

Define the Relationship

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] These are very challenging words of Jesus. These are piercing words.! And the big question that many of us guys were trying to figure out back then was how do we get from friendship to marriage?

And what is dating all about? And if I find myself attracted to this particular young lady, then what next? If I tell her how I feel about her, then what?

And if she feels the same way, then what do we do? Well, every relationship unfolds a little differently, but at some point there has to be what we call the DTR, the define the relationship conversation.

There has to be that conversation where we sort of put words to what this relationship is and where we'd like to go together. Are we going to keep seeing each other regularly?

To the exclusion of others? Is there a sense that each other could be the one? And what are we to each other?

[1 : 40] Are we boyfriend and girlfriend? Or are we not quite there yet? Are there any deal breakers? Things that we need to kind of get out at the beginning that this is a no deal for me.

We'd have to stop if that's something that you feel strongly about. Feelings can only take a relationship so far. Eventually, there has to be that moment of defining the relationship.

Clarifying what we are to each other and what our intentions are. Well, there's some similarity with our relationship to Jesus. It's not a romantic relationship, but there is the same sort of pattern to our relationship with him.

We first hear about Jesus and we begin to get to know about him. And for many, we're attracted to some of the things that he says or does.

We see the goodness in him. We feel drawn to him. But those feelings only take us so far. Eventually, there has to be that moment of defining the relationship between him and me.

[2 : 58] Jesus has had all kinds of people following him and oohing and aahing over all the things that he has been saying and doing. But now it's time for the DTR conversation.

It's time to define the relationship. And Jesus is going to be frank. He's just going to lay it out on the table. What kind of a relationship is he looking for with us? And these are the words Jesus uses. Luke chapter 9 verse 23. Then he said to them all, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it.

These are some of the most important words in our faith. It's here that Jesus defines what a relationship with him must look like. If you're new to Jesus but you desire to go forward in your relationship with him, these words lay out the big implications to your life.

[4 : 15] Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Let's meditate on these words together. We'll start with the word whoever. As we read these words, they're so serious.

And if we're honest, they sound kind of bleak and dismal at first. You know, denial and a march towards death. That's what Jesus is talking about.

And we start to think, well, this must be mainly for those who want to go all out for Jesus. This must be for the spiritual keeners. This must be for those few students in the class who actually like school.

These words must be for the apostles and for the pastors and the missionaries. The church leaders. Because this sounds like next level commitment. But then there's this word whoever.

[5 : 20] Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. We notice that Jesus isn't just speaking to the twelve here.

He said to them all. In Mark's gospel we read that he actually turns to the crowd and calls them to come before he says these words. Whoever means anyone.

And that stubborn little word must. Which follows. What this says is that these things are required of all who wish to follow Jesus.

So it isn't just for apostles and pastors and missionaries. It's for whoever wants to be a disciple of Jesus. Next we notice the word wants.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must do these things. And we can even follow it down into the next verse.

[6 : 23] For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it. This is the language of desire.

And this word leads us to a very specific question. What do you want? Do you want to be a follower of Jesus?

A disciple of Jesus? As I said before the feelings often come first. We're attracted to Jesus for many reasons. But then we have to make a decision.

Do I really want to be one of his disciples? And if not. Then what do I really want? This is where the words of Jesus.

I find them amazing. In the next breath in verse 24. Jesus addresses the biggest objection that people have to following him.

[7 : 30] And it comes in the form of want. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. This is the biggest desire that competes with our desire to follow Jesus.

We feel that it will cost us our very lives. We know deep down inside to really follow Jesus is going to require some big changes.

In me. And in how I'm living. I'm used to being the captain of my own ship. But if I follow him I'm going to have to surrender that position.

That role to him. That would be a great loss to me. And so I don't want to follow Jesus. I want to keep the life that I have now. I want to preserve it. I want to save it.

For myself. And surprisingly. Maybe. Jesus says that trying to save the life that we now have. Will result in losing.

[8 : 33] Our lives. We'll come back to that thought in just a bit. At the heart of this whole thing though is what we want. What we really want.

Do you want to be a follower of Jesus? A disciple of Jesus? Or do you want to hold on to your own life?

Which do you desire most? Let's keep moving. Whoever wants to be my disciple.

Now the word disciple is not actually in the original text. But this is a translation that seeks to give us the idea. In the words Jesus used. Quite literally.

Jesus said. If anyone wants to come after me. Or as Mark's gospel has it. If anyone wants to follow after me. It's a figure of speech.

[9 : 38] That describes not just a physical following of Jesus. But this relationship with Jesus. That someone who followed him in those days had. And so disciple is a good translation.

It's the meaning behind the words. Lots of people in this point in the story. Have been following Jesus around. But now Jesus is saying. If you want to be a true follower of mine.

A disciple of mine. Here's what will be required of you. And there's a lot of discussion about that word. Disciple. And other words like believer.

And which word should we use. If we talk about ourselves as those things. Or should we use the term Christian. Some try and even create a bit of a progression here.

You know. We kind of start as non-believers. Then we become believers. Then we become disciples. And there is some truth in that. But there's also some problems with that way of looking at it too.

[10 : 38] If we read carefully through the gospels. What we see is that the term disciple. Was not just used to describe the 12 disciples. It was used to describe a much larger group of people.

Who followed Jesus. And within that group of disciples. People came. And people went. We see that throughout the gospels.

There were people who truly believed. And they just continued to follow him. And there were some who were attracted. And came along. And explored for a while. And then quit.

Judas is the most well-known example. He was a disciple of Jesus. But he later betrayed Jesus. At its core. The term really means student.

Or pupil. Or apprentice. In the same way. If we carefully read through John's gospel. We see references to those who believed.

[11 : 38] But we also see at a few points. Some of those who believed at first. Turn on Jesus. And reject Jesus. In the same way.

There were many who believed in Jesus. But not all were true believers. And this is precisely the point of these words of Jesus.

Jesus. He's really telling us what is required of all true followers of his. In other words. There are many of you in the crowd. Who have been following me around.

But if you truly want to be one of mine. If you want to follow after me. This is what will be required of you. Some will hear these requirements of denial.

And death. And that will be it. That's too much. No thanks. I'm out. And we see that today.

[12 : 37] Even today. Many are attracted to Jesus. They're enamored with him. They show up at church on a Sunday morning. For a few weeks.

They see the goodness in his teaching. And how some of that would make a difference in their lives. Things like loving one another. And forgiving. And not being judgmental.

Or proud. But Jesus wants us to know. That really following him. Will cost us everything. Even our very lives.

Or so it may seem. Do you really want to be a follower. Of Jesus. The hard truth is.

Jesus is not interested. In having a casual relationship with us. He's not interested. In a brief. Fling.

[13 : 40] Or in being friends with benefits. He says it must be a committed relationship. And the level of that commitment. Is deny myself for him.

And follow him to my own death. Words like these. Help us see pretty quickly.

That Jesus didn't care too much. About popularity. Or saying what would appeal to people. But it kind of gets to the truth of things.

Jesus will not be. A sort of fire insurance policy. In our back pocket. And nothing more. He is God's Messiah. He is the king for all mankind.

And he has come. Not just to save us from punishment. Because of his mercy. But also to reconcile us to God. So that we can belong to God. And be with God forever.

[14 : 43] So we can't keep the status quo. Of our lives. And just sort of sprinkle a little bit of Jesus. On top. Some people want Jesus as savior.

But not as Lord. Some people want him as the sacrifice. That atones for our sins. But not the king. Of their lives. But these things can't be separated. Jesus will be. Both. Or neither. To us. I like the way that.

That Kyle Eidelman puts it. In his. Not a fan video series. He said. We say to Jesus. I don't mind you making some changes to my life. But Jesus wants to turn your life upside down.

We say. I don't mind a little touch up work. But Jesus wants complete renovation. We're thinking tune up. He's thinking overhaul.

[15 : 46] We think a little decorating. Why not? But Jesus wants a complete remodel. And I love that analogy. Of the house renovation.

You know. If our life is like a house. We think that. We'll just take some of the stuff. That we like from Jesus. And kind of. You know. Decorate a little bit with it. Put it into our life. Here and there. But Jesus comes along. And says. No. The house has got to be completely. Torn down. And built differently. From the bottom up. You can't keep the life you have.

And follow me. You have to lose it. To follow after me. And only in doing that. Will you save. Your life.

Let's talk about this word. Deny. Whoever wants to be my disciple. Must deny himself. What does that mean? Well to deny a person.

[16 : 44] Means to say no to them. And I don't think it's quite the same. As Peter denying. That he knew Jesus. Or disowning Jesus. Same word.

But I think. That was about. Disassociating himself with Jesus. Here we're talking about. Denying oneself. Saying no. To ourselves.

Well why would we have to do that. To follow Jesus. There's many ways. That we could flesh this out. But let's use the word want. The word Jesus has been using.

What happens when you want something. In your life. But what Jesus wants in your life. Is in conflict with that. We can only say yes.

To one. And we have to say no. To the other. What if Jesus. What if Jesus. Is my king. Commands me. Not to do something. But I really want to do it.

[17:46] Well I have a choice. I can deny myself. Say no to myself. And obey. His command. Or I can deny him.

I can say no to him. And do what I want to do. Jesus is saying. That if you want to follow him. You must say yes to him. You must say yes to God.

Which will often mean saying no. To yourself. Let's have an example of this. Just a little bit back.

In the story. We heard Jesus say. That we must love our enemies. And that we must turn the other cheek. To say yes to Jesus.

And follow him. In his way. Means that we must say no. To any desire. That we have. For revenge. They can't go together. We must.

[18:42] Deny ourselves. The seeming satisfaction. Of getting even. And we must even do. What we don't want to do. We must choose. Despite how we may feel. To love that person.

And even to pray for them. Or listen to how the apostle Paul. Urges. Us to live now. As followers of Jesus. In Colossians chapter 3.

He says. Put to death. Therefore. Whatever belongs. To your earthly nature. Sexual immorality. Impurity. Lust. Evil desires.

And greed. He goes on to say. You must rid yourselves. Of all such things. As these. Anger. Rage. Malice. Slander.

And filthy language. From your lips. So there's an ordinary way of life. For most people on earth.

And we were part of that. At one time. Living to fulfill.

[19:40] Our desires. In this case. Our sexual desires. And appetites. Without regard for God. And what he has. Said about that. Living to make ourselves. Happy. By accumulating.

Money. And wealth. And material things. Greed. Greed. And the list goes on. And what does Paul say here? He says. We must put.

Those things. To death. Those things. In our nature. To death. There it is. Denying oneself. It's saying no.

To the selfish. And sinful. And prideful. Desires. That we have. Let's just take greed. As an example. God knows.

That money. And the stuff. Of earth. Can never satisfy. The deepest longings. Of our hearts. In fact. We know this too. In fact.

[20:37] Even outside of. The church. And those who believe. In God. We know it. Chuck Norris. Said. Some of the most. Miserable people. I know. Are some of the richest.

People in America. They are the most. Miserable individuals. I've ever seen. He said. The actor. Jim Carrey. Said.

Wealth. Does not buy. Happiness. But it enables. A more comfortable. Misery. Money.

And the stuff. Of earth. Can never. Satisfy. The deepest. Longings. And needs. Of our hearts. We think. About money. When is enough. Enough. Even the person.

Who has. A hundred million dollars. Often feels. The same. As you do. If I only had. A little bit more. Just another million. Our tastes.

[21:35] Only grow. More and more. Expensive. You have a couch. That's comfy enough. Maybe fraying. A little. At the edges. From wear and tear. But if only.

It was one of those. New smart. Couches. With soft leather. And the cup holder. Built in. And the power. Recliner. That so and so. Has. And you can have.

That same feeling. About the couch. About everything. That you own. Your bed. Your pillow. Your TV. Your car. Your house. Even your Bible.

And then you could look at. The countless things. You don't own. But wish you could own. And we tell ourselves.

That if we can just. Get those things. If I can just. Upgrade this particular thing. I'll be happy. Life will be so much better. But the cycle.

[22 : 33] Never ends. There will always be. New products. New styles. There will always be something. In some way. Better than what we have.

This is greed. And it's ugly. It's sinful. We're living in God's world. We're having all we need. From him.

And yet constantly discontent. And so what does it look like. To follow Jesus. In relation to. Material things. And finances.

Deny yourself. Say no. To that impulse of greed. In your own heart. Put that desire to death. Says Paul. If you keep feeding.

That sinful attitude of greed. Ironically. It has the opposite effect. Just like Jesus says. It leaves you. Utterly impoverished. You're trying to gain wealth.

[23 : 32] And happiness. And fulfillment. But in the process. You become poor. Miserable. And empty inside. Look at the richest people in the news.

And the celebrities. They have all kinds of money. And yet do they seem truly happy. And fulfilled. Just four days ago. Elon Musk. One of the richest men on earth.

Tweeted this. Whoever said money can't buy happiness. Really knew. What they were talking about. This is just one aspect of life.

And what it looks like to deny myself. And follow Jesus. But this same idea. Applies to every aspect of life. To follow Jesus. We must deny ourselves.

We must say no to ourselves. To that selfishness. And pride. So that we can say yes to Jesus. The metaphor that Jesus gives us here.

[24 : 31] Is very powerful. Whoever wants to be my disciple. Must take up his cross. Daily. And follow me. Think about the cross.

For a moment. That wooden thing. That Jesus picked up. And carried. To his own execution. Jesus says.

If you want to be a disciple of mine. A follower of mine. You need to pick up your cross. And follow me. To your own death. Daily.

That word daily. Is so important. Luke's the only gospel. That has it in it. But it helps us see. That Jesus is speaking. In metaphor here. Jesus is not calling.

All of his followers. To be literal martyrs. And physically surrender. Themselves to death. Though some will. And some have. But daily.

[25 : 31] Means that we are to walk. This path of death. To ourselves. This path of self-denial. Day after day. After day. It's a metaphor.

He's talking about. Giving up our very lives. In order to follow. Him. And that word daily. It's powerful. This is not just a one and done decision.

Like. There's two paths in front of me. And I took this path. And now. It's over and done. Daily. Means that this is a decision. We must make each day.

Again and again. Day after day. To deny. To die. In order to follow Jesus.

And this feels difficult. Let's just admit it. It is painful at times. It feels like we're losing our very lives. Like we're suffocating.

[26 : 30] And killing. A part of us. But in our clearest moments. As followers of Jesus. We see that it's really only the part of us. That ought to die. And actually we're not dying.

But we're really living. A parent knows. How much must be given up. To look after young children. Day after day. They never say thank you.

For changing the diapers. While they're in them. And there are thousands of meals. Lovingly made. For those kids. Some of them are flat out rejected.

At first sight. By our children. And you love. And you serve that child for years. You trade countless moments. Looking after them.

Caring for them. That you could have spent. Doing things that you enjoy doing. Spending time out. With friends. Doing those hobbies. And activities that you love most.

[27 : 33] And you look at the bank account. And the money in the bank account. Is going towards. Stuff for the kids. And there's just. There's no time. It feels. In some moments.

Like you're dying. There is a real sacrifice. In love. But there is also. Not much sweeter.

Than love. And those many precious moments. With your children. From their birth. Until they leave home. Yes. It was a part of me. Dying every day.

To care for them. But then you look back. On the memories. And the pictures. And you realize. That you were really living life. To its fullest. In those moments with them. When you were loving. And serving them. And giving up. What you wanted. To do. Things with them. And for them. This is the way of the cross. This is following Jesus.

[28 : 28] It's a paradox. We may hear Jesus. Laying out all these requirements. And think. Forget it.

Deny myself. Take up my cross every day. Why would anyone want to do that? But Jesus goes on. A little bit more. And he reasons with us. He says.

Actually it feels that way. Because you're not seeing. The two paths ahead of you. Clearly. Whoever wants to save their life.

Will lose it. But whoever loses their life. For me. Will save it. It's the opposite. Of what you think. And feel it should be.

Trying to hang on. To your own life. And keep it. That's the path to death. And destruction. Says Jesus. But choosing to. Give up your life for me. That's the path to life.

[29 : 24] That's the way to save your life. It seems backwards. And it even feels backwards. But this is where faith comes in. We must trust Jesus. That this is the reality of things.

One path. Following him. Feels like suicide. But it's actually the path to life. And it's the only way. To save ourselves. The other path.

Not following him. Doing whatever I want to do. That feels like saving myself. But it's actually the path. That's going to cost me everything. In the end. Jesus is giving us the long term.

Big picture here. He's trying to see. Where these paths. End. He has been sent from heaven. By God. To rescue us. From the punishment.

We deserve. Because of the sins we've committed. There is a judgment day coming. There is that final day. Of putting right everything that is wrong.

[30 : 24] And for those who have done evil. In big ways. Or small. There are really only these two choices. We can receive.

The punishment we deserve from God. For our sins. Which is death. And hell. Or. Because God is merciful and kind.

We can accept. The gift. Of God. Which can rescue us. From that punishment. And that's Jesus. And the life and salvation.

And forgiveness. That he offers in his kingdom. Under his lordship. Those are the only two choices. There are for us. And. So if we ignore Jesus.

And we refuse to follow him. And instead cling to the life we have. Choosing to be the captain of our own lives. Doing whatever we want. Good or bad. We will lose our very lives.

[31 : 22] To death. And hell. Or we can listen to Jesus. We can take his words seriously. We can follow him. Taking this path that feels like a loss.

And a death. At times. Trusting that it leads to life. And at the end. Our lives will be saved. Jesus saves us. From the coming wrath.

All of this is captured. In these few words of Jesus. We'll go one verse more. He says. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world.

And yet lose. Or forfeit their very self. What if in this life you could gain it all. The whole world.

What if you work so tirelessly. That you actually became wealthy enough. To just buy and own everything. The whole planet. For yourself. Well that would be amazing.

[32 : 21] Wouldn't it? Until that day comes. That you die. You'll trade it your whole life. For something you can't keep.

And you'll lose it all. There's no amount of money. Or success. Or stuff. Or experiences. That this world has to offer.

That's worth giving up your very soul. That's what Jesus is saying. Following Jesus really is a matter of life.

And death. And there are only two paths. One is the way that feels like death. But leads to life. The other is the path of self-preservation.

Which seems like life. But actually forfeits it. Which path are you on? Have you decided to follow Jesus.

[33 : 21] And be a disciple of his? Or are you on the other path? The day is coming when Jesus will return.

As he says here in verse 26. He will come in his glory. And in the glory of his father. And of the holy angels. And Jesus says. If you were ashamed of him.

And his words. Did not follow him. Like we've been talking about. He will be ashamed of you. On that day. It will be too late.

Which path are you on? What is your relationship to Jesus? Jesus has defined. The relationship from his side of it.

Will you accept his terms? Many of you are on the path of life. But this is a hard path to walk.

[34 : 28] Isn't it? Maybe you feel tempted to throw in the towel. And switch back to that other path. But let's not grow weary. Or be discouraged.

It is difficult in the short term. But in the long term. We gain life. We gain life. We gain life. Forever. And a kingdom that will never be shaken.

Glory. With God forever. Or perhaps you've fallen into a spiritual stupor. And are thinking that you can get by with minimal self-denial.

Maybe you're looking for a middle ground. A way to take up the cross once or twice a week. But that won't do either. If we belong to Jesus.

We must and we will pick up the cross daily. And keep following him. It must be a daily thing. I'm a firm believer.

[35 : 28] After all these years. And meditating on the scriptures. That there will be no Sunday Christians in heaven. People who only went to church on Sunday. And made sure to live a life that looked good enough.

On the outside. But then the rest of the week. Really lived for themselves. And lived like the devil. If we belong to Jesus.

We must and we will. Pick up the cross daily. And follow him. And keep following him. Till we've spent what remains. Of the life that he has given us.

I'm going to end with. These famous words. Which really come from these words of Jesus. But I love the way Jim Elliot said it. Before he died.

Trying to give the gospel to the Alcus. In South America. He said he is no fool. Who gives up what he cannot keep. To gain what he cannot lose.

[36 : 30] He is no fool. Who gives up what he cannot keep. To gain what he cannot lose. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

These are hard words for us. I know. I feel that they are hard Lord. In my own life. Every day. Every week.

We ask for strength. We ask for help. And grace. And power. To walk this way. That you've put before us. And we thank you that there is joy along the way.

It's not all doom and gloom. Or death. And sadness. Keep us till the end we pray. In your name. Amen.