
Discipleship Under Pressure



“If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan?” (Jer. 12:5, NRSV).

Seeing Through God's Eyes

INTRODUCTION

1 Sam. 16:7; Col. 1:24; 1 John 3:1

Are you a people watcher? Do your eyes gaze over the congregation as you sit in church? Do you watch people in the mall or while you're waiting in line at the grocery store or the cafeteria? Chances are Jesus was a people watcher, too. I wonder sometimes what the world must have looked like to Him while He lived here. He had great spiritual insight which helped Him to look beyond the false exteriors people always build to try to cover up their real selves.

For example, consider His choices for His 12 disciples. Four of them must have smelled like they had been working in a fish cannery. And two of them were the type to harbor a grudge so bad that if Jesus had given the word, they would have prayed for fire to rain down on their enemies. Another was a tax collector (people back then really hated tax collectors), and still another was in love with money. But He saw beyond all of these foibles. He saw what they could become through His grace as His disciples.

Four of them must have smelled like they had been working in a fish cannery.

The next time you find yourself observing people, try to look at them through God's eyes. Perhaps you will see people who need you to disciple them, just as Jesus disciplined the 12 apostles. Just as He disciplines

you. Here are some things to consider as you people watch:

1. "Every soul whom Christ has rescued is called to work in His name for the saving of the lost."¹
2. "How many of the wandering ones have you . . . sought for and brought back to the fold?"²
3. "When you turn from those who seem unpromising and unattractive, do you realize that you are neglecting the souls for whom Christ is seeking? At the very time when you turn from them, they may be in the greatest need of your compassion. In every assembly of worship, there are souls longing for rest."³

So, start looking at others with God's vision. And allow the Holy Spirit to use you to disciple those around you regardless of their age, gender, race, social status, or appearance. Doing so will relieve much of the pressure you might feel when it comes to helping others grow in Christ.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 191.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

If Only . . .

EVIDENCE

Matt. 4:18–20; John 1:35–37, 40, 43, 48

Have you ever thought to yourself, *Oh, if I only had the money, . . . if I only had the wisdom it took, . . . if I only lived in the right house . . . in the right city . . . in the right century. Oh, if only . . . then I'd be able to lead people to Christ and disciple them?* However, our texts for today tell us that we don't have to wait for just the right circumstances to do that.

Think about how Jesus gathered His first disciples. Did they have the right amount of money, the right amount of wisdom? Were any of them living in a mansion? Did any of them dress in a costly array of finery? Today's texts describe just what it was these disciples were doing when they first met our Lord. Some were walking on the dirt roads near the River Jordan. One was disciplined beneath a fig tree. Yet another one was disciplined while sitting at the city gate scamming the people as they entered Jerusalem, and some were fishing.

This is all evidence that Jesus and you can disciple anywhere, any time, under any type of circumstance. The place you are in is always the right place. The right time is always the time that is now.

Oh, if only . . . then I'd be able to lead people to Christ. . . .

It is also important to remember that Peter and Andrew already knew Jesus when He called them to follow Him (Matt. 4:18–20). He had talked with them previously (John 1:35–42), and they most likely had heard Him preaching, so they knew what kind of Man He was. In a similar way, the type of person you are witnesses to those around you. Are you polite, courteous, and kind so that when people learn you are a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, they will be attracted to your religion? What about those people who already know what church you belong to? Once you claim to be a Christian, the witnessing begins no matter how much money you have or what type of a house you live in.

REACT

What have you been thinking that you must have or be doing before you can disciple another person? Based on today's lesson, think of three specific ways you can disciple someone with what you already have or are already doing.

Pressure From Many Sources

LOGOS

1 Kings 18; Matt. 26:56; Luke 9:51–56; John 6:1–15; 12:1–6; 18:1–11; 21:15–19

Pressure From Authority (1 Kings 18)

During the famine, Elijah asked King Ahab for a meeting with all the Israelites. Elijah had a thought-provoking question for them, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21, NIV). Because he had confidence that God was with him, Elijah was not afraid to speak words of reproof to Ahab.

God is looking for men and women who will stand firm under pressure; who will not obey human policy at the expense of God’s law.

Pressure From Peers (Matt. 26:56)

The disciples became terrified when they witnessed Judas betray Jesus. They believed that all hope in Him as their King was gone. Jesus had warned them about their lack of strength, but they promised Him that they were strong. However, because they had slept through their prayer time, they did not have the spiritual strength needed for what lay ahead. Therefore, in

“He desires only voluntary service. . . .”

the pressure of the moment, instead of showing their support for Jesus, they panicked.

After Jesus’ ascension and the time of renewal in the upper room, “these very apostles who were timid as hares, grew to be bold as lions after the Spirit had descended upon them.”¹

Pressure From Religious Zealots (Luke 9:51–56)

When the disciples asked fire to consume the Samaritans, they were too zealous. However, Jesus’ methods of discipling do not include force. “He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love.”²

Pressure From Authority (John 6:1–15)

The disciples were doing their best to help with the crowds. But after several hours of listening to Jesus, they knew the people were hungry. When Jesus posed the question to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (verse 5, NIV), the disciples felt even more pressure to find a way to feed the

crowd. Jesus used this experience to teach them to trust in Him for the solution to problems.

“Perhaps this story speaks to you because you are following him as the disciples were. You are challenged by Jesus to see the needs of the people around you and you feel overwhelmed. When Jesus asks Philip where they can buy food for the crowd, he does it to make the disciples think. . . . [He] asks the disciples to do what they are capable of. . . . He himself provides for the needs of the people, not the disciples.”³

Financial Pressure (John 12:1–6)

Judas was the treasurer of the group. While he portrayed himself as a successful businessman, he really was using the position and some of their money for his own interests. Judas didn’t have love for the poor or for Mary. Instead, he was self-indulgent and loved the life of ease. When Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with costly ointment, Judas’s questions led the others to question her motives.

Pressure From Gangs (John 18:1–11)

Judas brought the “gang” of chief priests and Pharisees to the Garden. He had buckled under financial pressure and the desire to be accepted by the “gang.” But Jesus quickly took command, asking that the disciples be allowed to leave.

Because Judas had put himself under Satan’s power, he wasn’t able to see God’s way.

Pressure From the Still, Small Voice (John 21:15–19)

Jesus asked Simon Peter three times if he loved Him. And three times Simon Peter verbalized this love. But Jesus wanted him to really think about what that love would cost him, to think about his willingness to “feed my [Jesus’] lambs.” Was Simon Peter really ready spiritually? Could he accept the challenge? Can you?

REACT

1. When someone questions your Christian beliefs or asks why you are a Christian, do you try to change the subject? If so, why?
2. Do you feel pressure from someone who has authority over you? Do you have a hard time fulfilling other’s expectations? Why do you think this is so?

1. C. H. Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening Daily Devotional* for the Morning of March 27, 2006. Retrieved December 7, 2006 from http://bible.christiansunite.com/Morning_and_Evening/chme0327.shtml.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 487.

3. Sermon on John 6:1–5. Pete Edwards. April 27, 2003. Retrieved December 5, 2006, from <http://www.barclaychurch.org.uk/SERMONS/TEXT/SER.2003.04.27.html>.

Tuesday
March 4

God Will Not Fail

TESTIMONY

1 Kings 18

After the fire fell from heaven, "Elijah addressed Ahab, 'Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.' While Ahab went up to feast, Elijah went up from the fearful sacrifice to the top of Mount Carmel to pray . . . and most earnestly supplicated God to send rain. Six times successively he sent his servant to see if there was any visible token that God had heard his prayer. He would not become impatient and faithless because the Lord did not immediately give the token that his prayer was heard. . . . The seventh time [the servant] informed Elijah that there was a small cloud to be seen, about the size of a man's hand. This was enough to satisfy the faith of Elijah. He did not wait for the heavens to gather blackness, to make the matter sure. . . . He sends a message to Ahab by his servant, 'Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.'"^{*}

"Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. Then

the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:45, 46, NKJV).

From Elijah, we receive an example of strength in God and an example of tremendous trust and humility.

"This was enough to satisfy the faith of Elijah."

Like him, we need to stand firm for what we believe, while from Israel we learn to be wary of letting God's warnings pass unheeded and falling into deception.

REACT

1. Israel turned their backs on God and repeatedly refused to listen to His warning, yet God still sent Elijah to them and took them back when they repented. What does this tell us about God's character?

2. Do you think God was testing Elijah's faith by not instantly sending the rain? How does He test us in the same manner?

^{*} "The Laodicean Church." *The Review and Herald*, October 7, 1873.

Conquering the Fear of Discipling

HOW-TO

Josh. 1:6, 9, 18; Ps. 34:7; Prov. 9:10

I remember when I first joined the church at the age of 19. At that time, there was a major emphasis on getting out and knocking on doors to invite others to become Christians. Now for some people that may be a great way to do things. But there are those of us who are extremely shy even when it comes to sharing our faith.

For those of you who share this timid spirit, and even for those of you who are a bit outspoken, you may wish to consider the following suggestions to witness to those around you:

1. Begin by taking small steps. When I say goodbye to people, I say, "God bless you. Have a good day." I couldn't tell you how many times people have stopped walking away as they departed and returned to thank me for those words. In fact, the other day as I walked out of one of the rooms of the rehab center where I help take care of people, I spoke those words. The paraplegic gentleman in the bed and his wife both invited me to come back. This led to a spiritual conversation. Finally, I asked the couple what church they went to. They then asked me what church I attended. When I told them that I was a Seventh-day Adventist, they smiled and told me they were currently reading several of our books, and that they were both quite interested in prophecy.

There are quite a few
avenues to the soul.

I know a girl who takes care of people in a hospital as a nurse assistant. She's very shy about talking to people, so she hums hymn tunes. This has helped her to have several conversations with people who have recognized the tunes and who in turn began talking about them to her.

2. Choose another avenue to the soul. Who says the only way you can disciple others is to knock on their door? There are quite a few avenues to the soul. If you're not comfortable speaking, then choose something you are comfortable doing. Try writing, art, cooking, or even just a smile.

REACT

1. Are you the timid type when it comes to witnessing? If so, what are some ways you could take some baby steps out of your comfort zone?

2. What were some of the advantages in the way Jesus paired up His apostles as He sent them out to disciple? Though we're not told how He paired up His friends, how would you have matched up His disciples with one another, and why?

Thursday
March 6

“Anointing” Under Pressure

OPINION

Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–6

Have you ever felt that warm, tingy feeling and then the full “face flush” as you were either being singled out, or of your own choosing were moving to a point of “front and center”? Just put yourself in Mary’s place for a few minutes. She was attending a feast hosted by Simon (who had been healed of leprosy). Let yourself feel the intensity of the moment. Look around the room, and notice who is present and who is sitting on either side of Jesus. Somehow, Mary was able to separate herself from the “crowd” and move unnoticed to Jesus’ feet.

In my opinion, Mary had learned the lesson that we all need to learn as disciples. She had made a conscious choice to live in God’s kingdom. Having chosen for a while the offerings of the world, she knew the feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, rejection, and worthlessness those offerings can bring. Now she was choosing “that good part” (Luke 10:42, NKJV).

The people of Jesus’ time did not get it. They were looking for an earthly king with all the trappings. They were programmed into “doing.” But when they asked Jesus when His kingdom would come, He responded by saying that the “kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, “Here it is,”

or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21, NIV).

Mary obviously had figured this out. That is why she was able to kneel at Jesus’ feet with total disregard for what the others around her were doing, saying, and thinking. Herein lays the strength of a disciple under pressure. It is in Jesus that we find our true identity! It is in Him that we find our true self-worth! It is in Him that we have the assurance of eternal life!

She had made a conscious choice to live in God’s kingdom.

REACT

1. Take time to evaluate your own life. How much of what you do and say are still tied to Satan’s earthly kingdom? Does this world still have a hold on your life?

2. Thinking back to Abraham’s call, do you feel it is possible to totally separate yourself from this world and enter a “virtual kingdom,” thus living in God’s kingdom until He comes in the clouds of heaven?

3. Having embraced God’s kingdom, would it not be easier to be a “disciple under pressure” than to try to do it in our own strength?

Avoiding Discipleship?

EXPLORATION

Jer. 12:5

CONCLUDE

Ministry to others is not the easiest thing God asks us to do. People are so different and have so many flaws. Then there are the roadblocks from external sources, such as financial pressure or pressure from those who think that what we're doing is all wrong. If only we had more talent, more resources, more time, then it would be easier. God never promised it would be easy to reach out to others, but when we stand up for what we believe and totally trust Him to provide whatever resources we need, He will never let us down.

CONSIDER

- Ministering to any group of people you have never thought about helping because it may not seem comfortable.
- Trying to connect with people through outdoor activities such as nature walks or whitewater rafting, waiting for opportunities to talk about God.
- Composing a song about the blessings we can receive through mentoring and discipleship.
- Writing a short story about a person who, through totally relying on God, is able to overcome self-doubt and external pressures and successfully lead someone to experience Christ for the first time.
- Doing a poll of people in your area about their interests, then calculating what activity would have the best draw to bring people to a small group where you or someone you know could begin friendship evangelism.
- Reflecting on what might be stopping you from ministering to others. Pray to overcome these things in your life so you can serve God more fully.

CONNECT

Christ's Object Lessons, "Who Is My Neighbor?" pp. 376–389.
Ronald Alan Knott, ed., *College Faith*, "Dying by Denying, Daring to Declare," pp. 4, 5; Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People*.