

# “Characteristics of a Disciple”

March 8, 2020

Luke 9:46-62

## I. Introduction

Today’s Scripture represents a change in location of Jesus’ ministry. For the past 2 years, Jesus has spent most of His time in Galilee. Beginning with [Luke 9:51](#) through [19:27](#), Luke recorded Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem. While traveling through towns and villages in Judea and Perea for those months leading up to His death, Jesus focused on more intensive training of the 12 Apostles. Time was getting short, and the disciples were slow to learn. As the master Teacher, Jesus was able to use different situations to teach and re-teach important truths.

Nothing comes more naturally to fallen human beings than pride. It is easily seen in others AND IN OURSELVES as self-centeredness, self-love, self-promotion, self-fulfillment—just an all-around selfishness. Pride is the root of all sin. It was pride that led to the fall of Satan. It was pride that led to Adam and Eve’s sin which corrupted all of humanity. Sadly, pride is often classified as a virtue in the world. But [Proverbs 16:5](#) says, “**The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.**” Because of its pervasiveness, pride was the first topic in today’s Scripture as Jesus reinforced and retaught “*Characteristics of a Disciple.*”

## II. A Lesson on Pride and Humility

**A. The Setting** According to Mark the setting for this lesson on pride and humility was Capernaum. In [Mark 9:33-34](#) we read, “**They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’**”

Jesus’ warning about His coming suffering and death just hadn’t sunk into the Apostles’ minds. They were still focused on the crown instead of the cross, on the glory, not the suffering. Still anticipating the imminent arrival of the Messianic kingdom, “**An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.**” Perhaps the debate started because of envy—three of the disciples had been with

Jesus on the mount. Perhaps it started as they compared what they had accomplished during their recent preaching and healing tours. They had forgotten that anything they accomplished was not because of their abilities, but only through the power granted them by Jesus (Luke 9:1).

**B. Jesus' Response** To teach them (and us) a lesson on humility and pride, Jesus set a child before them and said, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me.” A child has no power, no status, and few rights. A child is dependent, vulnerable, entirely subject to the authority of the parents. Jesus chose a little child to represent those who are needy and lowly. If a person wants to be great, Philippians 2:7 says that a person should be like Christ and should “make himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” Such a person will show humility of spirit by welcoming and showering attention on those who are regarded as insignificant as well as on those who have a “*position*” in life—just as Jesus Himself had done.

True humility means knowing yourself, accepting yourself, being yourself—your best self—and giving of yourself for others. The world’s philosophy is that a person is “*great*” if others are working for that person—the greater the number of people the greater that person must be, but Christ’s message is that greatness comes from serving others. Jesus requires his “*great*” disciples to show humble service to all people including the needy and lowly.

Using the little child as an analogy of believers, Jesus finished His lesson with the statement: “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” Jesus is saying that if a person—a Christian—welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence and no wealth and no power, the people that need things done for them, such a disciple is welcoming Jesus. More than that, he is welcoming God. Basically, how Christians treat fellow believers is how they treat Christ. And those who reject other believers are rejecting Christ.

Jesus finished by giving a paradox, “For he who is least among you—he is the greatest.” The truly great in the heavenly kingdom are not those who claw their way to the top and seek for people to give them

honor, but those who humbly defer to others, considering them more important than themselves and looking out for their interests—turn to Philippians 2:3-4. It is the humble not the proud that God will exalt—James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” In Luke 14:11 Jesus said, “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**C. A Sign of Pride** Perhaps John was trying to defend the disciples by pointing out their zeal or perhaps John’s conscience troubled him, so following Jesus’ rebuke of their pride, John said, “Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him.” The reason they prohibited the man is another sign of pride: exclusivity—“he is not one of us.” He’s not part of the group! It’s kind of ironic, the disciples who were unable to cast out a demon tell a man who could cast out demons to stop since he wasn’t a member of their group.

Jesus must have shocked them when He said, “Do not stop him.” He went on to say, “For whoever is not against you is for you.” There is no neutrality when it comes to having a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are not for Him, you must be against Him. Later, in Luke 11:23 Jesus put it this way, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” Since this exorcist was bringing glory to Jesus’ name, he had to be for the Savior and not against Him.

### III. A Lesson on Mercy

**A. The Scene** The scene for the next lesson occurred as they continued their journey to Jerusalem. Jesus used the opportunity provided by a Samaritan village’s rejection of Him to teach His disciples a lesson on mercy. This was a good follow-up to the lesson on humility since only the humble are merciful.

The direct way from Galilee to Jerusalem led through Samaria, but most Jews avoided it. There was a centuries old quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans. Because of that, the Samaritans did everything they could to hinder bands of Jewish pilgrims who attempted to pass through their territory. For Jesus to go through Samaria to get to Jerusalem was unusual; to attempt to find hospitality in a Samaritan village was still more unusual.

But Jesus' mission to save the world went beyond all racial and cultural boundaries. So, wanting to show this to the disciples and to teach them about mercy, Jesus “sent messengers on ahead...to get things ready for him.” The responses were not surprising.

## B. Three Responses

**1. The Samaritans** First, “The people there, the Samaritans, did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.” They didn't reject Jesus personally; they knew nothing about His miraculous power and divine teaching. They didn't reject Him just because He was Jewish. They rejected Him because He was going to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. It was a Samaritan thing.

**2. James and John** Then there's James and John. Upset at the insult to their Master, “When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” The two brothers, to whom Jesus “gave the name Boanerges, which means ‘Sons of Thunder’” (Mark 3:17), wanted to incinerate the Samaritan village. They had seen the Prophet Elijah on the mount, so they thought they might imitate him and call down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1).

**3. Jesus** Jesus, however, “turned and rebuked them” for their lack of mercy. To want to destroy those who reject the truth is not gospel ministry. The words that some of you have in your translations: “and said, ‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them’” are not in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke. They may have been added later in history by a scribe who wanted to clarify the rebuke and borrowed from other texts. The principle that Jesus came to save the lost is clearly found in other parts of the Gospels, e.g., Luke 19:10; John 3:17.

Unlike His overly zealous disciples, Jesus grants mercy to hostile, ignorant, sinners—like the Apostle Paul before his conversion. The Samaritans didn't reject Jesus because He claimed to be Lord, Savior, and Messiah, but because He was a Jew traveling to the temple in Jerusalem. Mercy was the right response there. But when hostility is continually fixed and persistent, mercy is withdrawn—turn to Luke 10:10-12.

## IV. A Lesson on Priorities

**A. Encounter #1** Luke finished this section on “*Characteristics of a Disciple*” by writing of three encounters that showed Jesus’ lesson on priorities: a true disciple must “**deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow**” Jesus. According to Matthew’s account (**Matthew 8:19**), the first man was a scribe. Matthew wrote that the man addressed Jesus as “**Teacher.**” He said, “**I will follow you wherever you go.**” Being a scribe, he knew that Jesus condemned the narrow legalism of the scribes. But since Jesus was the most impressive teacher this scribe had ever met; Jesus was worthy of his devotion.

But Jesus looked beyond the surface of the man and spoke to his heart. He said, “**Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.**” The Creator, God incarnate, had fewer creature comforts than the animals He had created. Jesus saw through the professed commitment and saw the man’s desire for comfort.

Jesus responded this way because He knew that self-denial was a barrier for this man. The man viewed Jesus in terms of what he would gain rather than the reception of forgiveness of sins at any cost. He represented the rocky ground, which symbolizes people “**who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away**” (**Luke 8:13**). The man was not prepared to “**deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow**” Jesus (**Luke 9:23**). He wanted to be in on the benefits of following Jesus, but not the sacrifices, but a disciple must “**deny himself.**”

**B. Encounter #2** To a second man Jesus said, “**Follow me.** ~~But~~ **he** the man replied, ‘**Lord, first let me go and bury my father.**’” At first glance, this seems a reasonable request. The problem was that since the Jewish custom dictated that burial take place immediately after death, the man’s father was not yet dead.

What this man was really saying was that he wanted to delay following Jesus until his father died and he received his inheritance. He was not willing to leave everything and follow Jesus. He is an example of “**The seed that fell among thorns...they hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature**” (**Luke 8:14**). Jesus challenged him to leave temporary, earthly

matters to worldly people and, instead to “go and proclaim the kingdom of God” no matter the cost. It is impossible to “serve both God and money” (Luke 16:13) and he chose money.

**C. Encounter #3** A 3<sup>rd</sup> man volunteered, he said, “But first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Once again Jesus looked past the words and looked at the man’s heart. The man’s words implied that his family ties were too strong for him. Jesus knew that if he returned home, the impulse of the moment would die, and he would never be able to leave. Like many people, fear of being away from or ostracized by his family would keep him from following the Lord. This is why Jesus said in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters-- yes, even their own life-- such a person cannot be my disciple.” Jesus saw that this man’s heart was not wholly with Him, and that he would be plowing and looking back. It is impossible to follow Christ with a divided heart. This man, like the other two, was not willing to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow” Jesus (Luke 9:23).

## V. Conclusion

Humility, mercy, and self-denial are not considered virtues in our proud, self-centered, egotistical culture, and it wasn’t in Jesus’ day either. As far back as 350 B.C., the philosopher Aristotle described pride as the crown of all the virtues. Every fallen human heart is a worshiper of itself; fallen human nature is dominated by pride--1 John 2:16 (NAS) says, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

Satan has sold the world a lie—our culture has swallowed it hook, line, and sinker as it diagnoses the cause of people’s problems as a lack of pride or self-esteem. No one lacks self-esteem—everyone is consumed with himself or herself to one degree or another—look at all the ads for making oneself better through make up, exercise, surgery, clothes, having the right car, and so on and so on and so on. The diagnosis of the cause of all human ills as a lack of self-esteem leads people to be even more prideful than they already are. Inflating pride under the pretense of promoting self-esteem leads to devastating

consequences—stealing, lies, disobedience of parents and those in authority, even murder. As [Rom. 1:18-32](#) says that pride leads to people ignoring the One True God and making their own gods instead.

Humility, mercy, and self-denial may be alien to the fallen human nature, but they are foundational to the Christian life. [Micah 6:8](#) says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not a part-time job. If you are going to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you need to deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow Him. [Turn to 1 Peter 2:21](#). Are you really following in Jesus’ steps? Are the characteristics of a disciple—humility, mercy, self-denial—seen in your life?