



**FOLLOWING  
JESUS  
INTO  
GLORY**

**Living Discipleship  
That Glorifies God**

*Biblical Research Library*  
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Cape Town, South Africa

Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

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(Cover Theme: CHARIOTS OF FIRE — R.E.D.)

## FOLLOWING JESUS INTO GLORY

It seems like it is easy to be a Christian today. This is true because there are so many religious people who claim to be Christians, but live after their own desires, believe whatever they want to believe, and live in spiritual apathy. It is supposed that anyone can be a Christian and believe anything of this world, or follow any religious charlatan who would claim some miraculous mystery. The religious world is convinced that one can be a Christian by simply calling himself a Christian. It is so easy today to profess that one is a Christian, and then live a lifestyle that is pleasing and in tune with the norms of the society in which one lives. So if one says that he is a Christian, then such he is supposed to be, regardless of how he behaves or what he believes. There is no pressure, no judging, no trying to convert someone to “his church.” One can simply sit idle and say that he is a Christian.

It is true that names can be deceiving. But being a disciple is something different than being a self-proclaimed Christian. There is action involved in the definition of the word “disciple.” “Christian” has digressed to being only a name, but not disciple. If one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, even the unbelieving world knows that he is a hypocrite if he does not live up to the name of Jesus. It is for this reason that many people would just as soon settle for being called a Christian instead of being a disciple of Jesus. However, they can do such, but they will have to take their chances with questionable behavior and the sin of apathy (lukewarmness). But if one is determined to follow Jesus (discipleship), then he or she must get on with the task of breathing Jesus every moment of one’s life. And this is not easy. It is a struggle. It is a struggle since we live in a world where there are so many people who call themselves Christians, but have created a religiosity after their own desires, and a lifestyle that is contrary to what Jesus lived. The challenge about being a disciple of Jesus in the world today is that there are too many “Christians” around who want the identity, but not the lifestyle.

### Chapter 1

## THE THEFT OF A DISCIPLE

The Bible is saturated with exhortations about not stealing material possessions from another person. The commandment “Thou shalt not steal” deals with the thief who would endanger human relationships (Ex 20:15). The thief

is such a personality that he must be cut off from the people because he cannot be a part of society (Zc 5:3). In the relationship Christians have with one another, the Holy Spirit exhorted, “*Let him who steals steal no more ...*” (Ep 4:28).

Stealing that which belongs to one's neighbor will certainly terminate a relationship one would continue to have with his neighbor. But what if we allow "spiritual thieves" to steal personality characteristics that will endanger our relationships with one another? If we allow spiritual thieves to prevail in our lives, we too will endanger our relationship with others. But most important of all, we will endanger our relationship with God. Look out for the following thieves:

### A. Procrastination:

Procrastination is not only the thief of our own time, but also the thief of opportunity. On the hallway of a university were written the words,

On the plains of hesitation lie the blackened bones of countless millions, who, at the dawn of victory, sat down to rest, and resting died.

After Paul presented the opportunity to escape the second death, Felix responded, "*Go away for now. When I have a convenient time, I will call for you*" (At 24:25). Felix procrastinated. He never called for Paul. Opportunity was lost. He should have responded according to the meaning of what Paul wrote in the following statement:

*I have heard you in an acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Co 6:2).

In reference to the salvation of men, procrastination is Satan's best weapon to keep lost men lost. Tomorrow is always the worse enemy for seizing the opportunity to obey God. But most of us are like the procrastinator who complained about the noise that was created when opportunity knocked so loud at the door. We must always keep in mind that tomorrow is like a postdated check. Today is cash. If we are in the habit of putting off that which should be done today, eventually tomorrow will have so many things that need to be done that we will continually live in frustration about what must be done. The common phrase used by the procrastinator is, "I should have ...."

In reference to our salvation, Hebrews 2:3 is a question that every disciple must answer. "... *how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who have heard?*"

Have you ever heard the statement, "Wait a minute"? Now have you ever considered what you would lose if you waited for a minute? If you were making R100,000 a year (or, whatever your local currency would be of the value of 100,000), you would be losing R1,00 a minute. Procrastination will cost you. An old Japanese proverb states, "Saying 'It is too early,' makes it too late."

We must keep in mind that one of the greatest labor saving devices for today is tomorrow. Alexander the Great gave a simple answer to one who asked him how he conquered so much of the ancient world in such a short time. He

simply responded, “By not delaying.” Calvin Coolidge stated, “We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once.”

We must remember that rolling stones gather no moss, and thus, in order to accomplish our dream for God, we must simply keep on rolling. There are those who dream about doing great things for God, and then there are those who just do it. Dreams are useless unless the dreams are put into action. There is an old French proverb that reads: “Young people tell what they are doing, old people what they have done, and fools what they wish to do.”

We would conclude as Paul in reference to our salvation. “*Knowing that it is already time to awaken out of the sleep because now our salvation is nearer than when we believed*” (Rm 13:11). “*Awake you who sleep and arise from the death, and Christ will give you light*” (Ep 5:14). Everyone harbors the spirit of procrastination in some area of his life, especially in those things we do not like to do. The only way to overcome these fault areas is **just do it**.

## B. Anxiety:

When we allow anxiety to take control of our emotional well-being, we allow our peace of mind to be stolen away. Stress is probably one of the greatest emotional battles to conquer. We have this almost incurable urge to dream up something about which to worry. Pessimism almost rules the day when we consider our future. It is as someone said,

“The pessimist never worries about tomorrow. He knows that everything is going to turn out wrong anyway.”

Jesus knew this spirit about ourselves. This was the emotional background for His statement in Matthew 6:34:

*Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

We must always keep in mind that worry and stress are like a rocking chair. It gives your mind something to do, but it will get you nowhere. The Philippians seemed to be in a state of anxiety when they learned of the condition of Paul in a Roman jail. Because they lived in a Roman colony, Philippi, they knew that being in a Roman jail was not a good situation. They were subsequently very anxious about the circumstances of Paul. Paul realized that they were anxious for him when Epaphroditus come from Philippi to Rome to see Paul in prison. Paul wrote the Philippian letter to calm their anxiety. He thus saturated the letter with statements of joy. “*Rejoice in the Lord always,*” he reminded the Philippians, “*And again I say, rejoice!*” (Ph 4:4). And just in case this exhortation was not sufficient, he followed it with a mandate from God. “***Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God***” (Ph 4:6). Paul practiced what he preached. At the same time and in the same jail, he also wrote, “*For I know that this will turn*

out for my deliverance through your prayers ...” (Ph 1:19). Even in the worst of situations, Paul refused to allow his difficult environment to determine his state of mind.

Paul did not stress about the future. He wanted the Philippians to know that their prayers for him would not go unanswered. He would prevail over imprisonment through the power of God that was released upon those who held him captive. We do not know how God would do this, but we do know that Paul’s deliverance from prison would not be the result of a merciful court. It would be through the power of God. And thus, Paul could from prison write of his future.

*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, have this mind (Ph 3:13-15).*

We simply must not forget that ulcers are what we get when climbing over mole hills as if they were mountains. We simply must never forget what George Muller said, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” Just remember, if you let anxiety prevail in your life, you can end up on a psychiatrist’s couch. You will subsequently spend a great deal of money for the couch, but will never own it.

### C. Covetousness:

This spiritual thief will steal away from the disciples of Jesus the spirit of generosity. This is why Paul referred to covetousness as a “member of this world.” So in reference to this member, he wrote, “*Therefore, put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Cl 3:5).

The story is told of Fredrick the Great who was about to launch war against a neighboring country. Fredrick subsequently called his secretary to write a declaration of war against the country. The secretary dutifully began to write the dictated words of Fredrick, “Whereas in the providence of God ...” Fredrick abruptly stopped the secretary and said, “Just write, Fredrick wants more land.”

In the parable of the sower, we must keep in mind that the seed that was sown on the thorny ground lost its purpose and destiny as seed because of covetousness, that is, the cares of this world (Mt 13:22). It was the same covetousness that caused Demas to forsake his destiny. “... for Demas has forsaken me, **having loved this present world ...**” (2 Tm 4:10). Jesus knew that the spirit of covetousness would steal away some of His disciples. For this reason, during His ministry He forewarned His disciples, “*Take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses*” (Lk 12:15).

A Sunday school teacher had just explained to her young students the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. She concluded by asking the young stu-

dents, “Which would you want to be, the rich man or Lazarus?” One of her students quickly replied, “I would want to be the rich man in life and Lazarus when I die.” Sorry, it cannot be that way.

## D. Lusts:

Here is the problem:

*Let no man say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God.” For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man. **But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.** Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (Js 1:13-15).*

It is for this reason that Paul wrote, “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Co 9:27). Our humanity lends itself to doing that which would lead us away from the spiritual. Since lust is of the world, then when we follow after that which is of this world, we are led further away from God who is not of this world. John wrote, “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world*” (1 Jn 2:16).

When we have the urge to obsess over the lust of the flesh, we must remember that this “*world is passing away with its lust*” (1 Jn 2:17). If we would allow

our lives to be controlled by the lust of the flesh, then we too will pass away from God with the passing of this world.

In order to guard ourselves from passing away with this world by our obsession to fulfill the lust of the flesh, Paul exhorted the young Timothy, “*Flee also youthful lusts*” (2 Tm 2:22). And the only way to flee lust is to pursue that which is opposite to lust, that is, righteousness, faith, love and peace (2 Tm 2:22). If one does not follow the way of righteousness, faith, love and peace, he will be detoured from the way to heaven.

Since the lust of the flesh is of this world, then when we fulfill the lust of the flesh by losing sight of righteousness, faith, love and peace, we will lose our soul. This is the meaning of what Peter wrote, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and pilgrims, **abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul***” (1 Pt 2:11).

The great spiritual leader Paul knew what he was talking about when he continually disciplined his body in order not to be disqualified from a heavenly home. He knew that if temptation were not continually resisted, it would become a lifestyle. He knew that life was like the statement of a Malay proverb, “If you value your corn, pluck out the grass.” We must confess that many of the problems that we have in developing our spiritual life is that we say “yes” too quickly to too many lusts, when we should be saying “no” more. Spiritual growth is always held up by the fulfillment of the lust of the flesh.

## E. Apprehension:

If there were a personality characteristic that would steal away our hope and vision for the future, it would be apprehension about the future, or the fear of moving forward. For the apprehensive, Psalm 46:1-3 is a passage for encouragement.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.*

Christians must remember that “*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Tm 1:7). And we must not for-

get that the lake that burns with fire and brimstone is reserved for “*the cowardly and unbelieving ...*” (Rv 21:8).

We must keep in mind that the future frightens only those who find comfort by living in the past. But for those who realize that they are more than conquerors through the power of God that dwells in us (Rm 8:37), they will willingly walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear (Ps 23:4). Those who truly know that God is working in their lives for good, will not be apprehensive about the future. The reason they are not apprehensive about the future comes from just one statement of the Holy Spirit:

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose* (Rm 8:28).

## Chapter 2

# THE HOLY DISCIPLE

Discipleship means that one is different from that which is common in this world. If a disciple is not different, then he has conformed to the life-style of the world. Peter defined this sacred life-style as a holy priesthood.

*... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Pt 2:5; see vs 9).

Now here is the challenge to everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus.

*But as He who has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of behavior, because it is written, “You will be holy, for I am holy”* (1 Pt 1:15,16).

The meaning of the word *hagios* (holy) defines one who is morally good. And since the holy are morally good, then they are different from those of this world.

The holy ones are “sacred,” “sanctified,” and “set aside” from that which is common and ordinary of this world. There is something very uncommon about the saints of God when we judge them in reference to the moral standards of the world. And since the holy priesthood of God is “*holy in all manner of behavior*,” then this priesthood of disciples does not conduct themselves after the manner of this world.

Peter makes 1 Peter 1:15 a command. “*Be holy in all manner of behavior*.” If holiness is enjoined upon disciples as a command, then there is more to holiness than being cleansed and sanctified from sin. It is through the blood of Jesus that we have been cleansed of sin. When we walk after Him as His disciples, we continue to be cleansed when we mess up (1 Jn 1:7). So there is something about holiness over which we have control through our behavior. Our sin is cleansed by the blood of Jesus, but our separateness from that which is of this world is our choice. The basic meaning of holiness is to be “set apart.” The holy, therefore, set themselves apart from the activities and things of this world that are contrary to God. When we choose to live according to the instructions of the Spirit in the word of God, then we are being set apart from the world by our obedience.

### A. Be holy as God.

God is set apart from the world, and thus, He is not of this world. The sin of idolatry is an effort to steal away the ho-

liness of God. The idol worshipers bring God down to a god who is created after the imagination of the one who is of this world. If God can be created after the likeness of man, then He is not a God separate from the thinking of man who is of this world. It was for this reason that God strongly condemned Israel when they ventured into idolatry. They were destroying the holiness of God by making God to be something of this world. This is the meaning behind God’s condemnation of Israel in Amos 5:21-23:

*I hate, I despise your feast days. And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*

What Israel had done was to develop a syncretistic religiosity. They mingled the ceremonial rituals of the law of God with what they believed the gods they had created after their own imagination would desire. Amos continued to write, “*But you have borne the shrine of your king and the pedestal of your images, the star of your god that you made for yourselves*” (Am 5:26). When they performed the ceremonies that were required by the Old Testament law, they were thinking of the gods they had created after their own imaginations. It was a time when in their minds they had dethroned God to a god, and thus assumed that they

could manipulate the behavior of their gods by their own desires. They sought to remove the one true and living God from His separation from the world in order to make Him conform to the wishes of their own thinking.

If the disciples of Jesus seek to be holy as God is holy, then they should make every effort that they do not dethrone God from His holiness in order to conform to their own imagination. Unfortunately, we see this idolatrous religiosity being played out as worshipers assemble for meetings that please themselves. They assemble in order to see what they can get out of an assembly, instead of seeing what they can give in worship. Israel tried this man-made religiosity. But God judged them with the statement: *“Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments”* (Am 5:23). In their idolatrous concept of God, apostate Israel assumed that if the melody of their songs and instruments was personally pleasing to them, then certainly it must be pleasing to the god whom they had created after their own imagination. There is something very subtle about idolatry for which worshipers must be very cautious. When we start believing that which we personally like for ourselves, it is time to search the Scriptures lest we be guilty of “will worship,” that is, forcing our worship on God (See Cl 2:23).

The purpose for the giving to Israel all the ceremonial laws concerning cleanliness was to separate them from the nations around them. It was God’s man-

date to Israel, therefore, that they maintain their separateness (holiness) from the nations around them through their obedience of the ceremonial laws He gave them. This was the reason why God commanded,

*For I am the Lord your God. You will therefore sanctify yourselves and you will be holy, for I am holy. Neither will you defile yourselves with any kind of creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You will therefore be holy, for I am holy* (Lv 11:44,45).

If a disciple is to be holy as God is holy, then it is necessary that he clearly understands the holiness of God. God does not exist according to the imagination of man, but is separate from the world. He is uncommon according to the behavior of those who live after the manner of this world. Those who do not understand the separateness of God from that which is of this world, cannot be holy. An idolater can never be holy simply because he has created a god in his mind that conforms to his wishes that are of this world. One is as holy as his understanding of the holiness of God.

## **B. Called to be holy**

Concerning the holiness of the disciple, the Holy Spirit proclaimed that the obedient were called into holiness. *“For God has not called us to impurity, but in holiness”* (1 Th 4:7). If one would re-

ject this call, he rejects God who is holy (1 Th 4:8).

### 1. *Motivation for holiness:*

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been sanctified by His blood offering (Hb 7:27). And because we have been made holy through the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God, it is only reasonable to do what Paul exhorted the Roman Christians: “... *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rm 12:1). It is only reasonable service to remain separate from the world in view of the fact that Jesus separated us from our sin through His incarnation and the cross.

As His holy priesthood, God assumes that we will respond to His grace by keeping our lives separated from the behavior of the world. “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is ... to keep oneself unspotted from the world*” (Js 1:27). It is grace that teaches this lesson of discipleship.

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age” (Ti 2:11,12).*

This simply means that we “*not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 Jn 2:15). So Paul reminded the Roman disciples how this is accomplished in the life of a disciple. “*And be not conformed to this world, but*

*be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*” (Rm 12:2). Disciples continue to renew their minds through the word of God in order that they not lose their way in this world of unholiness. The only direction by which the disciples of Jesus can renew their thinking is in saturating their minds with the word of God. There is no other way to know Jesus.

**2. *Follow the pattern:*** The pattern is Jesus. “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). We can find those “steps” only in the word of Jesus.

Jesus did not behave as the world behaves. He went to what we would consider an extreme in setting an example for us to follow as His disciples. As the Creator, and sacrificial Son of God, He washed the dirty feet of the disciples. After the foot bath, holy living is inspired by His sacrifice for us. He said, “*For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you*” (Jn 13:15). Holiness is “other world” behavior. It is not of this world. If we would be holy as our Father is holy, then it is imperative that we follow the example of the One who came from the Father in order to illustrate the holy behavior of the Father. He will stoop to wash our dirty feet, and then hang on a cross to wash our dirty souls.

**3. *Holy action glorifies God:*** Our holiness is meant to bring glory to God. Whatever we do, we must “*do all to the glory of God*” (1 Co 10:31). This means that our lives must be patterned after the

holy example of Jesus. This is what Paul meant when he wrote,

*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Cl 3:17).*

### C. Being unholy.

We can better understand holiness by the Bible's description of the unholy life. Notice where Paul grouped the unholy person in 1 Timothy 1:9:

*Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for **unholy** and profane, for murderers of fathers and murders of mothers, for murderers.*

The unholy person is not in good company. But this is not the end of the crowd of unholy people. Paul continued:

*Know this also, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, **unholy** ... (2 Tm 3:1,2).*

Those who would live unholy lives have put themselves in the company of those who would be rejected from eternal dwelling. They have either rejected being set apart for Christ in obedience to the gospel, or if they have obeyed the gospel, then they have agreed to walk the sanctified life in submission to Jesus.

Under the Old Testament law, the priests of God were to keep themselves from that which was unholy (Lv 10:10). As priests of God, we too as the disciples of Jesus must keep ourselves from that which is unholy (1 Jn 5:21). Jude exhorted, "... *keep yourselves in the love of God*" (Jd 21). In view of the termination of all that we now behold, Peter wrote, "*Since all these things will be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ...?***" (2 Pt 3:11).

As the unholy have no fellowship with the holy of this world, the same is true in reference to eternal dwelling. In the context of the judgment of God upon the unholy, John encouraged the saints by saying, "*And he who is holy, let him still be holy*" (Rv 22:11). The interpretive meaning is that the holy must continue in their holiness, without involving themselves in that which is unholy of this world. The Hebrew writer explained, "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, **without which no man will see the Lord***" (Hb 12:14).

Since no man can claim to be holy from sin on the basis of his behavior—for we all sin—then our sanctification from sin was made possible through the blood of Jesus. Our holiness in reference to sin, therefore, is the gift of God. It is the gift of the shed blood that came through the cross. This gift of grace is our motivation. We were set apart from the world through our obedience to the grace of God in order to be holy for God's purpose in this world. Jesus' sacrifice to make us holy from sin inspires us to keep ourselves holy from the unholy things of this world.

## Chapter 3

# THE DISCIPLE'S TONGUE

In one statement, Jesus ripped the mask off every person who would presume to hide within his heart evil things. ***“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”*** (Mt 12:34). The greatest fool on earth is the one who thinks he can hide his true character from others. Only mute people can do this. But even those who cannot speak will eventually reveal their true character by their actions. Jesus continued, ***“The good man brings good treasure out of the good things. And evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things”*** (Mt 12:35). We separate good men from evil men by what comes forth from their mouths and how they behave. In fact, Jesus assured us that what comes out of our mouths will determine our eternal destiny.

*But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned* (Mt 12:36,37).

There are those who would presume to be religious, but their heart is full of evil things. They offer a good presentation to cover a host of inward evils. But if such a person does not control his speech, then he has already judged his supposed religiosity to be useless. ***“If any man among you seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue,***

***but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is useless”*** (Js 1:26). It is interesting that this statement says that one “deceives his own heart” when he pretends to be religious, but harbors evil. With this statement, James introduced one of the most profound pronouncements from the Holy Spirit in the Bible. **James 3:1-12** is a dissertation from God that should exhort any disciple to engage in a lifetime of struggle to control that which cannot be tamed, that is, his speech.

### A. Little is too big.

James introduced the impossibility of controlling that which would declare useless our discipleship. ***“If anyone does not stumble in word, the same is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body”*** (Js 3:2). These are not encouraging words. Those disciples who would be puffed up in their own “spirituality,” should remember that they are continually brought down by a slipped word. If one would think that he can always control his speech, then he should consider the fact that the strength of a horse is controlled by a very small bridle (Js 3:3). If one would think that he is spiritually strong, then he should reconsider the small member of the tongue that can bring one down to humanity.

A large ship may stay afloat on the ocean and take the blows of the waves,

but it is turned about by a very small rudder (Js 3:4). An unguarded word spoken in jest can wreck a life. And then consider the strength of standing trees in a forest. No matter how strong the trees may present themselves, they can be burned to the ground with the flame of a small match (Js 3:5). A life of discipleship can be burned to the ground with a harsh word. A mighty automobile engine can produce tremendous power, but be brought to silence with a very small particle in the jets of the carburetor. James' metaphor is direct. Though the tongue is small, it can bring down lives. A businessman of our acquaintance once said that he had an investor come to him in order to invest 1.5 million dollars in his business. But during the discussions, our friend said that he made one statement as a joke, which the investor considered offensive. So the investor gathered up his papers and walked out. A word made in jest cost our friend 1.5 million dollars.

The curse of the careless word is in the fact that one can spend a lifetime making friends that can be destroyed with a few careless words. We wish we could thank the author who wrote,

A careless word may kindle strife,  
 A cruel word may wreck a life.  
 A bitter word may hate instill,  
 A brutal word may smite and kill.  
 A gracious word may smooth the way,  
 A joyous word may light the day.  
 A timely word may lessen stress,  
 A loving word may heal and bless.

James was right. If we could only

control our tongue, then we could really control our whole body (Js 3:2). Being a good disciple could be easy if it were not for the tongue. The tongue can never be completely controlled, and thus, discipleship will always be a struggle. And for this reason, we are always on our knees before God, asking that we be forgiven of all the senseless words that may have caused damage to our relationship with others. The struggle to be the type of disciple we want to be begins with the small member, the tongue.

## **B. Division is caused by words.**

Since the tongue cannot be completely controlled, then James cautions,

*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature. And it is set on fire by hell (Js 3:6).*

It is true that much gossip that is aired among the members should also be fumigated. The tongue is never on the sidelines when there is division among the members of the body. This is true, as someone said, because there are always three types of gossips among the members in times of turmoil: (1) vest-button gossips, those who are always popping off nonsense, (2) vacuum-cleaner gossips, those who are always picking up dirt, and (3) liniment gossips, those who are always rubbing it in. These are gossips with "hoof and mouth" disease. They are always hoofing it from one

member to another, mouthing off those things they should not. Paul reminded us that there are those “*wandering about from house to house ... gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not*” (1 Tm 5:13).

Why is it that when there is turmoil among the disciples that there are more people run down by gossips than automobiles. In times of controversy among the children of God—and there will always be those times because we cannot control our tongues—there are some who never know **what** to talk about, only **who** to talk about. We must never forget the wisdom of the sage who said, “Gossips are people who put 2 and 2 together and always get 22.” These are those people who have things go into their ears, but get mixed up before they slip out of their mouths. It is people as this who never seem to be interested in the work of the church until there is trouble. They will not show up at the assemblies of the disciples to discuss the work of the church until there is trouble. Sometimes it is as someone said, “Some people never get interested in anything until it is none of their business.”

The story is told of a young man who made a statement to several people, which statement he later found out was totally false. He asked advice from one of the elders, who instructed him to take a feather and lay it on the front step of the front door of every house where he stated the falsehood. He was then instructed to later go back the following day and collect up all the feathers. The young man replied, “But the feathers will

be blown all over town.” Right.

Someone wisely said, “The worst indigestion one can have comes from having to eat one’s own words.” The poet was right:

Two ears and but a single tongue,  
by nature’s laws to man belong.  
The lesson she would teach is clear;  
Repeat but half of what you hear.

For this reason, James exhorted, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (Js 1:19). Have you ever noticed the things in Proverbs 6 that God hates, things that are an abomination to Him? Just in case you have not, they are, among other things, “*a lying tongue*” and “*a false witness who speaks lies*” (Pv 6:17,19). Delmar Andrews probably revealed in a very precise manner the evil of slander.

The sin of slander is one of the most vile and wicked sins in the realm of iniquity. It is a devil’s caldron, brewed in correction, flavored with filth, spiced with deadly venom, and stewed over the fires of hell. Its stench is nauseating and repulsive to the nostrils of the decent and respectable.

The sin of slander could not have been better described. When dealing with our tongues that cannot be tamed, every disciple should make the control of his tongue top priority. If one would involve himself in slander, he has used his tongue in the most evil way it can be used. James

exhorted, *“Do not speak evil one of another, brethren. He who speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law* (Js 4:11). The slanderous person sets himself up as the law, and thus his slanderous speech speaks evil of the law of God. He judges the law of God to be inadequate to lead people, and thus, he slanders in order to manipulate people to follow him and his law. Such was what the church leader, Diotrephes, did in reference to the evangelists, and the apostle of love himself. So John wrote to Gaius, *“Therefore, if I come I will remember his [Diotrephes’] deeds that he does, unjustly accusing us with malicious words”* (3 Jn 10). If someone would so slander the apostle of love, then certainly disciples who step forward to be the type of leader they should be, should expect slander from those people who love to be first (3 Jn 9).

### C. The untamable is among us.

James is emphatic about the untamable tongue. There is no bird or beast that cannot be tamed by man (Js 3:7-9). *“But no one can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison”* (Js 3:8). It seems to always be true what someone said, “Some use language to express thought. Some use language to conceal thought. But some use language instead of thought.” It is true that if you speak when you are angry, you will make the best speech that you will ever regret. A poet said it right.

It is not so much what you say,  
As the manner in which you say it;  
It is not so much the language you use,  
As the tones you use to convey it.

Paul instructed concerning the tone we should use in our speech: *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone”* (Cl 4:6). In reference to our demeanor concerning our speech, Paul also instructed,

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you* (Ep 4:31,32).

We must always keep in mind that kind words will always echo back to us in kind words. How we speak to others is how others will speak to us.

### D. A loose tongue manifests a hypocritical heart.

James concludes his exhortation concerning the tongue with words none of us want to hear. A loose tongue will reveal our hypocrisy. *“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so”* (Js 3:10). The challenge in one's use of his speech is to be consistent. And in being consistent, one must always speak good consistently. We must not forget that our manner of speech is an indication of our manner of behavior. Jesus

was right. *“The good man brings good treasure out of the good things. And an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things”* (Mt 12:35). Someone once defined dignity as “the capacity to hold back on the tongue what should never have been in the mind in the first place.” But if there is evil in one’s heart, it cannot be concealed. It will be revealed through the tongue.

James uses two illustrations to explain that true disciples are consistent in their speech. A spring does not give forth sweet and bitter water. No disciple should be spouting forth sweet and bitter speech out of the same mouth. A fig tree does not produce both olives and figs. Neither should a disciple produce good and bad speech. It is simply true what James earlier said in his epistle, *“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways”* (Js 1:8). If one is double-tongued, then he is not stable. He is not conduct-

ing himself with dignity. Maybe we should write out and place on our refrigerators the words of the Holy Spirit of Ephesians 4:29:

*Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for edification, so that it may give grace to the hearers.*

This is more than advice from the Holy Spirit. It is a mandate to be obeyed. The Holy Spirit said in another place, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit”* (Pv 18:21). Is this not what Jesus said, *“For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* (Mt 12:37). As disciples of Jesus, we must never forget that our eternal destiny lies in the control of our tongues, that little member that is simply too big in our lives.

## Chapter 4

# THE PATIENT DISCIPLE

The control of our tongue is governed by the amount of patience one has with people. The less patience one has with his neighbor, the more harsh he will be with his tongue. Therefore, if we work on our patience, we will be working on our ability to relate with others through the control of our speech. The use of our tongue will either drive others away, or draw friends close.

Someone once said that patience is “the ability to idle your motor when you

feel like stripping your gears.” But in reality, a chronic lack of patience is a form of despair, and despair leads one to be impatient with others. The impatient person is simply depressed about the environment in which he lives, or the circumstances he is facing in his life. He is often discouraged about life, and thus takes out on others his inward frustrations. If one is narcissistic in his impatience, then he is seeking to project upon others his inability to cope with his so-

cial environment. He reasons that if the world is about himself, then certainly the rest of the world is out of order because it is not measuring up to his desires. Things are not going his way. Narcissistic church leaders always sink into bitterness when people reject their leadership. Such was the case of Simon the sorcerer when the people turned from him to Peter and John (See At 8:12,18,22,23).

We have found that people are very patient in some areas of life, and very impatient in one or more other areas. One can be patient in the transactions of his daily business at the office, but in the vehicle going home from work he turns into an impatient monster. His impatience manifests a personality disorder. He is seeking to control the traffic as he may have controlled his office staff. The impatient person, therefore, must look inward in order to determine if his problem is a problem with control issues. Regardless of the cause of impatience, disciples cannot function in their relationships with others unless they exercise patience.

#### A. In search of patience:

It is interesting that Christians seem to be those who realize their impatient behavior first, and thus, seek to correct their impatience in all areas of life in order to enjoy the fellowship and friendship of others. This desire is only natural because in their struggles to be a disciple of Jesus, they see no impatience in the One they seek to follow.

Sometimes we disguise impatience

with self-initiative. But there is a difference between taking the initiative and being impatient. We would define self-initiative as the ability to respond to a need or goal for which one patiently strives. If one is not patient in his response to opportunity, then he will find himself chasing dreams that are never fulfilled. If one does not take the initiative to do the work of the disciple, then he will fall into the sin of lukewarmness (Rv 3:15,16).

It is for this reason that the Christian has a completely different world view concerning the environment in which he lives. Those who are worldly see the world as an opportunity for self gratification. To these people obstacles to success are seen as “bad luck,” and thus, occasions for frustration. The Christian, however, views the tribulation of the world as a means for character development for eternal dwelling. This teleology is in the words of the Holy Spirit in Romans 5. “... *we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope*” (Rm 5:3,4). We cannot get much better than this in viewing the world around us. Obstacles are an opportunity for development in patience.

James moves this building of a world view one step further. Because the Christian accepts tribulation as the builder of a patient character, James graduates us to the next level of the fulfilled life. “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience* (Js 1:2,3). When the Christian

falls into “various trials,” he concludes that these “tribulations” will produce patience in his character. He can thus count it with joy that his character is being prepared for eternal dwelling through the struggles he must endure. It is for this reason that the patience that is produced by “various trials” is working to prepare us for eternal dwelling. The trials work for our benefit. So James added, “***But let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing***” (Jas 1:4).

The tribulations (trials) of this world are working the Christian to heaven. And since we will be there for eternity, each one of us is praying that we will be patient enough with people so that other saints will not consider us an eternal thorn in the flesh in heaven because of our impatience. No one wants to be around an impatient person. So certainly, none of us would want to be in eternity in the presence of an impatience disciple in heaven. We can endure all social environments of this world, knowing that our character is being fine-tuned for eternal dwelling.

### **B. Areas of intense focus:**

Because each person is impatient in different areas of life, then each one of us must target in our character those areas where we are the most impatient. As we do this, we must work on our general demeanor to be more patient. If one has a difficult time determining which areas of impatience on which to focus, then ask a close friend. Husbands can ask their

wives. We are certain that wives are often a good judge of those areas where their husbands suffer from impatience. When James said to confess our faults to one another, he at least meant that it was time to confess up to those areas where we are the most impatient (Jas 5:16).

It is one work of the fellowship of the family of God to help one another prepare for eternal dwelling with one another. One of the reasons why “church” often fails the people is that “church” becomes something that is relegated to a legal system of ritualistic assemblies, while the attendees have no social contact with one another. When Paul said, “*Let all things be done for edification*” (1 Co 14:26), he meant more than bringing order to chaotic assemblies. When Christians come together in assembly, the assembly should be of such a nature that each member can work in the development of the character of each member. This is the foundation for the statement: “*And let us consider one another to stir up love ...*” (Hb 10:24). The purpose of the assembly of the disciples is to produce an environment of contact and edification. If there is no contact, then there can be no true edification through interpersonal communication. One of the dangers of the “social media” today is that there are too many Christians who are substituting social media for personal social contact. Facebook is depriving people of face-to-face contact in assembly wherein disciples can exhort one another to stir up love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25).

There are three general areas where

dedicated members of the family of God must focus in reference to becoming more patient with one another. These are areas where disciples of Jesus function in their social (assembly) contact with one another in order to develop their personalities.

**1. *Patience for deliverance:*** It is not fun to struggle through tribulations and trials, especially if we try to struggle alone. And because it is not fun, we would just as soon the trials pass as soon as possible. James was dealing with some disciples who were struggling through their trials. They were possibly complaining somewhat because of the trials they were having to endure. On the background of a social environment that was not being kind to his readers, James gives some very helpful instructions in **James 5:7-11**.

Now before we look at the passage, it is imperative that this passage be understood in its historical context. James uses the phrase “coming of the Lord” in the passage. When this phrase is used in the Bible, Bible interpreters seem to jump up and down that the Bible is always speaking about the final coming of the Lord. It is true that the phrase “coming of the Lord” is used in reference to the final coming of Jesus to deliver us from the tribulations of this present world. **But this is the exception to the interpretation of the phrase. This is certainly not what the meaning of the phrase is in the context of James 5.**

James was writing to Jewish Christians, and these Christians were living in

the trying times of hardships immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Notice the context. James said to the rich persecutors of the poor, “*Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you*” (Js 5:1). James certainly was not speaking of “miseries” that would come upon the rich Jewish persecutors that would come over two thousands years after he wrote this note of encouragement to his immediate readers. If he did have the final coming of the Lord in mind, then he would have been deceiving the first readers into believing that Jesus was coming in His final coming within their lifetimes. But we are sure that the Holy Spirit, through James, did not deceive these persecuted disciples into believing that Jesus was soon coming to relieve them of their persecution.

The context of James 5 is the deliverance of the just Christians who were being unjustly treated by the rich in their economic environment. And since James was writing “*to the twelves tribes who are in the Dispersion,*” then we rightly conclude that he was writing to those Jewish disciples of the Jewish dispersion who had obeyed the gospel. The obedient Jews were being unjustly treated by the rich Jews.

James was making a prophecy of the deliverance of the obedient, which prophecy would be fulfilled in their lifetime. When the Roman armies cracked down on Jewish insurrection throughout the world from A.D. 67 to the final outcome of the crackdown in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then the righteous

were delivered from the persecution of Judaism. The rich oppressing Jews lost everything, and thus, their persecution of the just was terminated. So James wrote to the righteous,

*Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. And he has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near” (Js 5:7,8).*

As previously stated, **James did not deceive these early readers into believing that they had to wait until the final coming of Jesus at the end of time in order to be delivered from their tribulations.** Their deliverance was “near.” And since it was near in their lifetime, **then when we are personally enduring tribulations, we too, as James’ immediate readers, do not have to wait for our deliverance from tribulation until the final coming of Jesus.**

The deliverance from our personal tribulation can also be “near.” Jesus can come “in time” in order to deliver us. This is not the final coming of Jesus in person, but a coming of Jesus in time to deliver us from persecution. James was simply using the judgment language of the Old Testament to refer to the “in time” coming of the Lord to deliver His people out of tribulation (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:12,13; Ez 30:3; Dn 7:13,14).

“In time” Christians need to know that they can be delivered from their “in

time” trials by Jesus who can come “in time” for their deliverance. This is the clear and explicit message of James to his brothers and sisters, who were at the time of his writing, suffering trials and tribulations from the hands of those who were unjustly treating them. James’ readers needed help right then, not two thousand years later. And when we are suffering from the oppression of trials and tribulations, we too need to find comfort in the fact that Jesus can deliver us immediately. Our prayers for deliverance can happen immediately. We do not have to wait over two thousand years for an answer.

Our tribulation will produce the work of developing patience, but there will come deliverance. If James promised that his readers would soon be delivered from their immediate trials, then when we are on our knees in prayer, we must be confident that we too can be delivered from our immediate trials. We can thus do as Paul stated, “*glory in tribulation*” (Rm 5:3). Now read Romans 8:24,25 again.

*For we are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he still hope for it? But if we hope for what we do not see, then with perseverance [patience] wait for it.*

If we could paraphrase what Paul was saying it would be, “Just hang in there!” If we hang in there, we will imitate those faithful Old Testament people of God who waited for the coming of the Messiah.

*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, so that you not be sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises* (Hb 6:11,12).

The simple message of the Hebrew writer is that we must not become discouraged in times of tribulation. We must not allow tribulation to discourage us into inactivity. We must continue to work as disciples of Jesus until we are delivered, whenever that deliverance will come. Jesus promised, *“In your endurance you will gain your souls”* (Lk 21:19). Just remember the words of John in the book of Revelation.

*He who leads into captivity will go into captivity. He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints* (Rv 13:10).

**2. Patient with people:** Shakespeare wrote, “How poor are they who have not patience. What wound did ever heal but by degrees.” Winston Churchill once said to an impatient general, “Sir, you do not possess your emotions. They possess you.”

When discussing patience, it is almost always our impatience with people that affects our relationships with others. We struggle in our relationships with one another because we struggle with one another’s differences. Two Irishmen had just reached the top of a long hill on a tandem bicycle. The one on the front seat

said over his shoulder to the one on the back seat, “Pat, that was one stiff climb.” Pat replied, “It sure was. If I hadn’t kept my foot on the brake we would have rolled backwards down the hill.”

The goal that is set before all of us is what Paul wrote to Titus, *“... an overseer must ... not be quick-tempered ...”* (Ti 1:7). He added that Titus *“teach that the older men be ... self-controlled ... in patience”* (Ti 2:2). To succeed in this struggle over our impatience, we must exercise ourselves in self-discipline in order to be forbearing of others (1 Tm 3:2,3). This is not just an option to discipleship behavior. According to what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, it is a mandate of character. *“Now we exhort you, brethren ... be patient toward all men.”*

**3. Patient for the reward of our labors:** Thomas Edison was asked how he could justify about 1,000 unsuccessful experiments on a particular project. He simply replied, “Why? Now we know 1,000 ways it won’t work.” We must always keep in mind the old Chinese proverb, “Nothing is so full of victory as patience.” This was Paul. In prison he wrote,

*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Ph 3:13,14).

We can be patient for the reward of our

labors if we keep our minds focused on the reward. In a *Reader's Digest* article entitled, "The Power of Patience," Norman Vincent Peale wrote in the April 1972 issue:

Why can't people make better use of patience in their lives? Mainly, I think, because it has three great enemies: discouragement, that white surrender flag that makes people give up too easily; frustration, generating anger that clouds your judgment and wrecks your timing; and the tendency to over react under stress, hit the panic button, lose your cool.

Patience for reward should be the character of the disciple. God worked from the time of creation to bring the cross into the existence of earth history a little over two thousand years ago. He patiently endured until the fullness of time in order to accomplish His plan of redemption (Gl 4:4). We seek to be godly after this patience, for such was in the mind of the Holy Spirit when He wrote,

*Therefore, seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of [faithful Old Testament] witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance [patience] the race that is set before us (Hb 12:1).*

### C. The cause of impatience:

No one can become patient unless he focuses squarely on those things in his life with which he has little patience. Our

focus must be on those areas of the human spirit that lead one to be impatient with circumstances and people.

**1. Lack of mercy:** Remember the statement that was said to a surrounding crowd of unmerciful and self-righteous judges who were about to stone to death a woman caught in adultery? "*He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to cast a stone at her*" (Jn 8:7). Goethe said, "Tolerance comes with age; I see no fault committed that I myself could not have committed at some time or other." We must never forget what James said in James 2:13: "*For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. And mercy rejoices over judgment.*" This was the theme of Jesus' parable concerning the unmerciful and unforgiving servant. A certain king brought his servants before him and exercised mercy through the forgiveness of their debt. One servant was forgiven ten thousand talents. But this servant was himself unforgiving, and thus, he went out to extract a debt of a few denarii from one who owed him. His debtor pleaded with him, "*Have patience with me and I will pay you*" (Mt 18:29). But there was no mercy from the oppressing servant, for he took the debtor "*and cast him into prison until he should pay the debt*" (Mt 18:30).

We wonder how many people we have cast into our mental prison of exclusion from our presence. Because they owed us so little in comparison to what God has forgiven us, we have cast them forth from our presence because of an

offending word. They are out there in our “mental prison,” banished from our presence until they pay us with an “I am sorry.” The arrogance of our way is revealed in our self-righteous comfort that we will somehow be rewarded by One who forgave us all (See Mt 18:21-35). Some people have very little mercy for others, but a lot of mercy on themselves in reference to their debt to God. They have forgotten what Jesus taught those who would be His disciples: “*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6:12).

**2. *Too much anxiety:*** Blessed Mary, the mother of Jesus, was normal. When she discovered that her Twelve-Year-Old was not in the presence of the returning caravan of relatives from Jerusalem, she and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem. After three days of anxiety, they finally found Jesus where all twelve-year-old young people should be, that is, in the temple talking about the Bible. In exasperation Mary said to Jesus, “*Behold, Your father and I have anxiously sought You*” (Lk 2:48). Whether it calmed their nerves or relieved their frustration with Jesus, we will never know. Nevertheless, their Twelve-Year-Old calmly replied, “*Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*” (Lk 2:49). And how can an anxious mother be angry at that?

We know what Jesus said the latter part of His ministry. “... *do not be worried about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, what you will put on*” (Mt 6:25). That is easier said than done. Nevertheless, this

is the struggle of the disciple. Jesus concluded an exhortation on anxiety in Matthew 6 by saying, “*Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Mt 6:34). In order to deal with our impatience, we must work on our worry about tomorrow. Our impatience reveals our inability to trust in God today for tomorrow’s blessing.

Now in this context, Jesus would say to us pointedly, “*And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his life’s span?*” (Lk 12:25). If there is nothing within our power to change that which is in the future, then Jesus is simply saying, “Chill out.” It is still true that a person is about as big as that which annoys him. And if the present and future is not under our control, then we must relax. One might argue that this is impossible. But growth in the discipleship of the early Christians proves the contrary. In fact, while in a Roman prison facing death, one disciple wrote,

***Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*** (Ph 4:6,7).

When we are anxious in everything, then we need some peace from God in everything. We need the “peace of God that keeps our hearts and minds.” And since we all seek for peace of mind, then all the struggle that it takes to get to that

peace is worth it. The story is told of a young Chinese student who in frustration about his difficulty in learning a particular point, threw down his books and ran from his teacher. He later encountered an old woman patiently rubbing an iron bar on a stone. He asked the old woman, "What are you doing?" She quietly responded, "Making a needle."

Paul had written to Timothy, "*But you, O man of God ... follow after patience ...*" (1 Tm 6:11). And Timothy had surely got the message and preached such to those disciples in Ephesus with whom he worked. Jesus later addressed the disciples in Ephesus with the words, "*I know ... your patience. And you have perseverance and patience. You have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary*" (Rv 2:2,3).

The Ephesian disciples evidently listened to the teaching of Paul that came

to them through Timothy. In another situation, there were some disciples who had not yet learned what the Ephesian disciples had learned. The Hebrew writer exhorted, "*For you have need of endurance [patience], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*" (Hb 10:36). The first step on the road to patience is made when we confess that we have need of patience. We will determine to stay on this road in this life when we thirst for the reward that comes to patient disciples. One is considered patient, not because he is patient in all areas of life, but because he stays on the road of struggling for patience longer than others. Jesus would encourage all of us in reference to our patience, "*But what you have already, hold fast until I come*" (Rv 2:25). Just remember, snails did eventually reach the Ark in time.

## Chapter 5

# THE VICTORIOUS DISCIPLE

In our struggle to be a disciple of Jesus, one of the most scary passages in the entire Bible is this: "*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*" (Ph 2:5). The Holy Spirit then proceeds to explain what this "mind" was that was in Christ Jesus. He was before the incarnation "*equal with God*" (Ph 2:6). But "*He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Ph 2:8). It is the extremity of His will to do the will of the Father that amazes us. It was so extreme that, as God

incarnate, He was willing to humiliate Himself on our behalf. If we would be His disciples, therefore, it seems that He has placed the "humility bar" so high that we could never achieve what He would expect of us. And this is where there is good news. "*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*" (Ep 2:8). If one who is seeking to have the mind of Christ within, does not understand the grace of God that was poured out from the cross, then he will live in endless anxiety con-

cerning his salvation. When it comes to having the mind of Christ, we must have a strong appreciation for the grace of God.

The greatest struggle of the disciple is humility, for such a character seems to work against our innate desire to be somebody and to do things our way. We see such among so many religious leaders throughout the religious world today. Every effort seems to be used to set one's self apart to be someone who is somewhat. Fine suits are purchased. Gold chains are worn. Polished new shoes are paraded before the people. Collars are turned around and robes put on. The religious world is cluttered with pompous preachers, priests and popes who would parade themselves over and apart from the people. Many have forgotten that the bigger one makes himself before the people, the less God can use him as a servant of the people. David Livingstone once wrote, "God had an only son, and He was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation of Him I am, or wish to be." It is the spirit of both the missionary and the physician to focus on others. There are few missionaries or physicians who come from the class of pompous preachers who masquerade themselves as servants of the people. We have too many "boardroom leaders" among us whose fingers suffer from paper cuts by handing out dictates from behind boardroom doors. If one seeks to be the director of slaves, then he must always stay humble by remembering that little men who try to wear big hats are always blinded.

We must not forget that the blessings for humble character development are not placed on shelves one above another, and the greater we think we are, the more we think we can reach. On the contrary, the blessings are on descending shelves one below another. And the lower we get the more blessings we can access. There are no smooth-handed leaders among the disciples. All our leaders' hands have callouses. We must not make the mistake of thinking that humility comes by thinking low of ourselves. Humility comes by being honest with ourselves, and thus thinking truthfully about who we are. The humble disciples among us are discovered in the fields of toil, not in boardrooms.

We would not be as the man who was given the badge for being the most humble man in the world, and then having it taken away from him when he wore it. We would seek to allow God to "put us in our place." He did such with His only Son when He placed Him on a cross. This is what He also did with Israel when they exalted themselves to the point that they left Him. Isaiah spoke of the humiliation that they would experience in captivity. But once they were humbled, he spoke of their exaltation. God promised,

*I dwell in the high and holy place with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit in order to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Is 57:15).*

Our desire to take the initiative on

the road to humility is inspired by what both James and Peter wrote concerning the proud. James warned the proud, “**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble**” (Js 4:6). And then Peter defines the quest of every disciple who would seek to have the “mind of Christ”:

*... all of you be submissive to one another and **be clothed with humility**, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time ... (1 Pt 5:5,6).*

What Peter seems to be saying is that the road to the grace of God is named “Humility Street.” No proud person can access the grace of God if he seeks to go

down “Pride Street.” The reason the proud can never access grace, is that grace can be accepted only by those who know they can never make it on their own. When we seek to exalt ourselves, we cannot reach the grace of God. And without the grace of God we cannot dwell with Him in eternity, for only those of a contrite spirit will be there with the One who did not count Himself be equal with God a thing to maintain, but He humbled Himself even to the point of finding His predestined place on the cross for our benefit. It was on that old rugged cross where victory was found. Jesus became victorious over death in order to lead His disciples to be victorious over life. And thus, “*this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith*” (1 Jn 5:4).

## Chapter 6

# THE SUBMISSIVE DISCIPLE

The first verse of the old Gregorian chant stated the point:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I could but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

When one truly experiences the Jesus of the cross, there is always revival. In throwing ourselves prostrate before the cross, spiritual revival springs into life. It will continue until our last breath leaves our body.

There is no force more powerful to

change our characters than to comprehend our Creator dying through crucifixion on a cross. If in the business of our activity-oriented lives we forget this, we are doomed to harbor attitudes that are simply contrary to those that are necessary for eternal dwelling. Therefore, we must call ourselves to the cross. And as we weep there with sorrow and thanksgiving, we must begin a revival in our spirit to the humility that moved Jesus to go there for us.

### A. A humility revival through wilderness wandering:

David wrote, “*My soul will make its boast in the Lord. The humble will hear of it and be glad*” (Ps 34:2). The time would come in Israel after David’s death that the nation would exalt itself against God. God knew that the children of Abraham would eventually become a proud people. And being proud, they needed to be shown the way to humility. Before Moses left the nation, God, through him, explained to the nation why they had to walk forty years in the wilderness before being given the promised land:

*And you will remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and allowed you to hunger* (Dt 8:2,3).

If God’s work with Israel in the wilderness is an indication of how He works with us individually today, **then He will allow the proud to walk in the wilderness until they learn humility.** One of the first questions that one should ask himself when he finds himself in the wilderness is if his pride got him there. It may be that God has allowed one to walk in the wilderness in order to develop one’s character for dwelling with the contrite in eternal heaven. If after his time in the wilderness, we would ask King Nebuchadnezzar how he got there. He would be the first to confess that pride led him to eating grass in order to sur-

vive his time in the wilderness (Dn 4:25,32).

Moses said that God allowed Israel to walk in the wilderness for forty years in order to know “*whether you would keep His commandments*” (Dt 8:2). It may be easy to keep the commandments of God when everything is going great. But when one enters a wilderness, it is then that we determine if we are truly disciples. For this reason, during His ministry, Jesus cried out to the multitudes, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (Mt 11:15; 13:9,43; see 7:26). Jesus was crying out for those Israelites of faith who would be willing to follow Him out of the wilderness of Jewish religiosity and into the truth of the gospel. It would be only the humble who would heed His call. Therefore, it would be only the humble who would enter into the kingdom through their obedience to the commandments of Jesus.

Remember this statement of Jesus: “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*” (Jn 8:31). If one would be a disciple of Jesus, then it is imperative that he humbly and obediently hear the commandments of Jesus and continue therein. If one finds himself in a wilderness of struggle, it may be that God has allowed one to be there for the same reason that He allowed Israel to walk for forty years in the desert sands of the Sinai Peninsula. If we would conclude that God is thus working on our pride in order that we humbly submit to His commandments, then we can understand what the Hebrew writer stated:

*My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him. **For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives** (Hb 12:5,6).*

Remember, our trip through the wilderness may be a confirmation that God loves us. And because He loves us, He will allow us to struggle through the wilderness. But as God did with Israel, we must always remember that He will not forsake us in the wilderness, neither will He leave us there.

## **B. A humility revival through humble service.**

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders for the last time, he said to them, *“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility ...”* (At 20:18,19). Humble people seek to serve, but proud people seek to be served. The proud sometimes pass off their responsibility to serve with the practice of “delegating responsibility.” It is true that good leaders know how to delegate responsibility, **but they only delegate that which they cannot personally handle themselves**. It was for this reason that Paul instructed Timothy to instruct the rich that they not try to pay their way out of personal humble service.

*Charge those who are rich in this world that they not be high-minded .... Teach that **they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing***

*to share ...* (1 Tm 6:17,18).

No disciple can buy his way out of personal involvement in serving others. It was in service to others, especially evangelists, that Gaius was identified by the Holy Spirit as one who was doing well (See 3 Jn). He not only financially supported the evangelists who were traveling on their way to preach the gospel, he was also receiving them into his home. Paying for an evangelist’s hotel bill is not receiving the evangelist into one’s home.

1 Peter 5:5 says to *“**be clothed with humility.**”* The meaning of the Greek word in this text is to “tie on.” In other words, the humble tie on an apron in order to serve the needs of others. If one is too proud to tie on an apron and get his hands dirty by walking in the wilderness of struggle with and for others, then he has need of humility. There are no leaders among slaves who sit, watch and command from boardrooms.

We would not be as Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon when the kingdom fell to the Medo-Persians. He knew what was right, but he did not put into action through obedience that which he knew he should do. Therefore, it was said of him, *“**And you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this**”* (Dn 5:22).

The character of Belshazzar was, *“... you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven”* (Dn 5:23). Jesus admonished the religious leaders of Israel with the same judgment that was brought down upon Belshazzar. In judgment of His generation of religious lead-

ers, Jesus said of them, “*And whoever will exalt himself will be humbled. And he who will humble himself will be exalted*” (Mt 23:12). This was Jesus’ call for repentance from the religious leaders of His day. These would be good words for every young preacher to remember.

Immediately after Jesus made this introductory statement, He started into a condemnation of the character of the scribes and Pharisees. “*Woe to you,*” He continued to say in judgment of their arrogant character and behavior. There is a religious community today wherein are a host of those who have lifted themselves up. They have puffed themselves up to be political leaders who would parade themselves on behalf of One who counted not being on an equality with God something to be grasped. We can always know when a preacher does not have the mind of Christ by how he would proudly present himself before the people. Pompous leaders can never represent the Prince who had not even a fox hole in which to dwell.

We sometimes forget that God desires those who will walk humbly with Him with a contrite heart (Mc 6:8). He commands that we put on a heart of humility (Cl 3:12). We must remember that we are the disciples of the one who humbled Himself to wash the feet of those whom He had created (Jn 13:4,5), and then died for His creation (Ph 2:5-8). We follow no person who would claim to be a leader for Jesus who does not have a dirty towel in his hands.

If we find ourselves in the wilderness of God’s discipline, we must do as

King Rehoboam of Judah. “*And when he [Rehoboam] humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him so that He would not completely destroy him*” (2 Ch 12:12). If one would seek to get out of the wilderness of discipline, then he must search for “Humble Street.” As Rehoboam, Hezekiah also became somewhat arrogant as the king of Judah. His pride was about to bring down the nation of Israel. Thankfully, he came to his senses.

*“Hezekiah humbled himself from the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah (2 Ch 32:26; see 12:12).*

We must not forget that “*by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life*” (Pv 22:4). The fear of the word of the Lord will always result in humility. It is for this reason that those who walk in pride usually have little concern for the word of God. Even wicked Ahab had enough sense to fear the pronouncement of God’s word upon his prideful behavior. God pronounced that he would not escape punishment for this behavior (1 Kg 21:21-26).

*Now it came to pass when Ahab heard those words [of Elijah], that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. And he fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about depressed (1 Kg 21:27).*

There was still enough fear of the Lord

in Ahab to bring him to his knees. The Lord said to Elijah who had delivered the judgment of the Lord to Ahab,

*“Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? **Because he humbles himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days. But in his son’s days I will bring the evil on his house**” (1 Kg 21:29).*

It may be that in the wilderness of the discipline of the Lord we humble ourselves. But we must keep in mind that

we may still have to reap the consequences of our own sin while living in arrogance. *“Be not deceived. God is not mocked, **for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap**” (Gl 6:7).* Wilderness walking does not mean that we will not reap from our past wild ways. However, while we reap the harvest of wild seeds that we have sown, we can be assured that we can endure the reaping with a heart of humility. Reaping from wild seeds sown sometimes is a constant reminder never to return to the sowing of any more wild seeds.

## Chapter 7

# THE GOAL-MINDED DISCIPLE

In all the struggles one has to be a disciple of Jesus, this one area is the most difficult of all. When Paul wrote, *“And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**” (Rm 12:2)*, he was mandating something through which he had also struggled (Rm 12:2). “Renewing our minds” is not easy. But when we go on a journey with Saul and end up with Paul, we are encouraged by the fact that this journey can be made by everyone. The extremes between Saul and Paul is evidence of the fact that **God expects the journey of transformation to be made in the life of every disciple**. It may be that God chose Saul in order to prove that it is humanly possible to renew one’s mind, regardless of how far our mind may be from the mind of Christ. We seem to be able to identify with the struggles of

Paul in this area while we consider Jesus the ideal. But our minds can change for Jesus, for we must change in order that we be His disciples.

One of the most difficult aspects of our thinking that must be changed in order to be a disciple is how we view the future. If we allow our thinking of how we viewed the world in the past to distort our view of the world in our future, then the past becomes a curse to our future. If we are encumbered with our past worldly baggage in dealing with the present, then our thinking and behavior in the present will be stifled. It is our goal to stop stumbling over past baggage by kicking the baggage out of our way to spiritual growth. “Renewing our minds,” therefore, is not an option in discipleship behavior. It is a mandated necessity. Baggage of the past must be discarded

for the sake of the future.

When Paul wrote Romans 12:2 he was not giving a suggestion. He was telling us to get on with putting away the old way of looking at the world, and getting on with changing our thinking. If our thinking concerning the things of the world does not begin changing at the time we obeyed the gospel, then we never understood the mind of Christ in order to obey the gospel.

One of the most effective tools for mind changing in our “mental toolbox” is the tool of goal setting. We can be thankful to God that He put this shiny tool in our mental toolbox in order that we not live in the despair of the past, and thus, destroy our walk with Jesus in the present. Therefore, in times of discouragement, we must use the mental tool of goal setting in order to get ourselves out of the pits in order to fly as eagles.

Genesis 11:6 is a precious evaluation of the mental ability that God invested in man:

*Behold, they are one people and they all have one language. And this they begin to do. And now, **nothing will be impossible for them that they have imagined to do.***

In the historical context of this statement, the people were not fulfilling the Lord’s command that the world’s population spread throughout the world in order to populate the world. The people stayed together because they were of one language. The building of the tower of Babel gave them one goal in life. What is

revealed in this statement by God is that men have been gifted by God with a mental ability to plan and execute, to the point that “*nothing will be impossible*” that they have imagined to do. This is the ability that God invested in man.

Now keep the preceding in mind when reading Paul’s statement of Romans 8:37: “***But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.***” Now this is power! We have the natural power to unite and do great things. But add to this power the love of God that is in us. Those of the world have the natural ability to build great cities, fly to the moon, and organize strong governments. Now add to the natural God-given power the power of God that works in Christians, and we begin to imagine that within a group of disciples there is tremendous power that can be unleashed to the glory of God.

God did not forget how He created the mind of men. When it came to calling unique individuals to accomplish the task of world evangelism, He chose goal-oriented people who would stay the course until the job was done. He needed those who would be able to stand alone against all social opposition (Matthew, the tax collector). He needed those who had the thirst for freedom in order to preach the gospel of freedom to the world (Simon, the Zealot—Jewish insurrectionist). He needed those with self-initiative to boldly go where no man would go (James and John, the sons of thunder). He needed those who would just speak out what needed to be said (Peter, the impetuous braveheart). And He needed

those who were determined to accomplish their course regardless of all the obstacles that Satan could throw in their path, those who had no inhibitions about standing before any man on any occasion (Paul, the leader against all obstacles).

In His call of Paul, Jesus informed Ananias that Paul was “*a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*” (At 9:15). **Jesus knew that once the mind of Paul was triggered with the right mission, the mission would happen.** Jesus sees this in each one of us. By the renewing of our minds, we can pull the trigger, and see “*Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Ep 3:20). Once one pulls that mental trigger for Jesus, he can expect awesome things to start happening in his life to the glory of God.

### A. Establish goals for God.

In the life of every new disciple, the renewing of one’s mind must begin with the establishment of goals. Goals give vigor to one’s life. Jesus saw this in the mind of Paul before he was called on the Damascus road. When studying this aspect of Paul’s life, it is simply exhilarating to see what the mind of a human being can do with the ambition of one who seeks to do the work of God in his life.

Paul wrote to the disciples in Rome that they would be only one stop on his way to Spain. “*Whenever I make my journey into Spain, I hope to see you in my journey and to be supported on my*

*way there by you ...*” (Rm 15:24,28). With the financial support of the “Department of Corrections of the Roman Empire,” Paul accomplished his goal as far as a Roman prison, from where he wrote back to the Philippian disciples,

*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark [goal] of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Ph 3:13,14).

There are so many exciting things in this statement. Every disciple should take notice: (1) In order to fulfill one’s mission for Jesus, he must not let the past detour him. He must not let the past be an excuse for not moving forward. He must not let the past encumber his planning of goals for the future. (2) In order to fulfill our mission in renewing our mind in order to accomplish goals for God, we must simply keep on striving for the future. Christianity is not about bemoaning one’s misfortunes of the past, but about rejoicing over those “exceedingly abundant” things that God has for us in the future. (3) Regardless of being in prison, one must, as Paul, press toward the accomplishment of one’s destiny. Neither lamenting the past, nor idleness in the present, are an option. Every disciple of Jesus must press on.

One of the greatest emotional powers that is yet to be unleashed in the lives of some disciples, is the power of discovering one’s personal destiny for Jesus.

Paul's destiny was given to him directly by Jesus (See At 9:15). We, on the other hand, need the close fellowship of other disciples in order that we discover our destiny for God. What Paul wanted for the Philippians was that they too be of his mind. *"Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, have this mind"* (Ph 3:15). Paul was not unique as a human being. The statement "have this mind" is the Holy Spirit saying that every disciple can do what Paul did in his life, once we have discovered our destiny for God. It is the way God made us so that nothing will be impossible for us if we determine to get busy for God.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus began to change the thinking of His disciples. He first sought to capture their imagination in reference to the task that He would set for them. *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest"* (Jn 4:35). The fields (people) were there. The harvest (souls from preaching) would happen. Now they just needed to start thinking about getting the job done. It took over three years for Jesus to change the thinking of the disciples. But they changed, and then got on with the task of accomplishing the mission of their Master.

The sense of urgency to give every soul the opportunity to hear the good news of the cross was what moved Paul. **Wherever Paul went, he was looking for somewhere else to go.**

*Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and*

*having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, and after they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them (At 16:6,7).*

Get the picture. Paul was so determined to go wherever to preach the gospel that it took divine intervention to detour him to places God wanted him to go. What eventually happened—which thing Paul did not understand at the time in Acts 16—was that later in his travels he would go to Ephesus and teach in the school of Tyrannus. And from this two-year stay in Ephesus, *"all those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks"* (At 19:10). So those of Bithynia of Asia, as well as all Asia, eventually heard the word of the gospel through the labors of Paul. In Acts 16 Paul did not know God would eventually lead him to preach the gospel to Asia through other men in Acts 19. Paul's goal for God for Asia was fulfilled, but not in the way that Paul initially dreamed in Acts 16.

The lesson from this account of Paul's ministry is that for one to fulfill his destiny, he must be perceptive to God's leading. And if one's initial plans are detoured, it may be the work of God, not Satan. God may be redirecting us to a more productive mission.

## **B. God gives power to goals.**

The Holy Spirit made a statement in Romans 8:31 that a disciple must never forget. *"If God is for us, who can be*

*against us?*” If as a disciple one tries to start thinking about who can be against him, then he has not yet figured out the mind of Christ. When one starts thinking that the whole world is against him, then he needs to start lifting up his eyes and see that God has put the whole world before him. It is then that he must straighten up and say, **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”** (Ph 4:13). Those who rely on their own strength will certainly cheat themselves of God’s power working through them. They will not be able to “do all things,” or at least when they finish their task, they will not be able to fully give credit to God for working in them.

When one starts depending on his own strength, then he cannot do all those things God intends for him to do. It is for this reason that the mind of Christ is what Christ said of His own ministry: **“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work”** (Jn 4:34). When we start doing the will of the One after whom we claim to be a disciple, then the world opens up. Victories start coming our way. We are headed to mountain tops.

When we start allowing the will of the Father to be done in our lives, then His work on earth will be accomplished through us. This is exactly what Paul meant when in his latter life he wrote, **“I have finished my course”** (2 Tm 4:7). He had finished his destiny for Jesus. Every disciple must be able to say this at the end of his life. But in order to say this, one must be assured that he is allowing the will of the Father to be done in his

life. Jesus gave Paul his earthly destiny (At 9:15). Because he was given his earthly destiny directly from Jesus, he stayed the course of his destiny in order to complete his mission. As a result, he could lay his head down in death knowing that he had accomplished the course for which he was called to do. He completed his business for God.

We can do the same as long as we allow God’s power to work in us in order to accomplish His will. Victory is ours as long as we stay in the battle. The Holy Spirit writes, **“But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Co 15:57). The medium through which we accomplish the victory is our faith that Christ is truly working in our lives to bring about His ministry of reaping the white harvest. Remember this encouraging statement: **“For whoever is born from God overcomes the world. And this the victory that overcomes the world, our faith”** (1 Jn 5:4). This is a statement of fact, not hope. If one is born of God, then he will overcome all that the world has to throw at him. After about six months as new disciples who had been converted out of pagan idolatry, Paul gave witness to what can happen when a group of disciples have one mind and goal to accomplish great things for God. As we read the following testimony concerning the Thessalonian disciples, think about what God can do through one within six months after conversion to Christ.

*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia*

*and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything (1 Th 1:8).*

Discouraged? Then we need to remember that it is God working in us as we allow His will to be ours. When we remember that He seeks to work in us, then our mind begins to be transformed. When the world launches its discouragement against us, we need to raise an Ebenezer in our lives and move on. Such happened in the history of Israel when the Philistines were determined to destroy Israel. But Samuel stood before the discouraged Israelites, and after having raised a great stone, made the statement, *“Thus far the Lord has helped us”* (1 Sm 7:12).

We are where we are as His disciples because of the help of the One after whom we call ourselves. What would make us think that we will not be where we have determined to go for Him without His continued help? So we *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high*

*calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 3:14). We will not be of those *“who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hb 10:39). We will *“fight the good fight of the faith”* and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tm 6:12). This is the mind of Christ. This is the transformed mind that will take us through any discouragement of this world. And because we know that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn 4:4), then we can be determined that we will accomplish our destiny.

The victory has already been given to the Christian. We just need to claim it and continue in the battle. The beautiful thing about the psychology of Christianity is that it not only turns the world upside down, it reverses the sequence of battle and victory. In the world, battle first happens, and then victory. With Christianity, victory is first given, and then the battle ensues. It is great to engage in the battle with the enemy when you know that you have already won the victory.

## Chapter 8

# THE DETERMINED DISCIPLE

In order to accomplish any goal for God, our mind for God must be fine tuned. We must never forget that the bull’s eye of the target of many peoples’ lives is the last thing to wear out. One must be able to make a plan to accomplish great things for God, and then not fail to work his plan, knowing that God is working in our lives (Ph 4:13). But

we must make our goals, knowing that in order to get anywhere, we must start somewhere. We thus plan our work and work our plan to the glory of God. We determine what we want to do, assume that there will be a great deal of striving in order to accomplish our goals to the glory of God, and then get on with the work. It is as one poet once wrote,

Bite off more than you can chew,  
Then chew it.

Plan more than you can do,  
Then do it.

Point your arrow at a star,  
Take your aim, and there you are

.

Arrange more time than you can spare,  
Then spare it.

Take on more than you can bear,  
Then bear it.

Plan your castle in the air,  
Then build a ship to take you there.

James Allen once wrote, “The dreamers are the saviors of the world.” Now focus on how the Holy Spirit said we should use the examples of the Old Testament dreamers: “*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition ...*” (1 Co 10:11). We could say the same about the Holy Spirit’s record in the New Testament concerning the first century heroes of faith who dreamed of things far beyond this world. Their life’s ambitions and walk by faith were not simply recorded for doctrinal studies, but as examples for life behavior. The Spirit seeks that we focus on how these great men of faith behaved their faith, and consequently, accomplished their dreams. A few examples will prove what the Holy Spirit is trying to encourage us to do in reference to living after the example of those who have gone on before us.

#### A. Solomon:

There was once a king who desired

to build a great temple. After the initial start of construction, he walked among the workers. He asked one worker who was digging a hole what he was doing. The worker replied, “I am digging a hole.” The king then walked further and asked another worker who was digging a hole what he was doing. The worker replied, “I am building a temple.”

Once Solomon had settled into his reign, he set out to do the desires of his father, David. “*Now Solomon determined to build a house for the name of the Lord and a house for His kingdom*” (2 Ch 2:1). He first determined to accomplish a goal. He then, with “*70,000 men to bear burdens and 80,000 men to quarry stone in the mountains and 3,600 to supervise them,*” set out to accomplish his goal (2 Ch 2:18). And what happens when one determines to accomplish a goal which he has set for himself? “*And in the eleventh year [of his reign] ... the house was finished throughout all its parts, according to all the fashion of it. So it took him seven years to build*” (1 Kg 6:38). Remember Genesis 11:6?

#### B. Ezra:

Ezra was a teacher of God’s word. As a teacher, he determined to teach the word of God to the people in captivity, as well as the returnees to the land of Palestine. So Ezra “*prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*” (Ez 7:10). In order for a disciple to be a disciple, he must get into the word of God, and then get the word of God

into his heart and behavior. No one is a disciple of Jesus who does not know the word of Jesus.

Ezra's task was not easy. Profound ignorance of the word of God in the minds and hearts of the people lay heavy upon his heart. He knew that he had to first repent himself by seeking the law of the Lord. And then upon his repentance, he went to work teaching the law of God.

*Now when Ezra had prayed and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children, for the people wept bitterly (Ez 10:1).*

Ezra, and all Israel knew, as someone said, that “the path to success is not paved with good intentions, but with good intentions that are carried out.” If they listened to the word of God, then the Israelites knew that they had to do what they heard. In the context of Ezra's teaching of the law of God, the Israelites had married foreign women. If this marriage between the Israelites and Gentiles was allowed, then Israel as a distinct people of God, would pass away into history as nonexistent people. And if Israel did not exist as a distinct people by the time the Blessing promised to Abraham had come, then it would not be known if God had fulfilled His promises to the fathers. Both Ezra and his audience of Israelites knew that this was a serious matter. Their return from captivity to the land of promise was for the purpose of reestablishing

the identity of Israel in order to receive the promises that were made to the fathers of Israel. But if they returned with their Gentile wives, then they would become as the Samaritans who had no identity with the fathers (Compare Jn 4:9).

The sincerity and respect of the people for the law of God was profound. According to the law, everyone knew what had to be done to preserve the identity of the children of Abraham for the fulfillment of the promises. And so they did what had to be done. Notice this determination to repent and do the will of God:

*We have trespassed against our God and have taken foreign [Gentile] wives of the people of the land. Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born to them, according to the counsel of my lord, **and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. And let it be done according to the law** (Ez 10:2,3)*

Would such obedience ever be done by one today who realizes that his behavior is contrary to the law of God? This is what discipleship is about. It is about loving Jesus more than any relative (See Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26). As Ezra, and the Israelites who had married Gentile women, if we discover something in our lives that is contrary to the commandment of God, then we must change our ways. Those who would be disciples of Jesus must remember what Paul wrote to Timo-

thy: “*And if a man competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully*” (2 Tm 2:5). One cannot expect to receive what the law promises unless he is willing to strive for it according to the law.

Now before we commend the Israelite men too much for putting away their Gentile wives, we must also commend the wives who believed that this had to be done in order to preserve the identity of Israel. These were some well-taught women in the law and prophets. They understood that the hope of Israel, the Redeemer, would come out of Israel for their salvation also. We commend these wives for the part they played to preserve the identity of Israel. With their children, we would think that they made the greater sacrifice than their husbands who headed back to Palestine. At least they understood that God’s plan to redeem mankind was more important than themselves. They loved God more than themselves, even the well-being of their children. In our claim to be disciples of Jesus, we should think on these things.

### C. Jesus:

In His own life, Jesus established an example for His disciples to follow (1 Pt 2:21). He determined to do that for which He came into the world. He said to His disciples, “*And truly the Son of Man goes as it was determined*” (Lk 22:22). Jesus determined to do the will of the Father. He had an objective. And like Him, we cannot get excited about determining to accomplish an objective

if we have no objective to be accomplished. Jesus’ objective was to suffer for us. It was not a pleasant goal, but necessary on our behalf. Our’s may not be a pleasant task, but it is necessary on behalf of the salvation of others.

In His final hour, Jesus cried out to the Father, “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done*” (Lk 22:42). The cup could not be removed. The Son had to go to the cross. Was this objective easy? Luke recorded, “*And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*” (Lk 22:44). His objective brought Him to sweat drops like blood. With the same agony, so should ours.

Some goals that we set for ourselves will be difficult to accomplish, but they are necessary in order to fulfill our destiny as His disciples. Peter recalled the sufferings of Jesus, and then made a proclamation concerning the cost of discipleship: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21).

Jesus determined to go to the cross. With great suffering, He accomplished His destiny for our salvation. It is interesting that during His ministry He reminded His disciples that there was destiny in His ministry for their benefit.

*Behold, we are going to Jerusalem. And all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished* (Lk 18:31).

And from the cross, and in reference to all that was prophesied concerning His ministry, He said, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). Paul said, “*I have finished my course*” (2 Tm 4:7). True disciples will be able to say the same on their deathbeds.

#### D. Paul:

There is no greater personality recorded for us that illustrates the example of Jesus with reference to striving for a personal goal to fulfill one’s destiny, than the apostle Paul. When the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to make the statement, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1), He was pointing all disciples of posterity to the account of his behavior, as the New Testament writers pointed believers to the Old Testament heroes (1 Co 10:11). And from the inspired hand of Paul himself, we would not conclude that he was taking “literary selfies” of himself. The Spirit simply wanted the world of disciples for all time to understand that “here is one of you who can do such things as this” (See 2 Co 11:16-32).

Classic statements of commitment flowed from the end of Paul’s pen. One of the best is Romans 1:14,15, which statement explains his motivation:

*I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

This is a powerful statement as it is. However, as Paul progressed through his letter to the Roman disciples, he felt compelled to explain the intensity of his discipleship of Jesus.

*I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. **For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh** (Rm 9:1-3).*

WOW! Paul was consumed with the destiny that every disciple has, that is, to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). “*Brethren,*” as if he were writing directly to each one of us today, “*my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved*” (Rm 10:1). If we would seek for one passage that explains the heart of the disciple of Jesus, this would be it. If there is no desire to save the lost, then one’s discipleship has collapsed. His discipleship for the salvation of the lost, is useless. If there is no desire to give one’s life for Christ, then what good is it to claim that one is a disciple of the One who died for us? With his own life Paul had to explain this to the disciples in Caesarea.

*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? **For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus** (At 21:13).*

On the Damascus road, Paul was given his destiny directly by Jesus (At 9:15). Once he cleaned up the sin in his life by being washed in the waters of baptism, he was on his way for the rest of his life without ever the notion of giving up his discipleship. He reminded us, *“For this purpose I also labor, **striving according to His working that powerfully works in me**”* (Cl 1:29). What is powerful about this statement is the fact that he wrote it from prison. And if we would not believe the intensity of his passion for preaching the gospel to the lost, he wrote to the Philippians, *“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 3:14). It seems that he would never quit. The doxology of his life would be, *“And so I have made it my goal to preach the gospel ...”* (Rm 15:20).

So if one would want a personal testimony of true discipleship, then it would be necessary to study the life of Paul. We must ask ourselves why the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to write so much about his life in the New Testament? Our only answer is that the Holy Spirit wanted us to have a very personal, and human, witness of what true discipleship is all about. And if we do imitate Paul as he imitated Jesus, then we all can say at the end of our lives,

*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day, and not only to me, but also to all those*

*who have loved His appearing* (2 Tm 4:7,8).

## E. Us:

The word we would now use in reference to ourselves is “reflection.” Each disciple of Jesus must personally reflect on himself in reference to his commitment to be a disciple of Jesus. In reference to our financial commitment to the continued work of Jesus through us, Paul wrote, *“Let each one give according as he purposes in his heart ...”* (2 Co 9:7). If we could take this statement beyond coins that are cast into a collection coffer, **we must give our lives according to what we would purpose**, knowing that in the end, we *“must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, **according to what he has done, whether good or bad**”* (2 Co 5:10). Through our living as disciples of Jesus we must lay up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19,20). We must fill up our treasure chest in heaven in order that Jesus has a great source of good from which to draw when we stand before Him in judgment.

Our commitment to be the type of disciple Jesus would have us be, takes a great deal of effort. In our discipleship in prayer, the Holy Spirit had recorded for our benefit the intense prayer life of Epaphras. In writing to the Colossian disciples, Paul reminded them that Epaphras was *“**always laboring fervently for you in prayers ...**”* (Cl 4:12). The Greek word for “laboring fervently” in this text is the same word used for the

labor pains a mother has in giving birth. Few disciples there are who have reached this level of fervent prayer. Neverthe-

less, it is a goal to which we all would aspire. The greater our labor, the brighter our light will shine for Jesus.

## Chapter 9

# THE LIGHTHOUSE DISCIPLE

Have you ever asked yourself the question as to how much light you shine for Jesus? The only way to determine the intensity of your light is to start reading the New Testament. We must compare our “little gospel light” with those who were intensely evangelistic. Any other standard by which you would judge the light of your discipleship is misguided and twisted. One would certainly not judge his discipleship by the lives of other disciples, for other disciples are asking the same question of themselves. We must keep in mind that the discipleship of men as Paul was recorded by the Holy Spirit for our comparisons. Remember, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1)? We must not compare ourselves with ourselves as some arrogant disciples did in Corinth (2 Co 10:12). It was to these that Paul mandated that they follow him in his sacrificial life as a disciple. **Today, we must go to the source, straight to the dictionary on discipleship.** And in doing this, we come up with some distorted disciples in the first century, for the Holy Spirit also wanted us to see how others become lukewarm and twisted, thinking all the time that they were faithful. It might be good to review some of these disciples in order to guard ourselves from becoming the same. The Holy Spirit had the

life-styles of these disciples recorded in order that we avoid being sidetracked to a religiosity that we have created after our own imagination, or the misguided behavior of those who claim to be “Christian,” but are not.

### A. “Candle disciples”:

Ever blown out the candles on a birthday cake? Candles are easy to blow out, even when there is a group of them on top of a cake. They are easy to extinguish, because they are frail lights that give off little light by themselves.

There are a great deal of halfhearted disciples who give little light, and when times get tough, they are easily blown out by the trials of life. Remember this judgment of Jesus that He pronounced on the disciples in Laodicea?

*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth* (Rv 3:15,16).

In some disciples, Jesus is certainly present. But they follow Jesus only as it is convenient to their life-styles. And then in some, He is prominent. But He is usually preeminent in only a few Chris-

tians. The problem about being a lukewarm disciple is that when tough times come, there is not enough spiritual steam to take one up the hill. In the parable of the Sower, we must not forget the seed that was sown in stony places (Mt 13:1-23). One cannot miss the meaning of Jesus' interpretation of His own parable.

*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. However, he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away (Mt 13:20,21).*

## B. "Kerosene lamp disciples":

Some might refer to this type of lamp as a hurricane lamp. This is the type of lamp that has a glass enclosure in which the flame burns. The problem with the lamp is that the glass becomes obscured by smoke, and eventually the lamp gives off little light. The glass must continually be cleaned for the lamp to accomplish its purpose.

Those to whom the Hebrew writer wrote were "kerosene lamp" disciples. They had burned for a lengthy time, but by the time of the writing of Hebrews, they were "smoked up." The Holy Spirit thus said of them, "*About whom we have many things to say, and hard to explain, seeing you have become dull of hearing*" (Hb 5:11). One becomes dull of hearing the word of God when his mind is turned to something else. His disciple-

ship becomes religiously habitual. This is the curse of a legalistic system of theology. The adherents to such a theology simply accomplish their legal checks on what they are supposed to do, and then mentally check out.

When one becomes dull of hearing, he turns God off and follows after his own religiosity. He actually ceases to be a disciple, for discipleship means "to follow." No true disciple will become dull of following if he continually seeks to clean his soul with the word of God. However, Paul wrote of some disciples who would turn away from the word of God.

*Now the Spirit clearly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons ... (1 Tm 4:1).*

These are as dogs returning to their own vomit of sin, and pigs, after they have been washed, returning to wallowing in the mire of degradation (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). Peter identified these disciples.

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning (2 Pt 2:20).*

There is only one prevention from returning to the dirt of sin. Peter explained, "... *as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*" (1 Pt 2:2). We have

found that those who are not zealous Bible students are continually allowing their light to grow dim because “the glass is dirty.” If there is no growth through the study of the word of God, then our glass is becoming dirty with our own religious smoke. Therefore, the Holy Spirit exhorts every disciple to “*grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18).

### C. “Gas lamp disciples”:

Much of Africa still lights up the night with a gas lamp. It burns for a period of time, and then needs to be pumped up again. Throughout its use for a period of time there is the necessity of pumping it up in order that it continually gives light.

Some Christians are like this. They need someone else to pump them up continually with enthusiasm before they will shine. There is no consistency in their lives as a light for the gospel. Though everyone needs to be pumped up with enthusiasm periodically, we must be on guard with ourselves that we do not need to be continually encouraged in order to be a witness for Christ. If we do, then we are probably thinking mostly of ourselves and not of those who really need encouragement. “Gas lamp disciples” have not assumed their responsibility to pump up others. Since they are always low on “spiritual pressure,” they have nothing to offer to others.

Enthusiasm certainly inspires enthusiasm. We want to be around the truly optimistic individual who thrives with an

optimistic and enthusiastic spirit. We want to be around such a person in order to have our own batteries recharged. If we are the type of person who inspires others, then the spirit of Christ is truly working in our hearts. The small pamphlet, *Attitudes Unlimited*, was once distributed among businessmen in America. It was circulated in order to identify and encourage successful leadership. In one issue the statement was made,

As we examine the lives of those who have risen to great heights in their chosen fields of endeavor, we find a very definite indication that success is actually due less to one’s ability than to the enthusiastic drive behind the objective.

And when we think of the objective that was set before the early disciples, we can understand Acts 5:42:

*And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

Paul was such a person. He was willing, with whatever thorn in the flesh hindered him, to accomplish the God-given destiny that was set before him.

*I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome (Rm 1:14,15).*

Determination will result in goals accomplished. The accomplishment of our

goals depends more on our earnest determination than on our skills. The truly successful person is not the one who has the most gifts, but the one who exercises the most enthusiasm in his life to use his gift.

Have you ever said of some energetic Christian, “He is sure ‘pumped up’ on Jesus”? Now how do you suppose he became “pumped up” on Jesus? It is true that when one finally realizes that Jesus is the Son of God, and then goes to the cross with Him, into the tomb of water, and finally out of the water of baptism, he is usually burning with zeal. But we have also noticed that some new disciples just run out of steam. They do so because they failed to implement in their lives the principle that Jesus taught in John 13:17. Jesus said to His disciples after He had just washed their feet, **“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.”** “Know” without “do” equals lukewarmness ... spewed out ... death (Rv 3:15,16). Those who are “pumped up” on Jesus are that way because they went to work as a disciple while they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism. They were truly baptized “into Christ,” wherein there is work to be done. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them”* (Ep 2:10). If one does not do the work of a disciple, then he is not a disciple, for disciples find a towel and start looking for dirty feet. We can always find a “pumped up” disciple by the dirty towel that is in his hand.

## D. “Stop light disciples”:

What driver is there who is not occasionally irritated with stop lights (robots). Once the traffic gets rolling, then the light turns to yellow, and then red. The entire flow of traffic must come to a stop at the command of a stop light.

Every disciple will encounter “stop light” resistance throughout his or her life. Stop lights usually come through those who turn aside from the truth of God’s word. Paul identified two of these “stop light” characters in 2 Timothy 3:8: *“Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth ....”* As Moses had men stand in the way of his ministry, so it will be with every disciple who seeks to carry out the will of the Lord in his life. Such resistance may come from a spouse, a friend, or those who are simply “on and off” as disciples. Some will simply oppose one’s efforts to do good as Alexander opposed Paul in Ephesus. *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil. May the Lord reward him according to his works”* (2 Tm 4:14).

Some “stop light” people are deceptive in their efforts to discourage others. Ever hear the statement, “Let me play the devil’s advocate on this point”? We need no devils among us who hinder the work of God. Others will say, “I have some constructive criticism.” What they really want to do is throw up a red light in order to discourage. It is like a woman who came out of a store and saw a car rolling down a hill. The door of the car was

open, so she jumped in and hit the brakes. A gentleman came up from behind the car, and she said to him, “Well, I sure got it stopped.” The gentleman replied, “I know. I was trying to push it to get it started.” To such people who would act in such a way in reference to the work of God in the lives of others, we would repeat what Paul said to the Thessalonian disciples: “*Do not quench the Spirit*” (1 Th 5:19).

### E. “Blinker light disciples”:

These would be those disciples who are on and off in their work for Jesus. These disciples can always be identified by their attendance with the disciples. They are there and then gone, or there spasmodically. When the appointed assembly of the saints comes around, the church cannot depend on their presence because they may not be present. The “on and off” Christian has a problem with commitment to the family of God. He sometimes has a problem with living the disciplined life as a Christian. One unbeliever once said, “I think I would have become a Christian if I had not met so many people who said they were Christians.”

If our lives reflect a lack of commitment and consistency as a disciple of Jesus, then our behavior actually turns people away from Christ. No disciple who truly understands what Jesus did on the cross is an “on and off” disciple. Someone once said, “Live as if Christ died yesterday, was resurrected this morning, and is coming tomorrow.” We

must be a consistent light for Jesus.

*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:16).*

Notice that the passage says “so shine.” “So shine” means that there must be some quality to the light, which light must also be consistent before the world. It is not light that is placed under a basket on one day, and then on a lampstand the next day (Mt 5:14,15). It is consistent light. Blinker disciples do more harm than good for the kingdom because the world sees them as “halfhearted” disciples who pretend to follow Jesus.

### F. “Lighthouse disciples”:

What someone said about the disciple who shines forth the light of Jesus in his life, was true: “A Christian should be a breathing prayer, a living poem, a visible spirit, and a human lighthouse.” This is the light that should so shine that others can see the glory of God through our spirit. Truthful was the poet who wrote the old poem, “The Gospel According to You.”

There’s a gospel according to Matthew;  
To Mark and to Luke and to John too,  
There’s another that many are reading,  
The gospel according to you.

Everyday you are writing your gospel;  
In this life you may never know who,  
May be helped or hindered by reading,  
The gospel according to you.

Many read not the words of the Bible;  
 I will tell you what most of them do,  
 They are reading the book you are writing,  
 The gospel according to you.

There's power in the minister's preaching;  
 But the thing that may be most telling,  
 Is the gospel according to you.

This was the life-style of the Thesalonian disciples, for less than six months after they were converted to Jesus, it was written of them:

*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything (1 Th 1:8).*

No better example could have been given to every disciple than the preceding testimony. And no better advice could have been given than what someone once said

below:

Leave footprints of righteousness on the sands of time where you live so that other generations may have the lamp of truth by plain example.

Here are some questions to ask yourself: Does your school teacher know that you are a Christian? Do those with whom you work know that you are a Christian? Do all your relatives know that you are a Christian? And if you had to go to heaven on the testimony of those who know you, would you make it? The *Reader's Digest* once repeated the quote, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" It is simply not what we profess that makes us a disciple of Jesus, but what we practice. Faith will bring us to Christ. Life will prove our endurance for Christ. And once we have been proved and tested, death will bring a crown from Christ.

## Chapter 10

# THE STRUGGLING DISCIPLE

Growth in discipleship is as a widening river that makes its way to the ocean of maturity. It feeds from small tributaries of substance as it meanders around curves and bends, over rocks and down waterfalls. But when it reaches the ocean, it can be, as the Amazon River of Brazil, over 250 kilometers across when it finally empties all its substance into the Atlantic Ocean. McGuffey's Reader

gave the story of an old clock that ticked away every day until it started counting all the ticks it had to make: 120 a minute, 7,200 an hour, 172,800 a day, and in exhaustion of thought, it figured that it had to make 63,072,000 ticks to complete the year. So the old clock in mental exhaustion just quit. But then it began to consider that it would make just one tick. After that another was made, then an-

other, and another, until it finally found itself ticking again one tick at a time.

Alcoholics Anonymous teaches the concept, “Don’t try to stop drinking forever, merely say, ‘I will not drink today.’” If in looking back in our lives, we compound past problems with present turmoil, we will simply stop ticking. Jesus knew this when He said to His disciples, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Lk 9:62). Looking back is dangerous to discipleship. A Sunday school teacher once taught her class about Lot’s wife who turned to look back at the burning of her former home. The teacher told the class that she then turned into a pillar of salt. One young boy threw up his hand and said, “Teacher, my mother turned back last week and she turned into a telephone pole.” Someone once correctly said,

I have no yesterdays,  
Time took them away;  
Tomorrow may not be ---  
But, I have today!

When Jesus called people to discipleship, He knew He was calling them to struggle in the present over their baggage of the past. He thus did not paint a verbal picture of a comfortable journey as the world who hated Him would eventually pour out their hate on them. “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18). And we would ask, as the disciples of Jesus surely thought to ask Him, “If we are to live in the world, why must the

world hate us as Your disciples?” The answer is simple:

*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. **But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*** (Jn 15:19; see 17:14).

So Jesus reminded the disciples that the hate would not be directed to them personally, but in fact, it would be a hate directed against the Father. “*He who hates Me hates My Father also*” (Jn 15:23). Jesus comforted the disciples: “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18).

Because true discipleship involves living contrary to the way of the world, the life of the disciple is a living sermon of rebuke of the ways of the world. As a disciple of Jesus, the persecution that would come our way, therefore, will find its innocent victims. Jesus quoted the prophetic psalmist, “*They hated Me without a cause*” (Jn 15:25).

The irony of all this hate that was unleashed upon Jesus and His disciples lies in the fact that almost all the hate of Jesus and His disciples then, and our’s now, originates from religious people, especially misguided religious leaders. When these leaders dragged Stephen outside the gates of Jerusalem, “*They gnashed at him with their teeth*” (At 7:54). They did stone Stephen, even as they tried to stone Jesus (Jn 8:59). They could not stone Jesus during His ministry, but He allowed them to crucify Him when His ministry was finished. When

religious leaders seek to stone their opposition, then one knows that those who have stones in their hands are religiously misguided. Stones often reveal who is either teaching error, or behaving their erroneous teaching for the sake of pomp or purse.

When it is time to carry one's cross, it is time to lay our hands to the plow and not look back. It is time to look only for flying stones. Jesus knew this when He turned and said to the multitudes who were following Him, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*" (Mt 10:37). But discipleship would go far beyond loving Jesus more than one's relatives. "*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*" (Mt 10:38). Discipleship would go even further. "*He who finds his life will lose it. And he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Mt 10:39). Some will progress in their discipleship by leaving father and mother in order to follow Jesus into all the world. Some will even commit themselves to be Jesus' disciples by enduring the hardships of this life. But when the first gun shots are heard, then how many will scurry home in fear for their lives? We know of one disciple who did not, and thus, his life reminds all of us of the commitment that is needed to be a disciple unto death. Paul said to the Caesarean brethren, "*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (At 21:13). And so he did, not in Jerusalem, but in Rome at the edge of an

executioners sword, so we are told through tradition.

The fact of discipleship is that "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (2 Tm 3:12). This is not news to those who truly understood this from the beginning of their walk with Jesus. They knew, as Peter instructed, "*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example [of suffering] that you should follow in His steps*" (1 Pt 2:21). Before one commits himself to discipleship, he must look straight in the eyes of Jesus, as "*He turned and said to them ...*" (Lk 14:25). Then listen: "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother .... And whoever does not bear his own cross .... So likewise, whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:26-33). Scary words! Emerson was right: "Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain." So Jesus would say to us,

*Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life* (Rv 2:10).

So "*seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [faithful believers], let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*" (Hb 12:1). We run the race of the disciple in order to obtain the prize (1 Co 9:24). But in order to

stay in this race, we are “*looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*” (Hb 12:2). We would remain faithful in the race, for we understand what Solomon meant in the words, “*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning*” (Ec 7:8). And, “*A desire accomplished is*

*sweet to the soul ...*” (Pv 13:19). So it really comes down to one thing when determining whether we would become the type of disciple that Jesus expects of us. It is as someone said, “Many people have the right aim, but not enough courage to pull the trigger.”

## Chapter 11

# THE COURAGEOUS DISCIPLE

So by this time in your journey through this subject, there might be some apprehension about being a disciple of Jesus. Because of the complacency of the “Christianity” with which we are often associated, the norm may now be a lethargic behavior of those who pretend to be disciples of Jesus. But one’s discovery of true discipleship is always scary. We are never what we want to be. But do not fear, one only needs a word of encouragement to lay his hand to the plow of being the type of disciple that is pleasing to the One we all seek to follow.

One of those passages that one should put on his refrigerator is Psalm 46:1-3:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.*

Courage is the answer to fear, for fear is the basis of a great deal of unhappiness.

Fearful people never fully realize their ambitions. Fear is often the result of what we do not know. When Jesus came walking to the disciples on water, they did not know that it was Him. “*Now when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear*” (Mt 14:26). In response to taking ownership of his responsibility to produce, the one talent man relied on fear as an excuse. “*And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the earth*” (Mt 25:25). Fear will endanger our discipleship to the point that if fear is allowed to control our behavior, then we have disqualified ourselves from eternal glory. Revelation 21:8 still states, “*But the cowardly and unbeliever ... will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone ....*”

The answer to fear is courage. Courage is based on faith, and thus fear is a manifestation of a lack of faith. The courageous Christian has nothing to fear but God. “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Mt 10:28). It is not that we are fearless

of things of this world. It is that those of faith have learned how to master their fears. It is the challenge of the disciple to control his fears in view of a world that would move the focus of our faith to those things that are of this world.

### A. Old Testament courage.

We must look to those who have gone on before us. They are witnesses of true faith, and now they surround us in order to see how we will endure the race of life (Hb 12:1,2). In fleeing the murderous desires of King Saul, David penned the words, *“Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me”* (Ps 23:4). If that is not enough, then we must be encouraged by the life and death experiences of those who truly walked by faith. Every disciple of Jesus must read through the following testimony of Old Testament men and women of faith who never had Christ in their lives. They walked by faith without knowing that Jesus Christ would eventually come into the world to give us hope of eternal life after death.

*For the time would fail me to tell [of those] who through faith stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. From weakness they were made strong, became valiant in war and turned to flight foreign armies .... And others were tortured ... had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, also of bonds and imprisonment.*

*They were stoned. They were sawn asunder. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword .... They wandered in deserts ....* (See Hb 11:32-40).

Had enough? The men and women of faith before Christ stood by their faith and that which was right. They did not turn from God because of the harshness of what this world had to offer them. They were faithfuls, as William Penn wrote, “Right is right even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it.” And for the faithful righteous of the Old Testament, they stood their ground against all that could possibly turn one from God. And what is amazing about these people is not one person who struggled and died had any knowledge of Jesus. We often wonder today how many people would be hanging around if there were no such thing as Christianity, but only faith in God.

### B. New Testament courage:

It is true that persecution is to faith as wind is to fire. It blows the little fires out, but fans the big ones on. John was right when he stated, *“And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith”* (1 Jn 5:4).

Nero was Caesar of Rome between A.D. 54 and 68. He had a personal vendetta against those who would not submit to him as lord. He lived a life of vanity and pomp. On one occasion he decided to amuse himself, so he burned a part of Rome to make some real estate available for his own desires. He then

blamed the fire on the Christians, many of whom were arrested, and subsequently suffered the vengeance of Rome for the fire. But it was during this reign of terror of Nero that Paul was arrested, and eventually beheaded. But would Paul for fear refuse to preach Jesus in Rome? Not a chance. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encouraged his readers by saying, “*All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s [Nero’s] household*” (Ph 4:22). We have often wondered what Nero would have done if he knew that even some of his own household were baptized believers.

The exhortation of the Holy Spirit through His word is to be of good cheer in times of fear (Mt 14:27). “*Watch! Stand fast in the faith. Behave like men. Be strong*” (1 Co 16:13). “*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Tm 1:7). “*If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name*” (1 Pt 4:16). Is that enough encouragement?

Solomon wrote, “*The wicked man flees when no man pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion*” (Pv 28:1). Solomon was also right when he wrote, “*The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever puts his trust in the Lord will be safe*” (Pv 29:25). Disciples of Jesus must at least be as strong as those who walked by faith in the Old Testament. And because we have the added advantage of Jesus, then we can conquer all fear. We are not speaking in ideals on this point.

Paul is proof. He wrote from prison, “*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all men forsook me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me ...*” (2 Tm 4:16,17). And when the Lord stands by us, what will happen is what happened in Paul’s life. “*And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*” (2 Tm 4:17). He was not only delivered from death on more than one occasion, but his entire life was a deliverance from all peril (Read 2 Co 11:16-33). Paul knew that the poet was correct, who centuries later, wrote,

The curling waves with awful roar,  
 A gallant bark assailed,  
 And pallid fear’s distracting power,  
 O’er all on board prevailed;  
 Save one, the captain’s darling child,  
 Who steadfast viewed the storm.  
 And fearless, with composure smiled,  
 At danger’s threatening form.  
 “And fear’st thou not,” a seaman cried,  
 “While terrors overwhelm?”  
 “Why should I fear?” the boy replied,  
 “My father’s at the helm.”

Maybe it should be in our lives when faced with daunting foes, as the courage of General Ferdinand Fock at the battle of Marne, who was the head of the “Iron Division.” He reported back to command, “My center is giving; my left wing is retreating; the situation is excellent; I am attacking.” When called before the Deity of Worms by the Catholic Church to withdraw his heretical beliefs against some teachings of the Roman

Catholic Church, Martin Luther boldly stated: To such we would add:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by right reason, for I trust neither in popes nor in councils since they have often erred and contradicted themselves—unless I am thus convinced, I am bound by the texts of my Bible, my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither right nor safe to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

One reformer in those dark days of Reformation against the tyranny of religion was denounced with the statement, “All the world is against you.” His bold reply was, “Then I am against all the world.”

Here we are, and here we stand,  
Dear Lord please lend a hand.  
We'll walk across the stormy seas,  
That thou in us might be pleased.

Someone correctly stated, “Our strength is shown in the things we stand for, our weakness in the things we fall for.” Carlyle wrote, “The courage we desire and prize is not the courage to die decently, but to live manfully.” At the end of our lives, it should be written on our tombstones that which was written on a monument in the memorials of Westminster Abbey in honor of Lord Lawrence,

He feared man so little  
Because he feared God so much.