

In His Steps – Through Suffering

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

How many times haven't we watched as someone finishes a race, sets a record, or plays a difficult musical arrangement – only to hear ourselves whisper something like "I wish I could do that." Oh, we may share a passion for whatever that person has just accomplished, but few of us have the will or dedication required to see the task through. We want the success without the scars – the achievement without the agony.

We like our instant coffee, instant oatmeal, and microwave popcorn. We sit in lines at the restaurant drive-through for twice the time it would take to walk in for our food. We drive around the parking lot repeatedly, searching for parking spots close to the store entrance.

Likewise, I find the same principle applied to many people's spiritual lives. Several want the spiritual maturity of a Luther, Lewis, or Ten Boom; but are rarely willing to put forth the pain, passion, or persistence necessary to do so. We want to be Christian "grown-ups," without the hassle of "putting on Christ." And we certainly don't want to suffer too much for what we believe, even though Jesus promised we would:

Matt 24:9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

I often have people ask me what "God wants them to do" in a given situation. They haven't asked God themselves, or invested the time required to seek His answers personally – that's too much like work. Or if they have, they're struggling with what God actually wants them to do. Sometimes they're simply looking for someone who will agree with what their flesh desires. Either way, we struggle inside.

In his popular Bible study, *Experiencing God*, Henry T. Blackaby put it this way, "Watch to see where God is working and join Him in His work." And our initial response to that exhortation is, "Amen! That's what I want to do!" Unless, that is, the thing we see demands sacrifice. As Blackaby would write at another time, "Our difficulty is not that we don't know God's will. Our discomfort comes from the fact that we do know His will, but we do not want to do it."

That's why books like 1 Peter are so important, but yet, get so little air-time in today's culture. They prick us and make us uncomfortable; they challenge us to walk a spiritual path that's difficult and painful. Peter and the apostles understood better than most, how critical it would be for a believer in an unbelieving culture to hear a clarion call to holiness rather than placebo platitudes. After all, it was Peter who caved to the pressure of the

crowd and denied Jesus. It was Peter who struggled against the influence of the Judaizers and received the correction of Paul. However, tradition records that it was also Peter who made his bold proclamation in the face of Roman pressure, and was crucified upside down.

It is from this personal experience, and the example of Jesus Christ Himself, that Peter challenges each believer to do some serious soul-searching.

1 Peter 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

"For you have been called for this purpose..." What purpose? Suffering! Peter says as much in this verse, and in the passages just before this.

1 Pet 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. **19** For this {finds} favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. **20** For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer {for it} you patiently endure it, this {finds} favor with God.

"...do what is right and suffer {for it}...finds favor with God."

"...since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps..."

You see, what Peter is reminding us, and what we so often forget, is that you can't follow the Christian pathway *without* suffering. It is part and parcel of the Christian's identity and calling. It was also on this pathway of self-sacrifice and hardship that Jesus walked Himself, showing us the very footsteps to take on the way.

This is where the concept of "In His Steps" began. It was never intended to be a flippant marketing catchphrase or even a superficial filter for extravagant living. This call to walk as Christ (*not simply walking with Him*) is to be a wakeup call for the serious follower of Jesus. A shock-collar of sorts, to get the attention of the easily distracted "retriever" in us. But the idea of asking *What Would Jesus do* actually goes much deeper than a mental exercise we complete before we act:

"By all this suffering of his the Christ who suffered thus leaves us [an example] (found only in this verse), a writing or a drawing that is to be placed under another sheet and to be re-traced on that upper sheet by the pupil ... "in order that we may follow his tracks." ... We must go the way the Master went. When he was doing the highest good for others he suffered; this is the reason that our call obligates us to suffer in our humble way when we do good to others for conscience's sake. - Lenski

You see, to be a follower of Jesus, we must study His life and character so well, that we are able to trace in our own lives, the very example of Jesus. We aren't only to walk in the proximity of Jesus, we're to be a mirror image of His life sketched on the pages of Scripture (*like when your young child tries to walk "in your steps" in the snow*). It was

this understanding of what it truly means to walk *In His Steps*, which Peter carries forward in his thoughts:

1 Pet 2:22-25 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting {Himself} to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

One commentator summarized these verses this way:

“You were called because also Christ suffered in your behalf, leaving behind for you a written-copy in order that you may follow his tracks. And these are the things we see in Jesus’ example:

- * He committed no sin, and was never deceitful.
- * While being reviled (abused) He never abused
- * While suffering, He never threatened – but trusted in the righteousness of God
- * He carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness;
- * His stripes brought us healing
- * He is the Shepherd of straying sheep, and the Guardian of souls

This is the Jesus whose example we’re to trace, and in whose steps we’re to walk. But this won’t come easily. It can only come through humble submission to the Holy Spirit, Bible Study, and personal sacrifice. As Paul writes in Romans 12:

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The only way you can follow “in His steps,” is by going where He has gone, and living as He lived. You may not find your identical circumstances listed in a particular chapter and verse. But if you’ve spent time studying Jesus’ teaching, observing His behavior, and examining His life, you will have enough exposure to successfully identify what the perfect will of God is for that situation, by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.