

What is a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

John 1:35-42 NIV

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^[a]).

Who was John the Baptist?

Although his name implies that he baptized people (which he did), John's life on earth was more than just baptizing. John's adult life was characterized by devotion and surrender to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. John's voice was a "lone voice in the wilderness" ([John 1:23](#)) as he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior. He was the precursor for the modern-day evangelist as he unashamedly shared the good news of Jesus Christ. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others.

Most everyone, believer and non-believer alike, has heard of John the Baptist. He is one of the most significant and well-known figures in the Bible. While John was known as "the Baptist," he was in fact the first prophet called by God since Malachi some 400 years earlier. John's coming was foretold over 700 years previously by another prophet: "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken'" ([Isaiah 40:3–5](#)). This passage illustrates God's master plan in action as God selected John to be His special ambassador to proclaim His own coming.

John's birth was miraculous. He was born of elderly parents who had never been able to have children ([Luke 1:7](#)). The angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah, a Levitical priest, that he would have a son—news that Zechariah received with incredulity (verses 8–18). Gabriel said this about John: "He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He . . . will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (verses 15–17). True to the word of the Lord, Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, gave birth to John. At the circumcision ceremony, Zechariah said about his son, "You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; / for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him" (verse 76).

John was related to Jesus, as their mothers were relatives ([Luke 1:36](#)). In fact, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, he also told her about John. When Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb, she visited Elizabeth, and John leapt in his mother's womb for joy at the sound of Mary's voice ([Luke 1:39-45](#)).

As an adult John lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea, between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He wore clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, the typical garb of a prophet. His diet was a simple one—locusts and wild honey ([Matthew 3:4](#)). John lived a simple life as he focused on the kingdom work set before him.

John the Baptist's ministry grew in popularity, as recounted in [Matthew 3:5–6](#): "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." To be baptized by John was to admit your sin and repent of it—which was, of course, a great way to be prepared for the Savior's coming. The repentance associated with John's baptism also

kept the self-righteous out of the water, as they did not see themselves as sinners. For the self-righteous, John had stern words, calling them a "brood of vipers" and warning them not to rely on their Jewish lineage for salvation, but to repent and "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" ([Matthew 3:7–10](#)). People of that day simply did not address leaders, religious or otherwise, in this manner for fear of punishment. But John's faith made him fearless in the face of opposition.

The general opinion of John the Baptist was that he was a prophet of God ([Matthew 14:5](#)), and many people may have thought that he was the Messiah. This was not his intent, as he had a clear vision for what he was called to do. In [John 3:28](#) John says, "You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'" John cautioned his disciples that what they had seen and heard from him was just the beginning of the miracle that was to come in the form of Jesus Christ. John was merely a messenger sent by God to proclaim the truth. His message was simple and direct: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" ([Matthew 3:2](#)). He knew that, once Jesus appeared on the scene, John's work would be all but finished. He willingly gave up the spotlight to Jesus, saying, "He must become greater; I must become less" ([John 3:30](#)).

Perhaps there is no greater example of humility than what is seen in both Jesus and John in [Matthew 3:13–15](#). Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the River Jordan. John rightly recognized that the sinless Son of God needed no baptism of repentance and that he was certainly not worthy to baptize his own Savior. But Jesus answered John's concern by requesting baptism "to fulfill all righteousness," meaning that He was identifying Himself with sinners for whom He would ultimately sacrifice Himself, thereby securing all righteousness for them ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). In humility, John obeyed and consented to baptize Jesus ([Matthew 3:13–15](#)). As Jesus came up out of the water, "heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (verses 16–17).

Later, King Herod put John the Baptist in prison. Herod had married the former wife of his brother, Philip. John boldly spoke out against this marriage, much to the dislike of Herodias, Herod's new wife ([Luke 3:19–20](#); [Mark 6:17–20](#)). While John was in prison, he heard of all the things Jesus was doing. In what seems to be a moment of doubt, John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He truly was the Messiah. Jesus responded by telling the men to tell John what they saw and heard—prophecies were being fulfilled. Jesus never rebuked John; rather, He gave evidence that He was the promised Savior ([Matthew 11:2–6](#); [Luke 7:18–23](#)). Jesus then spoke to the crowd about John, saying he was the prophesied messenger who would come before Messiah ([Matthew 11:10](#); [Luke 7:27](#); cf. [Malachi 3:1](#)). Jesus also said, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women

there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" ([Matthew 11:11](#); [Luke 7:28](#)).

John the Baptist's ministry, as well as his life, came to an abrupt end at the hand of King Herod. In an act of unspeakable vengeance, Herodias plotted with her daughter to have John killed. Herodias's daughter danced for Herod and his dinner guests one night, and Herod was so pleased that he said to her, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you" ([Mark 6:22](#)). The girl consulted with her mother before she answered that she wanted the head of John the Baptist on a platter (verse 25). Herod had been afraid of John, "knowing him to be a righteous and holy man" (verse 20), and so was loath to kill the prophet, but he had promised to give the dancing girl whatever she asked. Since John was already in prison, it was a simple thing to send the executioner to [behead John](#), which is exactly what happened ([Mark 6:27–28](#)). It was a sad and ignoble end to the life of such a faithful man.

There are several lessons we can learn from the life of John the Baptist. One lesson is that whole-heartedly believing in Jesus Christ is possible. John knew that the Messiah was coming. He believed this with his whole heart and spent his days "preparing the way" for the Lord's coming ([Matthew 11:10](#)). But the road was not an easy one to prepare. Daily he faced doubters who did not share his enthusiasm for the coming Messiah. Under hard questioning from the Pharisees, John shared his belief: "I baptize with water, . . . but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" ([John 1:26–27](#)). John believed in the Christ, and his great faith kept him steadfast on his course until the time when he could say as he saw Jesus approach, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ([John 1:29](#)). As believers, we can all have this steadfast faith.

While it is hard to know for sure what John was feeling as he sat in prison, he did certainly seem to have doubts. But John sent a message out to Jesus in an effort to find the truth. As Christians we all will have our faith put to the test, and we will either falter in our faith or, like John, cling to Christ, seek truth, and stand firm in our faith to the end.

John's life is an example to us of the seriousness with which we are to approach the Christian life and our call to ministry, whatever that may be. John lived his life to introduce others to Jesus Christ; he was focused on the mission God had given him. John also knew the importance of repenting of one's sins in order to live a holy and righteous life. And as a servant of God, he also was unafraid of speaking truth, even when it meant calling out people such as Herod and the Pharisees for their sinful behavior.

John was entrusted with a unique ministry, yet we, too, are called upon to share the truth of Jesus with others ([Matthew 28:18–20](#); [John 13:34–35](#); [1 Peter 3:15](#); [2 Corinthians 5:16–21](#)). We can follow John's example of faithful and obedient trust in God as we live and proclaim His truth in whatever life circumstances God has given us.

Payne Stewart's death brought national attention to a pertinent question, "What would Jesus do?" In many of the photographs taken of Stewart, he wore a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelet. The bracelets became very popular across our nation, but many did not understand what they really meant.

Webster's definition of a disciple is "a pupil or follower of any teacher or school."^{iv} A true disciple is not just a student or a learner, but a follower: one who applies what he has learned. Thus, a true disciple will ask, "What would Jesus do?"

R. G. Lee tells of the pastor who startled his members one Sunday morning by asking the question; "What have you done today that nobody but a Christian would do?"^{iv}

In our text we find four characteristics of a Christian disciple.

I. A Love for the Word of God

A. They Hear It

As John the Baptist and his disciples were standing by the Jordan River, Jesus walked by. Once again John states, "Behold, the Lamb of God. This was a biblical message. John's disciples understood this to be a declaration from God Himself. They recognized John the Baptist was a prophet sent from God and that prophets spoke the Word of God. They had followed John for some time and they listened intently to what John had to say. When they heard John speak they knew his words were of God.

God's Word is exactly what Christians need for direction in their lives. "The Bible, not the church, is supreme in all matters of faith and conduct. Church councils, committees and organizations and their decisions do not supersede the Word of God. God's Word is final.

Isaiah **40:8** **NIV**

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

B. They Heed It

It was not enough for the disciples to just hear what John said. They took what they heard to heart. True disciples will not only hear the Word of God, it will move them to action. James states,

James **1:22** **NIV**

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. I once heard a man say it is not how much we get into God's Word that matters but how much God's Word gets into us. Reading, studying and applying God's Word in our lives is essential.

Dr. Lee tells the story of an old man who lived in a boarding house who was converted after a life of much sinning and manifold transgressions. He would read the Bible and say loudly: "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Praise God!" The boarding house folks got tired of it. One day, they took his Bible while he was at work and hid it. In its place they put a scientific book full of dry facts and figures. After reading it awhile, the old man shouted, "AMEN! Glory to God! Hallelujah!" They turned to him rebukingly and asked, "Why are you shouting? And what do you find in that book to make you shout?" The old man replied, "This book says the seas in some places are five miles deep. And the Bible says God has cast all my sins into the depth of the sea. Hallelujah!"

A true disciple who loves to hear and heed the Word of God in his life will be

able to rejoice in all things.

II. A Lasting Commitment to Christ

When the disciples heard what John had said, they immediately followed Jesus. These men had heard John tell that One was coming after him who was mightier than he. He even identified Him as the Son of God. It was no surprise then that when the disciples saw Jesus walk by they left John and followed after Jesus. As Jesus called other disciples, they would leave everything and follow after Him completely.

The story is told of a pig and a chicken talking about their importance on the farm. The chicken commented how she was very active in providing breakfast every day by laying an egg. The pig replied that while the chicken gave her egg every day he had to give his life for breakfast. The chicken was involved but the pig was committed.

A true disciple is not just involved but is committed to take up his own cross and follow Jesus to the very end. That is a complete and lasting commitment as described by Dr. Lee, "Live as if Christ died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back again tomorrow."

III. A Longing to Know Christ

When Jesus turned and saw the men following Him, He asked them what they were seeking. Why did Jesus ask that question? Did He not know what they were seeking? Jesus did not ask questions for information because He is omniscient. He asked the question for the disciples to identify their desire.

Notice their answer, "Where do you live?" They had a longing to know Jesus

more intimately. The true character of an individual is not what he does publicly before people but what he does privately in his home. Jesus Christ responded to their request with, "Come and see." The text states they went with Jesus to the place where He was staying and dwelt with Him for several hours. A true disciple will spend time to intimately know Jesus.

IV. A Leader of Others to Christ

Andrew is identified as one of the two disciples. Notice what he did immediately. He found his own brother, told him about Jesus and then brought him to Jesus. A true disciple will bring others to Jesus. R. G. Lee wrote "The greatest sit-down strike in the world has not been on the part of some labor union in some industrial or manufacturing plant, but in our churches. Many who love Jesus do not seem to love Him enough to make any special personal effort to get others to give Him their hands and hearts in repentance and faith for salvation.

Dr. Lee also relates this story as was told by Dr. R. C. Campbell. "A blind Chinese man was taken to a hospital. The missionary doctor operated, removing cataracts from his eyes. The man went back to his home seeing and rejoicing. In a few weeks he came back to the hospital. This time he was holding the end of a rope to which forty blind people were clinging. He had led them to the place where he had received his sight. Should we attempt to do less in a spiritual way?

When Dr. Lee spoke to the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1948, he stated, "If our hearts are not 25,000 miles in circumference, they are too small. If our arms do not embrace the whole world, they are too short. A true disciple will seek out family, friends and neighbors to tell them the Good News and bring them to Jesus just as Andrew brought his brother to Jesus.

When Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, Jesus gave him a new name. One of the greatest blessings in coming to Jesus is receiving a new name: *disciple of*

Christ. Let's demonstrate the characteristics of a true disciple.