

Discipleship

Discipleship Under Pressure

Lesson #10 for March 8, 2008

Scriptures: 1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 1; Matthew 26:56; Luke 9:51-56; John 6:1-15; 12:1-6; 18:1-11; 21:15-19.

1. This lesson is about the subtle and not-so-subtle pressures that tend to derail our discipleship. Some of those pressures are internal and some are external. Which pressures are harder to deal with? Internal, or external?
2. Often, when we feel that our Christianity is moving along relatively smoothly, we find ourselves challenged by some unexpected event. Is that just Murphy's law, or is that the direct work of the Devil?
3. Jesus exercised a great number of different kinds of power in His life. Certainly, His miracles of healing and feeding thousands as well as His teaching and preaching were powerful forces.
4. Commitment to a religious authority can be very positive or very negative! The disciples eventually turned the world upside down by their commitment to spreading the good news. In the Dark Ages, the Waldenses were committed to making the Scriptures known throughout Europe. Their enemies were just as committed to destroying them! Christians are committed to spreading the gospel throughout the world. Muslims are just as committed to spreading Islam. Is there a difference between the commitment of someone who gives his life as a Christian missionary and the commitment of someone who blows himself up in the name of God?
5. Religion is a very unruly force! Many governments have tried to control religious belief because they recognized that if people have commitments to other authorities besides their government, it can lead to real conflicts. So, what is the highest authority in our lives?
6. Is the use of political power and political authority always evil? Why did Jesus so strongly resist the efforts to make Him king?
7. Read John 6:1-15 and *Desire of Ages* 377, 378, 718, 719. All of the disciples had been longing for an opportunity like the feeding of the "five thousand" to ignite the crowds to take Jesus—if necessary, by force—and to make Him king. Judas particularly had a plan and he was determined to force Jesus to be king.
8. But God's miracle-working power and His teaching and preaching are for the purpose of relieving suffering and providing evidence about the truth and not for exerting coercive force. Judas was bitterly disappointed when his plans were foiled. He wanted to use Jesus—and the power that Jesus had—for his own purposes. Judas' desire for authority, power, and money eventually destroyed him.
9. Why is power so attractive to human beings?
10. The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, **Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it**

cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. {DA 22.1}

11. Read John 12:1-6. Mary was probably not invited to this banquet. (Luke 7:37) While she was still a young woman, her uncle Simon, who was giving the banquet in honor of Jesus, had led her into sin. (*ST* May 9, 1900 par. 9,15; *DG* 238.2; 239.4) Probably to avoid shaming the family, she left home and moved to Magdala where she became a prostitute and eventually was demon-possessed. But then she ran into Jesus who cast out her demons and invited her to follow Him. (Luke 8:1-3) She had heard the statements from Jesus about what was going to happen in Jerusalem. She was also very familiar with the desire of the disciples to become a part of a political kingdom. Her brother, Lazarus, had been raised to life by Jesus. (John 11) She was enormously grateful for everything Jesus had done for her. She was hoping that Jesus was about to be crowned king, and she wanted to be the first one to honor Him. So, she brought a gift fit for a king.
12. Judas, who carried the disciples' moneybag, was not happy with that extravagant gift! He pretended to be concerned for the needs of the poor. And he grumbled over the use—or misuse as he perceived it—of all that money (more than one year of wages for a common laborer). Compare the motives of Mary and Judas.
13. 1 Timothy 6:10 (*KJV*) records those famous words, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Why do you suppose that is true? Why is greed such an enormous challenge for so many people. What kind of pressure does greed put on you in your activities of daily living? Does greed prevent you from being a true disciple? Does greed destroy your influence with others around you?
14. If someone today used a large sum of money to honor another person for what he/she had done for him/her, would you be inclined to say the money should have been used for better purposes?
15. Think of other stories in the New Testament involving money. Were the widow's mites wasted? (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:2-4)
16. Read 2 Kings 1:10-12. Why did God send fire to destroy the soldiers sent by the king? Was Elijah involved in any way? After the experience in 1 Kings 18, Elijah, along with those who assisted him, killed 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. Does that seem like the God-like thing to do? Have you ever wished that you could call down fire from heaven to destroy a competitor or an enemy?
17. Read Luke 9:51-56. While traveling through Samaria—not far from where the fire was called down "by" Elijah on his enemies in his day—Jesus and His disciples were "refused welcome" by a Samaritan village. Do you ever feel jealous for Jesus? How should we appropriately respond when we have such feelings? Why was it appropriate to send fire down from heaven in Elijah's day but not in the days of Jesus?
18. Why is it so difficult for us to love the sinner and hate the sin? God has, at times, used enormous force to accomplish certain tasks: the flood, the firstborn in Egypt, etc. Why doesn't

God give us the authority and the power to do such things?

19. Human beings are emotional creatures. Peter was known among the disciples as giving the emotional response to almost every situation. In the story recorded in Luke 22:33,34 (*GNB*), Peter responded to Jesus' comments in an emotional way saying, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you and to die with you!" As we all know, those words were soon forgotten.
20. Review that whole story in light of Peter's life. He helped prepare for the Passover meal. He did not want Jesus to wash his feet. Then he wanted to be washed completely. He insisted that he was ready to follow Jesus, even to death. Then he tried to cut off the head of the high priest's servant but managed to cut off just his ear! Then he ran for his life. Then he went to Annas' courtyard. He was allowed inside because of his friendship with John. But he tried to keep himself separate and distinct from Jesus. He was not ready to identify himself with a Man on trial! He denied Jesus three times, and then the cock crowed. Then he ran back to the Garden of Gethsemane and threw himself on the ground believing that, in effect, his life was over. Two days later he raced to the tomb. He could not believe that Jesus' body was gone. He thought it was impossible that He could have risen from the dead. Finally, when Jesus appeared to the 10 disciples, he believed. The next time Jesus challenged him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he was much more modest in his claims. A few weeks later, he stood boldly before the Sanhedrin and accused them of killing the Messiah. (Acts 4:8-22) What can we learn about our emotional "roller coasters" from these experiences of Peter? How often do we make rash promises; then fail; and then make more reasonable statements about our commitment?
21. When faced with unexpected pressures or challenges, how often do we just run? To where did most of the disciples run from Gethsemane on that Thursday night? As a newspaper reporter, if you could have interviewed each of the disciples right after the Gethsemane experience, what do you think they would have said? Why do you think Peter and John followed the crowd at a distance and entered the courtyard of Annas while the other disciples disappeared? Did any of them at that point really believe that Jesus would allow Himself to be crucified?
22. Jesus had repeatedly warned them about what was going to happen. Why couldn't they hear and understand His words? (Read especially Luke 18:31-34) When the mob, led by the high priest himself, approached Gethsemane, did they plan to arrest Jesus' disciples as well as arresting Jesus? (Compare Mark 14:51,52)
23. Have we ever been challenged, pressured, or disappointed by church leadership?
24. How can we know for sure if we are having the right reaction to any given challenge or pressure? Is it better to be emotionally involved and overreact or to sit passively no matter what happens?

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