

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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Luke 14:27 – “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*”



THE ELUSIVE GOD

Adam, created by God, lived a perfect life, requiring nothing, enjoying everything. Without God, he would have been desolate, attempting to traverse this vast earth, wondering why he was put here. Sound familiar? And, of course, because of Adam's sin, that was exactly where he ended up.

So, God created us in His image, for His own purposes. Through Adam, however, we were born in sin. Jesus came so that we could be forgiven and restored to the former place of perfection. Translation: We receive Jesus, take hold of salvation, turn wholly to God and allow him to carry us down the narrow road to holiness so that we can, by His grace, be in a position where He can fulfill His purposes in us. He is God. We are His servants. He sets out His purpose. We yield to it. He commands. We obey. He provides. We receive. He is holy. We, likewise, are to become holy. God is very near to us. Like Adam, He comes in the cool of the evening and fellowships with us. Life is exactly as it was intended to be. And

we, too, as did Adam in the beginning, rest in God. Sounds great, doesn't it?

“What?” you say. It's not working out like that for you? Why not?

What we have, unfortunately, been taught to think is that this wonderful example that was just shared is the ideal, but one, of course, that is unattainable, an ideal that no one can possibly reach. My friends, it is not unattainable. We just think that it is. God is near to us, according to His word, but we do not experience His nearness, in reality. What we mean is that we know that He is near to us (we must learn to speak the Christian language properly or no one will know that we are a Christian), but we don't really know that He is near to us. Do we? In fact, God really is elusive. Isn't He?

Where we make our mistake is that we justify our unwillingness to be all that God has called us to be by then stating, “And God understands.”

So now it's okay to water down the requirements to be a disciple. God understands. But, you see, there is a major difference between God understanding and God accepting. God does under-

stand. I am fully convinced, however, that He doesn't agree, but He does understand. But there is nothing in the Scriptures that indicates that God accepts these excuses as reasons not to serve Him the way He has called us to serve Him. God is very demanding. And He is a jealous God. **He will not stand for a rival in the hearts of any of His people.**

Matt. 7:13-“*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*”

Is the Christian road on which you are walking lonely? Or are all your Christian and secular friends there with you? If the Church is powerless and anyone can become a disciple just by saying the right words, or by going to a discipleship class, then no one is walking the narrow road. Let's not mince words here. Jesus was straightforward in His speech. This Scripture was stated in the context of a long dissertation that Jesus was giving to His disciples. He was talking about the correct way to live the Christian life:

loving your enemies, giving to those in need, praying, fasting, storing your treasures in Heaven, seeking first the kingdom of God, not judging others, and learning how to pray. He was not speaking to unbelievers. He was speaking to radical disciples. And in the next breath he told them which road to travel because He wanted them to know that most of His followers would not travel that road. They would follow human nature and take the easier road. The broad road, He told them, leads to destruction. That's pretty clear, isn't it? But the narrow road leads to life. And only a few find it.

Matt. 16:24-25- "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*"

How many Christians will lose their lives because they choose not to believe Jesus' words?

The only way to save your life is to yield it completely to Jesus. Otherwise, you are going to lose it. Now, there are, obviously, a lot of us that don't believe that because if we really believed Jesus' words, then to continue in the same direction we are going would cost us our lives, and we would stop. Or would we? Is that true? How many

Christians will lose their lives because they choose not to believe Jesus' words. **Or more correctly, choose not to obey Jesus' words.**

MAKING GOD LESS ELUSIVE

Matt. 19:21- "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me.*"

This one's a little harder, isn't it? As a Christian, you know that everything you have comes from the Lord. You've made that statement more than once and you believe it. Well, kind of. But how often have you proven it to the Lord? You say, "But wait a minute. If God spoke clearly to me and told me to send \$5000 to a charitable organization, I'd do it in a heartbeat!"

How do you know? How often do you hear the Lord speak to you? Do you hear the Lord speak to you every day? Even once per day? How many things is He saying to you that you never hear? It's not that He isn't speaking; it's that you aren't hearing!

Why wait for God to tell you. If it's a good thing to do, why don't you just write that \$5000 check? That puts a different twist on things, doesn't it?

If you throw yourself on God's mercy and choose to

take that walk down the narrow road to holiness, one of the things that will happen is that you will begin to hear the Lord more often. Soon, you'll have an opportunity to see what you'll do when the Lord tells you to write that large check. I'm smiling. You'll do okay because, by then, your heart will be changed.

Do we wonder why there is no power in the Church today? How can there be power in the Church when so many of her disciples are worldly. Jesus did not say, "Stay the way you are, don't change a thing, and follow me." He said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me."

God is elusive to the modern-day Church. We say He is real to us, but we are lying. He is not real to us. We say that we love Him, but we refuse to obey all of His commands. Jesus said if we love Him, we *will* obey all His commands. If we do not obey all His commands, we do not love Him. If that is the case with us; if we are not obeying His commands, then we don't love Him – regardless of what we say. Stop lying! God does not change. God has not moved. God is still waiting for us to become radical, because if we don't, He's going to continue to be elusive to us. It is an enigma, isn't it? But in fact, you see, it is we, the Church, who has become elusive. How could God be

elusive? He is unchangeable. But we can't admit that. We can't admit that it is we who have become elusive. Who, then, would want to come to our Church?

1 Thess. 1:5-*Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.*

The serious Christian needs to go to the next level of understanding God's word.

There are two ways to receive the word of God. One is simply hearing the words. The other is hearing and understanding. As a Christian, when we read God's word, when we hear God's word, and when we discuss God's word, there is revelation. The Bible teaches clearly that man cannot receive the word of God with his intellect. It is foolishness to those who attempt to do so. The Christian, having been washed in the blood of the Lamb, having been redeemed, reads the word of God and receives revelation. He understands it. That is a good thing. But even with understanding of the word of God, God can still seem elusive to him. Why? It is because what he understands is the surface knowledge of the Bible. It is the milk of the word, not the meat. The serious Christian needs to go to the next level of understanding God's word.

God's word also needs to be illuminated to him. That is the depth knowledge of the Bible. Paul told the Thessalonians that he did not just bring them revelation – they could get that on their own – he brought them the word in the power of the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction. Because, you see, God was not elusive to Paul. Paul was a radical disciple.

Illumination is granted, by the Holy Spirit, to those on whom He chooses to bestow it. Who are they? They are radical disciples or those in the process of becoming radical disciples.

Illumination of the word brings the word of God to life; it reveals the deep meaning of God's word to the Christian; it brings conviction of sin, worldliness, and lack of faith; it excites his spirit to reach out for more of God; and it causes him to let down his guard (self-righteousness, self-defense, ego), knowing that He who can see from one side of the universe to the other can easily see through the plastic shield with which he has covered his heart. **Without spiritual illumination, there can be no true powerful growth.** If you have not been illuminated, you are not growing. And you wonder why God is so elusive?

When the Church becomes filled with radical disciples, the power of the Holy Spirit will, once again, be found in

her. Those using words without meaning will be exposed; those coming to fulfill an obligation only will be challenged and will have to make a decision. Those playing games and those who are just as worldly as others who wouldn't set foot in a Church will be exposed. The Church will likely see its numbers dwindle. Why? Because when the fire of the Holy Spirit comes, it will burn away the dross from those who, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are bold enough to walk into it. But others will back away, not wanting their idols of money, worldliness and false religion to be singed by the fire. With what is left, God, who will no longer be elusive, will rebuild the Church and it will quickly burst at the seams with new growth because power from on high engenders true growth.

The fire of the Holy Spirit draws like a magnet those who have spiritual foresight, and frightens like a specter of danger those who only see carnally. And when it finishes cleansing the Church, that same fire will shine forth like a Fourth of July fireworks display, drawing others to its cleansing power. It was not God who was elusive. It was the Church who was elusive.

A powerless gospel changes us intellectually and emotionally and, for many of us, especially early

on, even spiritually. But a powerless gospel will never change us radically. We have been changed slightly but we are not “new”. The Bible, which was written by the hand of God, says we are to become “new”. Have “old” things passed away in your life? Are all things “new”?

CONFORMING TO THE IMAGE OF JESUS

Do we want to find this elusive God? He is standing so close to us that if there wasn't all the world's garbage and its noise, and the putrid stench of self-control stinking up the place, we could hear Him breathing. He's always been there and we've known it. We just haven't believed it.

God has not once, not for a second, taken his eyes off you. How long have you been a Christian? That's how long He has waited for you to meet His gaze. But are you afraid to meet His gaze? You know that God sees into the heart and even though you've allowed your self to lie to you, telling you what a good Christian you've been, deep down in the depths of your spirit, you know better. And you know that God knows, too. What you don't know is that it's worse than you think. Your self-righteousness has done a better job than you've given it credit for.

Look at God. Look deeply at Him. Meet the Lord's

gaze. You won't see the anger or the judgment you deserve; you will see love unlike anything you've ever known existed; love that will cause you to melt and to weep at His feet. He has waited so long for you. Will you continue on, lying to yourself? Can you do that now that you've met His gaze? You see, when you meet God's gaze, you have no alternative but to make a decision. **You throw yourself on His mercy, yield yourself completely to Him, and allow Him to dissect you and to begin to operate on you – or, you reject Him. Period!** There are no other choices.

God does not have to be elusive to us, dear friends. It is our choice. We can continue on being false Christians with no power or we can allow God to be God in our lives.

Will you begin to walk down the narrow road to holiness? You must throw yourself on God's mercy. That is where it starts. But it doesn't end there. Count the cost, but don't make the mistake, like Lot's wife, of looking back. There is nothing there worth looking back at. Trust God. He is trustworthy. He will carry you through.

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