

“A TRUE-BLUE FOLLOWER”

Leviticus 19:11-19a, I Thessalonians 5:12-24, Matthew 5:43-48

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“The name Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, will forever be associated with discipleship, because discipling others became the passion of his life. It happened like this. One day early in his ministry Dawson was driving along and he saw a young man walking down the street on his way to caddy at the golf course. Trotman often picked up hitchhikers, for it gave him a chance to witness.

“The hitchhiker on this day swore as he got into the car; Dawson reached into his pocket for a gospel tract and handed it to him. The man glanced at the tract, then looked at Dawson and said, ‘Haven’t I seen you somewhere before?’

Dawson looked at him closely. As it turned out, the two men had met on the same road the previous year. Dawson had witnessed to him, led him to Christ, and had ‘sped on my merry way’ confident that another soul had entered the kingdom.

“But now, a year later, there was no more evidence of the new birth in this young man than if he had never heard the gospel.

“After I met this boy the second time on the way to the golf course, I began to go back and find some of my ‘converts.’ I want to tell you, I was sick at heart.’

“Motivated by that experience, Dawson Trotman began working on follow-up, on developing ways of mentoring those whom he was winning to Christ.

“Before, I had forgotten to follow up on the people God had reached through me,’ he later said. “But from then on I began to spend time helping them ... You can lead a soul to Christ in anywhere from twenty minutes to a couple of hours. But it takes from twenty weeks to a couple of years to get him on the road to maturity.” (Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1975])

It takes diligence and hard work to be a follower of Jesus Christ! And it takes diligence and hard work to reproduce followers of Jesus Christ! If it was only necessary to share the Gospel message with another person once to completely convert them into a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, then most

Americans and many around the world would be faithful in their walk with the Lord Jesus. However, a person needs to be not only led into faith in Jesus Christ, but also to be nurtured into a lifestyle of faithful living in Jesus Christ. And it takes a long time to develop a mature Christian through discipleship.

Discipleship is vital in the growing of Christians from infancy to maturity. And that requires the dedication and faithfulness of those who want to see their family, neighbors and friends find themselves in the kingdom of God, because of the need for careful nurturing in the Gospel message of Jesus by them. It demands each Christian living their faith genuinely and openly before all others in order to become a witness of the difference Jesus makes in us when we put our trust in Him as our Savior. It takes each one of us to not only profess that WE are a follower of Jesus Christ, but to also to diligently LIVE that faith before others so that they can see the difference in us. If we are Christians in name only (CINO's), hiding our faith and never telling another person about the love of Jesus Christ and never helping another person grow in their own faith, it is just like we have never put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We have to put feet on our faith and really live it, if we are truly a follower of Jesus.

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus called the first of His disciples to “*Come, follow Me ... and I will send you out to fish for people.*” Jesus called these men as His disciples so that as they could grow in their faith in Him. Then Jesus sent them out to those around them to instruct and guide them into faith in Him, too. Jesus does not want us to be secret followers of His, keeping His teachings unseen or unknown by others. Jesus calls us to become faithful witnesses for Him of the transformation that takes place when we allow Jesus to become our Savior and Lord. So we are called to be passionate in the way that we worship the Lord Jesus Christ, to be extravagant in the way that we love others, and to be bold in the way that we live our faith wherever we go; 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 12 months out of the year, and for as long as God allows us to live.

“In her little book, *Kept for the Master's Use*, hymn-writer Frances Ridley Havergal says: *Of ourselves we may have but little weight, no particular talents, or position, or anything else to put into*

the scale, but let us remember that again and again God has shown that the influence of a very average life, when once really consecrated to Him, may outweigh that of almost any number of merely professing Christians. Such lives are like Gideon's three hundred, carrying not even the ordinary weapons of war, but only trumpets and lamps and empty pitchers, by whom the Lord wrought great deliverance, while He did not use the others at all. For He chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."¹

So everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be their Savior, is called into the workforce of the Christian church so that we might make disciples of all people. Disciples of Jesus are not just born, but are made through the diligent and intentional efforts of those who would follow Jesus' commands and teach those around them to follow Him, too. It calls for us to seek God's sanctifying grace in our own lives so that we might share it with those around us as we live our faith before them.

Today we heard some of the laws of the Lord found in Leviticus 19. They were given to the people of Israel so that they might stand out as being radically different than those surrounding them. Some of the laws reflect the original 10 Commandments given during the Exodus when Moses received them on Mt. Sinai. But others are added so that those who would follow the Lord God Almighty would be very distinctive in the way that they lived. These very common-sense laws were to mark the followers of God from all the other nations, as well as to distinguish those within the community of the Israelites who were seeking the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

The laws of God are vastly different than the laws of the world, so when we live according to the laws of God, people notice the difference. And that is our first witnessing point to others. Our life in Christ makes us different people that have such high qualities that they are noticed by the general public. Sometimes that brings scorn and ridicule, but most often those qualities are highly valued.

And that is the encouragement of the apostle Paul, who highlighted those same qualities to the people in Thessalonica. He says, "*Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters,*

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 292-293)

warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else” (I Thess. 5:13b-15). Those certainly are not the ways of the world. So when we live according to those ways, we stand out as being very different than the world, and people notice, and then after they see the lives we live they begin to want what we have, thereby opening up the door to telling them about Jesus. Your daily life is a great witness to what you believe and whom you profess as your God.

Let me give you an example of how this happens. “In 1939 the first Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) workers went to Doro in southern Sudan to share the gospel with the Mabaan people, who had never heard of Christ. Years passed, and three SIM workers were buried at Doro, and more than fifty worked there diligently from 1939 to 1964, when they had to leave because of civil war. When they left there were less than a handful of baptized believers in good standing. But when they were able to return later to the Sudan, the SIM workers were amazed to find large groups of witnessing believers with nearly three hundred waiting to be baptized.”²

Once we have found ourselves in the family of God, having repented of our sins, claiming Jesus Christ as our Savior, and then living under God’s sanctifying grace, our lives change to become living witnesses of Christ. But it takes diligence to grow in faith. Faith does not just automatically increase; it takes careful and steadfast effort to allow Jesus to make the changes in us so that we are a pure and holy people. Without daily devotions, regular Bible study, weekly worship and continuous prayer, our lives easily revert back to following the things of this world rather than the things of the Lord. And that’s the importance of the church, to help people find that deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, to teach God’s truth, and to mentor one another to become disciples of Jesus Christ, who then go out and make more disciples for Jesus Christ.

You see, as we grow closer to Jesus, we become more and more like Jesus. And as we grow

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 290)

more like Jesus, we begin to see like Jesus, think like Jesus and long for the hearts of men and women like Jesus. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we actually allow Jesus to come into us so that we, a little at a time, become Jesus to our world around us. By this we can inspire and encourage others to find hope in following God's laws and commands, as we model Jesus before those around us. That is God's intent for each one of us as we follow our Lord. The question is, though, will we do it?

“Author Robert Fulghum sometimes, when attending lectures, would respond in an unusual way to the speaker's final, routine words: “Are there any questions?”

“Yes,’ Fulghum sometimes says. ‘What is the meaning of life?’

“People generally laugh and gather their notes, prepared to leave as the speaker smiles and shrugs off the question. But one day, to his surprise, Fulghum got a serious answer. It was from Dr. Alexander Papaderos, a Greek philosopher and the founder of an institute on the island of Crete. At the end of lecture one day, Dr. Papaderos asked, ‘Are there any questions?’

“Yes,’ said Fulghum, ‘what is the meaning of life?’

“The other attendees whispered and chuckled and prepared to leave, but Dr. Papaderos held up his hand. ‘I will answer your question,’ he said. He drew from his pocket a small round mirror, about the size of a quarter. As he was growing up during the war, his family was very poor, and he had few toys. One day he found the broken pieces of a mirror, left over from the wreck of a German motorcycle. He tried in vain to piece the bits together, but finally ended up discarding all but the largest piece.

“This one,’ he said, holding it higher. ‘And by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine - in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

“I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do in my life...

“With what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of this world - into the black places in the hearts of men - and change some things in some people.’

“Having said that, Dr. Papaderos took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them in Robert Fulghum’s face.”³

That’s the call of every follower of Jesus Christ. We are to live in such a way that we reflect the Light of Christ into the darkness of our world so as to change a part of it. The darkness of the world leads us into despair and destruction, but the Light of Jesus brings us into hope and life. If we will but take up the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, let it live and grow within us, then reflect the love and peace of Jesus from us into the world, others will be changed by it and find their way out of the darkness, into the daylight of God’s great love. But we must be intentional about it.

That’s Jesus’ challenge for us. Matthew 5:43-48 give us His instructions. Listen to what we are to do. (READ Matthew 5:43-48)

It can be so easy to hate our enemies, to hate those who disagree with us or do things that hurt us. It can be so easy to love only the ones who love us back and turn our backs on those who spitefully use us or malign us. It can be so easy for us to follow the world’s advice to repay evil for evil and get the revenge that we feel is worthy of the wrongs that have been done to us. It can be so easy to fall in line with all that the world presents as good and right, thereby give up the things of the Lord and live only by what feels right with us. But what good would that do? How would that make a difference in the dark places of the world? How would we be able to show the love of God, or help others find the love of God? It doesn’t happen by living according to the ways of the world.

Jesus calls us to live extraordinarily different than the world so that His light might illuminate the darkness around us and we thereby change our surroundings by living the way He instructs us to live.

Listen to this: Vance Havner tells us, “*God is faithful, and He expects His people to be faithful. God’s Word speaks of faithful servants, faithful in a few things, faithful in the least, faithful in the Lord,*

³ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 262-263)

and *faithful ministers. And they all point up to that day when He will say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'*

What terrible times we have in our churches trying to keep people faithful in attendance and loyalty! How we reward and picnic and coax and tantalize church members into doing things they don't want to do but which they would do if they loved God! The only service that counts is faithful service.

*"True faith shows up in faithfulness. Not everyone can sing or preach, but all can be faithful."*⁴

Jesus is inviting us to be His true-blue faithful servants who genuinely love Him and diligently seek to follow His commands. As we grow closer in our relationship with Jesus, our lives become more and more righteous because we are seeking to be like Him. And from there, we can begin to live our lives under the sanctifying grace of our Father God and use every moment to shine the light of Jesus Christ into the hearts and lives of those around us.

Every encounter we have with another person is the chance to shine Jesus' light onto them. It could be the bank teller who's helping us with a loan, or when we go to take money out - tell them Jesus loves them and ask if you can say a prayer for them. I was once in the grocery store, in line to check out, and this guy two folks ahead of me was balling out the cashier for something that was way outside of her responsibility. He was just nasty, and as he left, the cashier was obviously shaken and hurt. Well, the next in line just wanted to get out of the store, but when it was my turn to check out, I asked her if I could pray for her. It took her by surprise, but she said "yes." I looked at her and I asked God to bless her life, to give her the confidence she needed to do her work well, and to guide her in all of her ways so that she could do her best serving folks like us. I asked God to calm her heart and mind, and to be with her, giving her His peace. And by the time I was finished, those in line after me were all crying, because I cared enough to touch the life of this young checkout cashier in a way that blessed her. It was only a minute prayer, but it touched her, and all those behind me, with the love of Christ Jesus. And all it cost me was the courage to stand up as a witness for Jesus Christ. The light of Christ in a dark place.

⁴ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 292)

All of us can do that! We don't need to know the person, but all we need to do is to have the heart of Jesus to touch the lives of those around us. On another day, there was a man really struggling with 3 big paper bags of groceries right out here on 9th street as I was going to my car for lunch. Seeing his need for help, I went over and asked if I could help him out. Surprised, he said, "Sure!" I walked him all the way down to the Park Plaza apartment buildings; It wasn't really all that far at all. It only took about 5 minutes of my time. And as we got to the apartment building, I asked if I could pray for him. Reluctantly he said "yes," so I prayed for him. I've never seen that man again, but I was able to touch his life by shining the light of Jesus Christ in the darkness of his world for just a few minutes. Did it change his life? God only knows. But I was faithful to do the right thing to help him out and giving him encouragement and a blessing.

I can tell you folks, people notice when we live for Jesus! They will see it in the way we work. They will see it in the way that we live. They'll see it in the way that we speak. They'll see it in the way that we love others. And THEN we have the chance to tell them about Jesus. We've got to show them that we care about them first, and THEN we can draw them into the light of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship starts with our willingness to go beyond ourselves to let the light of the love of God through Jesus Christ shine out of us into the lives of those around us. If we live only like the rest of the world lives, no one will take us seriously, and they'll just brush off any attempt for us to lead them into faith in Jesus. But as we live among them, and love them, and pray for them, and care for them, they will notice, and the darkness will become illuminated with the love of Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for calling us as Your disciples of Jesus. Thank You that Jesus hasn't given up on us, but continues to call us to "*follow Me... and I will make you fishers of people.*" Give us the courage to grow closer to Jesus as we study, pray and worship. Then, provide us with the bravery to follow Your command to make disciples of all nations, beginning with the person right next to us. Open our eyes and hearts to see the ones You are drawing us too, so that we can touch their lives with the love of Jesus Christ. This we pray in the powerful Name of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. AMEN.