

FOLLOWING JESUS

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

Lesson 1 - conclusion

An Introduction to Discipo-stewardship

or How to Become a Spiritual Success Story

Outline

Part 1

- Introduction
- What is a Disciple?

Part 2

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

Part 3

- Engaging Our Vision

PART 3

In Part 2 we discussed the sad reality of how many born-again Christians are unnaturally “disconnected” from a life of discipleship and stewardship, and how this condition is primarily caused by the allurements and the distractions of this World system. And so we learned how we need to bridge that disconnect by securing an “incentive-driven, Holy Spirit engendered passion”. We condensed that long phrase—“incentive-driven, Holy Spirit engendered passion”—into one word: VISION. We need to “catch God’s vision”; we need to put on Biblical glasses and see life the way that God sees life.

And now that we have realized that the Christian life is a life of discipo-stewardship (we have bridged the disconnect) and now that we have put on God’s “eyeglasses” (we have secured our vision), we have one final step: How do we go about to engage that vision? This is the topic of Part 3...

Engaging Our Vision

- Putting our Christianity “in Gear”

Here again is the question: once we have made God’s Vision our Vision, how can we go about to engage this incentive-driven, Holy Spirit engendered passion (vision)? How do we put our Christian lives “in gear” so-to-speak? Let’s answer that question with a few rhetorical questions.

Where do you actually learn to be a good butcher, or baker, or candlestick maker? Where do you actually learn to be a good teacher, or a good mom, or a good auto mechanic? Is it in class... or on the job?

We can learn a lot of knowledge in a class, or from a book, but think about it; you become at good whatever you do, by actually doing it! In life we call this on-the-job-training. In fact, REAL-life demands that we MUST be able to put our knowledge into action; we must be able to practically translate what we know into what we do! For example, if your employer invests significant time and money into your training, but you can’t or won’t translate that training into production, then you won’t have your job very long!

Well, Christian discipleship is regulated by this same life-principle. To be successful disciples of Jesus, and stewards of the investments that He has entrusted into our hands, requires us to DO what we LEARN, to go beyond just learning and taking in, to producing and serving. Remember James’ admonition in v 1:22, *...be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, **deceiving your own selves.*** The Holy Spirit warns through James that learners, who only stay learners, i.e., they never translate the learned principles of the Bible into a spiritually-productive discipo-stewardship lifestyle, are self-deceived about being disciples!

So, to be frank, testifying to our community that we are “Christians”, that we are disciples of Jesus, but then not living with the passion and discipline needed to become not only a learner of the Word

but also a passionate “doer” of the Word, reveals that we are only self-deceived! We may have learned some principles and some Bible facts, and we may attend now and then, but we have grossly failed the Christianity Practicum!

Friends... we are the most pitiable of self-made fools when we claim to love Jesus and His Word, but we allow neither to change us and motivate us! James says we are self-deceived!

And the scriptures are plain that we don't measure ourselves against other Christians. In II Corinthians 10:12 Paul wrote, *...but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.* We need to measure our discipostewardship against THE standard, as taught in the Word of God. And that segues us into our next thought...

- Jesus' measure of discipostewardship

Jesus measures our discipleship NOT by what we know, or by what we SAY or claim, **but in what we DO** with His commandments!

- **Jn 14:15** *If ye love me, **keep** my commandments.*

- **Jn 14:21** *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me...*

And then there are the definitive descriptions of discipleship in John 8:31 and 15:8...

- First, listen to John 8:31: *Then said Jesus to those Jews **which believed on him**,...*

Now, stop right there. Jesus is speaking to whom? He is addressing Jews *...which believed on him*. He is talking to born-again, Heaven-bound believers. So there was something beyond salvation that qualified them as disciples. Now let's go on...

*If ye **continue** in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed...* The word *continue* connotes the idea of abide, dwell, endure, tarry, or remain, i.e., to engage in a mission and then keeping on keeping on! We have to decide that service Jesus is the most important thing in the world... because it is. And people end up doing what they consider important for them in life.

- Second listen to Jesus' words in John 15:8: *Herein is my Father glorified, **that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.***

Disciples are dedicated to fruit-bearing! We can take that list of spiritual fruit in Galatians 5 and then do inventory in our lives. Are we fighting the good fight? And, are we seeing Holy-Spirit empowered graces becoming more and more prominent in our lives? If we are not, then we may still be deluded; we may be only “cultural Christians”.

- Lifestyle Christianity vs. Cultural Christianity

- Jesus and the Scriptures differentiate between **Lifestyle Christianity** and **Cultural Christianity**.

Lifestyle Christianity is exactly what it says: it is our LIFE! It is what we think about, prioritize for, schedule our calendars and prioritize our budgets around. **It is living out what we learn, and not just for six months, or a few years, but for life!** Our pastors have said it a thousand times: Christianity is a lifestyle. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 4:2, *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* Lifestyle Christianity (or true discipostewardship) is taking that passion for Jesus and the disciplines that the passion enables, and focusing them into a VISION, and then for the rest of our days we march faithfully toward the successful implementation and fulfillment of that vision. Remember that Paul called his vision his *course* and his *race*.

Cultural Christianity, on the other hand, is just a label. We are not Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or Shintoist, or Mormon, or Jehovah's Witnesses, or Atheists... and so by default, we are “Christians”. We are Christians because our country is a “Christian” nation. We are Christians because our family has always been “Christian”. Cultural Christianity could actually be called “delusional Christianity”. James says we are self-deceived when we are hearers but not doers. When we see a brother in need, but we only say, “Be warm and filled”, what good does that do? It

accomplishes nothing except to embarrass the needy with a platitude and further deceive ourselves.

- Let's demonstrate this principle of "Lifestyle Christianity" with some heavy-duty scriptures.

- In Luke 16:13, Jesus teaches this simple fact: ...*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

The word *mammon* means wealth, possessions, and money. So there... we just learned a critical piece of Bible knowledge, which is this: devotion must be singular and complete. We cannot devote our lives to God and at the same time devote our lives to materialism, money-chasing and ladder climbing. And we cannot, because God demands ultimate devotion; God demands primacy in our affections. He won't share our love and devotion with the World any more than any sane person would share his/her spouse with another! When Christians allow the World to capture their affections, they have become spiritual adulterers!

So, what then must we do with this piece of knowledge if we are going to be genuine disciples of Jesus Christ? How should this truth change our living? Jesus answers that question for us in Luke 14:33.

- Luke 14:33 *So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not **all that he hath**, he cannot be my disciple.*

Whoa! I said these were "heavy" scriptures! The context of this verse is counting the cost. And that is what Jesus is asking all of us to do, right up front, in this journey called discipleship. And the cost to be Jesus' disciple is this: forsaking the World and all that it offers (which includes riches, possessions, titles, fame, pleasures, glory) and accepting our commission in the Lord's army, with all of the commensurate consequences (suffering and tribulations, the enmity of this World system), duties (fighting the good fight), and benefits (eternal riches, eternal glory, and eternal pleasure). A disciple's heart must be single-focused! Which is a fact truth by the Master in this next scripture.

- Matthew 6:21 (and Luke 12:34) reads, *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

We must honestly ask ourselves, "Where is my treasure?" i.e., what or whom do I consider the priorities in my life? Into what or whom do I invest my time, my emotions, my love, and my energies? Christians need to be constantly asking themselves that often uncomfortable question! Is our treasure revealed to be material things, is it in human relationships, is it in our avocations and hobbies, or is it in knowing and following our Master, Jesus Christ? In other words, "Where is my heart?" Paul made it very clear where he stood when he cried out, *That I may know him...* (Phil 3:10).

Of course, when Jesus demands that genuine disciples "forsake all" (there in Luke 14:33), He is **not** teaching that we should become ascetics (like the Greek Stoics or the Hebrew Essenes), or monks, or become physically separated like the Amish. He is not teaching us to give away every penny and become beggars on the street. No, Jesus is teaching us to discover REAL discipleship, i.e. REAL LIFE! Having money and things, and enjoying good human relationships isn't the problem. Riches and things are usually morally neutral. Job and Abraham were very rich men, but they did not allow their riches to capture their hearts! In fact the Bible teaches us that Abraham had his sights set on spiritual things: *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham looked ahead toward the New Jerusalem!

It should be starting to become clear that Jesus takes the practical aspects of Christian discipleship to a higher level than that of mere studentship and imitation! To forsake all that we have means to get our priorities correctly aligned in our... **hearts!** Yes, friends...

• Jesus makes discipleship a matter of the heart!

When the Bible uses the word "heart" it is not referring to our cardiac muscle, but to the seat of our emotions and will. A matter of the heart means we are not just going through hypocritical motions to be seen of men (as did the Pharisees). It means that our MOTIVE for becoming a disciple isn't self-glory or the esteem of our peers. Our motive must be love and appreciation for the Master! Remember that earlier I used the word "passion"!

Jesus teaches **love-motivated** discipulo-stewardship in these scriptures...

- Consider **the analogy of the Plowman**

- **Luke 9:62** *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is **fit** for the kingdom of God.*

Again, this is heavy teaching! It was this kind of teaching that caused the vast majority of Jesus' early followers to forsake Him and follow no more (we read about this in John 6:66). Now, let's understand this verse.

First, the word *fit* does not mean "worthy". Jesus is NOT saying that if we have a failure then we have disqualified ourselves from His Heavenly kingdom (lost our salvation)!

Here, the word *fit* means "**well placed**" in the sense that we might say, "Bob is a good 'fit' for that position; he is well suited for that job." Jesus' point is that half-hearted discipleship is not making us a "good fit" for God's spiritual kingdom. If we continue in a lackadaisical attitude toward our disciplo-stewardship, one day when we stand before Jesus to receive our job assignments for the Millennial Kingdom (and later our assignments on the New Earth) we are going to experience deep regrets and be deeply ashamed because we will discover that we are not a good *fit*, i.e., we have not prepared and trained for the jobs that He has to offer! **We are not going to be a good fit for a Kingdom job if we don't learn to be a passionate disciple of Jesus in this life.** THIS life is a boot camp for the Kingdom and for eternity! I personally believe that **what we do with this life, to a great extent, determines what we will do for the rest of eternity!**

Yet another important point that we should glean from Jesus' plowman analogy in Luke 9:62 is that **disciples must be committed to the long haul.** It's that same idea expressed in John 8:31, *If ye **continue** in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed...* Discipleship is not a lackadaisical, half-hearted, shallow, on-again and off-again commitment to serving God. Jesus' analogy of the plowman is deeply rich. Let's think about the realities of being a plowman.

- When a hired hand hit the field with the oxen and the plow at sunup, the day was cool, the birds were singing, the ox was fresh, the hired hand was fresh, his belly was full and all was right with the world.
- But by about 2 p.m., the sun was very hot, the wind was blowing dust in his face, he was sweaty and grimy, he had blisters on his hands and feet, he was really hungry, the ox was hungry and no longer wanted to work and was continually kicking against the goad, the ground was hard and baked, and he longingly looked back... down the road toward his house... and he thought to himself, "This plowing isn't all its cracked up to be! I could be at home, in my easy chair, with the AC cranked, watching Animal Planet and drinking a Diet Dr. Pepper!" In short, discipleship can be, and usually is, hard work that requires sacrifice and discipline!
- Yes, we can learn much from the analogy of the plowman. But we also need to consider this next analogy.

- **The love-of-family analogy**

If the plowman analogy in Luke 9:62 is not austere enough to get our attention, let's consider this point-blank teaching!

- **Luke 14:26** *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. 27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

Wow! If this teaching doesn't cause us to sit up straight, nothing will! Jesus here uses a figure of speech called hyperbole to emphasize the level of devotion that is required to be called a genuine disciple. The teaching of this verse is again this: God demands primacy in our hearts!

I believe you can condense all of these strong teachings into one phrase: **ULTIMATE DEVOTION.** The United State Marine Corps uses the Latin motto, *Semper Fidelis*, which means, "Always Faithful" or "Always Loyal". Marines also have another principle: they never leave a man behind. Their code, their creed, is ultimate faithfulness to our country, our constitution, and to their fellow Marines.

Well, just like the Corps, Jesus wants our ultimate devotion. And He deserves it because HE IS WORTHY! THAT, my fellow believers, is discipleship.

Here is reality: we ARE going to give our lives and our hearts to something! We are going to use up our time on this earth in some pursuit or another. Our precious time can be devoted to sleep. It can be devoted to our career and climbing the ladder of success. It can be totally focused upon the weekend, and hobbies, and pleasure, and gratifying our flesh. Or, like many, we can devote our lives to the accumulation of things and money.

But... what could be more rewarding than loving and serving Jesus Christ? I tell you that nothing, I repeat nothing, will mean more for all eternity than this: I served Jesus with my whole heart! I caught a Holy Spirit-engendered, incentive-driven passion for Jesus and then I translated that passion into a VISION (a life-quest, the big-picture meaning of life), and then I engaged that VISION and lived a life of discipio-stewardship.

- Friends, life is not a drill; life is not a game. Life is eternally serious with one of two outcomes: **HEAVEN** [*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mat 25:34)] OR **HELL, and then THE LAKE OF FIRE** [*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mat 25:41)].

And within those two destinies there lies **levels of reward** for those serving God during the 1000-year Kingdom and then forever on the New Earth and **levels of punishment** for those separated from Him in Hell, and then forever in the Lake of Fire. As disciples of Jesus Christ we should be concerned about those destined for Hell and we should be concerned about our own effectiveness in the Kingdom. We should be concerned about making ourselves a good “fit” for the Kingdom of God.

Yet most people—even most who **claim** to be Christians—play at life and with life as if it were a frivolous, inconsequential game. Many waste their lives! And even many genuinely born-again believers play a game that they call “Christianity”... or, more accurately, I should really say that they “play at it”. My point is that MOST believers never get serious about those things that define genuine discipleship.

- Now, there could perhaps be many definitions of “genuine discipleship”, but here is a good 3-part definition.
 - 1) A genuine disciple lives a **separated**—what the Bible labels as a **holy**—life. We must separate from the world’s...
 - contaminants and pollutants,
 - from its paradigms (i.e., its mindsets or world views) and
 - from its mind-numbing and life-consuming **inanity** (stupid, worthless, empty, vain, activity)!
 - 2) A genuine disciple must **dedicate** his/her separated life wholly to the Lord to use in any way that He deems necessary. We are talking total, radical, sold-out loyalty! And finally...
 - 3) A genuine disciple must live that separated and dedicated life **totally by faith in and through the power of the Holy Spirit**, on a day-by-day basis.
- And so the purpose of this intensive 22-lesson journey called “Following Jesus” is to reveal to us...
 - 1) a pathway that few Christians will follow,
 - 2) a lifestyle that only a few believers will live, and
 - 3) a level of devotion (read that **passion** and **discipline**) that, quite honestly, few are interested in embracing.

The purpose of this journey is to again introduce us to that abundant spiritual life that Jesus wants all to experience. Jesus said, *The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly* (Jn 10:10). That word *abundantly* carries the sense of something beyond. It can mean superabundant in quantity or superior in quality. Jesus intends for every believer to go beyond just living and dying. Because... to miss the abundant life will be a waste of such magnitude that we cannot even imagine it, both here on the Earth and eternally with Christ on The New Earth. So I hope that, if you are not already, that you

will become very passionate about genuine Christian discipostewardship!

And with that we will end this introductory material.

- Oh... but I forgot to mention one important detail. I forgot to tell you about the fine print, didn't I? There is some fine print regarding discipleship that we all need to read and understand before we sign at the bottom. And that fine print reads thusly: **We can't do it!** That's right; you can't and I can't achieve the status of disciposteward, that is... **in our own power, and ability and talent.** This is a foundational truth and it is likely the most critical teaching of this entire course!

You see, while the journey called "Christian Discipleship" is of course a lot about **learning**... it is also so very much about **LEANING!** It is leaning on the power of our indwelling Holy Spirit. For Jesus said, "*...without me ye can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5).

End - Lesson 1