

Chapter 1

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

In order to be a disciple, you must first believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and receive him in your heart, affirming that he died, was resurrected on the third day, was seen by others, ascended up to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father according to the Holy Scriptures. (*I Corinthians 15:1-8*) Once you have accepted this initial step into the kingdom of God, you begin to show your love through faith and action in what you do in everyday Christian life. A transformational process will take place as you yield to his Holy will and are sanctified by the reading and understanding of his word. His word says “*Sanctify thy word; the word is truth*” (*John 17:17*)

We are so eager to please the Lord when we first become a Christian. We do all the church stuff. We attend bible study and worship services, pay tithes, and get involved in some church organization or group. Then, we do those things that are good, but do we take the time to pray about our purpose in God and ask the Lord what our gifts are? Do we ask Him to develop our gifts for His glory? Do we take time to ask God to mold and shape us to be the disciple He calls us to be?

How do we know we are pleasing the Lord? Ask the Lord if He is pleased with your service? How do we obey His commandments? We have to study the word of the Lord so we know what to do and what not to do.

We have many icons today. A lot of young people want to be like Michael Jordan, some imitate the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, and others imitate the King of Rock, Elvis Presley. I challenge you to imitate the King of all Kings, Jesus Christ. He is the greatest icon that lives forevermore. People can imitate others well. Why? They have studied them. We have to be like that with Jesus. We have to study His life and how He lived in the earthly realm. We are on fire for the Lord until we get hit with an adversity or challenge in our faith. There has been a misleading idea about what discipleship is all about, and, my brethren, there is a cost in that fallacy. The Lord is clear in His word when He says; "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (*Matthew 5:10*) Our journey in life will begin to change, and there will be a giving up of some things, friends, and circumstances so that we may walk in truth of the word.

A disciple of Christ must believe the word in its entirety, and remember that just because you are obedient and doing all the things you believe are right does not mean you cannot be tested. The word said Job was a perfect and upright man and one who feared God. (*Job 1:1*) God also pointed it out to Satan that Job was one who shunned evil. (*Job 1:8; 2:3*) We are to be like Job as disciples. A disciple is one who fears God and avoids evil. A reverence for God is out of the heart. Satan, the accuser, wanted to prove to God in his prideful way that he could dominate Job. Satan accused Job of serving God only because of his possessions and offspring. Satan was saying no one could possibly love God unless they received something in return. (*Job 1:9-12*)

We know Job was a man of many possessions and wealth. The word said he had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 1,000 oxen,

and 500 donkeys. He must have had servants or employees who worked for him because scripture mentions him as being an employer. He had seven sons; this was often considered evidence of divine blessing. (*Ruth 4:15; I Samuel 2:5*) He also had three daughters. (*Job 1:2-3*) He was highly respected (*Job 29:7-11*), a fair and honest judge (*Job 29:7,12 -17*), a wise counselor (*Job 29:21-24*), an honest employer (*Job 31:13-15, 38-39*), hospitable and generous (*Job 31: 16 -21, 32*), and a farmer of crops (*Job 31:38-40*).

Job was tested twice. Firstly, he was tested on his possessions and on his offspring (*Job 1:6-22*), and secondly, he was tested on his health (*Job 2: 1-10*). Satan wanted Job to suffer to the point that he would eventually curse God. Job stood the test and trusted God through it all. It also demonstrated that when things go wrong, a standard of Godly living should be maintained. The nerve of Satan attacking the integrity of God as if the only way people would worship God is based on the promise of wealth or blessings. The children of God love Him because of who He is. This love can be found only in an established relationship with the Father.

Now, I understand why God wanted me to write this epistle and share some of my testimonies and encourage others to be true disciples. When I was being tested on possessions, the business, the church plant, and ministry, God told me several times to read the book of Job. Many times I was tested. I will share some of them. The first time I was tested, I was still at my old church, Love United Methodist Church. It was at the second worship service that I heard God's voice speak to me. I was the worship and lay leader of the church. The service was high, songs sung were high, the preaching was high, and the worship experience was all high. I heard the Holy Spirit say, "This is your last Sunday." I started rebuking what I heard and kept right along going about my day. A day went by as I was preparing for our leadership retreat that next weekend. I was teaching a young adult bible study and was excited about

the lesson. I had a strong visitation from the Lord, and He said, "It is I."

With my crazy self, I asked, "Who?"

The Lord had revealed to me again that it was truly he. I dropped to my knees with my head bowed. He said, "Look up daughter." I said, "No Lord, I am not worthy." I began to sob like a baby.

He asked me a question, "Do you love me more than your church?"

I answered, "No, no, Lord!"

"Do you love me more than the choir?"

I answered, "No Lord! I have been singing in a gospel choir since I was five.

He said, "You attend almost every function of the church and there almost the entire week."

I said, "What?" I told you I was crazy!

He said, "Daughter, you have labored well here, and I am pleased. You have a greater purpose to fulfill in Me."

Now, I must have forgotten for a moment that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. He told me that I would not attend the leadership retreat and I was to spend three days alone with him. He gave me specific instructions to tell my family, my pastor, and the church. He told me to write up instructions for them to carry out at the leadership retreat. The three days I spent with God were the most powerful spiritual moments of my life. He began to reveal to me my destiny in him.

He was calling me out of my church, and my flesh was undergoing surgery. He told me to give all my choir robes back to the church; I would not need them at this point in my life. I was devastated because everyone knew I loved praising and worshipping God. I cried for two weeks before I gave the first robe. I could not take it to the church, so I took it to my mom. I was crying so much that she asked what was wrong. I said, "I have to obey God." I gave each choir robe back over a period of time. I now understand the passage more plainly that

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "I die daily." (*I Corinthians 15:31*) When he first called me out, I said Lord what now? He said, "Simply trust; I will guide and lead you." He said, "You are in school, and I am the instructor. I need you for three years." Then he told me to read the book of Galatians. It was evident that God's grace was in my life. I believe a lot of times God does not reveal all because we are not ready for it. We would become God's executive assistant, and it would not be good because our humanistic side would try to help, and there goes trouble.

Why is the biblical story of Job so important in reflecting a life of discipleship? It is important to your foundation of belief in Jesus. You are not following Christ for what He can give you but simply because you love Him from your heart. The love you have for Jesus is because of his perfect sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection power that saved your soul from hell. After all that Job went through, not only did God restore him double for his trouble, but his spiritual life was deepened by all he had been through. Job said in Chapter 42, "Lord I seeth thee," meaning Job was even more humbled in the sight of God. True disciples should always maintain a life of humbleness.

This same unconditional love was also given to the Israelites. The Lord had delivered them out of Egypt. He gave them the Ten Commandments, and while the Ten Commandments were being written, the Israelites fell into sin. He forgave them, and then they would fall into sin again. As the Lord was leading Moses to the promise land after receiving the second set of stone tablets, He gave him a commandment again. He had required Israel to fear the Lord and to serve Him. (*Deuteronomy 6: 13*) He also commanded them to love Him with all their heart, and all their soul and with all their might. (*Deuteronomy. 6:5*) It sounds familiar. This commandment is repeated numerous times throughout the bible.

What does that mean? It means you begin to walk in a different light. All the things you thought were right are subject

to God's teachings and ways. As a disciple you are to serve the Lord with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. You must allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth and you must meditate on his word day and night. We must be willing to totally commit our life to God's authority. The scripture is clear when it says to present yourself as living and holy sacrifice unto the Lord for a reasonable service. (*Romans 12:1*) When Jesus called the four fishermen, he said "*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*" (*Matthew 4:19*)

These men left what they were doing and followed him. They believed that he was the Son of God not realizing He was God, but they knew something was different about Him. God wants us to follow Him by fishing for souls instead of fishing for what we think is important in our lives. Sometimes we might just throw our reel into the water aimlessly, and when we think we have got a catch, in reality it's something useless or old like a shoe with no soles. We realize we have to throw it back because we got it aimlessly. If we genuinely have a heart for God, our goals, priorities, and other daily routines are left behind as we focus on casting our net and reeling in lost souls unto him.

Now that we believe, we must learn and follow His example as a disciple. A disciple is a follower, student, or learner of Jesus Christ. We believe in His doctrine, rest upon His sacrifice, embrace the Holy Spirit, and live His example. (*Matthew 10:24; Luke 14:26, 27, 33; John 6:69*). We must walk the way Jesus walked with all power and authority. We must not fear what man can do unto us but fear the one who is able to kill both the soul and body in hell. (*Matthew 10:28.*) As a disciple you must be yielded to the sanctification process of the Lord so one can mature in his or her faith.

We must follow Him in love. The same love He has given us should be the same love given to others. He said in his word, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" (*Matthew 19:19*) Our neighbor is everyone. He loves everyone but does not love

their unrighteous ways. He does not have any special group, club, organization, fraternity, sorority, economic class, race, origin, or fat or skinny, tall, short or handicapped persons to whom he ministers exclusively. He ministered to Samaritans, Jews, publicans, sinners, Pharisees, Sadducees, high priests, harlots, prostitutes, adulterers, zealots, tax collectors, business woman, fishermen, and others.

We must learn to love and minister to all those whom God has put in our path. God loved us so much that He sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. (*John 3:16*) God loves us in spite of ourselves, and we must love others in spite of their ways. We must reach out more to others and try harder to be a better disciple. We must live what we believe. Jesus was the best example for loving others. Think about the disciple Judas, who eventually betrayed him, but Jesus still allowed Judas to be with Him even though He knew the end result. We must learn to pray always and love our enemies no matter what the circumstances. He wants us to have righteous attitudes and behaviors. No, not everyone is going to like you and you should not expect it. We have to allow others to grow as well just as God allows us to grow. Bless them that talk about you, call you names, attack you for no reason, spread rumors, lie about you, or leave you helpless in a crisis situation while focusing on the real prize. (*Matthew 5:44*) The prize is everlasting life with Jesus.

We must follow Jesus in faith. We must believe on His word and not doubt. (*Matthew 21:21*) We must put our faith in action. We must have faith as we go in love and proclaim the gospel at every opportunity. God said in His word that all things are made possible with Him, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed. (*Matthew 17:20*) When he called me to do street ministry, I was fearful and unsure. I prayed and prayed to ensure it was God's voice. It was His voice. I obeyed, and it was the most rewarding experience.