



INTRODUCTION

What is a Christian?

Ask ten different people and you'll probably get ten different answers: someone who goes to church every Sunday; someone who was born into a Christian family; someone who believes

Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead three days later; someone who celebrates Christmas and Easter; someone who doesn't drink, smoke, or use profanity. Others take a darker view.

They'd say Christians are judgmental, homophobic moralists who think they're the only ones going to heaven and secretly relish that everyone else is going to hell.

If there's so much disagreement about what a Christian is, how are we supposed to know who to trust on the matter?

WEEKLY READING

Not much of what we've talked about so far describes a Christian as defined in the Bible. In fact, the word "Christian" only appears three times in the Bible. First-century Christians didn't call themselves Christians. It was a derogatory term used by outsiders to describe followers of Jesus. Christians called themselves something far more intimidating: "disciples."

"Disciple" is an intimidating word because it's concrete. It means a learner, pupil, apprentice, adherent, or follower. A disciple learns and grows by obeying and imitating his or her master.

Discipleship isn't as simple as going to church services or believing a set of facts or observing rituals or celebrating holidays or being born into the right family or behaving morally. Being a disciple is active. It requires effort...and sacrifice.

We can hide behind the word "Christian," but early Christians considered themselves disciples.

So, what does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? In John 13:34–35, he gives his disciples their marching orders: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

When Christians live like disciples, outsiders look at their communities with wonder: "Look at the way they love. Look how they honor women, children, the elderly, and the sick. Look how they respond to persecution—it's like they don't even fear death." That kind of love has the power to change the world.

Jesus calls his followers to build communities of world-changing love. Too often, we fail and outsiders end up viewing churches as places of scorn, hostility, rejection, and stifling moralism—exclusive, self-serving clubs in which they're not welcome.

So here's the question: *Are we going to be content just being Christians, or are we going to be disciples?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you define “Christian”? Does the word have positive or negative connotations for you? Why?
2. What’s been your experience with church so far? Have most of the people you’ve met in churches been disciples or just Christians? How has that shaped your perception of Christians?
3. How have your interactions with Christians shaped your perception of Jesus?
4. Read John 13:34–35. How is Jesus’ description of what it looks like to be his disciple surprising?
5. Think about someone in your sphere of influence who is difficult to love. What is it about that person that makes him or her difficult to love? What is one thing you can do this week to show that person love?
6. What’s most intimidating about the idea of being a disciple of Jesus? What’s most compelling about it?

MOVING FORWARD

Can you imagine what your workplace and community would be like if you loved the way Jesus calls us to love? Can you imagine what would happen in our nation—in our world—if Christians everywhere began living like disciples? What if for the next three to six months, Christians committed to love the people around them?

If you’re a follower of Jesus, try it this week. To the best of your ability, by God’s grace, love the people around you. This isn’t a means to an end; you’re not going to fix people. This is better. This

is being a disciple. It has the power to change your heart, your relationships, your community, and even the world.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:34–35