

Discipleship: from Believing to Following

Part 1: Discipline Beats _____ (9/20/26)

Please turn to *Matthew 16:24-27*.

I'm about to share a parable and remember they are symbolic, so I'm not being blasphemous. The following parable was a childhood fantasy of mine that I remembered when out for a walk through the woods...w/o my phone. The very next morning, a Christian meme appeared in my newsfeed that confirmed I was hearing from God vs. just indulging in a whim.

The parable and the sermon is about being a disciple of Christ; taking the next step after believing in Him to following Him.

Imagine, if you will, that you live a difficult life. First, there's a gang of thugs who sometimes ambush you when you go outdoors. They throw you to the ground, beat you up, then take all your money and divide it among themselves. To make matters worse, every time this happens, **the cops pull up...but they don't arrest the thugs.** They arrest YOU! They throw you over the hood of their police car, put the cuffs on you, and haul you to jail while the thugs laugh.

As a result you're often miserable, can't get ahead, tired, angry, hopeless, and anxious. One day you meet up with a friend who had the same experience as you, but he's looking good, chipper, energetic, and joyful. He claims he's been taking kung fu lessons and can now fight off the thugs AND avoid getting arrested! He tells you something strange: ***"whosoever calls upon the name of the master shall be saved."***

What's the name of "the Master"? you ask, and he answers **"Bruce Lee!"** He says that all you have to do is believe in Bruce Lee, call out to him, and he will save you from both the cops and the thugs.

You're skeptical, of course. This whole thing just sounds weird...can it really be that simple? Why would someone as famous and busy as Bruce Lee come and rescue you? Besides, didn't he pass away a long time ago?

You're thinking about this as you walk home and suddenly hands grab you and drag you into a nearby alleyway! It's the thugs! They knock you to ground, kick you from all sides, grab your wallet, and start dividing the spoils between them. Then, sure enough, the cops roll up siren blaring, blue and red lights flashing. Just like all the other times they ignore the thugs and grab YOU, slamming you face down on the hood and cuffing you.

You're at the end of your rope. Suddenly its as if you can hear your friend talking to you out loud, telling you to call upon the name of Master Lee and be saved...so you do! ***You desperately raise your voice and cry out to him!***

Then the strangest thing happens...a dense fog rolls in, carpeting the ground. The thugs stop dividing your money and look around uncomfortably. Even the police seem paralyzed, as if time has stopped for them and they freeze in place. Then, walking confidently forward, dressed in his famous yellow spandex jumpsuit with the black stripe, is ... BRUCE LEE!

He approaches the cops w/o hesitation and says "unbind him, he belongs to me now." You're shocked as the police comply w/o saying a word, taking the cuffs off you, and driving away.

Bruce then turns to the thugs, who are showing open fear. Nun chucks magically appear in Bruce's hands as he begins to spin them around dramatically. The thugs charge forward and Bruce dispatches them quickly and easily!

When he's done and all the fight is out of them, **they point at YOU and say "you haven't seen the last of us! We'll be back!"** and they run away.

Bruce gathers up your money they dropped then extends his hand to you. You take it, and he lifts you up to you feet and gives you your money back. ***"Follow me"*** he states, then turns and starts walking. So you do.

You follow him all the way back to his kung fu school that also has a restaurant and a laundry mat. He points to the locker room and tells you to clean up and, when you're done, new clothes will be waiting for you. After your shower you see an exact replica of the yellow jump suit with the black stripe that he wears. It looks like it just came off the factory floor. ***You put it on, and it's a perfect fit! You feel great, you look great!***

You emerge from the locker room and follow Bruce to a meditation room, where the two of you sit in silence with each other praying for 30 minutes. Then he brings you to the practice room where you do some stretching then learn basic punching and kicking techniques—the beginner’s class. After an arduous workout, Bruce takes you to his restaurant for a meal.

You’re starving and when the waiter appears you order a burger, fries, a coke, with a slice of cheesecake for dessert! Bruce looks at you with a serious expression, and says to the waiter ***“two orders of Chinese dumplings, rice, and green tea.”*** The waiter nods and gets the food. Not exactly what you wanted but you have to admit: ***when you’re done, you don’t have the same tired, sluggish feeling you normally get when you eat the other stuff.***

Bruce then gets out the book he wrote, ***The Tao of Jeet Kun Do***, and gives you a copy. Together, you read chapter one. After that he tells you to **step into his laundry mat** and have your jumpsuit cleaned, and you do.

At the end of the day he says to you: ***“it is good that you believe. But to be my disciple, you must follow. Do what I do. Say what I say. Eat what I eat. Drink what I drink. Go where I go. Practice what I practice. Learn my book and teachings, and pass on the same to others. Enter fellowship with my other students, let them help you, and you help them. Invite others to join our school as your friend invited you.”***

You assure him you will and **every day after that, you show up at the school to meditate**, stretch, practice kung fu, eat the dumplings, rice, & green tea, launder your suit, and hang out with the other students. You’re losing weight and your muscles are toning up from the workouts! Your punches faster, your kicks higher, and you’ve even learned some blocking techniques. You have more energy b/c of working out and clean diet, and you maintain the newness of your suit. ***You feel confident and free for the first time in a long while!***

One day while walking, **the thugs reappear**. They look nervously at your suit, but start taunting you saying Bruce isn’t here to save you this time...then they attack! You drop into the stance Bruce taught you then the ***weirdest thing happens***: it’s as if the spirit of Bruce Lee rises within you, giving you super strength, speed, and endurance. As the first thug gets in range “bam!” you drop him! The second one comes from the side, and your foot shoots out in a kick then sends him flying! The third one tries to grab you from behind but you reverse headbutt him and bloody his nose!

The gang leader has stood back the entire time, watching. You can see concern on his face. But he is bigger and stronger than the others, and he finally steps forward. *“You’re dealing with ME now!”* he says and charges forward! This fight is tougher...you take a few shots, you give a few, but with this Sampson-like ability, ***you defeat the gang leader!***

You make your way back to the school, and the other students surround you, asking if you’re OK, what happened? You tell them the whole story as they patch you up and congratulate you.

One particular student is looking at you with big eyes; he just joined that morning. *“You beat the gang?”* he asks, with hope. *“I have a gang that attacks me too, and I’m tired of it. I don’t want to live this way anymore. I’m glad that cops leave me alone now, but I can’t seem to outrun the thugs...they always catch me. I know I have to fight, but IDK if I can....”*

You grab his shoulders and reassure him that if he keeps following Bruce and his ways, he’ll overcome! He’ll be victorious! You tell him you were in his shoes not too long ago and if that Bruce did this in you, he’ll do it in any who follow him. The young man looks hopeful and less scared.

You go home and the next day, life reasserts itself.

- You get sick, show up late for work, and get berated by your boss.
- Bills come due that you can’t pay, and the power company is about to turn your electric off.
- Then CPS shows up at your door and claims that, at the last visitation you had with your kids, your spiteful nosy neighbor turned you in.

It’s as if all the hope, joy, and courage you’ve built up since meeting Bruce is being quickly stolen. You “reward” yourself with a burger, fries, a coke and some Jack Daniels to wash it down and take some of this pain away. You don’t go to Bruce’s school the next day, but sleep in instead b/c you’re feeling depressed and just want to be alone. You ignore the texts and calls from your fellow kung fu students, asking where you are and if you’re OK.

This goes on for days, weeks, months...and the anxiousness and fear you thought you had beat, return. The food and other “escape” cravings you felt you were past, come back. Your yellow and black striped jumpsuit is getting dirty and wrinkled, and you start gaining some weight back.

Then the worst happens: as you're out and about, **the thugs are back and they don't seem afraid of you at all.** They immediately attack and overwhelm you, beating you up and taking your money like they used to.

You feel ashamed and humiliated. Something is telling you to go to the school and appear before Bruce, but you decide it's better to avoid him so that you won't see the look of disappointment and disapproval on him...and face the other students who might judge you.

Eventually, however, **it's impossible to avoid Bruce.** By the time he sees you and you him, it's too late to avoid him. Instead of anger or disappointment, Bruce looks you with patience and compassion. He takes your hand and leads you back to his school. While your suit is getting a much needed dry clean, he says to you: *"it's good that you believe and are saved. Now it's time for you to take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow me."*

[Mat 16:24-27 ESV] 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, **let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."

This is NOT about my Salvation or yours...it's about discipleship.

To be Saved, one needs to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and believe in Him.

Let's identify all the characters in my parable:

- Bruce Lee played the role of Jesus.
- The spirit of Bruce Lee that manifested in the MC during the fight is the Holy Spirit.
- The thugs represent **our OWN sinful desires, passions, and addictions.**
- The bigger thug that put up a tougher fight was a sin more deeply ingrained, that we have a tougher time turning from.
- The cops represented The Law, God's commandments.
- The other students were fellow Christians.
- The nosy neighbor, angry boss, and CPS represented the hardships of this world, other people in our lives, and attacks from the devil.

Now let's identify the symbolic ACTIONS taken in the parable:

- Our sin beats us up and takes everything from us, leaving us broken, depressed, anxious, and poor.
- We cannot run from it or fight back with willpower.
- It robs us of joy, peace, patience, faith, hope, and love.

- When we sin and violate God's commandments, it invoke the divine penalty of the Law that "binds" us and puts us in "jail."
- When we cried out to Jesus and believed, *He Saved us from the divine penalty of the Law.*
- The thugs are able to attack again, however, because **we're not delivered from earthly consequences of our sin, when we commit them.**
- When first Saved, Jesus appears and gives us fine, white robes that look just like His.
- This robe IS His righteousness that we will have on wherever we go, all the time.
- The 30 minute meditation is much needed solitude WITH Jesus, talking back and forth, giving thanks, praise, and worship.
- The stretching is bringing us out of our comfort zones and patterns, and getting ourselves ready to do MORE.
- The Kung Fu lessons are spiritual warfare as we learn a new way.
- The book reading/teaching is time in our Bibles, both privately and with a group.
- Eating the dumplings & rice vs burger & coke is having our minds renewed by Jesus and His Word, vs. eating social media, news, porn, bad movies, gossip, and anything else that corrupts our minds.
- Laundering our robes is repentance and pursuing the righteousness that He's given us.
- It is good that we believe....
- **When we stop following Jesus, we get spiritually weak.** Although we remain free from the divine penalty of the law, our sin will beat us up and steal from us again...for when a man sows to the flesh, he reaps of the flesh corruption.

To be a disciple, one must take up his personal cross, deny himself, and follow Jesus. We do what He does, go where He goes, eat what He eats, drink what He drinks, say what He says, practice what He practices, learn and share what He teaches. *We follow Him to be LIKE Him.*

[Mat 10:25 ESV] 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

John 12:26 "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

There are plenty who believe, and few who follow.

According to the Pew Research Center, 62% of the people in the US identify as Christians.

Barna Research claims that, of the 62% just named, **only 4% in the US are what he calls “Integrated Disciples”** meaning Christians whose beliefs and behaviors line up with Scripture across many topics (God, salvation, morality, purpose, family, etc.).

In the remainder of this sermon series, **I will share 9 spiritual disciplines** that help you and I take the next step from believing to following.

- Solitude DAILY!
- Prayer, thanks, praise & worship DAILY!
- Bible Reading (alone & in group) DAILY!
- Self-examination & Repentance (alone & in group) DAILY!
- Controlling the Tongue
 - Glorifying God
 - Witnessing to Unbelievers
 - Edifying the Saints
- Community/Gathering of Saints
- Serving the brothers and sisters in faith
- Tithing/Generosity
- Sabbath (doesn't have to be Sat).

Look at the order, please:

- ***The first 4.5 are INTERNAL, come first, and are the most important.***
- The last 4.5 are EXTERNAL and come after the first 5.

If we attempt to do the last 5 without the first 4, then the following happens:

- “Tank” is empty resulting in irritation, duty/obligation, conflict, resentment, coldness, etc.
- Will “grow weary of doing good” and stop.
- **Corruption/temptation.** Ever heard of ministers preaching the Gospel, evangelizing, laying hands on the sick...while stealing or having an affair?

The first 4.5 disciplines should be done DAILY.

Do we not eat every day? Drink? Breathe? Are these not important things for physical life?

The first 4.5 disciplines are essential for spiritual life on the same level as eating, drinking, and breathing.

The first 4.5 disciplines do the following which PREPARE us to do the last 4.5:

- Builds HOLY character (Spirit vs Flesh).
- Increases knowledge and wisdom of/from God.
- Inspires zeal/passion.
- Reveals/solidifies calling, purpose & direction.

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. **Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**”

1 Peter 2:21

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, **that you should follow in his steps.**

COMMUNION

