

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 29

As For You, Follow Me

by Sharon K. Griffie

In the natural, physical world we live in, there are many voices competing for a following. Some voices are good. Some voices are bad. They have one thing in common, the desire to gain your attention - even your loyalty. If you are in a jail or prison, you have been placed in an environment where you are exposed to numerous voices daily. People from all walks of life are constantly in your face. In this unsettled environment, resistance is not easy. Whether you are innocent or guilty of the crimes brought against you, you are in the system now. You are left to fend for yourself among the ranks of the incarcerated. Day in and day out, you have to deal with the oppressions, manipulations and demands of those seeking your allegiance.

Surrounded by the voices and the darkness of prison life, sometimes your emotions get the best of you, and you feel like you cannot handle one more day of this chaos. Oh - but wait, there is another side to the story. All is not lost. Your life isn't over just because you are in prison. Sooner or later, you discover that the voices echoing through the corridors of prison are not all bad. In the stillness of the night, when the lights are out, another voice suddenly breaks through. Though not a loud voice, it nevertheless shakes your whole being. The voice appears to be singling you out, bringing a personal message that you cannot deny. The voice is saying, *follow me!*

John 8:12 (NIV) - "...I [Jesus] am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Hearing those words impressed upon your mind, you get goose bumps. You begin to feel a huge burden being lifted off your shoulders. You do not have to be alone. You do not have to fend for yourself. A choice has been presented to you, the choice to follow the light of life. The voices of

confusion, which have been competing for your attention, no longer need to be a threat. You don't need to argue with those who aren't hearing the same message you are hearing. It's enough that you have heard the voice of Jesus calling, "*As for you, follow me.*"

Following Jesus is a magnificent lifetime journey. The details don't have to be laid out all at once. To do so would only spoil the value and the great joy to be discovered from walking in faith. Unfortunately, in my observation, there is a lot of emphasis by religious leaders on coming *to* Christ, but not enough emphasis on staying *with* Christ for the fulfilling journey ahead. Following Jesus is about getting to know him intimately as Lord and Savior; it's about becoming a disciple.

We have been sadly misled if we think that coming to Christ is all about *us* tapping into the power of Almighty God, so that we can have whatever we want, while we sit on the sidelines commanding God to bring it to us! God is disappointed when he sees people worshipping him as if he were a magician. Those who test God's love by demanding favors and gifts from him, only show their spiritual immaturity. The real sign of a spiritually mature person is one who maintains faith in God even when adversity strikes. We can learn from those, such as Peter, who have gone before us.

While standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (after His resurrection), Jesus spotted Simon Peter and the other disciples out in a boat, fishing. Make no mistake; Jesus was there on a mission! Not only did he want to fellowship and share breakfast with his disciples, but also there was something important he wanted to tell Peter. He wanted Peter to know that he still loved him and that he had not cast him out. More than anything, Peter needed to hear those words from the

Master. His heart ached because he knew he had messed up badly before Jesus went to the cross. Peter was guilty of pride. He had actually boasted that whatever the other disciples decided to do, he would never fail Jesus. He did fail Jesus, and his prideful words came back to haunt him. With the cross impending, Peter was asked three times if he was a disciple of Jesus, and three times he denied that he knew him. To have denied the Master was unthinkable! How could he have been so foolish? It brought great remorse to Peter's soul. Now, standing before Peter in his resurrected body, Jesus made it clear how much he loved Peter. Nevertheless, Jesus wanted to know if Peter was ready to love him at all costs.

John 21:14-17 (NIV) - *This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

Again, Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep"

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Perhaps to help him make amends for the times he had denied Christ, three times Jesus asked Peter the question, "Do you love me"? Each time he asked the question and received Peter's positive answer, he gave him a task to do. What does this say to us? With love comes responsibility. This is the key to discipleship. The one requirement of discipleship is that we love Jesus so deeply that we are willing to do whatever he asks us to do. No matter where we are or what we are doing at this very moment, Jesus is asking each

of us the same question, *Will you accept the responsibility that love demands?*

If our love for God is shallow, he can't trust us with much. I find it interesting that the people who seem the most baffled about their purpose in life are the ones who choose to walk a safe distance behind Jesus (not wanting to get too close). They seem to have no clue what Jesus wants them to do with their life. Yet, the answer is quite simple. We cannot casually follow Jesus (lag behind) and be in a position to know his will for our life. If we want to know what our purpose in life is, we need to seek his face, not his backside!

Jeremiah 29:12-14 (NIV) - *"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD..."*

The bottom line: When our relationship with God is motivated by our deep and abiding love for him, rather than by the things we hope to get from him - like Peter we will be able to say with conviction, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you!" And, Jesus will say, "Then do this...for me!"

Questions For Personal or Group Study:

1. Why do people test God's love for them? What does this testing of God's love reveal about their relationship with God?
2. According to the lesson, what is the real sign of a spiritually mature person?
3. Even though Peter messed up before Jesus went to the cross (denying him three times), Jesus still had confidence in Peter. He knew Peter could learn to love Him with all his heart. When you think of your own life, how would you rate your love for Jesus?
4. If our love for Jesus is shallow, He can't trust us with much responsibility. Do you find yourself avoiding a close relationship with Jesus, for fear he might ask you to do something you would rather not do?