

Pastor's Ponderings

March 2007

“Growing as a Disciple”

by

Davey L. Lefler

Then he called his disciples and the crowds to come over and listen. "If any of you wants to be my follower," he told them, "you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. ³⁵If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life. ³⁶And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? ³⁷Is anything worth more than your soul? ³⁸If a person is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, I, the Son of Man, will be ashamed of that person when I return in the glory of my Father with the holy angels."

Mark 8:34-38 (NLT)

A simple truth is, “You will not grow, if you do not eat.” Probably, countless times you can recall your parents saying something similar to you as you were growing up. If your memories are like mine, it was most often heard when your parents were coaxing you to eat something you did not want to eat. Generally statements like, “You want to grow up to be big and strong, don’t you?” would follow. Sometimes, no amount of begging and pleading by your parents were enough to get you to eat what you didn’t want. Even though you knew your parents loved you and that whatever it was that they were trying so diligently to get you to eat, you were just as determined to not eat it.

If you are a parent and reading this, you know how frustrating and challenging those days were. If you are a child who has gone through the dread of just about gagging at the thought of whatever it was let alone the taste of it, then you too know of frustration and

challenge. Generally, the one with the stronger will won.

Jesus is trying to tell us the very same thing about our spiritual lives. If we want to grow up to be “big and strong” Christians, then we have to; 1) “deny ourselves” (do some things we may not like doing), 2) “shoulder our cross” (daily witness to others about Christ), and 3) “follow Me” (endure suffering and hardship).

Jesus never said being a true disciple would be easy. As a matter of fact, Jesus insisted disciples “count the cost” before committing to follow Him (see Luke 14:25-33). Jesus wants disciples that are willing to “eat what is good for them,” not just what tastes good and is easy going down. Sometimes the spiritual food Jesus asks us to eat doesn’t taste so good to us, but we know it is good for us.

Spiritual food comes in various forms and flavors. Allow me to list just a few items on the menu of spiritual food. Bible study, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, serving Christ by being involved in a specific ministry (teach Sunday school, serve on a committee, visit the sick or shut-ins, or help at a Church event), being in mission (local or away from home), and being at and involved in worship services, are just a few of the ways you eat to grow as a disciple.

God allows us to grow in discipleship in so many ways. Jesus has empowered and enabled us through the Holy Spirit to use whatever gifts God has given us to “build up” the Church. Your gifts, talents, and abilities are not like anyone else’s. God has blessed you specifically and especially so that no one else can bless others the way you can.

Do not deny God the joy of blessing others through you. Get involved. Count the cost. Know that God rewards and that you will grow. Sometimes it may seem frustrating and challenging, but isn’t that how the Creator designed us---to grow as we feed on the One who provides it all? It is a wonderful experience to know that you may not have “liked” everything God put on your plate, but that you grew because you ate it.