

FOLLOWING JESUS

If any man serve me, let him follow me... (Jn 12:26)

Lesson 1

An Introduction to Discipo-stewardship or How to Become a Spiritual Success Story

Outline

Part 1

- Introduction
- What is a Disciple... and What Isn't?

Part 2

- Bridging the Disconnect — Getting Serious with God!
- Securing Our Vision

Part 3

- Engaging Our Vision

PART 1

Introduction

Pastor Waterloo has several times mentioned a George Barna poll that reported a majority (I think it was 70% at the time of that poll) of Americans consider themselves to be “Christians”. We understand that reality is most likely an order of magnitude less: maybe 7% instead of 70%!

Most of those answering, “Yes”, to that poll are people we would identify as “**Cultural Christians**”, i.e., they are expressing an **affiliation** that has been (for the most part) defined by their culture. What I mean is this: they are not Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist, they are not Shintoist or Taoist, and they are not Atheist (yes, Atheism is a “religion”, a faith-set)! So by default, they are “Christians”.

Most people in our country simply view “Christianity” as a cultural label or an affiliation such as a political party. Consequently, we understand that in the “Christian world” at large, there is a great disconnect between **profession** (claiming to be a Christian) and **possession** (actually possessing Jesus Christ in salvation).

And I propose for your thoughtful consideration that there is perhaps an equally great disconnect among genuinely born-again, heaven-bound Christians in regard to possession of Christ versus being Christians involved in discipo-stewardship [**discipleship** (learning) and **stewardship** (doing)]! Among those who are truly **possessors** of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit, we must admit that there are some, and perhaps many, who are not *doers of the word* (James 1:22), i.e., they are not actively learning (as disciples) and they are not, as faithful stewards, producing fruit (returns) for the Master of the House).

- If it was possible to take a poll of only born-again believers and ask them, “Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?”, I suspect the vast majority would answer, “Why, yes! Of course!” This is because even genuinely-saved people tend to believe that being involved in Christian activities, to whatever degree, makes them a disciple. And, of course, each responder gets to define what “involved” really means. Involvement to some could mean having their name on a membership roster or attending a church service on Christmas and Easter.
- But the Biblical reality today is even as it was in Jesus’ day: relatively few born-again believers become genuine disciples of Jesus Christ! And what a tragedy this is. One of Satan’s greatest triumphs in our scriptural, Bible-preaching, New Testament churches is **disconnecting believers from lives of genuine discipleship and productive stewardship**.

So, the goal of this entire *Following Jesus* course is to introduce the saved person to the real faces of Christian discipleship and stewardship. And right off the bat there are two disclaimers.

- Disclaimer 1: Going through this course does not make you a discipo-steward. It only makes you a reader of materials.

- Disclaimer 2: You may already be a disciplo-steward before even taking this course!

What is a disciple... and What Isn't?

- The Greek word translated *disciple* is pronounced *math-ay-tes*´. It simply means a learner or a pupil. So technically a disciple is one who learns from, and patterns his life after, a master teacher. For example, many of the renowned Greek philosophers (e.g., Plato, Socrates), had followers who literally gave their lives away to learn from and follow these master teachers.
- Therefore, a Christian disciple is a believer who...

1) learns **about** Jesus Christ and **from** Jesus Christ (through preaching and study of the Inspired Word), and

2) then **patterns his or her life after Jesus** to produce spiritual fruit and become good and faithful stewards! Remember that James warns that a disciple is a *doer* and not just a *hearer* (James 1:23).

But wait, there is yet something missing. These two qualifications might be enough for Plato or Socrates, but there is one more critical requirement before you become a genuine disciple of Jesus. You see, you can do items 1 and 2 and **appear**—to other people, and even to your human master—to be a disciple, but as God explained to Samuel (in I Sam 16:7), He looks at the heart! God looks at our motives; He judges the motive that underlies every act of so-called Christian “devotion”. Therefore, anything that we do or say, that is NOT motivated by a deep and passionate love and appreciation for the Savior, is not God-honoring (and, by the way, is not eligible for eternal rewards). Consequently, this third requirement is really the make-or-break definition of Christian discipleship!

3) Discipleship is giving our lives totally to the Master **because of a motive of LOVE and APPRECIATION!** Our following, learning, our sacrifices, and our stewardship have to be love-motivated.

- Sadly, most who claim Christ as Savior don't even get to a point of maturity that they even grasp point #3. In fact, many don't even get to point #2! **Many who claim salvation are evidently not interested in patterning their lives after Jesus' example!** The truth is that people pretty much end up doing what is important to them; people end up doing what they want to do! And so from the testimony of the lifestyles of many Christians, they evidently do not love Jesus as much as they claim, because real love motivates us to become sold-out to the objects of our love. God literally sold out Heaven to redeem us. *God so loved the world, that he gave...* (Jn 3:16). Jesus demonstrated genuine love: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn 15:13). And therefore in Jn 14:15 Jesus warned, *If ye love me, keep my commandments* (Jn 14:15)

Dr. Paul Chappell made this point so well. He quoted Mat 16:24, where Jesus said, *...unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* Dr. Chappell then explained, “Taking up the cross is not a metaphor for suffering—it is a **metaphor for dying**. I do not know anyone who is praying hard that he can become a martyr. But I do know men and women of faith and courage who are willing to give their lives for the cause of Christ.”

In my opinion this kind of disconnect can be dramatized by this analogy. Let's say you won the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes Grand Prize, but you left the registered notification and claim letter laying on your coffee table, gathering dust and half covered with junk mail. As your friend I might rightfully ask with amazement...

- “What are you doing? Are you out of your mind? You have a gold mine sitting on your coffee table and you haven't even bothered to respond and let PCH know that you are alive and are claiming your big prize! Call them! Claim your prize and start using and enjoying it!”

- In response you might reply in a nonchalant manner, “Oh yes... I've been meaning to get that done. Let's see, maybe I can do that tomorrow right after I watch Wheel of Fortune, get a haircut and sort my baseball cards.

- I believe we could rightfully judge that a winner acting and replying in such a manner has lost touch

with reality!

Well in that same way, born-again believers who leave the opportunity for discipleship, the obligation of discipleship, and the rewards of discipleship on the “table”, are missing out on the greatest mission, the greatest obligation, the greatest empowerment, and the greatest rewards that mankind has ever and will ever know! The Christian life is not about us, and what we want. The Christian life is about Him and what He wants and our unbelievable opportunity to be a part of God’s plan.

- But this kind of disconnect isn’t just a sad product of the spiritual entropy of our last-days. This disconnect existed even in Jesus’ day! Jesus Himself addressed this perplexing disconnect when He asked, *...why call ye me, Lord, Lord (Master! Master!), and do not the things which I say (Lu 6:46)?* Yes, there were pseudo-disciples tagging along after Jesus even in His very day, living fruitless lives and Jesus put them on the spot and demanded, “Friends! Why the disconnect? You are claiming me as your Master, but I don’t see you incorporating my teachings and commandments into your lives!”

The bottom line is this: **a claim of discipleship that does not manifest itself by a life given to emulating and the Master and serving the Master, is a deluded claim!**

- So, how can we explain this disconnect?

1 — The disconnect may exist because the person is not saved!

- I really, really, REALLY have a fear for people who confidently claim to be saved, yet they...

- 1) have absolutely no interest in spiritual things,
- 2) they have no priorities set for the things of God, and
- 3) most telling of all, there is no Galatians 5 “fruit” in their lives.

I fear that these people are simply living in Satanic self-deception. They are Cultural Christians.

Salvation is not signing up for fire insurance! Salvation is happily and thankfully bowing in contrition and repentance before the Savior and crying out for His forgiveness! But what many Christians don’t understand is that when we were born again, we became bond-slaves of Jesus Christ and instantly it all ceased to be “about me” and it started to become “about Him”. Listen to what Paul wrote in I Cor 6:19, 20.

- **I Cor 6:19, 20** *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

- This deluded lost person is typified by one of the first three soils in Jesus’ parable of the Sower and the Seed (Mat 13). This person had some emotional experience in a church service, or they repeated some prayer as a rote exercise at the front of a church, or they have become involved in a Christian religion as a part of their culture (i.e., it was what Grandpa and Grandma believed), or they are involved in a religion as a family tradition (like most Catholics, i.e., it is what we do and are)... but sadly they have never, in contrition, admitted their sinfulness to God, believed ON Christ and called out in repentance for Christ to save them (Rom 10:13). These people are not disciples of Jesus Christ because they don’t even POSSESS Jesus! And I personally fear that this group makes up a very, very large percentage of that disconnect between profession but no evident discipleship.
- And if you confront this person about the obvious disconnect in his life, he is likely to become offended, or defensive and confrontational and then, in self-justification, even more entrenched in his delusion of “good works” and “religious experiences”. He just gets more “religious” in an attempt to justify his claims in his own mind. Jesus lamented that **many will even argue with God in that day of the Great White throne judgment**, saying, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works (Mat 7:22)?* And Jesus will have to answer, *...I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat 7:23)!* These people are “professors” but they are not “possessors”.

- This is very sobering and it causes us to take God's admonition through Peter very seriously. Peter wrote, *...give diligence to make your calling and election sure...* (II Pet 1:10). I am certainly not attempting to question the salvation of everyone who comes through this class. **But I am admonishing all of us to makes sure that our "salvation" matches the salvation we find described in the Bible!** If it does not, there is a good chance that we never WERE saved, but have been living as Cultural Christians.

2 — The believer has **not been taught** or has been **mis-taught**

- It is possible that this disconnect (between profession and discipleship) may occur to genuinely born-again believers because they have **never been taught** the Truth. Some people become genuinely born-again, but not through and under the auspices of a scriptural New Testament church. Perhaps they read a Gospel tract deposited in a magazine at an airport, or they read the *done* booklet by Cary Schmidt, or perhaps they attended an evangelistic crusade, or perhaps they watched a Charles Stanley TV broadcast, and through one of these resources or venues the Holy Spirit convicted, and they responded in contrition, and then cried out to Christ for salvation.

But, because they were not in a scriptural church they were not in a position to be taught! They were like newborn babes with no parent for protection and guidance. Hence, it is possible that some truly born-again believers have never connected with discipleship because they don't even know what discipleship IS, let alone that they need to BE one!

- It is also possible that born-again believers can be **mis-taught!** They can be captured by pseudo-Christianity, e.g., Catholicism, or by a pseudo-Christian cult, e.g., Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventism and Christian Science, or by a dead form of Christianity, e.g., most of Protestantism and even some who call themselves Baptists! In other words, this unlearned believer get captured by heretics and their heresies.

Heretics and spiritual wolves are always on the prowl and they will quickly entangle unprotected babes-in-Christ in the *rudiments* and heresies of worldly, man-made religion, e.g., false gospels, catechisms, ordinances, penances, indulgences, Papal dictates, works-religion, and etc. Paul warned the Ephesian and Colossian brethren of this very danger.

- **Acts 20:29** *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.* (Spoken to the Ephesian elders at the Miletus meeting)

- **Col 2:8** *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

- And so it is theoretically possible that a believer may not be patterning his/her life after Jesus because he has not been correctly taught (discipled). Newborn Christians—just like newborn babies—need to grow in truth and faith. They have to be taught and this teaching is a vital part of the Great Commission given to local churches.

3 — Or this disconnect may occur because a believer gets **caught up in The World**. This is a "biggie". Let's camp here for a bit.

- In our Western culture, the lures and entanglements of the World are probably the biggest reasons why genuinely born-again believers are not pursuing lives of discipleship.

When I use the capitalized word "World" in Bible teaching I am usually referring to **The World System**. And The World System is Satan's system! Satan is the *god of this world* (II Cor 4:4) and *the prince of the power of the air*, i.e., the circumambient globe (Eph 2:2). This was the Holy Spirit's intent when He inspired John to write, *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (I Jn 2:15).

The word *world* in I Jn 2:15 (and in many other scriptures) does not refer to the physical planet (our 3rd Rock from the Sun) or to this planet's inhabitants (as it does in John 3:16). The Greek word translated *world* in this verse is *kos'-mos*, the root of our English word *cosmos*. *Kos'-mos* means an orderly arrangement, as in something decorated. The idea then is that Satan has a highly organized and often outwardly-beautiful economy or **system** in place upon this planet. In

the Revelation Jesus uses the moniker “Babylon” to describe Satan’s World system because ancient Babylon (and its leader Nimrod) was Satan’s first attempt to dominate the planet. Furthermore, Jesus explains that Babylon (the World System) exists in three forms: governmental, economic and spiritual.

And YES, even believers can get caught up in Satan’s World System because all we have to do is “go with the flow”! All we have to do is go downstream with the current, all we have to do is join the other “rats” in the “rat race” of life and all we have to do is get caught up focusing upon what the World focuses upon. It takes work and effort and even courage to paddle upstream or to get out of the river altogether and walk (“How odd that is!”, the World would say!)

- Let’s think about how believers can get swept up into Satan’s World System

Let’s start with some physical analogies of how the culture can capture us. Consider first “the disconnect” between knowing what we OUGHT to eat and then what we routinely DO eat. Or how about “the disconnect” between knowing that we OUGHT to get quality exercise every day, but somehow we just never find the time to go out and GET the exercise?

Why do we allow these disconnects to form and then to continue? Why do we get into fast food habits? Why do we become couch potatoes and not get proper exercise? The answer is simple: **we get caught up in our culture!** Our lifestyles become so busy and so many things capture our time and attention, that we end up having no time or energy to plan and cook nutritious foods or to get quality exercise! We are on the run, and we run for so long, that we have to catch fast food in between our obligations and then we hit the sack exhausted, without any convenient exercise opportunities. Living “healthy” in our Western world is almost counter-culture and therefore it takes a tremendous, going-against-the-current effort.

Well this “disconnect” between knowing and doing on the physical plane—this tendency to become culturally anesthetized, to become too busy and over-obligated—also impacts our spiritual lives. We can become spiritually flaccid and anemic because we obligate too much of our time for the World. And because of this cultural lifestyle James writes that we can become self-deceived! He writes, *...be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves* (James 1:22)! James tells us that saved people can honestly believe that they are living as disciples... when they are not.

The bottom line is that discipleship—i.e., patterning our lives after Jesus—is COUNTER-CULTURE! Discipleship takes significant time and energy! And it is so much easier in our already time- and obligation-strapped lives to just ride downstream with the current, to go with the flow, and to therefore to remain **spiritually anemic**. We can sit in Sunday school and church every Sunday of our entire lives and become very knowledgeable in the Word, but unless we allow LIVING the Word to become preeminent in our lives, we are not disciples... and James says we become self-deceived!

- And I believe another significant problem for saved people in our Western culture is this teaching that we have to be passionate about everything! We are told we must be passionate about our diets, about our fitness and health, about our education and training, about our vocations and our professional prowess, about our appearance, about our hobbies and entertainment, about injustice and equality for all, about world peace, about feeding hungry kids on the other side of the planet, about good reading and mind expansion, and on and on and on it goes, ad infinitum!

BUT... because it is impossible to be passionate about every thing, we end up being passionate about nothing! We spread our lives so thin in our attempt to become everything to all people, that we become good at nothing and mediocre at everything!

- And so this cultural paradigm can spill over even into our discipleship to Jesus Christ. We can get caught up in life and in living (i.e., the World), to the extent that we no longer have the time and energy to do what is necessary to maintain a healthy spiritual lifestyle (discipleship). Consequently, **Satan successfully defeats many Christians, NOT with carnality and immorality, but with LIFE and all of the DISTRACTIONS AND TIME WASTERS that LIFE can afford us!** Just like Bro. Demas, many born-again believers are drawn away from Christ because they abandon their new “spouse” (Christ) and pursue a relationship with an

idoltrous lover, called *this present world* (II Tim 4:10). Remember what John warned, “...*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (I Jn 2:15b). You can’t love the World and God at the same time!

- Now, Satan’s World system effectively uses two very different classes of **distractions / time-wasters**.

- Class 1 — **Blatant immorality (sin)**

John teaches in I John 2:16 that all sin fits into one or more of just three buckets: *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 of the Father, but is of the world.*

There are first the *lusts of the flesh*. Examples of this class of sin include fornication, lewdness and lasciviousness, rioting (partying) and drunkenness, gluttony and excesses and carnality in general. Conveniently, for those who wish to pursue these behaviors, our culture has relabeled many of these many immoralities with respectable titles, e.g., “an alternate lifestyle”, “a choice”, “a disease”, “a genetic predisposition” and even “a constitutional right”.

Then there are the *lusts of the eye*. These are the “desire-to-have” sins, e.g., greed, covetousness, materialism, mammon-worship, and etc. Many Christians allow their lives to be consumed in the chase to be “successful”, i.e., the big house, the fine car, fine clothing, fun toys, and etc.

And finally, John says there are the pride-of-life sins. These involve ego, pride and self-aggrandizement, e.g., chasing career advancements (ladder-climbing), pursuing titles and positions and community respect and recognition.

- Class 2 — **Morally-neutral involvements**

Even morally-neutral involvements can become sin because we allow them to divert and distract us away from discipleship and service. This is Satan’s forte; it is Satan’s most effective weapon against Western Christians. I call these **diversions** and **distractions**. If the Devil can’t destroy us with outright sin, he will distract and divert us to death!

Some examples of very effective distracters and diverters are jobs and careers, family demands, schooling, hobbies, our toys, volunteerism, sports, our kid’s sports and activities, community involvement, travel, and simply fun and entertainment.

Again, none of these things are necessarily morally evil in and of themselves, but in our affluent Western culture all of these are capable of diverting us away from a life of dedicated service to God. And Satan is just as pleased to use your career or your hobby or your family or your fun to draw you away from Jesus, as He is to use a wicked vice or some great moral failure.

As much as our culture wants us to believe that we can...

- go like a race car 18 hours a day, day in and day out,
- taxiing our kids to every sport and extracurricular activity on the planet,
- volunteering our time to 4 or 5 civic organizations, and
- then trying to develop our careers, and
- become experts in our hobbies, and
- then doing quality reading and mind enrichment, and
- then planning and taking our vacations (so we can relax), and
- then if we have time, hurriedly dropping in to church for some “quality” worship time and fellowship,

...well, we can’t!

The bottom line is that **we cannot do it ALL!** We have to decide what our priorities will be in life, and consequently we must then eliminate all other things in order to accommodate and emphasize those priorities!

Let me use the analogy of a college education. When you register you are given your College's course catalog. And if you walked up to your advisor and said, "OK, Mr. Advisor, here is my plan. In the next 4 years I want to enroll in every one of this college's 468 courses and I want to make an "A" grade in each." You would get a very funny look from your advisor! People, we just can't do it all. Therefore we must be very wise and discerning before we involve or obligate ourselves, even in other good things. We must ask, "Will this new obligation benefit or detract from my spiritual priorities in life?"

Paul had a very narrow life-view. He allowed himself to concentrate only on the things that would lead to the success of his spiritual goal. Paul wrote this in Phil 3:13 & 14...

- **Phil 3:13** *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this **one thing I do**, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

We might say that Paul had a one-track mind or a one-goal life! We call it a Christ-centered worldview or paradigm. And we need to develop that same "*this one thing*" worldview so we won't be diverted and distracted by the Devil.

- Truly we (as a culture) are, as Daniel prophesied (Dan 12:4), running *to and fro* so fervently that we don't have time to eat right, get exercise, be a family, read and study our Bible and pray, to devote our lives to discipleship, to worship properly and etc. And then we wonder why we, as a society, have heart disease, strokes and ulcers and then why we as Christians have fruitless, frustrating lives. And then we allow these "disconnects" to continue, and widen, because it is hard to pull out of the River of Life, the Rat Race! CHANGE IS HARD! Change takes work! Change takes discipline! Change takes... CHANGE! It so it is much easier to go with the flow and not buck the current, especially in a life that is already too full. It is so much easier to just become... wore out and spiritually anemic!
- So how do we go about to bridge that disconnect between professing to be a disciple and practicing as a genuine disciple? We will discover that "bridge" in Our next session:

Bridging the Disconnect — Getting Serious with God!