-3 (NIV)

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

If you avoid the trials, or fail to endure them, you can’t move forward — and you certainly won’t graduate as a disciple.

4. Graduating

A student who has passed all their tests receives a certificate — a mark of completion and honor.

In the same way, a disciple of Christ who endures and overcomes every trial will graduate spiritually.

And what is our certificate?

The Crown of Life.

James 1:12 (ESV)

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

So... are you a disciple of Jesus, or just a follower?

Many people followed Jesus during His earthly ministry, but very few became His true disciples.

Some followed for the miracles, others for the message, and others for the movement — but only a few fully surrendered and joined His “school.”

And the entrance requirement to that school hasn’t changed.

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That’s the only way. No shortcuts. No exceptions.

There’s no Christianity without discipleship.

There is no separate category of “Christian” apart from being a disciple. The two are one and the same.

Acts 11:26 (NIV)

“...The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

So, if you want to know whether you're truly a Christian, ask yourself:

Am I really His disciple?

If you haven't been taught, if you're not learning, if you're avoiding the tests, and if you've never graduated — you may be a follower, but you're not yet a disciple.

And if you're not a disciple... you're not yet truly a Christian.

May the Lord Jesus help us all.

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