

# FOLLOWING JESUS

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

## Lesson 1 - continued 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 2

- As previously stated in lesson 1-1...

- 1 - There are those who are disconnected from discipleship because they can't be disciples... because they are lost! These folks simply need to be saved!
- 2 - There are born-again believers who are disconnected from discipleship because they have not been taught what discipleship is and how to be a discipo-steward. These folks simply need to seek out a teacher (i.e., a scriptural New Testament Church) and get serious about "doing" and not just "hearing". This is why the Great Commission was given to local churches. If a person is saved apart from a local church, that new babe-in-Christ is likely to drift and flounder because they are not immediately surrounded and led by good spiritual leaders.
- 3 – There are those born-again believers who are disconnected from discipleship because of Worldliness. And Worldliness can be in Class 1, sin, or more commonly in Class 2, morally-neutral diversions and distractions.

- So how do we go about to solve our disconnect dilemma? This is where we pick up Part 2...

### **Bridging the Disconnect — Getting Serious with God!**

- We start to bridge the disconnect of being a born-again believer, but NOT a discipo-steward, by deciding to get serious with God! Instead of PLAYING AT Christianity in name only, we need to BECOME a Christian.

It is very easy for Christians to become double-minded in their loyalties, in their priorities and in their devotions. Christians know they should be serving and worshiping Christ in local church (in, I suppose, an attempt to keep God as an ally, and their consciences soothed somewhat), but they live for the most part "in the world" (because they love to please their flesh, their covetousness, and their ego). And so they end up playing at their worship, they play at their giving, and they play at their service to the Lord. And while they claim to love the Lord and they claim that He is a priority in their lives, their actions say otherwise. They allow their lives to become **overfilled** with careers, and hobbies, and volunteerism, and materialism, and things, and money, and travel, and education, and kid's sports, and on and on. Most of these things are not immoral or ungodly in and of themselves, but the end result is that cumulatively they crowd God out of our lives.

Disconnected Christians need to make big changes so they can break out of their frenetic lifestyles, which produce nothing but physical exhaustion and spiritual anemia.

- To make these changes we FIRST need to recognize that **exhaustion, lethargy and spiritual anemia are accepted byproducts of our culture.**

- But, we know that the wrong culture will kill us!

Why is it so hard to lose weight and maintain a proper weight? It is because of our culture! We have developed fast foods to meet the needs of our fast, and often frenetic, lifestyles.

Why is it hard to exercise right? It is because of our culture! Most of us no longer do physical work to make a living and so physical exertion makes up a very small part of our day. And because we are so busy, we don't have the time to exercise. Obesity, heart-disease, high-blood pressure, and diabetes are significant phenomena of our Western culture.

Why is it so hard to turn off the TV so we can study and pray more? It is either because...

1) there is something on that we just HAVE to see (translate that like this: there are many things on TV that are much more important than God's Word and its impact in our lives!), OR

2) it is because we use TV like a sedative. TV has become our society's mind-neutralizing drug.

- Why is it so hard to have Paul's "*this one thing I do*" worldview? It is because our culture bombards us with 10 million other things that compete with our affection for, and our service to, Jesus Christ.

- Second, we have to recognize that it takes a lot of **discipline** and **effort** to break out of this World's cultural molds and then live counter-culture (i.e., counter to this World's culture)! But John says we MUST! He writes in I Jn 2:15, *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.* And Jesus taught the same principle like this: *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon* (Matthew 6:24).

- Satan would have us live like cultural automatons, never thinking, wandering like glass-eyed lemmings through a wasted life, with no service and no souls to give to our Lord.

- Third, we need to ask, "Why is it so difficult to engender enough discipline and effort to make the changes that are needed, to break out of our world's cultural molds and get serious with God (i.e., to actually major on what we KNOW we ought to major on)?"

Well, "breaking out" of this World's cultural molds is difficult, even impossible, because our **discipline** and **effort** are often flesh-generated! If we expect to be successful in breaking out of the prison of our culture, then **our discipline and effort must be engendered by Holy Spirit PASSION and POWER!**

- **And finally four, how is Holy Spirit passion and power harnessed in our Christian lives?**

- Holy Spirit passion and power comes from spiritual INCENTIVES! Ah! Now we are getting somewhere. Our lives are incentive-driven; and this applies to both our physical-material lives and our spiritual lives as Christians.

- The bottom line is that we do what is important to us! So when the doctor says, "You must lose weight and get more exercise, or you will have a heart attack or stroke, and very soon!", then you suddenly have an incentive and with this kind of incentive most people get pretty passionate about weight loss and exercise. And so their new-found incentive-engendered passion produces the discipline and effort needed to accomplish those hard tasks of weight loss, diet modification, and faithful exercise habits. WE ALL NEED INCENTIVES!

- And so, what are our spiritual incentives for service, for sacrifice, for taking the harder road and becoming a disciple and steward? Here are a few...

- Consider the amazing sacrifice of our Savior, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross. Jesus had an incentive; the redemption of humanity! And so He threw Himself into the redemption role with great passion.

- Consider the unfathomable love, grace, and mercy of God!

- Consider the eternal souls of men and women!
- Consider the rewards that Christ even now has reserved for us to enjoy forever upon the New Earth.
- And finally consider this incentive: to miss out on the plan of God is a tragedy that is beyond the scope of our understanding!

So... bridging that disconnect between KNOWING what we need to do and then DOING it, whether it be a physical lifestyle change like diet and exercise, or a spiritual lifestyle change like breaking out of a culture of spiritual lethargy...

- requires discipline and effort,
- which must be driven by a Holy Spirit-engendered passion,
- and Holy Spirit passion and power is engaged and harnessed by incentives!

Bro. Jason Gaddis (pastor at Southwest Baptist Church in OKC) preached at our 2010 Spiritual Boot Camp. The theme of that youth rally was "Essential Disciplines for Spiritual Growth". Bro. Gaddis told the crowd that THE one, fundamental spiritual discipline for a successful life of Christian growth was: **Seeking God!** His entire sermon emphasized the **passion** necessary to embrace the disciplines required to develop and follow that VISION, i.e., that Bible paradigm, that big-picture goal.

- I want to take a teaching-point from Bro. Gaddis. I want to equate this concept of **incentive-driven, Holy Spirit engendered passion** with the Biblical equivalent term: **VISION!** Solomon wrote, *Where there is no vision, the people perish...* (Prov 29:18).

The word there translated *vision* there in Proverbs 29 literally means an oracle or revelation from God. We could rightfully equate it with our written Word of God. And the word translated *perish* means to loosen, or expose, or dismiss. So Solomon is saying this:

When we cease to be regularly exposed to the oracles of God—i.e., God's Word, through preaching, teaching, and study, to God's way of seeing things—THEN our Biblical world-view will gradually weaken and diminish, we will get caught up in this World system, and our lives will "loosen", "unravel", "come apart at the seams", and "dissolve"! Our discipleship and stewardship will fail to grow. In fact it will, as Solomon warned, *perish!*

- So to bridge the disconnect between 1) just being saved and 2) becoming a genuine disciple (what God intends) we need to allow the Holy Spirit to create within us a **vision** (i.e., an incentive-engendered passion directed by the oracle of God); we need a spiritual big-picture or a spiritual life-goal. And when we develop this vision we will discover it is much easier to bridge that disconnect between what we know we ought to do and then doing it! Passion always produces incentive. If we love our spouse we have an incentive to do things to please him/her. If we love our hobby we'll be passionately purchasing equipment, or training, or practicing, or participating. **The bottom line is that we have no spiritual vision because we are not passionate about spiritual things!**

All the Apostles caught this vision! It literally drove them to live counter-culture, and so much so that all them (except for perhaps John) died martyr's deaths. Do you think that they had passion? I tell you that no man will give up his life for something that he is not passionate about! What kept the Apostle Paul going in spite of the horrific and continual persecutions that he suffered? It was his passion for Christ! And that passion was engendered, it was engaged or set on fire, by this incentive: millions upon millions were deceived and lost, including his own beloved nation Israel! The Apostles were eaten up with zeal for our Lord and His Spiritual War. They properly recognized that they were actively recruited by the God of the Universe to fight in the battle-of-all-battles, the battle for the souls of men and women, the battle for Truth! That was their incentive!

- So, disciplo-stewardship is learning... and then doing! Disciplo-stewardship is realized and accomplished when we allow the Holy Spirit to develop a passion within us, and passion is always engendered, i.e., ignited, by incentives. And we can reduce all of this into the word: **VISION, i.e., a long-term spiritual goal.** In Hebrews 12:1 Paul called it a *race*...

- **Hebrews 12:1** *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay*

aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the **race** that is set before us...

and in Acts 20:24 he called it his *course*,

- **Acts 20:24** *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my **course** with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

Paul finished his race, his course, as a victor: *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith...* (II Tim 4:7).

- So, as would-be discipole-stewards of Jesus Christ, we need to be actively securing that spiritual vision. And that segues us into our next section...

## Securing Our Vision

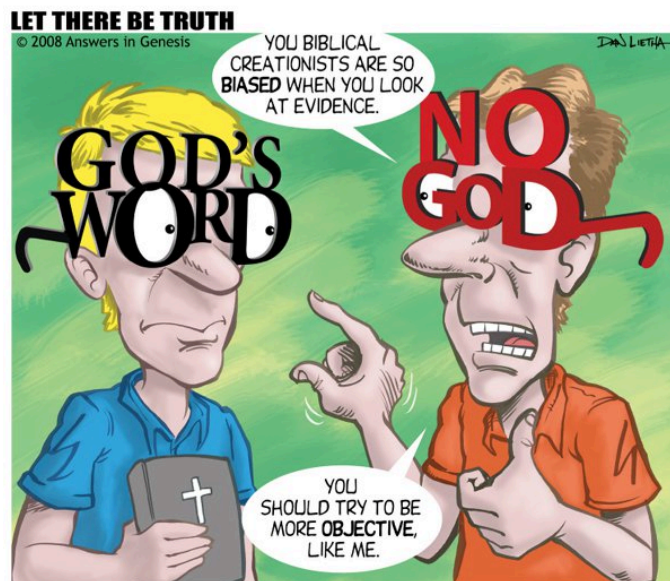
- The Christian life is very practical; there is nothing magical or mystical about it. So very practically, how do we go about to secure our spiritual VISION, i.e., how do we take this incentive-driven, Holy Spirit engendered passion and make it the reason that we breath, and walk and talk? How do we find that focus that Paul possessed, and lived by, that focus he condensed into that famous statement: ... *this ONE thing I do* (Phil 3:13). Well, let's permit God to tell us how from His Word!
- You have heard the sayings, "Walk a mile in my shoes"? or "See the world through my glasses!"? These idioms teach that if we really want to understand a person and see the world from his or her perspective, we will have to experience life as they experience it. In other words, we will need to understand what they face, what motivates them, what they love, what they hate, and what their priorities are.

With this thought in mind then, how did Paul come to possess and secure his singular "*this one thing I do*" VISION. We could call it his paradigm, his worldview or ultimate race goal?

I'll tell you how! Paul put on "God's eyeglasses", "Biblical glasses"! [See the cartoon "Let There Be Truth" by Dan Lietha] Paul started seeing things the way God sees things! The Biblical idiom is putting on the *mind of Christ*, from I Cor 2:16. [NOTE: There will be an entire lesson entitled, The Mind of Christ.]

When Paul was helped up out of the dust of that roadway outside of Damascus, he found himself PHYSICALLY blind, but ironically for the first time in his life he could actually see SPIRITUALLY! Paul suddenly started to see reality; he suddenly started to realize what was important in life. He now started to see life from God's perspective, as the Holy Spirit was starting to give him a truly spiritual world-view or paradigm.

Paul's new vision first convicted him of what HE was! He was a wicked sinner whose personal sin had nailed the Son of God to a vicious cross and required Him to suffer the very Wrath of the Father. This realization broke his heart (the Bible calls this contrition), it caused him to repent (change his mind about how he could be justified before God), and finally it led him to call out to Christ, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do* (Acts 9:6)? This is evidence that Paul had experienced what Jesus called the new birth.



And just days after the Holy Spirit re-birthed Paul's dead spirit, the Holy Spirit expanded Paul's VISION (his worldview or paradigm) beyond himself and his condition. He looked out and began to see humanity's dire spiritual condition. He first saw his own beloved people the Jews wandering lost and blind and in need of that same salvation he was now enjoying. Acts 9:19, 20 reads, *Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. 20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

And then later still, after the Jews as a whole essentially rejected Paul, God expanded the Apostle's vision even further; his spiritual scope broadened to the Gentile world, people-groups immersed in godless paganism and wicked debauchery, all lost and undone, and all perishing as he stood watching. We read of this change in his ministry focus in Acts 18:4-6.

- **Acts 18:4-6** *And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*

In short, Paul obtained his urgent ministry VISION when he took his eyes off of himself, and off of this carnal world and its allurements, and started looking at REALITY through the eyes of God. In other words, Paul put on the Mind of Christ!

- Like Paul, we must secure a vision of reality, which is God's VISION! And so, here is what God sees!

- 1) God sees a world that is spiritually poisoned by sin, a world perishing.
- 2) God sees humanity condemned to spiritual death because of sin. That death, called the second death, will be an eternity separated from God in a place called The Lake of Fire.
- 3) In short, God saw mankind's helpless and hopeless condition.

And when God saw, He acted! Even before the foundation of the World, the Trinity Counsel developed the rescue plan, a plan put into action even before there was a soul to rescue. And when we see, we too need to act!

Think about this analogy with me. If the world was in the grips of a terrible and deadly plague with people dying daily by the tens-of-thousands, and we had not only the knowledge of the cure, but the very cure itself in our possession, and we did not share that cure, would that not be a criminal act? I tell you, it would be an act beyond criminal; it would be an unthinkable act!

Well the reality is that we DO know the cure and we CAN share the cure for mankind's sin problem. And to withhold it is indeed a criminal act! The only difference is that the World does not recognize that it is sick and dying because its disease causes spiritual blindness! And so the World often rejects the cure. In fact the World doesn't even like to hear that it is sick.

- **The bottom line is this: LIFE is not about us.** Life for a Christian is all about our LORD and His mission and His vision. And His mission is the greatest rescue this world has ever or will ever experience. Jesus' priority is to rescue the perishing!

So, I hope we have secured our VISION, which is God's vision. Our next session will conclude Lesson 1 with this section...

## Engaging Our Vision