

Find the Treasure of Being a Disciple

Some time ago, a California woman, Teri Horton, bought an abstract painting from a junk store for \$5. Ten years later she discovered that the “junk” she purchased was possibly an original Jackson Pollock painting that could be worth more than \$10 million.

Let's project our imaginations into the future and suppose that Ms. Horton has been paid \$10 million for the painting that cost her \$5. Imagine that she is sitting in a palatial mansion the money has afforded her. She is dripping in jewels and draped in fine designer clothing, none of which she could have purchased previously.

If I were to ask her, “What did that Jackson Pollock painting cost you,” how do you think she would answer that question?

I imagine she would say: “Cost me? It cost me nothing. It gained me \$10 million and afforded me everything I own.”

The initial cost of the painting was swallowed up in the benefit it obtained. The expenditure showed up on the profit side of the balance sheet.

The same holds true in other areas. When the profit far outweighs the investment, we call it gain.

How We Gain Christ

Jesus challenged those who would be His disciples first to count the cost. He said: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was

not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30, NIV).

Christ made it clear that discipleship would cost a person everything. But He also challenged those who sought to be His disciples to consider the reward.

Jesus said: "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

In the book of Philippians, Paul acknowledged that nothing was of greater worth to him than knowing God. He wrote: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Phil. 3:7-9).

Here the apostle is saying that he gave up everything he valued because compared to knowing Christ Jesus, everything else was worthless. All he valued apart from Christ was less than nothing.

If we could ask Paul, "What did radical discipleship cost you?" I believe he would answer: "Cost me? It cost me nothing and gained me everything."

The Meaning of 'Follow Me'

In calling men to discipleship, Jesus framed His invitation in this way: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus often was referred to in the gospels as "Rabbi." Historically, the title was conferred on a scholar or learned expositor of the Scriptures. His job was to study, learn and teach.

In Jesus' day there were several schools of rabbinical thought. They distinguished themselves by the manner in which they interpreted the Torah (the books of Moses) and the Talmud (writings, laws and commentaries on the Mosaic law). These various schools, according to A.T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Broadman & Holman), were called "yokes."

To become a disciple of one rabbi or another was to take that particular rabbi's yoke upon your neck. Notice how Peter uses the word *yoke* in Acts 15:10 and how Paul used it in Galatians 5:1.

In each case they are referring to a branch of teaching or biblical interpretation. It was a term commonly employed in this way. When Jesus' contemporaries heard Him use these words, there was no confusion about what He meant.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn *from* Me," Jesus said (emphasis added). A disciple did not learn *about* his rabbi; he learned *from* his rabbi.

A disciple was not a casual learner but one who left everything else in order to follow his rabbi day and night. Therefore, he gained far more than knowledge from his rabbi; he absorbed his rabbi's life.

A disciple learned a way of thinking and living from his rabbi. He listened to him. He discussed and debated with him. He ate as his rabbi ate, slept as he slept and adopted his rabbi's phrases and speech patterns. As much as possible, the rabbi reproduced himself in the disciple.

From the time he was a young teenager until the age of 30, the disciple was the pupil of a rabbi. Then when the disciple

became a rabbi, he began to teach, using the words of his rabbi and reflecting his teacher's heart and life.

The disciple-turned-rabbi might say: "The words I speak are not my words, they are the words of my rabbi." But that rabbi's rabbi had a rabbi himself, and no rabbi spoke on his own authority. Rather, he might say to his disciples, "Everything my rabbi has taught me, I am making known to you."

Jesus' Rabbinical Model

Jesus was and is an altogether different kind of rabbi, so being His disciple—taking His yoke upon you—is a call like no other. When Jesus taught and healed, the religious leaders challenged Him by asking Him by what authority He did such things.

Matthew 21:23 states, "Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. 'By what authority are You doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave You this authority?'"

They were asking Him, "Who is Your rabbi? Whose yoke do You wear?" The aspect of Jesus' teaching and personality that first caught the crowds' attention was that He taught as one who had authority (Matt. 7:28-29).

Many times, as in the encounter recorded in Matthew 21:23-27, when the scholars and leaders of the day challenged Jesus by questioning His credentials, He used the typical rabbinical method for answering a question: He responded with a question of His own.

"Jesus replied: 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer Me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?'"

The only reasonable and logical answer to His question would

have led His detractors to the conclusion that Jesus' authority came from His rabbi—Yahweh. Other times Jesus spoke more forthrightly claiming that His teaching came from Yahweh.

In the book of John, Jesus said: "I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me" (John 8:28). Moreover, He stated: "When a man believes in Me, he does not believe in Me only, but in the one who sent Me. When he looks at Me, he sees the one who sent Me" (John 12:44-45).

In saying to His disciples, "These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent Me" (John 14:24), Jesus' audience would have understood Him to mean: "My rabbi is Yahweh, and Yahweh is My Father."

An earthly rabbi did all he could to reproduce his image in the lives of his disciples, but it was an impossible task. Whenever a prominent rabbi died, having left behind his writings that proclaimed his thoughts, arguments would break out among his disciples based on a new question and his disciples would debate among themselves, wondering how the rabbi would have responded.

Entirely new schools would emerge from these debates, with one disciple guessing this and another disciple supposing that. No one knew for sure because the rabbi was no longer alive.

But your Rabbi, dear disciple, is able to do what an earthly rabbi could not. He lives in you. He is not dead. He is alive, and He is alive in you.

You do not have to ask, "What would Jesus do if He were here?" Your Rabbi *is* here. He is pouring His life into you, through you, from you.

Your Rabbi is continually recreating you into His image from the inside out. He is changing you into His likeness from one degree of glory to the next (2 Cor. 3:18).

The Call Is Radical

Answering the call of Christ requires that you empty yourself of everything you have in order to be His disciple. Once you have done so, He will fill you with everything He has.

What does your Rabbi have to give you? Hear His words: "All that belongs to the Father is Mine" (John 16:15). Once you have counted the cost, then count the reward.

Since the age of 20, I have passionately pursued a present-tense relationship with the living and indwelling Jesus. I have one goal for every moment I live: to be completely and utterly abandoned to Him.

I don't know where that goal will lead me, but wherever it leads, that is where I'm going. People often ask me, "What is your five-year plan?" My answer: "To be completely and utterly abandoned to Him."

Long ago I learned that following the Ruler instead of the rules would take me down paths I could not have imagined. Every day I traverse new terrain, desperately dependent upon the moment-by-moment guidance of Jesus because He is leading me into new territory. He reminds me that my eyes must be fastened on Him: "Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before" (Josh. 3:4).

An earthly rabbi taught the Word of God. He interpreted and explained it, applied it and tried his best to make it come alive for his disciples. But our rabbi is the Word of God. Rabbi Jesus is teaching Jesus to us.

By the time a young man could present himself to a rabbi as a potential disciple, that young man would have been through the Jewish educational system. He would have memorized, word-for-word, the entire Scripture from Genesis through Malachi. He would know every word.

Individuals did not own personal copies of the sacred Scriptures, but they devoted their lives to hiding the Word in their hearts. Rabbi Jesus is every word. Paul wrote, quoting from the Old Testament, “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom. 10:8).

My friend, is there anything that you would not lay aside to be a disciple of Rabbi Jesus? Is there anything that holds its value when compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Him?

When you hear Him call you to be His *talmiyd*—His disciple, His follower, His learner—is there anything your flesh has to offer that can outweigh the riches of His kingdom?

Count the cost and then count the reward. What is the cost of discipleship? Ultimately, it costs you nothing, and it gains you everything.

Read a companion devotional.

Jennifer Kennedy Dean *is a conference speaker and author.*