

Take up your cross

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you. Why were the disciples called Christians at Antioch first? Because if we read before and if we go back to Acts chapter 2 and chapter 4, we may not read that now.

We will see why they were called Christians. The life of the early church, how the church lived, the communal living. They identified them by their lifestyle. It was not just a name that was coined for convenience sake.

They were named after Christ, which means they saw something in them that gave them, that resembled how Christ lived. At this point, Christ had died and had ascended.

So they saw something in them that made them give them that nickname, if you like. So the life of Christ was evident in them. And, you know, in our contemporary days, these days, how we know and what we know, you know, who we actually call Christians.

You know, people who believe in Christ. John 3, 16 tells us that, you know, if you read John 3, 16 to 17, it says, For God so loved the world that he gave his holy son, begotten his son, that who believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

[1 : 1 6] So the Christian, in our days, are people that believe, and, you know, believing in Christ, someone gave an analogy some time ago, that if you believe in something, you hinge your life on that thing. If I believe that this chair can take my weight, I don't just believe by, I have to sit on it, right?

And so that's how it is. For people who believe in Christ, it means we anchor our lives on Christ. So believing, and the word the Bible uses, from my background as a linguist, believes is something that is going on, you know?

The grammatical, the tense that is used, there's like a continuous kind of thing. Believes in him. It's not someone who believes, someone who believes in him shall not perish. So for us, a Christian is one who believes in Christ, someone who anchors, you know, people who anchor their lives on Christ.

So it begins with believing in Christ, the Son of God, and the Messiah sent by God to wash away our sins through his death and resurrection. And that's who a Christian is.

Somebody said that God doesn't have grandchildren, God has children. I'm sure we understand that analogy. So which means you can't say that your parents are Christians and therefore you are a Christian.

[2 : 3 3] You have to have that personal encounter, which is what is here. And that's who the definition, that's the person I'm referring to in this case as a Christian.

And so the Disciples Cross, which I will be sharing on, you know, Sorry.

Yeah. We are talking about the disciple. And, you know, a disciple is tied in this sense. You can't be a disciple without being a Christian, you know.

The discipleship, in the sense, in the sense in which we have defined who a Christian is, is tied to what, to a disciple. You know, of course, the word is gotten from a Latin word, disciples, which means a pupil or a student.

You know, the root word is discipline. And in this sense, we are talking about one who adheres or subscribes to the teachings of a mentor. And in this case, Jesus is our mentor.

[3 : 4 1] And Jesus had disciples, of course. The 12 he called. And people, you know, would say that the cycle was kept growing. Yeah, there was the 72 and also, you know, the 12 were the popular ones we knew.

But then there were others, too, that, you know, were disciples of Jesus. And so in this dimension, there are pupils or students of Jesus, learning under the master's feet.

And that's what it is. So it means that there's a mind. Your mind is filled with the knowledge. There's a knowledge that your mind is filled with. You know, since there are teachings and disciplines that you are imbibing as one who, you know, identifies with the mentor in this case.

And Christ is the mentor. So one who makes Christ the center of his life. You know, following the teachings and what we see in scripture, the principle of scripture is one who one can refer to as a disciple.

So your heart is there. Not just the knowledge, you know, in your mind, but your heart and your inclination and everything about you is to do the will of the master. To please the one, you know, you follow.

[4 : 53] And so the disciples cross that I'll be sharing, I just said this as a background, the disciples cross, which is an illustration that I will be sharing today to help us as we take the communion, is an illustration I got from a discipleship I went through called Master Life 10, 11 years ago, like I said earlier.

And this helped me to assess my, you know, and has always helped me, rather, to assess my life as a Christian. And I hope we find it helpful to help, to guide us as we, you know, go ahead in our Christian journey.

So it's gotten from one of the series. There are six books in that discipleship resource. And the disciples cross was one of them. And this is an illustration that helps us to, you know, the different approach to look at the idea of what it means to carry your cross.

Sometimes when we say carry your cross, it's an expression or it's a figurative meaning, expression that has to do with maybe bearing your own burden or dealing with your own problems.

That is cross to bear. It's used a lot in Nigeria. You see, carry your cross or carry your, it's like it's your own problem. But the sense in which I'm sharing this today is not to look at it as a problem, but to look at it as a, this, as some set of disciplines that will help us as we live our lives as Christians.

[6 : 28] And especially as members of the body, as we take the communion this evening. So permit me to probably stand this way as probably we'll go together.

And that the, the disciples cross is mainly gotten from the text that Daniel read for us today. And especially verse 23, Luke 9, 23.

There are several scriptural passages. We may not read all, but I will attempt to see if I can still memorize some of them as we go ahead today in our time.

So if we look, if we look at Luke chapter 9, verse 23. He said, and it says, the scripture says, and he said to them all, if anyone will come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.

So there are three things we see there. There are three commitments that one who is a Christian, one who is a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ needs to take note of.

[7 : 36] There are three commitments. The first is to deny self. The second is to take up our cross. And the third is to follow Christ. And I'm going to define that as we go ahead shortly before we punctuate our time.

But denying ourselves does not mean neglecting ourselves. Because when we read scripture, we are precious before God. We are, you know, we are purchased by his precious blood.

So we are held in high esteem, you know, by God. And so it means that we are valuable. So denying ourselves does not mean, denying ourselves does not amount to neglecting ourselves or treating ourselves with disdain.

It just means that we should get rid of our self-centered lives. You know, as human beings, there's a tendency to be self-centered. There's a selfish, there's always that selfishness that tends to show up sometimes where you always want to be in charge of your life.

And that is what Christ is telling us to do here. You have to deny that self-centeredness. There's that tendency that is there. That's what denying self means.

[8 : 46] To be in charge all the time. All right? And so this circle represents you as one who is a Christian and willing to follow Christ.

And this is Christ in you. So getting rid of your self-centered life means that Christ is at the center of your life, not yourself anymore. Not your will, but Christ. Christ's will.

And it is Christ in us that helps us, you know, take our cross and follow him. It is by his power that we do that. It is not by our own power that we keep ourselves or keep carrying on.

Because sometimes the Christian life is challenging. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed. But with Christ in us, he helps us to do a lot. And John 15 verse 5 tells us, he says, I am the vine, you are the branches.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. So it is Christ that helps us to live in accordance with his purpose.

[9 : 44] You know, Philippians chapter 2 verse 13, it says, For it is God who wills in you to act according to his good purposes.

So it is Christ in us that helps us to live as disciples, to live in the disciplines that, you know, the Christian life entails.

So whenever you feel weak, please remember that Christ is in you. And he is the one who gives you the strength to live boldly for him. When you feel you are in a context where, you know, nobody wants to hear about Christ.

You feel like you are being attacked. People might mock you because you believe. Some people will think you believe in fairy tales or it is just something that you have made up, you know, or it is a cooked up story.

The Bible cannot be believed. Just remember that what you have is a glorious hope in Christ. And it is Christ in you who will keep you. So, you know, be encouraged by that.

[10 : 40] And so Christ in us helps us to carry our cross. Because the cross, in this sense, I will be sharing will be disciplines for each of the arms.

You know, the cross has four sides. For each of the arms, there are certain things I will be mentioning that signify certain disciplines that will help us to remain in Christ. And remember that it is Christ who helps us to live these things up.

We can't do them by ourselves. The first one is the word, living in God's word. John chapter 8, verse 31 to 32. To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, if you hold on to my teachings, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Living in God's word is holding on to the truth as we know it. As we see in scripture.

You know, principles that are consistent with what we have in God's word as we read them in scripture. So, living in God's word is, you know, patterning our lives after the principles of scripture.

[11 : 43] And how can we pattern our lives after these principles if we do not read, if we do not study, if we do not make out time to, you know, memorize and even just meditate on God's word.

So, living in God's word is an important discipline in the life of a Christian. There are so many things that, you know, would take our attention.

So much is going on probably in our lives. There is so much to do. We are busy. But please remember that as a child of God, we need to spend time with him. We need to spend time in his word.

Reading his word. Meditating upon his word. And very importantly, obeying the word. Because that's where the blessings are. That is what, you know, helps us to practicalize what we know. And it helps us to live out our Christian conviction. So, living in God's word is very important. The second one is prayer. Or praying in faith.

[12 : 45] And praying in faith, of course, in this sense has to do with, you know, our communication with God. Through, you know, the various platforms you may have.

So, prayer is a very important discipline in the Christian life. And as we live in God's word, we'll be able to pray in ways that, you know, are in line with God's will.

In John 15, verse 7. You might want to open that. John 15, verse 7. A lot of what I'll be saying will be centered in John 15. John 15, verse 7.

You might want to look at that. It says, If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and to be given to you. What it means then is that prayer needs to be hinged on remaining in God's word.

Because when we live in God's word, our prayers will be, not probably all the time, but our will will be aligned with what God wants for us.

[13 : 52] You know, there are certain times we pray, but then how do we pray? You know, it's important to pray in the will of God. One of the ways, or one of the things that helps us pray in the will of God is remaining in God's word.

Because God's word helps us to align with what he wants to do. Since our self-centered, you know, life is being dealt with Christ in us, it helps us to pray in alignment with what God wants.

So we are aligned with God's agenda on different issues in life. And it's very important, because when it says ask whatever you wish, and to be given to you, it's within the context.

It's not just a wild goose chase. It's just ask anything based on our self-centered, you know, on our own agenda. No, but it's based on what God's agenda for different things, for different aspects of our lives may be.

So praying in faith is very important. And the right arm has to do with fellowship. Fellowship.

Fellowshipping with believers is a very important aspect of discipline of the Christian life.

[15:02] What we are having right now is fellowship, right? But we come together. Hebrews 10.25 also tells us that, that we should not give up the habit of meeting together as some are doing.

You know, we should, but we should meet and encourage one another as we look forward to the coming of our Lord. So fellowship is very important. And there are various platforms.

I know there are a couple of platforms we have as a fellowship, as a church family within our church community that foster us fellowship. Our church prayer meetings we have, you know, the Sunday services we have, the evening service, what we are doing now.

And I think the music evening coming up is also an avenue for fellowship. And so it's good that we look forward to those platforms that help us to fellowship, you know, as believers.

Because when we fellowship and we come together, there's, you know, there's some kind of encouragement and strength we get to know that, look, as we go out to live our lives out there in the world, we are not alone.

[16:07] There are certain challenges that everyone is facing. So when we come together, it's like we're recharging, you know, we get charged up to go back. And then, so fellowship is a very important part.

And it also serves as an evidence that can draw people to Christ. In Acts chapter 2, verse 42 there about, and even Acts chapter 4, if you look at the life of the early believers, you know, the Bible says, nobody, they were one in heart.

You know, they were united. That nobody felt that what they had was theirs. As a matter of fact, people sold things, brought the process to the church so that it can be shared among those who had need for them.

So they kept meeting constantly. And the Bible says, and God added to their numbers daily those who were being saved. Because if you look at the love and you see what's going on within a fellowship, it makes you want to be part of that.

Right? John chapter 13, verse 34 to 35 says, a new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another.

[17:19] So fellowship is, you know, is a platform, is an avenue where the love of Christ is spread across in our hearts. And it's shown in a tangible way.

The last discipline is witness, witnessing to the world. Witnessing to the world. John chapter 15, verse 8. It says, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Sorry, I'm rushing over the scriptures. But if you need the slides, I can make them available. And we can have further discussions. So this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples.

As we live in God's word, and as we pray in faith, as we fellowship with believers, we want to share. We want to be witnesses for Christ. We want to witness to the world. And witnessing to the world is a very important part of the Christian life.

Because there are various ways in which this can be done. You know, sometimes you may not always have the opportunity to go out to talk to people.

[18:29] But God can bring people our way that we can share our faith with. You know, there's so much going on in terms of what you can say, what you cannot say.

But one of the things I've found that has helped me, especially ever since I came to the UK, something that I've seen happen a lot, is that sometimes people can just meet you and talk about issues.

And these people may not necessarily be believers. Some might not have even been to a church. But when they ask you certain questions, and they really want to know the answer, what helps me is to share it from the convictions that I have in the faith.

And that is a way that I've seen God use to encourage people, you know. So you may not always go out, but God can bring people your way.

And the convictions you have can be shared. Being a witness is that you are, you know, testifying of something that you have witnessed, you have experienced as a first hand, rather than something that was told to you.

[19 : 37] Because as children of God, you must have witnessed a point in your life where you got convicted by the Holy Spirit of sin, and you received Christ into your life. And your personal relationship with God has translated into certain outcomes that, you know, you can share about, you know.

So that in itself is a form of witnessing. So we need to make witnessing something that is, you know, part of our lives.

And I think the church also has, as we go into the Christmas season, there are going to be a couple of opportunities, I think, for witnessing to people, especially as the Christmas comes. There's a lot around the culture.

People are, it's one of the, if not the most celebrated festival or occasion, event in the earth. How many millions of people celebrate Christmas, you know.

Even growing up, Christmas was just a different atmosphere for us growing up. Buying new clothes, everything. It was wonderful. Some of the nostalgic feelings I have about growing up were around Christmas.

[20 : 48] One of the happy memories were around Christmas. And that is a very good opportunity to share our faith as well. And I think the church has those opportunities. So John 15, verse 8, tells us that bearing fruit, you know, bearing fruit, the fruit here are people or souls of men that are brought to the saving knowledge of Christ.

So, as we take up, this is the cross we should take up. The cross that has this discipline. So this is the definition of the cross I'm talking about.

Living in God's word, praying in faith, fellowshiping with believers, and witnessing to the world.

And as you follow Christ in these ways, you'll find that you are serving men, you are reaching out to people.

And there's a potential for these things to branch out into various forms of reaching out to people or service, if you like. And so, living in God's word, you'll find yourself probably serving in the ministry through sharing the word, you know, which can be expressed in teaching and preaching.

That's one of it. The ministry of prayer, the discipline, would branch out to the ministry of worship and intercession. These are ways in which reaching out to the world, you know, in these disciplines can look like.

[22 : 09] So, that's what these ministries are about. And then fellowship will lead to ministry by nurture. And I think this church is blessed in that.

It's one of the strong points I've experienced being a member of this body. The aspect of fellowship and nurture. So many caring. I mean, everybody's, personally, I've seen that people are really interested, genuinely interested in helping and looking out for one another.

And I think it's something that we should continue as a body. It's a strong point for me. And then witnessing to the world will lead to ministry by evangelism. And then all these would, you know, you would commit in serving other people.

Because when you reach out to people in these forms, you discover that it's just all about service. Serving in various capacities. And that's what the Christian life is about.

Jesus said that the greatest among you is the one who serves. That's what he told his disciples when they were asking him about who will be the greatest. The one who will sit on the left or on the right.

[23 : 20] He said, it's not up to me. It's up to my father. But notice that the greatest among you is not the one who looks for positions. But the one who serves. Who really serves men. And so, that's very important for us.

And so, summarily, we have one Lord. And this Lord is Jesus Christ. Who is in the center of the Christian's life. There are two relationships we can see from the cross.

There's the vertical relationship. Which is relationship with God. Right? Through prayer and word. And then, there's the horizontal relationship.

You see, fellowship and witnessing has to do with reaching out to men. And so, that is basically about the horizontal relationship. So, there's one Lord. Two relationships. There are three commitments.

Denying ourselves. Taking up our cross. And following Christ. Right? And then, there are four disciplines. Living in God's word.

[24 : 24] Praying in faith. Fellowship. And witnessing. Those are the four disciplines. Right? Yeah. There you have it. Then, there are five ministries. Ministry through teaching. Through sharing the word.

Ministry through worship and intercession. Ministry by nurture. And ministry by evangelism. Sorry. And then, ministry of service.

All of them. All about serving others. So, this is what the life of a disciple needs to be.

And we pray that God will help us as we take the communion. Let's reflect on our lives. The Christian life is both declared.

Which means professed. And demonstrated. Practiced. I was just thinking about it in another way. And especially with my research that I'm doing right now.

[25 : 23] I'm doing a lot of grammatical descriptions. And from the literature I read. And I was thinking about this. I just discovered that the Christian life is more of a verb than a noun. Which means it is beyond just naming things.

Just the name. But it's about doing. That's what verbs are. So, about doing. So, the Christian life is more of demonstrating.

Or practicing. And remembering that there's a family name here. As a Christian. As a disciple. As a child of God. There's a family name we need to protect. And that's why how we live our lives matters.

Before God's sight. From my background. My African background. Is that there's a family name. Whatever I do. Doesn't just rub off on me. It rubs off on my family. And so, growing up. A lot of parents tell children. Remember where you're coming from.

[26 : 22] Remember that you bear a family name. And how you live your life. You know. How you live your life. Matters. Because it will go back to the family. My son name.

Is my great grandfather's name. Not even my father's name. Or my grandfather's name. Because my great grandfather was. Kind of. He was not a Christian.

But he had. He had many wives. But then he seemed to be a wealthy man. I was kind of a good man. Kind of. And so. I just saw. That people used his name.

Because the name opens a few doors. So whenever they call Maku. Where I come from. It's only one family. That they know that name. And that's because. Probably by his works. People knew. And so. Somehow. We just decided to retain the name. And so wherever you go. Oh. Where are you from? Oh. This family. So the name opens. That's because of how people use the name.

[27 : 17] And how people practice. You know. And so when you do something. They say. This person is from this house. So if you misbehave. The disgrace goes back to the family.

And so. It can apply to our lives as Christians. When we misbehave. As children of God. What happens? You know. They think.

It goes back to God. It misrepresents the kingdom. And so. It's very important. That we leave. Out the Christian discipline. So. Again. As we carry our cross.

Let's remember the ultimate cross. That was. You know. That was carried. By Christ. There's no cross. Greater than that. And as we sit here. To.

Have the. Communion. And contemplate the sacrifice. That Christ made. For us. Even as we carry. The cross of. The disciplines.

[28 : 12] Living out the Christian life. Let's remember that cross. That Jesus carried. And what it cost him. And let's renew our commitment. To Christ. We fall short of his glory.

I'm sure there are many ways. And as I speak these things. I. I also. See myself. Falling short. In many ways. But. Helped by God's grace. And remembering that it's Christ in me.

That helps me. Live out these disciplines. I can always pick myself up again. And so. Through Christ enabling grace. That's.

How we live. As Christians. We live by grace. We are living. And we are living by his enabling grace. And so. Let's remember that. That it is not by our ability. But it's by Christ. You know. So. As we close. I would like us to sing this song. I know we sang it in the morning. But it resonates with the message. Of what this. This sharing is all about.

[29 : 11] Christ in us. Living out his life. And us willing to cooperate. And partner with Christ. In living out his life. So. Yet not I. But. But through Christ. In me.

And as we take the communion. Which Daniel will lead us. But we'll sing the song. Before. The communion. So. Yeah.

Let's sing.