

## The Way of the Lord

### 23. Developing the Character of Jesus (Part 3)

The invitation Jesus gave His first followers has remained the same throughout all these generations: *“Come follow Me.”* (Matthew 4:19) As we’ve often emphasized, following Jesus will require your willingness both to change *and* to develop Christ’s character as you set aside old personality traits.

Lord Jesus never intended that His offer to you to follow Him would be easy. To the contrary, He tells you this right up front: *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:37,38). That’s why Jesus makes crystal clear how essential it is that we *count the cost* of following Him (see Luke 14:28-33). To belong to our Lord Jesus is worth giving up everything, even our very lives. That reality undergirds His parables of the man who found a treasure in a field, and another who found a pearl of great value. Both went and sold *all* they had to obtain what they so earnestly desired (see Matthew 13:44-46).

We in the United States haven’t yet faced what our brothers and sisters in Muslim and Communist and Hindu countries so often endure: persecution, imprisonment and even martyrdom for loving and following Jesus. Instead, in this country we encounter myriads of *false* gospels that are man-centered and *unscriptural*. We falsely expect God to serve *us* and to freely dispense blessings no matter *how* we live or what we choose to believe or disregard from His Word. Instead of followers of Jesus who are prepared to forfeit everything for His sake and for the true Gospel, much of westernized Christianity is absorbed in SELF-fulfillment and personal satisfaction.

But this is how the *Bible* describes an authentic Christ follower, one who endures to the end in Jesus: *“They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death”* (Revelation 12:11). Keep this mind: Scripture *and* the lives of the first followers of Jesus who were persecuted for their trust in Him reveal to us the extreme cost of being His follower.

Followers of Jesus are called by Him to walk in His steps. To expect an easy life in Jesus is to believe a lie. Weigh in your heart this heartrending description of our Suffering Lord: *“He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not”* (Isaiah 53:3).

In earlier segments we mentioned that our Father uses *suffering* to produce the character of Jesus in us. One dimension of that suffering which we mentioned is the struggle of your sin nature when an opportunity arises to grow in a character quality of Christ. Another level of suffering comes when you must leave relatives and friends who *cling* to their sin nature and strongholds. They may not want anything to do with the Jesus you’re so intent on becoming like. So you need to decide *now* whether walking in obedient trust in the Lord you love is more important to you than *compromising* what His Spirit and His Word have shown you is true.

You may also suffer persecution just because you follow Jesus and refuse to deny Him as the *ONLY* God in the flesh and the *ONLY* way to forgiveness. Your suffering

may come at the hands of neighbors, coworkers or even those within church systems who disagree with your devotion to Jesus and your stand in Him. But from HIS perspective, consider yourself *blessed* when this happens! “**Blessed** are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **Blessed** are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matthew 5:10,11).

Have you ever thought about why certain people cling to our Lord Jesus no matter what suffering or persecution they go through? You need to anchor deep in your heart that our Lord *isn't* a God Who's far away. If you've embraced His Covenant in Jesus, then your Father has put His Spirit *inside* you. And through that Spirit you can live in *union* with your Father, and find the strength and courage to follow our Lord Jesus no matter where He leads you, or what it costs you.

Think about the word “covenant” and its meaning “to be in union with.” Union implies a deep sense of *oneness*. That's the kind of intimate oneness that Jesus defines for a marriage covenant: “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be **united** to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but **one**” (Mark 10:7,8, apperceiving Genesis 2:24).

We grieve that so few married couples understand the *nature* of the union our Lord speaks about. But so few couples experience this union of physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy because they've *set aside* the goal of being more like Jesus in their relationship. They have neither intent nor desire to *mutually grow* in Christ's likeness together. Nor do they have any regard for their marriage to *reflect* the character of Jesus. However, our Father intends that their marriage reflect the kind of intimacy that He wants Jesus's followers to experience with *Him*.

Think about how Jesus describes the *oneness* He has with His Father: “*Believe Me when I say that I am **in** the Father and the Father is **in** Me*” (John 14:11). This wonderful *oneness* is for *all* followers of Jesus. It's a union that's made possible by His Spirit *in* us, and galvanizes our confidence to look to Jesus for comfort, strength and empowerment.

Your *oneness* with the Spirit of Christ is holy and precious. That's why even our *bodies* are to be kept holy—because of the Holy Spirit in us.

- “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, **Who is in you**, Whom you have received from God? You are **not** your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- “See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain **in** the Son and **in** the Father” (1 John 2:24).
- “Christ **in** you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

The covenant our Father offers in Jesus invites you to live in *union* with Him. United by His Spirit in you, you're on an ongoing pilgrimage *with* Him on earth until the time when your name is read aloud before the host of heaven. So your *motive* for keeping this Covenant of love is to live in a way that brings glory to your Father.

We want to end this segment with a reminder of the promise our Lord Jesus has made to you: “‘Whoever trusts in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive” (John 7:38,39). Streams of *living water* will flow from within us. We aren't the stream, but His Spirit at work in and through us is that water of

refreshment and life to others.

We hope you can see what we're driving at here in regard to spiritual intimacy. *Religion* causes people to look to a god who is "out-there" somewhere. But a *Kingdom* focus prompts us to look inward to the comfort and power that only His Spirit can give us. As you pray, you can experience that union of loving trust and be strengthened for the purposes Father has for you each day. And by His Spirit you'll be able to endure any and all kinds of suffering and persecution—because you're not going through it *alone*! In the process, you'll find yourself not only becoming more like Jesus; you'll also be deepening your sense of loving union with Him.

If you're to walk in the way of our Lord, that Spirit-birthed oneness of His presence in you will enable you to be *His aroma* to the world.

### **For Further Study**

- Hebraic Article: *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*
- Teaching E-mail 45. *Do You Understand the Kingdom?*
- Lifebytes 61 thru 65: *Does Your Marriage Reflect Your Covenant With Our Father?*

Each is a free download on our website: <[restorationministries.org](http://restorationministries.org)>