

At the beginning of the year millions of people think about what needs to change in their lives. Some of these make resolutions or self-commitments to make changes. This self-evaluation is a good idea. It is even biblical. From time to time Christians should examine themselves for sin. We should examine ourselves for sin that needs to be confessed and repented of. We should evaluate our obedience to Jesus. We should evaluate our maturity in Christian character, behavior, and values. You might ask the question, "Am I the kind of disciple Jesus wants me to be?"

To help you answer that question we're going to look at some disciples in the Bible. We will look at what they were like and you can see if you are similar to them. Some of the qualities we will look at are good and others are not. This first quality is not good. The first group of disciples are those who were with Jesus on the night he was arrested. That night, Jesus' closest disciples deserted him. Are you like them?

Are you a fair-weather disciple? I gave them this label because of the following incident.

Matthew 26:47, 50, 56, (NIV) While he (Jesus) was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people...

... the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

... Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

These were the men who had traveled with Jesus for most of three years. These were the men who once before refused to quit following him. At that time one of them said, "To whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life." Yet, when trouble came, they all ran away.

Do you desert Jesus when trouble comes? Do you roll along with Jesus as long as things are going good in your life, but back off when trouble comes? Then you quit praying. You quit praising. You give Jesus the silent treatment, resenting him for allowing this trouble to enter your life. You think to yourself, "If he really cared about me, I wouldn't be in this situation. I shouldn't have to deal with this." Are you that kind of disciple? You take the good times, but kind of quit being a disciple when trouble comes? Are you a fair-weather disciple?

Are you a hidden disciple? When Jesus was arrested, two disciples followed him from a distance as the guards led him away. Peter was one of the two. Then someone confronted him about being a disciple of Jesus.

Matthew 26:69-70 (NIV) Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

He was brave enough to follow Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest's home. But when confronted about being a disciple he denied it. He did so three times within a few minutes. He was outnumbered there, and it was dark. He was afraid. He was afraid of being one lone voice for Jesus in a crowd of possible enemies. But that is really no good excuse for what he did.

Is this the kind of disciple you are? You come to church and sing the praises of Jesus. You act and speak HERE as if you love Jesus and are devoted to him. But out there, away from the Christian crowd, are you a hidden disciple? Are you quiet about following Jesus? Do your coworkers have any clue that you are a Christian? Sure, you don't deny him like Peter did, but do you speak up for him? Do you speak up for your Lord?

When people are putting down the church do you fail to speak up for your lord? When people are puzzled about the true meaning of Christmas or Easter do you fail to offer instruction? When someone labels Christians as haters or bigots do you fail to speak up and clarify? Do you fail to try to dialogue with them? Are you a hidden, silent disciple?

Are you a gospel-sharing disciple?

When the persecution against Christians broke out in Jerusalem the first time almost all the Christians left town.

Acts 8:1, 4 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered proclaimed the word wherever they went.

These were not apostles. These were not the missionaries. They were just regular Christians. As they went back to their hometowns, they shared the good news with others. Even among these sharers of the gospel there were differences.

Acts 11:19-20 (NIV) Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

Some of them shared only with other Jews. That means they shared the gospel with people like them. Others shared with non-Jews, people unlike them. It is easier to share the gospel with people like you than with people unlike you. This is a known principle of mission work. The more differences or boundaries between people, the harder it is to relate to them, to communicate to them, to build relationships. Without some common frame of relationship it is difficult to share the gospel.

Some disciples are better than others at sharing across multiple boundaries. But a maturing disciple will have a heart for sharing the gospel with the lost. All people need to be saved from their sins. And they have to hear about Jesus in order to put their faith in him.

You have family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, schoolmates who are not saved. Are you working with Jesus to tell them the good news? Are you praying for opportunities to share Jesus?

Jesus is working to get the word out. Are you? Are you a Gospel-sharing disciple?

Are you a worldly disciple? A worldly disciple means you still speak and act like a non-Christian.

It is disheartening to be around those who call Jesus Lord, but act so unlike him. I find it heartbreaking on Facebook when people refer to their faith in Jesus one day and use foul language or write nasty things about people on other days.

Such were the Christians at Corinth. There is not a church in the New Testament with more problems than that one. Paul wrote the following in his letter to them.

1 Corinthians 3:1, 3 (NIV) Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ... For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?

As you read this letter you see issue after issue that Paul had to deal with. These were not problems from outside the church. These were internal problems. These disciples were self-centered, proud, factional, cliquish, lazy, with no real sense of community or unity as a church.

But a local church should be a family of believers working together for Jesus. We are to care deeply for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. WE are to be compassionate, kind, merciful, patient with and forgiving towards each other. We are to bend over backwards to work together in serving Jesus. We are to help each other learn to obey Jesus. The disciples at Corinth were missing all of these qualities.

Sure, beginner disciples don't yet talk the talk or walk the walk. But some have been disciples for years and still talk and act worldly. That is NOT what Jesus has planned for us. Are you a worldly disciple?

Are you a semi-Gospel-trusting disciple?

What does that mean? Well you become a Christian by believing the gospel. You put your faith in the blood of Jesus. You believe that his death paid for your sins. And God forgives your sins.

But some disciples then depart the gospel. They don't realize that the blood of Jesus keeps them saved. Instead, they believe that they remain saved through what they do. They start a right relationship to God by faith in Jesus, believing he died for their past sins. But then they work to be right with God for the forgiveness of their present sins.

This is a departure from the gospel. This is denying the full effectiveness of Jesus' death on the cross.

For the first disciples it meant they were still locked into living the Law of Moses, all those old covenant commands. Paul put it this way in his letter to the disciples at Galatia.

**Galatians 3:2-3 (NIV) Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law (of Moses), or by believing what you heard? (the Gospel)
Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit (faith in the Gospel), are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?**

These disciples trusted Jesus for salvation. But they mistakenly thought they would stay saved by following a strict set of rules, the Law of Moses.

Are you like them? You sing about trusting in the blood of Jesus, but are you really trusting in your attendance at church to be right with God. You hope to be acceptable to God by your good behavior, your good character.

Listen, there is nothing you can do to be acceptable to God except to trust in Jesus. Jesus paid the full price for your entire salvation, not just the beginning. Trust only in Jesus, not in yourself. If you add your good works to Jesus, you make his death of no effect for you. Are you a semi-gospel-trusting disciple?

Are you a missions-giving disciple?

Are you the kind of disciple who gives generously to missions like the Philippian Christians? Paul had started a church in the town of Philippi. When it was time to move on to the next town the disciples in Philippi had caught the vision of Paul's apostolic ministry. They wanted to be a part of it. Paul did not ask them for money, but they gave anyway. Some time later they sent more money. And in his letter to them Paul makes mention of their gift.

Philippians 4:14-15 (NIV) ... it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;

Is this the kind of disciple you are? Are you burdened with getting the message of salvation out to all people, even if it means sacrificial giving on your part? Do you share Jesus' love for the lost? Does your heart hurt for the people who still need to hear the gospel? Sure, you want your family and friends to be saved. But does your heart hurt for the billions all over this planet who need to hear about Jesus?

As a church we do. That is why so much of our budget is for missions work. That is why we are a part of the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program. That is why we support the Lottie Moon Christmas and Annie Armstrong Easter offerings. We are a part of Christian missions around the world through the several thousand missionaries we support with money and prayer.

Are you a missions-giving disciple?

Are you a persevering disciple?

Are you the kind of disciple who faithfully ministers for the Lord in and out of church? Paul wrote of the disciples at Thessalonica...

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV) We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This church had been suffering persecution from their neighbors. We don't know the specifics of the persecution. It may have been loss of jobs and income or as bad as imprisonment. At any rate, this church held on to Jesus and each other. Even in persecution they continued to put their faith in Jesus, hope for his return, and love each other with Christ's love. They persevered through the trials they were facing.

We see such faith in China today. The government there has cracked down hard on churches in the last year. It is jailing pastors and others who continue to meet despite government warnings to cease. Disciples of Jesus continue to meet together for worship, knowing the risk of getting caught.

While we are not facing persecution, there are issues facing us as a church. We are small. Our average age is rising. We have less able workers to do the work. We recently sent out a call for help with the homeless ministry and some have stepped up to fill the need. There will be more challenges in the year to come.

There are also challenges in your personal life that could hinder your service in the church family... if you let them. Are you the kind of disciple that will let the work suffer? Or will you persevere in serving Jesus with us?

Invitation

I hope you can see in this that there is a cost to becoming a disciple of Jesus. You will change. You will become a different kind of person if you closely follow Jesus and let him be Lord of your life. This is his plan.

So seeing this you might back off and say to yourself, "Maybe I need to rethink this thing of becoming a Christian." Yes, no one should rush into this. Jesus gave everything to save you from your sins. He asks no less of you to live in his salvation.

But if you are ready to receive him as savior and Lord, there is no better time to do so than right now. And you do that in prayer.