



"To say you have no choice is to relieve yourself of responsibility."  
—Patrick Ness

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## Conditions of Discipleship (Part One)

When [Jesus Christ](#) gathered His core disciples as He began His ministry, He knew who and what kind of men they were. He needed principled and devout worshippers of [God](#) to teach and prepare for the immense work of spreading [the gospel](#) in the early decades of the church. He could not pick up just anyone off the street. What kind of person was He looking for?

For starters, He looked for people who could deny themselves and bear a cross, as He says in [Matthew 16:24](#), "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Adam Clarke comments: "[A Christian is] to renounce self-dependence, and selfish pursuits . . . [and] to embrace the condition which God has appointed, and bear the troubles and difficulties he may meet with in walking the Christian road."

In [Galatians 5:24](#), the apostle Paul writes something similar: "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." A Christian must take a hard and unyielding position against his own urges and desires that go against God's righteousness. Instead of allowing them to hold sway in his life, he must walk Christ's path and shoulder the trials and sufferings of being a Christian in an ungodly world.

Jesus' reaction and words to the rich young ruler in [Mark 10:21](#) add another layer to the conditions of discipleship: "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.'"

The situation on the ground was that Christ was recruiting disciples, and He wanted twelve men who fit the bill. He needed those who would literally leave everything behind, and He chose His words to the rich young ruler to test for this trait in him. The next verse tells us that Jesus' command to give away his riches was, for him, a bridge too far.

Jesus says in [Luke 14:33](#), "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." Some of those He chose were wealthy, like Matthew, a well-to-do tax collector ([Luke 5:29](#)); some had wives, like Peter ([Matthew 8:14](#)). When Jesus called them, they had to decide if they would give up everything to follow Him.

However, the situation on the ground has changed in our time. Christ is no longer physically eating, walking, or talking with us. He is no longer organizing a small cadre of followers to witness His earthly ministry. Giving up our careers or our families to walk the nation's roads does not make as much sense these days. He is no longer working with us that way.

Yet, even in today's world, some men and women spend their entire lives living in monasteries and convents, having given up literally everything. But to what avail? If God's Spirit does not guide such abandonment of goods and livelihood, it means little, gains little. What a tragic waste of a life!

What God is looking for today is an attitude *willing* to give up everything for the Kingdom! He will probably not require it completely of us, but He still wants proof of our willingness. How does He find it? The only proof we can offer Him is our good works, of which James 2 points out the extreme importance.

So, do we have any good works? [Matthew 25:35-36](#), 40 helps us see how we measure up:

[F]or I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.

This list should provide us an idea of whether we are among the few God has chosen, as these are some of the works Christ requires of those to whom He will give salvation. Paul prays that God's elect "may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, *being fruitful in every good work* and increasing in the knowledge of God" ([Colossians 1:10](#); emphasis ours).

There are, of course, other good works we can do. Paul, in [I Timothy 5:3-16](#), writes about helping widows—true widows and older, unmarried women (whom we once called "spinsters"). He also charges "the strong" in the church "to bear with the scruples [*weaknesses*, margin; *infirmities*, KJV] of the weak, and not to please ourselves" ([Romans 15:1](#)). [Leviticus 25:35-37](#) explains what this can entail:

If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit.

Few of us have the resources to support someone and his family. However, what Jesus says in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 suggests offering help rather than providing total support: supplying food and drink, providing temporary housing, giving clothing, helping when sick, and visiting when imprisoned. If an entire congregation obeyed God's commands in this way, more of those in desperate situations would receive the help they need.

Here is a final good work to ponder. Paul writes in [I Corinthians 8:10-11](#):

For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened

to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

The apostle asks us to consider if we are sensitive to the weaker consciences of newer brethren or those with shallower knowledge. He calls it like it is and tells us what he would do: "But when you thus [sin](#) against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" ([I Corinthians 8:12-13](#)).

A Christian does not have to give up eating what God has provided as clean food, but if someone who lacks understanding sees us partaking of something *he* believes to be sin, we should forbear from eating it in his presence. Paul states this principle more broadly in [Philippians 2:4](#): "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Sometimes, looking out for others' best interests means sacrificing our rights and freedoms for their benefit, which is the essence of godly [love](#).

In Part Two, we will discuss a few of Jesus' other conditions of discipleship.

- Mike Fuhrer

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Knowing, Following, and Striving for Christ](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Christians are set apart from others because they believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that He is alive and actively interceding for us right now. Because of this, we must know, follow, and strive to conform to Christ's image. Our goal is to know Christ on a personal and intimate basis, knowing the power of His resurrection. This knowledge should be a practical understanding of His power and of the depths of His suffering, leading to a daily pattern of life that will become eternal. Only by knowing Christ can we possibly know the Father. Nothing is truly knowledge unless it is practiced in daily life, empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Part of knowing Christ is to

share His sufferings, enduring persecution. We should make every effort to diligently live for Christ, living among those who are spiritually dead. God had a purpose for calling us, an event which begins a new process of spiritual life, being conformed to the image of His Son. We have an obligation to follow Christ. Discipleship is personal. We should never base our Christian living on the circumstances of a brother or sister in Christ. Fighting and overcoming our carnal human nature is not easy, but the rewards for doing so are enormous. Nothing we give up in this life will compare with the trade-off in God's Kingdom. It is a total win-win proposition. We need to let go of the past, and press forward to the goal of conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[What Does It Mean to Take Up the Cross?](#)**

by David C. Grabbe

Beyond the fact that our Savior Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross of some sort, He used its imagery to instruct His followers: He bids us take up our cross and follow Him. David Grabbe analyzes what Jesus' command would have meant to those who heard Him, showing that our Savior is asking us to follow His example of sacrifice in our own Christian lives.

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