



C R O S S - S H A P E D
D I S C I P L E S H I P
b y L y n n G r e e n

*I wonder how much you and I have
our hearts set on human things
rather than divine things?*

When it comes to Christian discipleship there are many things that immediately spring to mind. Being a disciple means *being with* Jesus. Discipleship means following in the footsteps of Jesus. Disciples are practical learners who live out the way of Jesus in their everyday lives. Disciples are those who go and make disciples of all nations. What an awesome adventure we are being invited to embark upon. Discipleship is certainly a profound and worthwhile commitment and an amazing opportunity to be part of God's purposes for the whole of creation.

But there comes a point when things get *really* serious. A time when the full meaning of discipleship becomes clearer.

We see this happening in Mark 8 when Jesus begins to spell out to his disciples what the journey ahead is going to look like. *'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.'* Mark 8:31

Even though the invitation to, "Follow me!" is an incredible privilege, Jesus wants the crowd and his disciples to be under no illusions about the sort of discipleship that he invites people into. Jesus goes on to say, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* Mark 8:34

People who carry crosses are on their way to be executed.

Jesus' point, of course, is that discipleship is a radical commitment to giving our whole lives over to following him. Whether we live or we die, all that we are and all that we do is for him. In responding to the invitation of Jesus we are literally disowning ourselves and owning Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. The call to discipleship is not simply a call to the joy of disciple-making, or the wonder of miracles, nor the blessing of seeing God move; it is also a call to follow Jesus as he embraced the way of the cross as an expression of God's sacrificial love. Some of you reading this article will know exactly what this means as you have experienced first-hand suffering and persecution because you are a follower of Jesus. In Global Baptist gatherings I am constantly reminded of the costly nature of discipleship from

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sisters and brothers for whom this is their lived experience - the church planters who are working in Northern Nigeria, the pastors who continue to serve in war-torn Ukraine, those who seek the Kingdom in the midst of oppressive regimes or drugs cartels.

But for many of us, our response is much more like Peter, who heard the words of Jesus and then took him to one side to rebuke him! Peter didn't want to hear what Jesus was saying. He didn't want discipleship to be like this. Very naturally he preferred to carry on with the teaching and the miracles and the crowds responding in awe and wonder. But Jesus' response is to rebuke Peter.

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."
Mark 8:33

And I wonder how much you and I have our hearts set on human things rather than divine things? How much we are wedded to our comfortable, Christendom discipleship that doesn't really want to hear too much about the reality of the cross-shaped discipleship of Jesus?

I heard recently about a group of our ministers who were apparently discussing whether they would do what they do if they weren't paid! I have no idea how the conversation ensued, but the question is a good one for us to ponder, nevertheless.

I am encouraged, however, by Luke's version of the same passage. There Luke talks about the need for disciples to take up their cross *daily*. For me, the word *daily* gives discipleship a more dynamic, unfolding sense. For Peter himself, his discipleship was unfolding. He responded without hesitation on the seashore in Galilee when first called by Jesus. But now, in the shadow of the cross, his more human motivations become apparent, and we know that in the courtyard after Jesus' arrest he denied Christ. And yet after the resurrection we see Peter boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus in the public square. This gives me hope that

while my discipleship might not be as cross-shaped as it could be right now, God's not finished with me yet. As I continue to love and follow Jesus, and as I am upheld by grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, I trust that whatever the future holds, I will have the courage to be a faithful, cross-shaped disciple wherever Jesus leads me.

The call to discipleship is a cross-shaped call. If we want to be followers of Jesus, let us deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow him.



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