

INSIGHTS

DENNIS BURKE MINISTRIES

The Way to a New Life

MAY / JUNE 2012



part
one

What kind of disciple are you?

Go deeper
as a follower of Jesus:
learn the 6 levels of discipleship.



— What to do when trouble comes



What kind of disciple are you?



part
one



Follow Him.

BY DENNIS BURKE

Every person chooses for themselves how closely they will follow Jesus and adhere to His Word. The depth of our Christian walk is solely up to us. God doesn't choose for one of His children to be closer to Him than another. He is completely accessible to every man and woman. We choose how intimate our walk with Him will be.

The following is an overview of the first four of six possible levels in our relationship with God, as reflected in the various followers of Jesus during His earthly ministry. We'll look at the last two levels in our next issue. By looking closely at these six different categories of Jesus' followers, we will better understand what makes the difference between the casual saint and the truly committed leader.

Level 1 Salvation

In First Corinthians 15:6, Paul said, "After that, he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep." Five hundred people were watching as Jesus ascended into Heaven. Five hundred people heard the final statements He made before He ascended into Heaven. These were the people who had believed and received Jesus as the Son of God and were following Him.

Salvation is a very inclusive word that includes deliverance, healing, and restoration—spirit, soul, and body. These 500 people believed in the miracles,

"It's shocking to realize that 380 of the 500 people who heard the last words of Jesus didn't follow His instructions!"



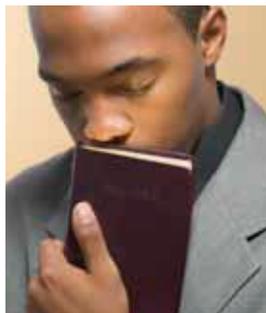
the promises, and the provision demonstrated throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. They were pursuing Jesus as disciples. They had used their faith to receive salvation

and possessed a real, personal relationship with God.

Level 2 Spiritual Hunger

As Jesus ascended to Heaven, He told the 500 to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father to come (Acts 1:4). Jesus was referring to what would happen on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, the Holy Spirit descended like a rushing mighty wind into the Upper Room where 120 people were gathered to pray, all of whom were gloriously filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:4).

Five hundred people saw Jesus ascend into Heaven, but only 120 gathered in that Upper Room weeks later on the Day of Pentecost. It's shocking to realize that 380 of the 500 people who heard the last words of Jesus didn't follow His instructions!



The 120 people who did show up on the day of Pentecost belong to the second category of discipleship: those whose spiritual hunger causes them to pursue the deeper things of God.

Believers who belong to this category

are in on the action of God's Kingdom—they're not just on the sidelines *observing* the action. Personally, I'm on the lookout for spiritually hungry people who fit this description, because these are the people God can use.

We must stay fresh and full of the Holy Spirit in order to be useful as one of His disciples. Our prayer life and pursuing His plan daily will keep our spiritual life vibrant and alive.

Level 3 Servers in God's Kingdom

In Luke 10:1, Jesus sent 70 of His disciples on an assignment: "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go."

These 70 disciples had put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Their choice to follow Jesus also revealed that they possessed a spiritual hunger for their own development and growth. But when Jesus called on these 70 disciples to go out on a mission, something suddenly shifted

"Personally, I'm on the lookout for spiritually hungry people who fit this description, because these are the people God can use."

in their roles: They moved into *service*. Suddenly they weren't only pursuing their own personal development; they were also motivated to lead *others* into a relationship with Jesus.

In other words, Jesus told these



70 disciples to *go to work!* Traveling ahead of Jesus to the various

places He was going to minister, this larger group of disciples moved up to a new level of service. Now they were not only desiring to be used by God; they were actively becoming a part of what He was doing on the earth.

Deep in the heart of every believer is the desire to serve God in a meaningful way. This entails much more than being an usher or a nursery worker in church. As

important as these services are, there is far more to serving God.

A disciple will grow to a place of serving the Lord and becoming more deeply involved with the ministry of the Word *outside* of a church setting. Although straightening chairs at church, picking up litter, or participating in any of the

other helps ministries within a local church is vital and necessary, such tasks aren't really what this level of discipleship involves.

When Jesus sent those 70 disciples out on their assignment, He was doing more than setting their focus on what was



currently taking place in His ministry. He was also moving them out to the spiritual frontlines so *they* could minister the Word.

Research shows that 17–20 percent of all believers do 90 percent of the work being accomplished in the Kingdom of God. Most people simply refuse to become

“These 12 men were not only called; they actually came.”

servers. And the truth is, no one can really be forced to serve; their service has to come from their own heart.

Level 4 Partnership

Now we shift to the fourth level of discipleship: the level of *partnership*. This is the level where leadership really begins.

Notice what Mark 3:13 says about Jesus: “And He went up to the mountain and He called to Him those He Himself wanted. *And they came to Him.*” When Jesus called the 12 disciples, they came to Him. In many places throughout the four gospels, the Bible says that they were “with Him” (Mark 3:14; Luke 8:1). These 12 men were not only called; they actually *came*.

Not everyone who is called actually comes. These men chose to enter into a deeper level of *partnership* and *fellowship*

with the Lord. This is the level where leadership truly begins in the Christian life.

This aspect of partnership with Jesus is different from spiritual hunger alone. The person who moves to this level in his relationship with the Lord takes on a different role. He steps into a deeper level of fellowship with God that includes a daily walk of power and the moment-by-moment

influence of God’s Spirit in his life. This believer chooses to pursue Jesus and to be with Him even in the uncomfortable times. His spiritual hunger is now at a different level of intensity than it was when it existed only for his own spiritual development.

Each of us who have taken this step can look back and remember the transition to this level of discipleship. We became *hungry* for this deeper kind of fellowship with the Lord. We chose to go where He told us to go and to do what He told us to do.

The 12 disciples committed themselves to be with Jesus at any cost. The 70 hadn’t made that same commitment to Him. In fact, the 70 heard Jesus speak one day but were unwilling to receive from Him because His words were difficult to hear. Jesus said, “Unless you eat My

flesh and drink My blood, you don’t have anything to do with Me.” Many of the 70 disciples turned away and left Jesus at that time (*see* John 6:53–66). They weren’t truly hungry, nor did they crave His presence.

Once you begin to crave Jesus’ presence in your life, you won’t walk away when things get hard. Let me give you an example from my own life.

Vikki and I first started in the ministry as youth ministers in southern California. Pastor Ezell was a powerful man of God who deposited many wonderful things into both of us. However, he could be tough to work for! He was a man of deep prayer and discipline. He had high expectations and a philosophy of ministry that we’ve since adopted. For example, according to his way of thinking, to be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late, and to be late is to be left. As members of his staff, we were not expected to be on time; we were expected to be *early*.

At first, that didn’t seem fair, since so many other people didn’t have to do that. But for Pastor Ezell, it wasn’t a matter of being fair. It was a matter of doing whatever was necessary to get things done *right*. If we were going to be a part of his staff, we had to step up our game and meet that requirement. It was a lesson that has remained with Vikki and me through the years.

When you’ve decided to make it your life’s priority to walk in close fellowship and partnership with Jesus, you step into a separated life. At this level of discipleship, your choices must be carefully considered, and you must always hold up the standard of God’s Word in your life. Your fellowship with Jesus becomes a part of every aspect of your life—from the way you spend your money to the way you treat people.

Just as the 12 disciples were with Jesus as He walked on this earth, we are with Him now, and our deeper fellowship with the Lord has become our sustaining strength. We crave the presence of God, and we seek to overcome every obstacle that would keep us away from our times of fellowship with Him. This is both the joy and the responsibility of this deeper level of discipleship before God. And still there is further to go!

Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptures are taken from the New King James Version.

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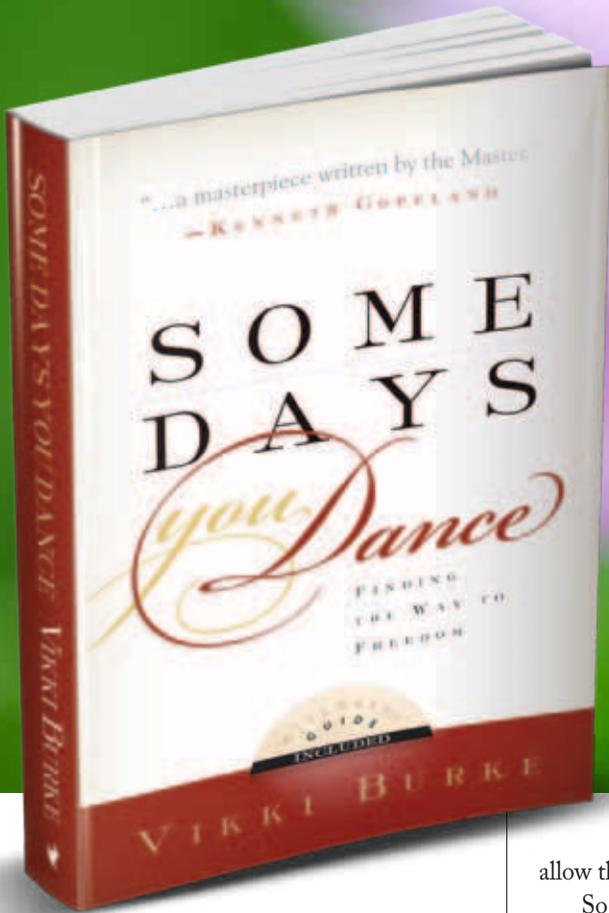
what to do when **TROUBLE** *comes*

BY
VIKKI
BURKE

Have you ever been suddenly broadsided by trouble when life seemed to be pretty comfortable? What's worse is when the trouble comes from a friend, family member, or someone else close to you. No matter what direction the attack comes from, we know the kingdom of darkness has planned it with a purpose—to cause us to be hurt, disappointed, and offended. But if we follow Jesus closely, He'll give us the wisdom that will bring us out on top!

Jesus warned us that "...offenses *must* come..."¹ The Webster's 1828 dictionary defines "offense" as *hurt; anger; shock; to annoy; to violate; or to cause to stumble*. The devil will use people or situations to annoy, anger, shock, and hurt us, all with one purpose in mind: to cause us to stumble in our faith. The devil doesn't care *how* that is accomplished, as long as he achieves his purpose.

Peter, one of the three closest disciples on Jesus' ministry team, was tested this way. Peter was so committed to Jesus that he left his fishing business to follow Him. Peter was with Jesus at some of the most significant times in His ministry. He was there on the Mount of Transfiguration when Elijah and Moses appeared. No one except Peter jumped out of the boat and walked on water with the Master. Jesus even asked Peter to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane during the most difficult, stressful time of His life. Peter was so close to Jesus that he couldn't even conceive that he might ever deny Him.



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Remember when the Roman soldiers came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus? It was Peter who defended Him. Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave. Peter was no soldier; he was a fisherman. He didn't know how to wield a sword—a net maybe, but not a sword! Peter loved Jesus so much that he was willing to die for Him—or was he? Peter probably expected Jesus to stand His ground against the soldiers and fight to the bitter end. Hadn't He done that for three years? Peter watched Jesus cast out demons, calm a raging sea, feed the hungry and walk through the midst of an angry mob. When had Jesus ever just lain down and taken what was dished out to Him? Never! It didn't occur to Peter that Jesus would surrender and

The Holy Spirit always prepares us for what is to come because that's His assignment. We must, however, be sensitive to His voice, always ready to listen and obey Him."

allow the soldiers to arrest Him.

So Peter pulled a sword out of someone's scabbard ready to defend Jesus—and then was shocked when Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?"² To Peter, it looked like Jesus was

cowering before his opponents after standing up to them so courageously for three years. This was uncharacteristic of the Master, and His response left Peter feeling upended and confused. Peter didn't understand this change in Jesus' behavior. Just when he thought he had Jesus figured out,

everything changed. Had he been a part of Jesus' ministry all this time just to surrender and be defeated? What about all the wonderful miracles Jesus had performed? Were they all wasted? Had he left his fishing business to join something so short-lived? Needless to say, Peter was discouraged. He had

committed his life to Jesus, but now what was he supposed to do?

Actually, Jesus had warned the disciples this would happen on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane: "...All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.'"³

The Holy Spirit always prepares us for what is to come because that's His assignment. We must, however, be sensitive to His voice, always ready to listen and obey Him.

Even though Jesus had warned His disciples, they hadn't understood what He told them. They certainly didn't believe things would ever happen the way they did. Especially Peter.

Instead of considering Jesus' warning, Peter had argued with Him, saying, "... Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you."⁴ But Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me." Again, Peter had insisted: "... 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!' And all the other disciples vowed the same."⁵

As the soldiers led Jesus away, Peter

upcoming meetings

dennis & vikki burke



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VIKKI (LADIES MEETING)

followed at a distance, shocked and discouraged. In the courtyard, as Peter sat a short distance from the place where Jesus was being questioned, a servant girl said, "You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean."⁶ Peter immediately denied her claim in front of everyone.

This was repeated two more times. Three times someone claimed to have seen Peter with Jesus, and three times he vehemently denied it. Then right after his third denial of Jesus, Peter heard a rooster crow, and the Master's unthinkable words rang loud and clear in his mind: "...This very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me..."⁷

The shock from Jesus' arrest had pierced Peter's heart. Questions of doubt surged through his mind. *Does this mean*

he sent disciples asking Jesus, "...Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"⁹ Why would John ask Jesus that question after hearing directly from God? He shouldn't have questioned what God said.

Jesus' response to John might surprise you. He said, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."¹⁰ *Jesus warned John about offense.*

John found himself in an unexpected situation—imprisoned and awaiting execution. What is Jesus' answer to unexpected situations? "Blessed is he who doesn't become offended." What is

Jesus saying to us? "Don't let unexpected situations shock and hurt you. Don't allow questions to disconnect you from Me. Don't stop trusting Me."

The devil's strategy is to bring doubt-filled questions, disappointment and hurt that will cause you to "follow at a distance" just like Peter did. They come to make you disconnect from a close relationship with Jesus...."

Jesus is not the Messiah? Have I been a part of a hoax? Why would Jesus surrender after resisting all this time? I just don't understand. The devil's strategy is to bring doubt-filled questions, disappointment and hurt that will cause you to "follow at a distance" just like Peter did. They come to make you disconnect from a close relationship with Jesus—and ultimately cause you to no longer believe. The question is, will you continue to believe in Jesus when you don't understand? Or will you be tempted to ask, "Why?" and become discouraged?

A similar situation happened to John the Baptist. When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, a voice came from Heaven, saying, "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."⁸ John heard God's voice with his own ears validating Jesus as the Son of God. Yet after John was imprisoned,

Are we going to keep believing in God's faithfulness when things don't turn out the way we thought they would? There's a lot we don't understand, but we do know that God is faithful. We must stay connected to the Vine. "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."¹¹

Just determine to *believe what God has said*. As you do, He promises to manifest Himself to you, and then you'll begin to understand more and more.

Satan wanted to cause Peter to doubt and to disconnect him from Jesus. But Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. "...Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."¹² Notice

Jesus said, "when you have returned to Me," not "if you return."

Peter was grief-stricken after he denied Jesus. He felt disqualified as a disciple so he returned to fishing—devastated, ashamed and alone. But after His resurrection, Jesus appeared at dawn on the shore where Peter and the others were fishing. They had fished all night without catching one fish. But then Jesus said, "...Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish."¹³ John immediately recognized Jesus and

exclaimed, "It's the Lord!" Peter jumped into the sea and swam to shore.

When Peter arrived, Jesus didn't mention his denial; instead, He asked Peter to do Him a favor.

No one asks a favor of someone they don't trust. Favors are asked of those whom people are confident will get the job done.

Three times Jesus asked, "Peter, do you love me?" With every question Peter replied, "Yes, Lord." Then Jesus asked Peter to do something that weighed on His heart: "Peter, feed My sheep."¹⁴ This request gave Peter the greatest vote of confidence he could have asked for. Moments before Jesus asked this question, Peter had felt condemned, disqualified. But this request let Peter know that Jesus hadn't disqualified him. Quite the opposite—Jesus was trusting him to carry out His greatest mission!

Peter was a changed man forever. Jesus had not only reassured him that he still qualified, but He'd also assigned Peter with the task of carrying on the ministry Jesus had begun. Peter spent the rest of his life feeding sheep. He was so free from condemnation that on the Day of Pentecost he made this proclamation to the crowd, "This Jesus *you* killed...."¹⁵ Peter no longer felt condemned for denying Jesus. He was forgiven and would never follow Jesus at a distance again.

We cannot allow ourselves to become hurt and offended because we don't understand how events are transpiring. We may have thought things would turn out differently, but we still must not allow ourselves to question or to disconnect from God, following Him from afar. We have to keep on trusting Him and give no place to offense! We must tell the Lord, "I may not understand what's going on, but I know You're faithful to Your Word. I trust You, Lord, no matter what happens!" That's faith speaking!

Make your mind up today to follow Jesus closely! It doesn't matter what you don't understand—nothing should make you doubt God. We all have some shocking things happen now and then, but we must trust the Lord with all our hearts and refuse to lean on our own understanding.

You may have been hurt, shocked, angered, or offended in the past. You may even be following God at a distance. But you can decide to draw close to the Lord right now. He will forgive you. He may even ask you to do a favor for Him!

¹ Matthew 18:7 NKJV, ² Matthew 26:52, ³ Matthew 26:31 KJV, ⁴ Matthew 26:33, ⁵ v. 35, ⁶ v. 69, ⁷ v. 75, ⁸ Matthew 3:17 NKJV, ⁹ Matthew 11:3, ¹⁰ vv. 4–6, ¹¹ John 15:5, ¹² Luke 22:31–32 NKJV, ¹³ John 21:6 NKJV, ¹⁴ vv. 15–17, ¹⁵ Acts 3:13–15

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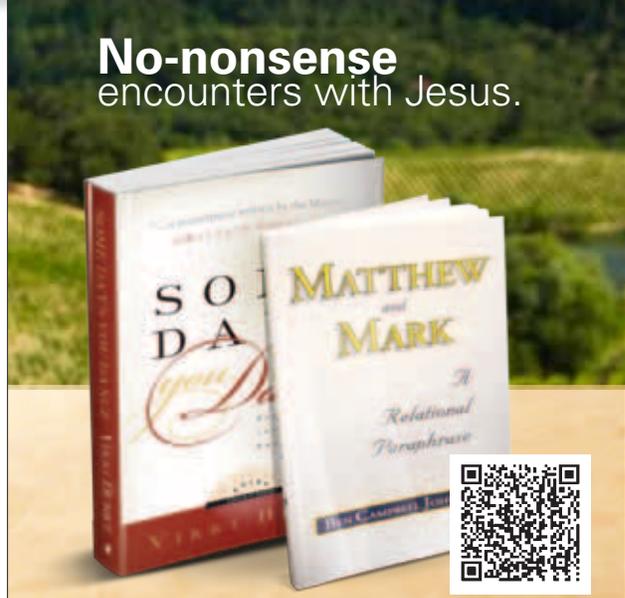
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