

# Consumers or Disciples?

by Michael L. Brown

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*Michael L. Brown's sermon challenges listeners to move from a consumer mindset to a committed discipleship in following Jesus.*

**Duration:** 59:04

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Luke 14:27-33, Luke 15:4, Hebrews 13:11-13

**Topics:** "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the difference between being consumers or disciples of Jesus. He emphasizes that as followers of Christ, we should not expect to be treated any better than Jesus himself, who was hated and crucified by the world. The speaker encourages the audience to go beyond just the excitement of being part of a church community and to become true disciples of Jesus. He urges them to take action and get involved in evangelism and other forms of service, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness and perseverance. The sermon also highlights the inspiring story of Adoniram Judson, a missionary who faced immense suffering and loss but remained faithful to his calling.

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## Transcript

On a Sunday, I had a very unusual traveling schedule over almost a three month period. It's about one Sunday I was here, that was during the missions conference. Of course, we're constantly involved with what's happening in the body and praying and working together to see God's kingdom advance here.

But as I was really praying and looking at my schedule for the new year, for things that are on our heart for this region for the new year, I really felt God directing me to be home much more than normal, kind of the exact reverse of what's been and just to pour in on the home base even more. And we believe as we've prayed and sought the Lord that for the beginning of the new year, the first five weeks or so, we wanna bring key foundational messages beginning right January 1st, key foundational messages for the life of the body in particular in terms of what God's called us to do as a people here in this region. And of course, the rest of the year, each time we gather there are key messages and themes that God will be speaking.

But I just wanna share that in advance and let you know that what's on my heart today is another one of those foundational things that's just part of who we are. So glad that you're here to receive it, let's pray. Father, I ask you to open our hearts and minds.

I ask you to write these words within us. Lord, may this be part of our spiritual DNA to the extent this is your word and your heart. May it be written on our hearts, Father.

In Jesus' name, amen. Luke chapter 14, about a year and a half ago, I was preaching in Canada at a service. During the meeting, God laid some points on my heart concerning a theme.

I touched on this in different ways but never quite hit on this exact theme. The message is called consumers or disciples, consumers or disciples. And in a way that's appropriate for fire, I want to expand on that today.

Luke chapter 14, large crowds, this is verse 25. Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Now, just to stop there for a moment and say that he came during his time before his death on the cross to teach and to preach and to heal.

He cared about the masses of people but we see here from his teaching and attitude that he was absolutely not out to please people but rather please his father. This was a messianic movement. And in the thinking of the day, what his disciples were really expecting, even though he talked about dying and going to the cross, they didn't really get it.

And I'm sure they must have been very excited when great crowds were following him. We all like it when the thing that we believe God's calling us to do seems blessed and lots of people are attracted to it. And ultimately, around the throne of God, there will be a massive crowd that no one can number from every tribe and tongue and people and nation around the world.

But there is something about people just being attracted in carnal ways, being attracted because of miracles, being attracted because of good teaching, being attracted because of exciting music, being attracted because of just different cultural things and a crowd can draw a crowd. Jesus was not interested in just having crowds. And he does this several times in the gospels at what seemed to be the most inopportune moments, he comes with a radical teaching.

Just when it'd be nice to kind of stroke everybody and give them a soft message and just build them up and make them feel good about themselves, look at what he says. Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them, he said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him saying, this fellow began to build and was not able to finish. Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king, will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Now amazingly, when you get into the next chapter, just a few more words of teaching and then you get into the next chapter, the way it's written here, it shows his extraordinary compassion as the great shepherd going after the one lost sheep. And yet there is a carnal approach that is completely destructive to the gospel. There is a carnal mentality and a carnal method.

Churches of North America and other parts of the world are filled with it today, are dominated with it today. It is a flesh orientation that bypasses the cross. And Jesus was not out just for crowds, he was out for disciples.

And I wonder what his disciples were thinking when they heard him teaching like this. I mean, I just like to wonder about it. Sometimes you think Peter and maybe some of the others there, they're getting the crowd.

Come on, plenty of room, come closer. He's gonna start teaching about five minutes, about five minutes. You ever heard him teach? You never heard Jesus? Woo, you are in for a treat.

You want, have you ever seen the miracles? You've never seen the miracles? Just stay close, you don't know what's gonna happen. I mean, it must be pretty exciting. You're with Jesus and what's he gonna do next? And you're just, you know, you're standing there listening and he shouts out, if anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his father and mother, what, Jesus, wrong sermon, wrong timing.

This is the, now's the time to say, you guys look beautiful. I can see destiny all over your faces. I mean, that's the right time to give a message like that.

And you know, people struggle with this so much. I've often heard it said that if you'll study this in Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic, that you'll see the word hate actually means loveless. You know, first thing, common sense would tell you that doesn't make a lot of sense.

You know, to take a word as radical and extreme as hate, use it just to mean loveless. The second thing, if you'll study it in Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek, you'll see this loveless concept is a myth. Normally the ones who say that are the ones who can't study it in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

That's why they come up with such far-fetched ideas. By the way, hate does not mean here despise in the sense of I hate your guts. You know, when you go home and you see, sir, you go home and see your wife and look her in the eye and say, I just heard Jesus teach.

I'm gonna be one of his disciples. I want you to know you're ugly and I despise you. And then she turns to you and says, I regret the day I ever saw you.

Ugly does not describe you. You're foul. Praise the Lord, we're following Jesus.

Listen, this is contrary to everything that he teaches everywhere else and every example that we have. But we know that hate in other places can mean clearly and utterly and totally reject in terms of any other claim, any other hold, any other allegiance that's gonna stop you from following me, you're gonna have to let it go or you can't be my disciple. For years, I read this as if he was saying I won't let you be my disciple.

And I'm sure there's truth to that, but the statement is not I won't let you, but you can't be. No, it's not gonna work. It's not possible.

It's like someone that you walk from your car into the building 20 feet and you're ready to collapse from exhaustion and your heart's ready to beat out of your chest, you're so out of shape. And then you tell me, I'm gonna run the New York City Marathon. And I tell you, you can't run the marathon.

You can't. No, anyone can enter. Correct, anyone can enter, but you're not in shape.

You can't do it. He's saying if there's any other tie you have, any other hold you have, any other allegiance you have, he says plainly elsewhere, whoever loves father or mother, son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He wasn't bowing down and groveling and just trying to get a few people to like him.

He's the son of God, the glory of his father. He's about to lay down his priceless life for our salvation. He doesn't have to make deals with us.

It cheapens who he is, it degrades who he is. It degrades the message when we have to try to make carnal deals to get people to come in. Consumers are disciples.

Consumers are always shopping around for the best deal at the best price. That's the consumer mentality. More for me at less cost.

Isn't that right? Disciples are servants, not living for themselves, but for the will of the one who sent them. Consumers are concerned with their needs and their desires. Disciples are concerned with the needs and desires of their master and teacher.

It's a total different orientation. Fire is not a consumer-friendly church. Hopefully if God calls you to be part of us, you'll be ministered to and strengthened.

Your kids will be nurtured. Your family will be watched over. You'll be built up.

You'll have times of worship. You'll be edified in the word. You'll be equipped and strengthened to go out and do the work of ministry.

Hopefully what we do, we do with excellence is unto the Lord and to serve others. But the goal is not to get more consumers. The goal is to produce disciples for the master.

People of like heart. What's the use? Listen, if Jesus didn't just try to get crowds, and I believe ultimately we'll have several thousand in our community, in school, and the things God's called us to do, and the missionaries that have been sent out from us will multiply and works will be planted all over the world, and there'll be thousands and tens of thousands of lives and hundreds of thousands that we're able to touch and millions, literally, that we can impact for the gospel. But crowds for crowds' sake is absolutely self-defeating.

If Jesus saw through it, then why can't we see through it? Consumers are focused on saving their lives. Disciples joyfully lose them, finding the meaning of life and becoming like and pleasing their Lord. Consumers base everything on personal benefit and comfort.

Disciples base everything on effectiveness and impact and obedience and loyalty. You know, there's some articles that have been written in Christian magazines recently about, quote, "'When Walmart comes to town,' meaning when a megachurch sets up, when a well-known speaker comes into town and sets up church, all the smaller churches close down." I mean, it happened with one prominent man. I'm not saying he wasn't led by God.

I'm not his Lord or master. I'm not saying what he should or shouldn't do. Just talking about a phenomenon that when one anointed brother set up shop in a particular city, almost 200 smaller churches shut down because the people from there went flocking to the big place that could do everything well.

Now, maybe God raised him up and maybe God shut the others down. I don't know. Or maybe part of it is our consumer mentality.

Maybe part of it is just going where we like it best and feel best and enjoy it best as opposed to where God's calling us so we can be in his service and be world changers, be part of a group of people that has an impact for Jesus. Some years ago when I wrote the book, *It's Time to Rock the Boat*, I made some statements. I wanna share some of them with you.

God's people are called to rock the boat. We are not called to coexist with this sinful society. We are called to confront it.

We are not called to a life of comfort. We are called to a life of conflict. Following Jesus does not mean catering to our selfish desires.

It means crucifying them. Are we ready to walk in the Savior's footsteps? Remember the world hated Jesus. He made people uncomfortable.

He exposed sin. He rebuked unrighteousness. He would not compromise.

He would not hold back. And he was nailed to a cross by a godless world. Why should it be any different for us? He was rejected.

We wanna be respected. He was regarded as radical. We wanna be recognized as reasonable.

He was accused of having demons. We are acclaimed for having degrees. He was put out.

We long to be taken in. He put no stock in the praise of man. We thrive on it.

Is it any wonder we make so little impact here for him? In this book, I wrote a chapter called *Connoisseur Christians and a Gourmet Gospel*. And just talking about how soft we are and how when preaching or teaching gets under our skin and begins to challenge us, when following Jesus is gonna cost us something, when we're called to take up the cross, we go somewhere else where it tastes better, get some nice little dainties that'll satisfy us. One of the Puritans said this, he that thinks to please men goes about an endless and needless work.

A wise physician seeks to cure, not please his patient. Another Puritan put it like this, ministers are not cooks, but physicians, and therefore should not study to delight the palate, but to recover the patient. So let me give you the connoisseur Christian, the consumer approach to people in scripture.

Here's how the consumer looks at, how the connoisseur Christian looks at some people. For example, John the Baptist, John the Immerser. This would be our counsel as North American consumer connoisseur Christians to somebody like John.

This is our evaluation, too harsh. I hate to say it, but this guy arrived late on the scene and his parents, well, let's just say they never put him in his place. They were so happy to have a kid of their own, they catered to his every whim and fancy.

That's why he always thinks he's right and the whole world is wrong. That's why he's so sure that he's the chosen messenger, something about being the forerunner of the Lord. It's typical of the only child syndrome.

They think everything revolves around them. I mean, we'd have it analyzed, we'd have it figured out. You know, I don't even feel sorry for John, even though he's in prison.

After all, he asked for it. Who told him to meddle in the king's personal affairs? He would have been better off just sticking to his behold the Lamb of God sermon. That was good preaching.

Mark my words, 20 years from now, when he's married and has a grown family of his own, he'll be a lot more mellow. Some things just take time. Or maybe Jesus, how would we counsel Jesus? It's too radical, too radical.

He makes totally unrealistic demands. I mean, come on, just if we preach out of the words of Jesus for a while, or Bob Gladstone keeps preaching his Jesus sermon and brings us in contact with the Son of God and what his message is, for most ears today, that's a little extreme. That's a little too far, over the top, cult-like.

He tells people if they wanna be his disciples, they have to leave everything, deny themselves and take up their cross daily. He's obviously not a family man. He orders people to hate their parents.

He tells them if they don't love him more than them, they're not worthy of him. It's clear he doesn't have a shepherd's heart. I hear he once called a needy Canaanite woman a dog, and he was totally insensitive to his son grieving for his dad who had just died.

He said, let someone else bury your father. You come after me. To judge by his followers, he's not very deep either.

Only the fishermen, tax collectors, political activists, and prostitutes seem to be impressed by him. The religious leaders know better. He's so undignified, too.

He spits when he heals people. He talks out loud to demons and actually touches lepers and corpses. Worst of all, he has this death fixation.

He keeps talking about being crucified in Jerusalem. If he's not careful, he's gonna find himself in a heap of trouble pretty soon. Jesus, take it from me.

If you get some good seminary training under your belt, tone down your message, and quit offending your spiritual elders. You'll live a lot longer. Think of how many more people you could help if you could avoid a premature death.

Think of all the people we could help if we could only have it our way. Listen, I know this sounds exaggerated, but if you just translate most of what you hear on the airways and most of the counsel in terms of how to build church and how to grow church and how to succeed in ministry and just apply it to the words of Jesus, it's not gonna sound much different than that. Listen, fundamental, start here.

If we're gonna follow Jesus, we have to take up the cross, we have to die to this world, and we now live to do the will of God. And our whole perspective on life, on this world, on what matters and what counts, it all changes. Our priorities change, our emphasis changes.

We live in this world like other people live, but we have a different purpose. When Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, the fifth chapter, and when he says, if anyone's in the Messiah, if anyone's in Christ, he's a new creation. All things are passed away, everything's become new.

He's not just talking about enjoying new life in Jesus. He's also talking about a whole different perspective. He says, that's why we don't regard anybody anymore from a worldly point of view.

We see them differently, we're in Jesus. Our whole thinking in life has changed. Everything has become new.

Listen, unless we can take hold of these basics, unless these things are foundational to us, unless we understand that we are now under orders to a king, to a Lord, to a master, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Corinthians 7, we're not our own. We've been bought with a price. What he writes in 2 Corinthians 5, that we've died with Jesus and we no longer live for ourselves, but for him who did, who died for us and rose from the dead.

And Colossians 3 that says, we've died and our lives are now hidden with the Messiah and God. Unless we embrace those foundational truths, how are we gonna impact this generation? If we have light and we see things that are wrong in other places, it's not so that we judge and criticize and attack, it's so that we apply it to ourselves and seek to live differently. And don't repeat the same error that we see.

If we see that for at least one generation, maybe two, instead of the church changing the world, the world is changing the church. The question is, how do we do differently? How do we live differently? What's it gonna take if we just assume because we're fire or because we go to a certain place or we hear certain messages or we do things a certain way that that's gonna do it? It won't. It takes a determined effort.

It's a war. The devil's been around for a while. The world is very experienced.

It takes a determined effort in God to live differently than others. I watched as God poured out his spirit in a church where we were with the Barrys and some other friends over 20 years ago. I watched some of my closest friends turn against what God did and remain separated from us to this day.

And I had read about it historically. And as a Jew, I was aware that my own ancestors, the majority of them, the national leaders, rejected the Messiah when he came and prayed and waited long for him, then rejected him when he came. Then in the midst of an outpouring, I saw people pray and look for God to come.

And when he came, it was too intense. It was too costly. And some turned against it.

And from that point on, my attitude has been what makes me think I'm right? How do I know I won't do the same thing? That's the only safeguard I can find. The moment we think, hey, we're gonna be different. We've made it.

We're this, we're that. Then we're deceived. Then we settle into self-confidence and self-righteousness and arrogance.

Rather, we cast ourselves before God. How do we know that we'll fulfill the purpose of God for this generation? How do we know that we as individuals and we as a body and we as a school of ministry and a missions organization, whatever else God's called us to do, how do we know that we'll really bring about change through the gospel? How do we know that we'll really maintain the standards that he's given us? How do we know that we won't walk away from our first love? How do we know that we haven't walked away from it already? It takes a self-examination and a going back to God and being ready to hear correction and being ready to be corrected and rebuked by the spirit of God and not just patting on the

back all the time. It says in Proverbs 27, that open rebuke is better than secret love and that the kisses of an enemy are profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend.

We need to be open to God and say, Father, we just wanna please you. We know you love us. We know you're with us.

We know, God, that you have great things in store for all your people who set their hearts on you. We're not concerned about that. We're not worried about that, but Father, we don't wanna let you down.

We're not concerned about God's end of things, but we wanna be faithful. Do we wanna grow? Yes, but not just so we can have more numbers and have more numbers and feel better about ourselves and have more numbers and have more money to do more things. For what purpose? It all has to go back to the attitude.

We're disciples of the master and we're here to bring about change. Certain fundamental things we emphasize. We say, before there can be revolution in society, talk about a spiritual and moral and cultural and kingdom revolution.

Before there can be revolution in society, there has to be revolution first in the church. And we say some of the fundamental ways it has to happen, we have to change our thinking. Instead of going to church, our attitude is being the church.

So we come together for corporate gatherings. We come together in homes and small meetings and large meetings to edify one another, strengthen one another, worship together, pray together, hear the word together, exhort, encourage one another. We do all those things, pray together, et cetera.

But just saying those words, while our emphasis is on being the church rather than going to church, just because we say it doesn't mean we're doing it. We could still get in the same habit. We could still get in the same rut.

Everyone that feels joined here, you should be plugged in somewhere, somehow, beyond coming to a corporate meeting, beyond going to a small group meeting. There should be some area of service, some area of giving, be it in prayer, be it in witness, be it in standing up for life in the community, for righteousness. Some area where you're saying, here I am.

You say, my schedule is 100% filled just from when I get up to when I go to sleep between kids and family and work and other commitments. I understand that that's how it is for many, but there are ways that God can give you to still have the mentality. I don't just go to religious services.

I don't just go to meetings. I don't just exist. I'm not just trying to survive.

There's a divine purpose. It's just mentality. It's attitude.

You know, we say another way there has to be revolution in the church is that we smash the clergy-laity distinction. Leaders play a clear role in Scripture. There's much that Scripture says about leaders and their role to equip and watch over the flock and strengthen the flock, and at times, correct.

They're key roles that leaders have, but the clergy-laity distinction is absolutely unscriptural. The clergy-laity distinction says you have some who are clergy, and they do the work of ministry. Okay, so we don't wear collars, and we don't wear special outfits, and we don't use special titles, but the fact of the

matter is we can still have that mentality that a few people do the ministry, and quote, doing the ministry means either being on the worship team and singing or standing up here and preaching or getting to be part of a special prayer team, whereas doing the ministry is out of here.

If our big emphasis is on what happens here once or twice a week, we're missing the point. If our big emphasis is just what happens in a home group meeting in and of itself, we're missing the point. Somehow, we have to just take hold of this, being part of the Jesus movement, going into the world to bring about change.

You say, man, I've been trained in school, I'm a grad, what can I be doing? Do something, something is always better than nothing. You know, just listen, if you're faithful and little, God will give you much, and to prove faithfulness takes more than one shot, one time. And the more you sow, and the more you cry out, and the more you say, but there's gotta be more, there's gotta be more, and the frustration turns to desperation, you'll have a breakthrough.

Man, there's so many lost people to be touched, just get on an evangelism team. There's so many babies to be saved, just stand with our teens in front of an abortion clinic, just say, man, I gotta get involved, I gotta do something, and I'm gonna do it faithfully, I'm gonna do it regularly. There's so many needs, just if you can be a faithful intercessor, you can be a world changer.

There's no reason for anybody to just be sitting back, unless you've been through tremendous trauma, and you're just in a recovery healing process, in which case, let us love on you and help you, put our arms around you and get you back to health, but then do something. We're all called, every one of us, listen, aren't we all equally branches of the vine? Isn't every branch called to bear fruit? Isn't every branch called to bear much fruit? Isn't every branch called to bear much fruit that will remain and give glory to the Father? It's not just the clergy you're part of the branches, and the laity, they're like the leaves, or the grapes, the little grapes at the end of the branches. Every believer is integrally joined with the vine.

Every believer is a member of the Messiah's body. I guess I'm like just the sole, the under sole of the foot. Well, if you are, you play a very important role, you better get your life together, because you're supporting the rest of us.

It's not just the mouth, that's clergy, the hand, that's clergy. You know, whatever we like, whatever seems dynamic and powerful, and I'm like, what do you call the lines that come out from the nose? We don't even know those are, that's what I am, I'm just like laity. We degrade and diminish, and listen, every single one is called to be a priest, has to infuse us.

There's even teaching today about kings and priests that has certain truth to it, but certain error with it. You know, the kings and priests are that, you know, the priests, that's like the pastors and the spiritual leaders, and the kings, that's like the business people, and let the business people worry about the money, and let the spiritual people worry about the things of God. Well, first we shouldn't worry, anyway, wrong terms there, but you know, let one take care of one thing, one take care of another thing.

There's a certain aspect of truth, in that those that are called to the ministry of prayer and the word should be able to focus on that, and those that are called into other aspects of the community and society should focus on that, but there's a wrong way of thinking if we forget every one of us is called to be a priest, and the ministry in the workplace is just as important as the ministry in the prayer room, and the ministry in the home is just as important as the ministry from the pulpit. See, we can take that and just all coast, so I work

my job, I raise my kids, you preach your messages, or we can say, I'm a servant of God, I'm a minister of the gospel, I'm a priest, I'm a priestess of the king. How can my light shine? How can I make a difference? How can I bring about change? And the less outlet you have, the more frustrated you should get in the flesh so that it turns into prayer and fasting and seeking God for breakthroughs.

We're disciples. How do disciples think? How do disciples live? I've often said this, but just to repeat it, the Great Commission is not a call to go and make Christians and the word Christian, for those that don't know, it occurs just three times in the entire New Testament. Acts 11, Acts 26, 1 Peter 4, and Christos in the Greek-speaking world did not even mean anointed one to them.

Jewish people understood that. Jews that spoke Greek and knew the scriptures, but your average Greek-speaking person, that was just a name. That's why some of the early writers mistook it for Crestos, just another name.

Didn't have any meaning to them. So to call these people Christians was just an insult. These Christ ones, be like calling people that followed me Brownites or something like that, or Volkites.

Or Kava, Kavaites, Altites, Altites. That sounds like a new brand of, instead of the relaxed fit pants, now the Altites. Altites, right, we can even make that into a mint.

It was just, you understand, it was just a name, just an insulting name. And today in American society, what does it mean to say you're a Christian? Not much, not much. Most people think they're Christian.

You know, our friends from Belgium will appreciate this. You know, I learned some years ago about Belgium being one of the least evangelized countries in the world, having one of the smallest, in particular in Europe, one of the smallest born-again Christian populations in the world. I was flying overseas one time and going by way of Brussels and Belgium and talking to a guy from Belgium, a worldly unsaved guy, and stupidly, I thought that his perspective would be the same.

I just started talking to him, I told him there's not a lot of Christians in Belgium. He looked at me like, what are you, crazy? His mind, it's a Christian country, right? Catholic and all this. You know, what does it mean to say I'm a Christian? Not a whole lot in today's society, and the Great Commission is not to go and multiply Christians.

Yeah, in the Muslim-Hindu world, it may mean more to say that, but I'm just saying that's not the emphasis. Even believers, which occurs 26 times in the New Testament, 13 times just in Acts, okay, that's a good word. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

Without faith, it's impossible to please God. Yes, it's foundational and important, but the Great Commission is not even a call just to go and make believers. And even in American society, what does it mean to say I'm a believer? I mean, we're religious people, you know, and we're superstitious people.

What does it mean to say I'm a believer? The call is disciples. It occurs 254 times in the Gospels alone, 28 times in Acts. Go through Acts and just make a note, just take a concordance, just go through Acts or check on your computer.

Just go through it. You'll see disciple, disciple, disciple. That's the main way we're talked about, which means that all these teachings of Jesus about what it costs to be one of his disciples is very relevant.

It applies to us. You know, you go in the mirror and look in the mirror and say, I'm a Christian. Okay, I'm a believer.

I'm a disciple. The mirror may talk back to you. You know, people say I wanna be disciple.

Sometimes they just mean I want somebody to take time with me and pour into my life. That has validity, but do we wanna be disciples? Do we wanna be disciples of Jesus? What does it cost to be one of his disciples? Here, let me just share some reports from some disciples. Here is a Chinese-Korean woman living in northern China.

She and her husband got saved. He wasn't quite as deep in the Lord as she was. Then he died, and she was depressed and struggled for some time, and then felt God calling her to North Korea, which is one of the most heavily persecuted countries in the world today.

I mean, horrific, mind-boggling suffering. This is heavy, what I'm about to read. So she feels she's gonna go to North Korea.

She's a disciple. She's gonna go to North Korea, share the gospel there. Dangerous, but she felt, her kid said it's too dangerous.

She said, but I had to see if this was indeed God's calling. The moment I stepped foot into North Korea, my depression went away. I felt an inner peace that I hadn't felt in many years.

I knew God had called me here, but then I was heartbroken by what I saw. Brace yourself. I walked down the road in this one village where dead bodies were on the side of the road.

They've had terrible famine there. I saw a hungry boy eating one of the bodies, but then a policeman also saw him and pulling out his revolver, he shot the boy in the head. It was the first, but not the last person I saw shot for committing cannibalism.

When I returned to China after my first trip, I left something in North Korea in my heart. I knew this was to be my ministry, so I began a network of people to evangelize. You could bring small gifts, some food, a toy, or even pencils and paper.

As the North Koreans warm up to me, I would look for opportunities to share the gospel. When they believed, I would come back for training and try to bring them a Bible. Since my first trip in 1997, this is a widow.

Since my first trip in 1997, I have made contact with 40 house churches and helped start another 60. But now the work is very difficult. The larger it gets, the more dangerous it gets as well.

Our first arrest happened in 1999. Four believers were caught worshipping together. They were arrested and sentenced to seven years.

A young man who was trained extensively and active in the Bible delivery was recently arrested and has disappeared. I'm really worried about him. Another family was arrested, the whole family including the children.

They were all in prison except for the father. He was executed. Some former prisoners have died from their imprisonment as well.

They will let a prisoner go when they are near death. They usually die within a few weeks or months after their release. Just this year, a family was arrested.

The parents were taken to one prison and the children to another. The authorities burned their house down. Two children, a son and daughter of one family I helped came into China for more training.

But when they were returning to North Korea, they were caught and charged with treason and becoming Christians. They have been publicly executed. This is the saddest for me.

I was very close to this family. I'm sorry it is difficult for me to share more. So many have been arrested, so many killed, but I'm also thankful for others working in North Korea.

I know there are many people doing what I do. I see them coming across the border. No one ever speaks a word, but you just know who they are.

They have wings. Here's another pastor, keeps getting arrested in China. He said he can't recall how many times he's been in prison.

It's too many. He said, the longest sentence I served was three years, but I also served many short detentions. Every time I was sent to prison by God's grace and protection, I was delivered out of it.

I was labeled non-repentant, a non-repentant prisoner. I endured much hardship when I was in prison. Right at the beginning, my ears were beaten with an electric baton and fluid kept flowing from my ears for six months.

My hearing has been greatly hindered ever since then. Another time, my leg was beaten and its swelling became large. My fellow prisoners had me clean the toilet.

To do the job, I had to have the injured leg kneel on ice-cold concrete ground with another leg stand up. Upon cleaning up the toilet, there came a man who put dirty water into the toilet and made me do it again. They used this trick to torture me.

My right eye suddenly lost sight one day during my three years in labor camp. Later, I learned it was a cataract that has affected my life since then. I experienced too much of these, but I have to confess the most precious thing I have ever learned is the Lord suffered more than we did.

My family has not fallen away in the midst of our suffering. Rather, we become bolder following the Lord. Now, my children are in the ministry and they inherit our wonderful examples following him to the end.

Listen to what he says. I would like to tell those who would hear my testimony, drink the cup that Jesus drinks, for a student is not above his teacher. Our light troubles are temporary, beatings are temporary, pain is also temporary, but eternity and joy are everlasting.

Let me just read you one more account from a disciple. Again, I say we have a curse in our country which is a consumer Christianity. We have another part that dogs us which is cultural Christianity.

It's known throughout so much of the world where you just have a set of things that are associated with Christianity. Sunday morning services, Easter, Christmas, denominations, certain types of meetings, choirs, popes, different things that they get associated with Christianity. So, and people are raised with it and they think that's what it means to be, quote, a Christian.

If you ask, are you a disciple? You're speaking a foreign language to many of them. That should be foundational. How many of you guys know who Adoniram Judson is? Many of you, okay, wonderful.

For those who don't, let me just remind you that Judson was the first American missionary sent out from America overseas. Others had already gone from other parts of Europe and other parts of the world, but he was the first one. We had missionaries going within America to reach the lost and ministering with compassion to the Native Americans.

But he was the first with his party in 1812 to sail for India and then ultimately Burma. Extraordinary life, extraordinary dedication, extraordinary suffering. And he was raised in the Lord, then fell away during his college years, then through an extraordinary series of events came back to God, got his faith restored, then felt a calling to the mission field.

He was articulate, he was clear-headed, he was a leader. He was gonna be putting together a team and raising support from the Presbyterian Church to back him as he went. He meets a young lady who herself had only been saved a few years.

Her family was a famous socialite family. She was known as the life of the party. Then she gets radically saved.

Name was Anne or Nancy Hasseltine. And when her father one day goes past her room and hears her weeping over her sins under conviction, he's smitten and he too comes to the Lord. So now they've just been saved a few years.

She's a young lady and Judson is coming through this area to share the vision and to raise funds for what the team is gonna do. And he meets her and she's not particularly impressed with him because he can't put two words together around. He can't put two words together around her.

He's so kind of overtaken by her that he just kind of stutters his way through the times there. She's wondering what's so big about this guy? Well, they fall deeply in love. And now he has to ask her father for her hand to go on the mission field.

All dads here, especially fathers of daughters, I want you to hear this. This is the letter that Judson writes to John Haseltine asking for his daughter's hand in marriage. You listening? Remember, they're fairly new believers.

Father, daughter, I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring to see her no more in this world. Whether you can consent to her departure and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life. Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India, to every kind of want and distress, to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death.

Can you consent to all this for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you? For the sake of perishing immortal souls, for the sake of Zion and the glory of God. Can you consent to all this in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise, which shall redound to her savior from heathen save through her means from eternal woe and despair. Quite a letter.

Now, if you just, let's say you're just reading through the word of God and reading through the words of Jesus and reading through the New Testament, reading through Acts and reading through the letters of Paul and Peter and John and so on, and you'd read this and say, that makes sense. That's consistent. That's the way they, yeah, that's the way everybody should be thinking.

You know, we read it in today's society. You know, picture you just listening to a typical Christian broadcast coming across the airwaves, thank God for the good that comes across and grieve over that, which doesn't rightly represent God. But you know, what if suddenly the signal that, you know, something happens to the signal, next thing it's Adam and Judson saying, I'd like to share the letter that I wrote to my father-in-law.

It's like, what world did this come from? So some people said to the father, you chain her to the bed. You don't even think of letting her go. And he wrestled with it.

And he decided, I'm gonna leave the choice to her. So she wrote to a friend shortly after. She said, I have about come to the determination.

Remember, these are people just like us. The people that I just read about in China and North Korea, they're people just like us. Same feelings, same emotions, same ups and downs, same pressures, same family relationships, same humanity.

She says, I've about come to the determination to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God and his providence shall see fit to place me. In spite of some fears, she knew she could rest in the faithfulness of God, although, as she said, no female has, to my knowledge, ever left the shores of America to spend her life among the heathen, nor do I yet know that I shall have a single female companion. But God is my witness that I have not dared to decline the offer that has been made me, though so many are ready to call it a wild and romantic undertaking.

They labor almost seven years before they get their first convert. In fact, before the boat even arrives in India, they've already lost one of the, there are six couples left, the wife of one of the couples, she's pregnant, she miscarries, and then she dies. Before they even get there, while on the boat, Judson, through studying scripture, becomes convinced that the Baptist position is correct about believer baptism, and he can't accept funding from the Presbyterians anymore because they believe in infant baptism, and he's gonna have to submit to that, so he has to write to them and lose all his support, and then gets to India and gets baptized by William Carey.

So several of the other missionaries leave, die, others leave the work. Their first baby was stillborn during their initial voyage from Calcutta to Burma. Second baby, Roger, died before reaching his ninth month.

Adoniram himself was brutally imprisoned for 17 months during a crackdown against all foreigners, barely surviving the horribly inhuman treatment. One night, while his raw and bleeding feet were hanging in elevated stocks, swarms of mosquitoes settled on his bare soles, producing excruciating torture. Then, not long after his release from prison, Adoniram's beloved wife, Nancy, died.

Her constant life of sacrifice and service had finally taken its toll. Just a few weeks later, little Maria, their third baby, was suddenly taken from this world. So Judson's alone in a Buddhist country by himself, basically, and what does he do? He doesn't even come home for another 20 years, and continues to labor and serve and produces a translation of the Bible into the language there, and develops a dictionary that's

been used for generations, and through different workers there, the gospel goes out and spreads in such a way that today, in Burma, which is now called Myanmar, in that country, there is currently state-sponsored persecution of believers, because the gospel has gone forth, become so entrenched among a million or two million people, that there's governed persecution in this Buddhist country.

This is the direct fruit of Judson and his people, that produced several million souls for the kingdom of God and beyond. And you look back at the decisions made, you see those were decisions made by disciples. That is not the Judson letter, it's not a consumer letter.

It's not a consumer letter. It's not a what's-in-it-for-me letter, it's a how can we please the Lord letter. How can we glorify Jesus? How can our lives bring forth fruit? Of course, I'll give the qualification.

Of course, the path of blessing is the will of God. Of course, there's no way you will experience more of the smile of heaven than in obedience to him. But the reason that you follow is not for all the blessings, the reason you follow is out of love for the Savior, out of a sense of gratitude that you've been ransomed and redeemed and we live to do his will.

And in that path, the blessing comes. You know, all the teaching about the hundredfold return. You know, if you give this, you get this back.

Well, that comes from the words of Jesus. But you know what the context is? Is the context that the disciples say, all right, now one second, you're telling me to follow you. What am I gonna get? What if I give like my house, my car? What am I gonna get? Tell you what, son, I'll cut you a deal.

You give your house, your car, I'll give you a hundred back of each. What am I gonna do with a hundred? I mean, all around the world you'll have. Sounds like a good deal, I'll follow you.

I wonder what kind of mentality is produced that when a little suffering comes, when a little hardship comes, when a little challenge comes, a little difficulty comes. One of the cars is not as nice, one of the houses is not as pretty. That's a consumer mentality, that's why.

And listen, you know Scott is our primary pastoral leader here at FIRE. You know his heart is for people. You know his heart and Beth's heart are community people.

And they love the flock and are very sensitive to needs of the people. The last thing we wanna do is just offend people or mistreat people. But there are so many leaders that they calculate every single word because they don't want anybody to get offended.

Only preach from certain parts of the Bible for fear that people may leave. And that's not the heart of the shepherd. The heart of the shepherd resembles the heart of Jesus.

He's doing what's best for the sheep, whether they like it or not. He's doing what's best for the Father and for the kingdom. The context, when the hundredfold return teaching comes up, read it in Mark 10.

It's after the rich young ruler won't give away his possessions, won't sell what he has and give to the poor and follow Jesus. That they then say, we've left everything. In other words, we've already done this.

We did this at the outset. When you called us, we left everything. Even if you're still working your job, there still has to be the leaving of everything.

Even if you're still raising your family, there still has to be the leaving of everything. You become a disciple. And when you go back home with your family, you go back to your job, you go with a different mentality.

I mean, we read in Luke five about Jesus calling Matthew, Levi to follow him, right? He leaves everything and follows him. And then later they have a big meal at his home. He obviously didn't give away his house, but he had already broken the ties with everything that held him.

And now his whole orientation was different. And if Jesus said, okay, you're going somewhere else, then he goes somewhere else. Peter says, we already left everything.

What do we get? Because Jesus is talking about reward. And so what about us? And that's when he explains, no one's left father, mother, brother, sister, sons and daughters, houses, lands, et cetera, for my sake and the gospel. But he'll get a hundredfold return in this world.

And he lists the things then says with persecutions, with persecutions, and then the big thing in the world to come eternal life. I mean, who even cares about eternal life when we have everything here? Why even mention it? Why even have Paul talk about, it's not even worth comparing the sufferings of this present age with the glory that's gonna be revealed in us when we suffer so little for Jesus in this present age and the promise of the glory doesn't even need to be there. But when we really start to live as disciples, there has to be a comfort beyond just this world.

When we start to live as disciples, there has to be a reward and a payback beyond just this world. And he meets us abundantly in this world, but our motivation is Jesus, I'm here to serve you because I love you. I wanna glorify you master because you gave your life for me.

If we can continue to seek before God to be disciples, and then our goal is not just get somebody to pray a prayer or not get somebody to just come to a church or join a service, but to get disciples, to be disciples and reproduce disciples, there's no telling what we could do. And remember as much as Jesus pruned and pruned and pruned during his lifetime and just wanted to get the key men and women that he could entrust himself to after his death, once the spirit comes in the book of Acts, the numbers start to grow by the thousands. And later in Acts you read about the tens of thousands.

Increase is a wonderful thing, but let it be built on right foundations. As God entrusts us with our own building and own facilities, as he entrusts us with more people, as he entrusts us with more funds, if our foundations are secure, if we're determined to be who we are before God, if we're determined, we're not serving for the fishes and the loaves, if we're determined to follow him, whether it means reproach or whether it means honor, then he'll continue to smile on us. Just gonna say this last thing.

When our cats was with us and brought us a wonderful word, a challenge, maybe this is the one thing we lack, a challenge about not receiving honor from men, receiving honor from God only. One of these things that on the surface, you could say, man, that's not us at all. But you dig deeper and you say, God, is that there? And let it penetrate, let it speak.

We were talking on a Saturday after he was with us, he spoke that on a Thursday. Then the following Saturday, we had lunch before I went out of town. And we were talking about some of the things that God was calling me to do.

So some of my life calling and certain things in particular in the community here that we really felt God calling us to do. And he was talking about the call of the congregation to birth those things in prayer. But it

goes beyond that.

He said that the congregation, the things that God's calling us to do together, association with me, things I'm called to do, things we're called to do together. He said, there must also be a corporate bearing of the reproach together. In other words, it's kind of neat to say, where do you go to church? I go to fire.

You know, man, cool worship, a lot of young people going after Jesus and this and that, and all these missionaries out in the field and activists and this. I go to fire. It's kind of cool today.

Now listen, if there's reproach because of our foolishness, if there's reproach because of a scandal, a sexual scandal, a monetary scandal, ethical scandal of some kind, doctrinal scandal, we all rather God took us home before that happened. That kind of reproach is from the pit and is a blemish on the name of Jesus. But if there's reproach because we're his disciples, we have to embrace it.

If there's reproach because we belong to him, you know, when Paul writes about not being ashamed to Timothy, he says, you weren't ashamed of me or his prisoner. You weren't, listen, you're in China. They don't release to the public, brother so and so is suffering for his bold stand for the gospel.

They say he's been arrested for murder. They say he's in prison for embezzling funds. And if they can't get him to sign a confession, they'll try to get somebody else to sign it.

And bring reproach. Where do you go to church? I go to brother Lamb's church, praise the Lord. Oh, he's just, didn't you see the announcement? He's in jail for rape and murder.

Well, not that brother Lamb, it's a different brother Lamb. I mean, do we wanna be associated when the gospel brings reproach, falsely? Do we wanna be associated for standing for righteousness? Will we be ashamed of Jesus when it's costly? You know, I've actually noticed sometimes when I'll go on my way to lunch, just I take a Bible, sit down and read. I've noticed more of a spiritual feeling of resistance to it.

In other words, in our culture, there's more of that opposition, more of that vilification, you know? And I think, isn't that interesting? I didn't feel that years ago. So of course I got a small Bible I can put in my bag. God forbid.

I'm not talking about us being silly or ostentatious or just making noise to make noise. I'm talking about going about our business as disciples. While we seek to be peace lovers and peacemakers and submissive to authority, our ultimate authority is the will of God.

We're gonna obey Jesus. It will bring some reproach. It will bring some level of hatred.

If it happened to the master, if we walk in his footsteps, it will happen to us. And he said, we quoted it earlier from this Chinese Christian, the servant's not above his master. The student's not above his teacher.

If the world did this to the master, called him the prince of demons, hated him, crucified him, cast him out, what's it gonna do to his servants? So let me just end here in Hebrews 13. Let's get beyond just the excitement of who we are. Let's get beyond just the life force of our corporate energy.

And let's dig in even deeper as disciples, especially as we come to the end of this year and seek to move forward decisively in the new year, in particular at the home base and in this community, a lot of things are gonna swirl. A lot of things are gonna happen. Ask our folks that are in front of the abortion clinics how

many people drive by and say, thank you so much, may the Lord bless you.

Some of you probably never heard grandmothers use profanity like that until they drove by the car. What are they so mad at? There's a spiritual battle. So look at what it says in Hebrews 13, beginning in verse 11.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the most holy place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp bearing the disgrace he bore.

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. And with that mentality that we don't have an enduring city here, we look to extend the kingdom of God where we are. And God may give great favor.

God's done that in the past. God may give great favor when everyone speaks well of us for a season. But if everyone keeps speaking well of us, something's wrong, because that's how the world speaks to the false prophets.

We'll accept favor if God gives it in obedience and we'll use it wisely to have influence for the master. But our goal is to please God. Our goal is to honor him.

Our goal is to bring glory to his name. And our goal here, yes, we'll care for people in a compassionate way. By God's grace, we have true shepherds in our midst caring for the flock, but we are not trying to multiply consumers.

We are trying to multiply disciples. Everyone that says I want the consumer method, please remain seated. Those that say I'm out to be a disciple, stand.

And we'll pray. And as children of the Lord, I entrust you to him for him to continue to speak to you. As you study the word and pray as families, you go to the Lord together as husbands and wives, as single people.

I trust the Lord will continue to speak to you and let you know what his priorities are, what he requires of you. The yoke of Jesus is easy and his burden is light, costly to the flesh, but absolutely wonderful in him. And he gives us grace to carry it.

Father, I pray you'd look down on this congregation standing before you as one. And I pray, Lord, that you would show us what it really means to be disciples of Jesus. Lord, beginning with me, Lord, in our thinking, in our orientation, in our way of life, anything, Lord, that is contrary to your calling, Lord, reveal it.

Where we have blind spots, Lord, have mercy on us and show us and speak to us. Lord, may we not just fall into a religious trip. May we not just try to prove something by sacrifice, but Lord, in delightful obedience, may we follow your son.

God, I pray for things you've spoken to us in the past that we've become hard of hearing or we've forgotten. Lord, in your mercy, speak them again. Remind us again.

Anywhere, Lord, where we've gotten off track, Lord, guide us back. Lord, we're open to your voice and your correction. And where we are doing your will and pleasing you, smile on us, breathe on it, Father.

Just give your amen, your yes, your affirmation, Lord, and back everything you've called us to do. To the extent we're doing your will, back and bless that we can make an impact for your kingdom, that we can see Jesus glorified, that we can see literally a region turned around as we work with your body here, oh God. Use us, Lord, to live as disciples and to multiply disciples.

We reject and cast off every dead religious work, every condemning notion, everything that would drive us. Instead, Lord, we accept your leading, your direction, your voice in our lives, and we pledge ourselves afresh to obedience to your son. We want to be disciples.

May consumer Christianity be crucified for good in this place, in Jesus' name, amen, amen.

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