

"Being a Follower of Jesus!"

Key Verse: "Firmly and trustworthily, firmly and trustworthily, (KJV: verily, verily... Gk: amen, amen [doubled for effect]...) I say to you, When you were younger, you did whatever you wanted and went wherever you wanted to go: but when you are older, you will stretch out your hands and others will direct you and take you places you don't want to go. This He spoke, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him, "Follow me." Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following... and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he lives until I return, what is that to you? You follow me... John 21:18-23

Introduction

What an awesome passage of scripture... so loaded with Truth! Who can get by the pre-colon phrase of the very first sentence without being overcome by the reality of *our own* self-rule struggles!

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, When you were younger, you did whatever you wanted and went wherever you wanted to go:"

[I have lived my life my own way, doing what I wanted, whenever it suited me, by choice and with pride! In step with the world order of things, I was singing "I did it my way." I called my lifestyle aggressive, dominant, bold, strong, decisive, cavalier, independent, free, self-made and sufficient, all "desirable" qualities. Never once did I consider the words: stupid, selfish, short-sighted, bound, deceived, anti-God, irrefutably wrong! I brought the baggage of my self-rule with me into my Christian life, thinking it was especially okay now that I was bringing my "strengths" to bear on doing "good stuff" for God! It has only been since following, rather than running out ahead of Jesus ("let's go this way Lord and this way and this...") that I have perceived the abject ignorance of my directing! It is only since beginning to serve rather than being a master commanding ("Do this and this and this...") that I have come to know the "youth-full lusts" of my sins of self rule! It is only since yielding control (yielding and yielding control are two very different things!) to the Holy Spirit rather than orchestrating life from the caverns of my mind ("I think we should go and do and get...") that I have come to taste the bitterness of my ignorance. It is only since wanting, more than life, to please my Heavenly Father rather than myself, that I have come to know the joy and sweet release promised to all control-yielded believers! The world honors independence; Jesus freed us for dependence on God!]

I reel from the *incarnational* applications of the promise to Peter regarding his "future" state!

"but when you are older, you will stretch out your hands and others will direct you and take you places you don't want to go. This He spoke, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

[Necessary note: Many readers, students and teachers interpret this as a negative comment! While it could be, if read like a newspaper, it is rich with nuggets of heart warming truth!

To the man whose "leadership" had failed so often... Peter had failed to control Jesus with his influence (Mt 16:21-23 "Get behind Me Satan."), he failed to control violent circumstances with his strength (Mt 26:51-52 "I can't

protect You.”), and he failed to control himself with human courage (Mt 26:69-75 “I do not know Him.”)... but as Jesus speaks these words, and they slowly sink in, sparks must have flown upwards from his heart igniting his mind with the realization he was being forgiven, restored, and re-commissioned! The Risen Savior is making a raid on Peter's broken life! “You're going to be caring for my sheep Peter; you're going to be part of the kingdom again! Your flesh might not like the way things go and where you end up, but you're going to be part again, and effectively, glorifying God until, even with, death!”]

Historical Note: Tradition says that Peter was crucified at the end of his life (AD 64) upside down because he didn't count himself worthy to be crucified the same way as the Lord. There is, however, nothing to suggest that he experienced a life in bonds, suffering the whims of others (that was Paul's life, which he willingly embraced!).

This whole thing comes alive for me the more I “serve” our Father's desires! The more I grow-up in the Lord, I realize life is not “living for me,” but first, for Him and then for others! And as I stretch forth my hands unto Him (true worship) and others (true loving service) I am being “more and more directed” by the Lord, and others' needs, and find myself doing things and going places I never would have conceived of, or chosen, for myself! I am experiencing Peter's wonder (Paul's too), and every other servant-believer's awe, of how death to self-rule brings glory to God!

Paul's description: “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord; and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death works in us, but life in you. 2Corinthians 4:5-12

I have empathy with the man being led by Jesus away from self-mastery, personal waywardness and self-gratification as he looks back and asks, “But what about him (them/that)?”

And when he had spoken this, he said to him, “Follow me.” Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following... And Peter seeing him said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”

*I am pierced by Peter's situation. **He is in the process of being restored – but he is still looking back, “What about him?”** and Jesus words, “**What is that to you?**”*

*What does emerging from, and standing against, my sins have to do with others? Why do we always want to compare with others and set ourselves up for the (further) compromise it breeds! The echo grows louder in my ears with every year of service; “You follow me. You Follow Me! YOU FOLLOW ME! **YOU FOLLOW ME! YOU FOLLOW ME!**”*

In the text, Peter is instantly put in mind of his self-will which is the source of his weakness and *individuality* (our “uniqueness” should not stem from self-will but from God's creative plan for each of us!)! In his return to Jesus, he is being told that from

this step onward, his future is sure, he is no longer his own, his strength will give out (hallelujah!) and he will be without control. Gratefully, Jesus elevates him from thoughts of "dismal death" to true life by injecting "this is how you will glorify God!"

We have been commanded by the Holy Spirit to flee (pneugo: escape) our youthful lusts... which includes "doing what we want when we want where we want while we want it!" In place of fulfilling our own desires we are to yield control of ourselves to "His good pleasure," pleasing Him whom has called us out of darkness and purchased us with great price! In place of following our own desires we are to follow Jesus, and to follow (dioko: pursue) righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart! Once saved we are not supposed to be "about us" anymore but about our Father's Kingdom (and His Rule)! Up to the time of salvation He may be chasing us around, cleaning up after us, protecting us, herding us in the direction of finding Him, but once saved, we are called to follow Him!

Jesus final words, "If I will that he..." tells us that He has personalized thoughts and a perfect will for each of His servants! The Bible says His thoughts are higher than ours are... And those thoughts are plans for good and not for evil!

In The Beginning There was God... and it was all about Him!

In the beginning of the church it was all about Him! He was everything! Everyone wanted Him, and everyone who believed wanted to be like Him! From the beginning of the church Jesus intended for people coming to a life of faith to be instantaneous "followers" of Him, "*Never being where He isn't and always being where He is!*" The disciples (Mt 4:19; 9:9), the rich young ruler (Mt 19:21), the all-too-busy and involved people of his day (Mt 8:22; 16:24), all those who were (and are) His sheep were to hear His voice and follow Him! (Let the image of the Shepherd and sheep fill your mind! Watch what the sheep do as the Good Shepherd walks away toward the "upper slopes," speaking to them as He goes!)

While many might say they are "following Him" from the moment of their salvation, modern men are not so immediately submissive nor as mentally prepared as our 1st century counterparts to abandon "all else" for the sake of the Kingdom. We are quick to say one thing and then do another... to say the Christian world is made up of "true followers" is not accurate!

First Century believers saw Him, accepted Him, followed Him, imitated Him, and by doing what He did – they comprehended the Kingdom, and became extraordinary witnesses of Him! We have changed that simple order and have added a few hamstringing "extras" that now hobble the church!

Now, we see Him, accept with assurance our insurance, then strive to comprehend Him and His kingdom over a conveniently scheduled period of time before agreeing to fully enter into a service agreement. We want a full explanation of benefits, of the possible changes and potential consequences before we will make the commitment to "follow along." We want discussion, personal input, our suggestions and opinions to be considered and testimony from others actually doing the job before we'll sign up. We want to know how much training we will receive before asked to do the job on our own, who are "supervisors" are, who our "helpers" will be, how long the job will last, and what sort of package we can expect at the end!

The modern model is that we come out of the world through salvation, over the process of time and by mental engagement in study (equivalent roughly to pre-K through college years) we *become* a disciple (student). Then properly prepared we do a short and hopefully productive tour of duty for God! Jesus model was that we be saved from death by conversion, and as one newly-alive, we follow Him, imitate Him and perceive the kingdom of God in it's depths throughout a lifetime of service!

[Note: In our modern case: if you are one of the "special ones" called to a life of "ministerial service" you study a little more than everyone else and that basically makes you a super-disciple, capable of leaping tall obstacles in a single faith bound, and teacher of the rest! Generally, Pastors are selected from the top of the "disciple pool" and taught to bring more people out of the world, into salvation, and into the same mind model. This mind-centered mentality has crippled us! That "Get saved (a very emotional experience) and fill up your head (a very intellectual pursuit)" Christianity is far away from the "Get-saved and learn as you Get-going" life of the Holy Spirit minded and controlled, wonderfully chaotic, turn the world upside down, signs-and-wonders first century church!]

The mind-focused part of our discipleship training should come very quickly, and as we begin experiencing life in God as a follower of Jesus! New believers should be taught from the moment of new-birth that life with Christ begins with *living with Christ, never being where He isn't, always being where He is!* I can't prove it from scripture as a specified amount of time, but all the training a person should need to get their *Bible basics* in could be taught in a matter of weeks, maybe months, at the outside a year! [Yes, the disciples had three years with Jesus, but they didn't have the Holy Spirit to give light to their darkened understanding! And look how quickly they got started ministering once He came and brought them the fire!]

Life as a Christian is not just knowing stuff about Him, but knowing Him, loving Him, following Him! The world is populated with churches where the congregations are great repositories of knowledge about the Kingdom, but it's all head knowledge! They know much about the kingdom and little of the King, just like Jesus-day Pharisees and Saducees! Discipleship was never the goal of spiritual development, "Now I have a diploma, therefore I am somebody!" It was meant to be the beginning of spiritual growth! "Go and make disciples of all nations" is the beginning of Spirit-led experience! Once you come into the kingdom and get your bearings (we call them basics) you're supposed to get out there behind Jesus, never being where He isn't, always being where He is, doing the will of God!

So, Where Is (And Isn't) He?

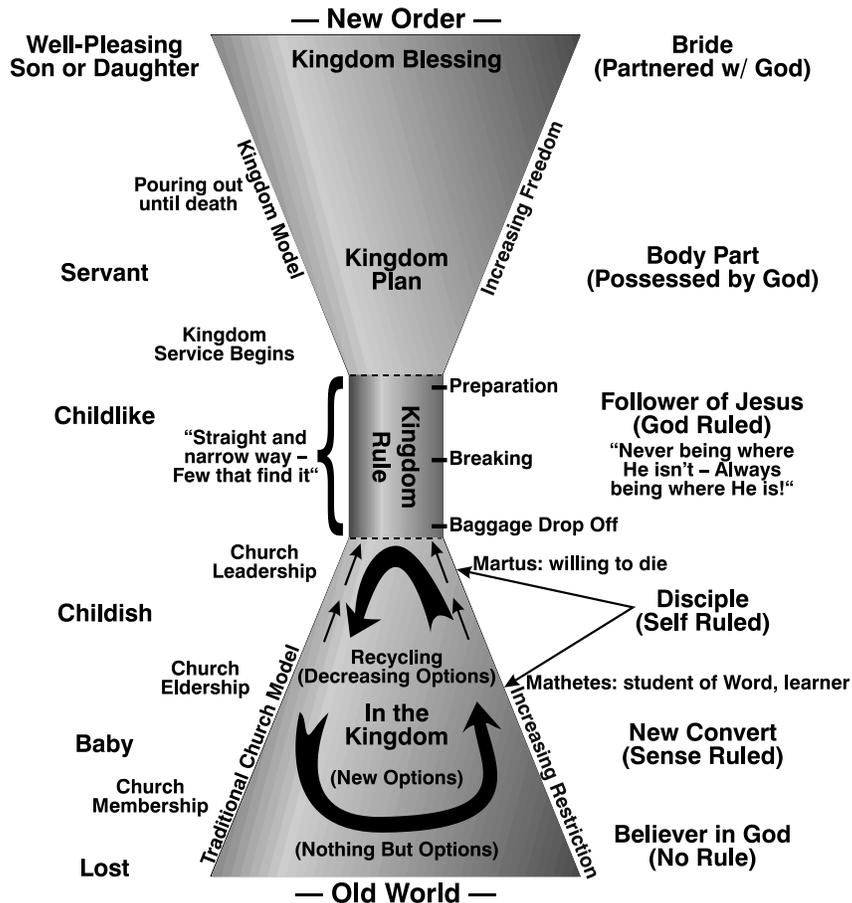
He is doing the will of God! He is always in His Father's presence! He is always in communication with Him! He is walking among His people, talking and touching and healing them! He is always present in times of trouble! He is at the side of those being forsaken! He is ever ready to forgive and rescue! He is on the job, fulfilling His role as an ambassador of God! He is bent over in service to all those who are in need, even those who aren't aware of what they need, and even those who aren't easy to serve! How about us? Are we His followers? If we are then great things are happening all around us, in us and through us... just like it happened to Him!

Knowing where He is, where isn't He? He isn't holed-up at home killing time with the TV/video/radio/playstation. He isn't curled-up in the corner of the house or laying-up in bed reading His way into a vicarious life experience. He isn't consumed with hobbies or sports or anything that attracts His attention away from His primary role and assigns value to him that isn't lasting. He isn't counting His money and storing it up for a rainy day so that He's "independently" wealthy. He isn't off somewhere, isolated by fear, rejection, anger, cynicism, anxiety, uncaring, intimidation, sickness, discomfort, apathy, lust, selfishness, pride, the pride of life, misfortune, age, sorrow, sin, confusion, distractions, business, past performance, weariness, imagination, unforgiveness, bitterness, brokenness, weirdness, boredom or over-busy-ness, etc. If we look around, Jesus isn't a lot of places we find ourselves regularly! If we're not where He is, it's not because *He* moved away from us! As a child, Jesus did a lot of child things, but when He grew up He put away the child-ish ones.

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” 1Timothy 4:12

So, Where Are We?

There are several different pictures painted in the Word of God providing kingdom models of growth and progression. There is the “seed” model that germinates, grows, crowns, and bears fruit. There is the baby to child to adult to overseer model; the childish to childlike to servant to fully useful son or daughter model; The Believer in God → New Convert → Disciple → Follower of Jesus → Body part → Bride model. There is the no-rule to sense-ruled to self-ruled to God-ruled (Word) to Head-ruled (submitted) to God-partnered model. There is the initiation, information, imitation, integration, transformation, multiplication model. Actually we like them all and use them all from time to time... But our favorite model is what we call the double-funnel model. It's the combination of the traditional church leadership triangle (boo!) and the true-to-Jesus-likeness-of-the-servant triangle (yay!), both connected by the straight and narrow way (ouch!), which we fondly call “the tunnel of the funnel!”



According to our study and model, being a follower of Jesus (Never being where He isn't, always being where He is) is the beginning of a true Christian life of service! It's the point where having been saved, coming to knowledge of His love and sacrifice for us, climbing the ladder of understanding, desiring more and more of Him, we push through the “glass ceiling” of traditional church life and enter the tunnel of the funnel! It's where we first begin yielding control of ourselves to Him. It's where we enter the straight and narrow place! It's where we begin dropping off our baggage (there's little room for the past failures and triumphs, ever-present and swelling opinions, future dreams, goals, desires, etc. in such tight quarters). It's where we are brought into a

close, tight walk with others, being sharpened and scraped by one another until it gets so tight it's a single file walk before the Lord into His processing chamber! One by one He breaks off the hard pieces of our lives and everything that doesn't look like a "follower of Jesus!" Once broken and cleaned it's into the molding stage, where He makes us, by the beautiful touch of His hands, able ministers of the gospel, glorious imitations of Himself! When we become a follower of Jesus we begin doing what He says rather than what we say... we begin doing what He is doing rather than what we want to do... we are never again where He isn't and always where He is!

[Note: It's *from* this stage that we enter in to the Kingdom Plan He has for us all. Ask Peter what the "tunnel of the funnel" was like for him! But see Peter in the balance of his life of service to the Lord and you'll see it's all worth it to be faithful unto death! It's from this stage of "following Jesus" that we enter into the Kingdom blessing stage! Until the tunnel and the ever-widening triangle of service, spirituality and service and love and effectiveness are just hopes, desires and dreams!]

So, where are we? Are we in the Kingdom (Hallelujah! – No one can take away the joy that we all feel at being saved!), but still serving according to our will, trying to gain more knowledge to be released at some point in the future for service to the King? Does the glass ceiling that says we can't go any further because we aren't pastors or teachers or leaders in the church lock us in? Are we in the recycling swirl where we've gone as high as we can go in one church and now we are starting all over again someplace else? Are we "circling" around the church just looking for something, or someone, to feed on like birds of carrion (positive or negative) instead of soaring up and over the limitations to high places like the eagles we are? Are we caught in the whirlwind, spinning-without-control, bumping into people and things, causing damage to them and ourselves? If you are, you didn't follow Jesus there! He isn't there! He's gone on, *resurrected*, with Father! And being a follower of Jesus we shouldn't be where He isn't, we should be where He is, *resurrected and with Father!*

If we find we have failed as a follower, if we have come to the end of this day; our influence ignored, own strength exhausted, our courage drained, remember Jesus restoring words to Peter, "You come follow Me!" It's an invitation to a new start, with new power, for everyone who can answer "Yes" to Jesus question; "Do you love Me?"

Response To Truth

 **Are you willing, by prayer and consultation, to locate yourself on the diagram above?**

 **Regardless of where you find yourself, are you willing to press into Father's Kingdom Plan by becoming a true "follower of Jesus?"**

 **What is the definition of being a "Follower of Jesus?"** _____
