

INTRODUCTION

What is your most precious possession? This world has plenty of expensive baubles and trinkets. Here are some actual things people own that they probably consider to be a precious possession. For instance, how about a gold-plated, diamond studded iPhone? The cost is \$2.97 million and it's only a 3G model!

Or you can own the world's most expensive television called the Prestige HD Supreme Rose edition. The outer frame is gold with diamonds and the inner frame is alligator skin. The cost is a mere \$2.3 million and it's only got a 55-inch screen!

A couple of years ago, a Mexican billionaire bought a 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO from the British owner for a cool \$35 million. I'm sure he considers it a precious possession. Or for you ladies who like purses, you can buy a Hermes Birkin Handbag for prices that start at a paltry \$10,000. Or you can buy one with gold and diamonds for a sweet \$1.9 million.

Or maybe you're into watches. If you own a Rolex it's probably a prized possession. But if you paid \$25 million for a diamond and gold watch designed by Chopard, it might be your most precious possession.

If you're an art lover, you can be the owner of a Jackson Pollock piece called Painting #5 for \$140 million. Make sure you have room to hang it in your house, because it's 4' x 8'—the exact size of a piece of plywood, because that's what he painted on.

Those must be cherished possessions by that people who own them. But what is your most *precious* possession? I'll give you a hint: It's not a thing.

According to the words of Jesus, your most prized possession is your soul. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man (or a woman) if he or she gains the whole world and loses his or her soul? And what shall a man or woman give in exchange for his or her soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

Your soul is infinitely more precious and valuable than anything or anybody in this life. It will last when the sun, moon, and stars have all gone cold and dark. Your soul will exist when the entire universe is gone and replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Your soul is worth more than all the banks and Fortune 500 corporations combined. The worth of all the stocks, bonds, gold, silver, diamonds, oil, and gas in the world can't compare with the value of your soul, because your soul will go on, endless, timeless, and measureless into the future. You haven't always existed; only God is eternal in both directions. There was a time when you were not but there never will be a time when you are not. Your soul will exist long after your physical life is over, either in heaven with God or in hell separated from God.

This is truth that is too important to miss. Let's read about what Jesus had to say about your most precious possession.

Mark 8:27-38. "Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the

Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.' Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'"

This message is all about discipleship. Jesus has an interesting interaction with His disciples, especially Simon Peter. And then He gives us the steps of discipleship. We throw the word "disciple" around a lot, but we may not understand what it means. The best translation of the New Testament word is that of a pupil or a follower. It captures the idea of being a lifelong follower, not a temporary follower. It doesn't mean you follow Jesus one day a week, or for a few weeks or years—it is a 24/7 lifelong commitment to keep following and keep learning. Jesus doesn't call us to be a believer only. He calls each of us to be His disciple. And beyond that He calls all of us to be disciple-makers. But you can't be a disciple maker until you are a true disciple. In this passage, Jesus reveals five basic steps that a disciple takes.

STEP 1: BELIEVE AND CONFESS THAT JESUS IS LORD

Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter, who usually said the wrong thing, gets it right for once. He answered, "You are the Christ."

This was about mid-way through the three-year ministry of Jesus. He was usually pursued by a mob of people who wanted to be healed or fed miraculously. So Jesus and the Twelve escaped on a retreat to a northern city in Galilee called Caesarea Philippi. This was a pagan Roman city that had a temple dedicated to the half-man half-goat god named Pan. A huge spring gushed from a cave in the side of a massive mountain, and the temple was built over this gushing spring that was known as the gates of hades. Human sacrifice was practiced there. It was a wicked city. Many scholars believe Jesus visited the area because he knew there wouldn't be any Jews there. It would be like me taking our staff on a retreat to Las Vegas but that wouldn't work because we'd see too many GABC members there; I'm sure they'd all be doing mission work!

This was a time for Jesus to evaluate where they had been and where they were headed. In the way of review, He asked the guys what people were saying about Him. Some of the disciples spoke up and claimed that people were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. They probably had a good laugh at those answers. Then Jesus asked, "But who do YOU say that I am?" I think the laughter died in their throats, and there was a period of silence. When Peter answered, "You are the Messiah—you are the Christ—you are Lord."

You grow up hearing what others say about Jesus. If you're blessed with in a Christian home and church, you grew up hearing that Jesus loves you this you can know for the Bible tells you so. But when it comes down to it, it's not what others say about Jesus. It's what YOU say about Jesus. Right now, Jesus is asking you, "Who do YOU say I am." It's not enough for you to say, "Well, my parents say you're the Son of God." Or you can't get by with saying, "My pastor says that you are the only way to heaven." You've got to answer that question for yourself.

Have you believed and confessed that Jesus is Lord? The Bible says: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

Since the beginning of the church in the book of Acts, the point at which new believers have made this confession was at their baptism. This became a counter-cultural revolution as Christianity spread into the Roman Empire. Every year a Roman citizen was required to pay an annual tax and confess, "Kaiser estin kurios" which means "Caesar is Lord." But these radical disciples refused and instead they confessed, "Iesous estin kurios," which meant, "Jesus is Lord." Have you ever wondered why Christians were arrested and persecuted? They were accused of treason against Rome.

When we have the joy of baptizing someone at Green Acres we ask the question, "Who is your Lord?" And these new believers confess, "Jesus is my Lord." That is the first step of discipleship. But there are other steps as you grow as a Christian.

STEP 2: REMOVE YOUR EGO FROM THE THRONE OF YOUR LIFE

Jesus said something pretty unexpected to Peter. He said, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus explained the marks of a true disciple. He said, "If anyone would come after me he must DENY HIMSELF." (Mark 8:33-34)

After Peter made his powerful confession, he was probably feeling pretty good about himself. He became Proud Peter. And while he was busy patting himself on the back Jesus began to tell the disciples the schedule for the rest of His ministry. He told them He would suffer greatly and that He would be rejected by the Jewish leaders who would kill Him, and after three days, He would rise from the dead.

Proud Peter didn't want to hear anything about failure, suffering, or death. He was on the winning team, not the losing team. He was the right hand man of the Messiah—that meant riches and honor and glory. So Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. So picture this, the big fisherman rebuking the Son of the Living God. "I don't want to hear anymore silly talk about dying. We've got a good thing going here and we're going to win big!"

That deserved a real rebuke. In front of the other disciples, Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You're thinking like a man, not like God."

Simon Peter was full of selfish pride. His ego was in charge. Jesus said you could never be a disciple unless you “deny yourself.” That doesn’t mean you have to deny yourself something like sweets, sleep or food. It means you deny your Self. Think of your “self” as your “ego” or the “Big I.” Because we are sinners, our human nature makes us self-centered. We put the “Big I” at the center of our own little universe and everything revolves around our “ego.”

Imagine a circle represents your life, and in the middle of your life, there is a throne. In a self-directed life, you have the Big “S” (self) on the throne. Christ is in your life, but you are calling the shots. The smaller circles represent your interests and they are all out of balance. Some characteristics of a self-directed life are: Legalistic attitude, impure thoughts, guilt, worry, discouragement, a critical spirit, frustration, aimlessness, and fear. The list goes on and it includes a poor prayer life and no desire to study God’s Word. Does this describe your life? Is your ego the center of your existence? A good acronym for EGO is Edging God Out.

In the life of a self-centered person, it’s all about me. It’s about what I think, what I feel, and what I want. A disciple of Jesus says, “It’s not about me. It’s all about Jesus.” Say that with me.

STEP 3: VISUALIZE YOUR EGO AS DEAD

Jesus gave us the next step when He said, “If anyone will come after me he must deny himself and TAKE UP HIS CROSS.” (Mark 8:34) A person carrying a cross had only one destination: Death. It was always a one-way trip. For you to take up a cross doesn’t mean you carry a cross in your pocket or wear one around your neck. Other people think their “cross to bear” is some kind of physical ailment. I’ve heard people complain about their diabetes or arthritis “But I guess it’s just my cross that I’ll just have to bear.”

Jesus isn’t talking about aches and pains. He is talking about dying. It isn’t physical death but death to self. After you have denied self, you must constantly subject your “Big I” to death. In Luke’s account Jesus says we must take up His cross DAILY. So this isn’t a one-time action. Actually, since all our sins were nailed to Jesus on the cross and since our ego is the essence of our sin problem, our “Big I” was already crucified with Jesus; we just have to visualize it.

Since college, one of my life verses has been Galatians 2:20. Hardly a day goes by that I don’t quote it several times. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

For years, that was just a verse I quoted, but I didn’t get it. It was so nebulous and spiritual that I couldn’t sink my teeth into it. It was like trying to chew CoolWhip. But then one day the Lord gave me insight into how I could apply this in a practical way.

It’s really so simple, I almost missed it. There really was someone who was literally crucified with Christ, and we’ll get to meet him in heaven. It was the thief on the cross. As he hung there, he knew his life was about to end. He looked over at Jesus who was bleeding and dying as well. The last thing Jesus looked like was a king, but he said, “Lord, remember me when you come

into your kingdom.” And that simple profession of faith was enough. Jesus said, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

When we're crucified with Christ, we'll be like that thief. He no longer cared about what people thought about him. His ego and pride were long gone. People could have yelled that he was ugly and stupid, but it didn't bother him, because he was crucified with Christ. He didn't fear arousing the wrath of the Romans for talking to Jesus, because he was crucified with Christ.

Imagine while he was being crucified with Christ, a well-known prostitute walked by. Do you think he was interested in looking at her? No, he was crucified with Christ. Imagine a Roman Centurion drove up in the latest model of a sporty chariot. It had eight horsepower and dual slaves. Do you think he thought, “Man, I'd sure like to have one of those?” Nope. He was crucified with Christ. Imagine a wealthy Sadducee stood there wearing a mink robe and a velvet prayer shawl. Do you think that thief yelled, “Hey, Simon, where can I get me an outfit like that?” Nope again. He was crucified with Christ, so none of those things mattered to Him. The only thing that mattered was Jesus. Put yourself on that cross with Jesus and look into His eyes, and you lose the desire to look at anything else.

STEP 4: PLACE JESUS ON THE THRONE OF YOUR LIFE AND OBEY HIM

Jesus continued, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and FOLLOW ME.” (Mark 8:34)

To follow Jesus means that where He leads you go. When my daughters were young we'd walk on the beach in Florida. I looked behind and saw that both of them had their heads down and were stepping in my footprints. So I started taking giant leaps and going around in circles. They made them start giggling as they tried to match my steps. By the way, moms and dads, you're making tracks for your children and they are going to walk in your footsteps.

Following Jesus means to walk in His footsteps. Now this doesn't mean you have to live a perfect life to be a disciple—that's impossible. But you must desire to follow Jesus. It means a will to choose to obey God in every area. You see God is able to judge us on the basis of our desire and our direction rather than on our actual performance.

Imagine another circle that represents your life. But in this picture, Self has stepped down from the throne and Jesus is in control. Your various interests are all in balance. Some of the characteristics of a Christ-directed life are love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness—all the fruit of the Spirit. It is a life empowered by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is on the throne of your life you have a powerful prayer life and you trust and obey God.

Does this represent your life? This is what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus.

STEP 5: DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE; INSTEAD LOSE YOURSELF IN GOD'S CAUSE

Jesus often spoke in parables and paradox. This is one of those paradoxical statements. On the surface it seems contradictory, but when you dig below the surface you see the truth. Jesus said,

“For whoever wants to save [live for me only] his life will lose [waste] it, but whoever loses [surrenders] his life for me and for the gospel will save it [a life that matters for eternity]. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:35-36)

A lot of people don't even know they have a soul. On my iPhone, I asked Siri, “Siri, do you have a soul?” Her reply was very interesting. She said, “I've never really thought about it.” The sad thing is there are many people who would answer the same way. Your soul is the real you who lives inside your body. Jesus has told us to love God with all our being, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.

CONCLUSION

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you believe and have you confessed that Jesus is Lord? Are you denying self, taking up your cross and following Jesus? Are you willing to lose yourself in God's great cause?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who knew a thing or two about discipleship. He wrote a classic book entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship* in which he wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Of course, he was talking about dying to self, but Bonhoeffer came to understand that denying self, and taking up a cross sometimes leads to physical death as well. From the beginning of Hitler's rule in Germany, Bonhoeffer opposed him. Hitler used the German church to spread his message of Aryan supremacy and hatred against the Jews. Bonhoeffer was a part of a small splinter group called the Confessing Church that saw the evil in Hitler's leadership. Hitler was called, “de Fuehrer” which means “the leader.” Bonhoeffer was speaking on the radio in Berlin once and he said, “There can be only one fuehrer for Christians, and it isn't Adolph Hitler. It is Jesus Christ.” He didn't get to finish the radio address, because the plug was pulled. He was part of several attempts to have Hitler assassinated. He was arrested by the Gestapo and spent two years in concentration camps.

Three weeks before the war in Germany ended, on April 9, 1945, seventy years ago this week. Bonhoeffer was led out of the prison with several other prisoners. They were ordered to strip naked and were led to the gallows to be hung.

A physician who claimed to witness his death later wrote, “I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the few steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”

In Bonhoeffer's last letter to a pastor friend in England he wrote, “This is the end. But for me it is the beginning of life.”

You may be thinking, “How sad. He lost his life. No, he didn't lose it; it gained it. He lost himself in a cause greater than himself, and as a result has impacted millions of disciples.

So what is your most precious possession? It's your soul. Make sure you aren't wasting it. Instead lose it in a cause greater than yourself.

John Piper wrote, "The opposite of wasting your life is to live by a single, soul-satisfying passion for the supremacy of God in all things. If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on into eternity, you have to know one great all-embracing thing—and be set on fire by it. Like Paul, declare, 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'" (*Don't Waste Your Life*, p. 43-44)

OUTLINE

STEP 1: BELIEVE AND CONFESS THAT JESUS IS LORD

Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." *Mark 9:29*

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. *Romans 10:9-10*

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"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men...If anyone would come after me he must DENY HIMSELF." *Mark 8:33-34*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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