

## Loneliness Of A True Disciple

'Jeremiah said to the Lord, "Know that for Your sake I have suffered reproach. Your words were found and I ate them. Your words were to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart for I am called by Your name, Lord. I did not sit in the assembly of those who make merry nor rejoiced. I sat alone because of Your hand (on me) for You have filled me with indignation (against sin) so why is my pain perpetual and my (emotional) wound incurable, which refuses to be healed?" (Jeremiah 15:15 to 18).

True Disciples are the focus of this Bible study. People who were dedicated to God were first called Disciples long before Jesus came. 'Wrap up the testimony. Seal the Law among My Disciples' (Isaiah 8:16). This Bible study is to encourage people who feel they are alone or on the outer circles of Godly fellowship. A true believer/disciple/sheep lives only to please God and is prepared to give everything up to follow and obey Him and being chosen by God for His purposes can be very isolating, so we have to rely on our faith in God. The isolation comes as a result of our decision not to compromise our faith, just like Jeremiah who knew he was chosen before he was born. God said, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah was wholly within God's divine will, yet he endured terrible persecution and suffered many things, which brought him to despair. Jeremiah was very unhappy and strangely, he cursed the unfortunate man who did not kill him at birth and who told his father he had a son. Killing a newborn is murder so it is strange for Jeremiah to have cursed the man. Jeremiah said, "Cursed be the day I was born. Do not let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought news to my father saying, 'A boy is born to you,' making him very glad. Let that man be as the cities (Sodom and Gomorrah), which God overthrew because they did not repent, and let him hear a cry in the morning and shouting at noontime, because he did not kill me from the womb and so my mother would have been my grave and her womb always great. Why did I come forth out of the womb only to see labour and sorrow, my days consumed with shame?" (Jeremiah 20:14 to 18).

There are several events written in the Bible where the main characters are alone and all of them were called by God for a particular reason at a particular point in time. Like Jeremiah, they sometimes felt miserable. Noah was alone in his walk with God when he was told to build the ark (Genesis 6:7 to 9). Noah did have his wife and three sons but none of them were deemed righteous like Noah was. 'God said to Noah, "Come with all of your household into the ship for I have seen your righteousness before Me in this generation" (Genesis 7:1). 'Though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they should deliver their own souls by their righteousness ... If I (God) send a pestilence into the land and pour out My wrath on it in blood to cut off from it man and animal, though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live says the Lord, they should deliver neither son nor daughter. They should deliver their own souls by their righteousness' (Ezekiel 14:14, 19 & 20). Daniel was alone when he was shut in the lion's den (Daniel 6:16). In fact his life was often threatened because of his righteousness. Some weaker Christians cannot comprehend why Disciples suffer so much, for so long, one terrible situation after the other, loss, family deaths, major sickness, sometimes two or three unbearable problems at once and they think the suffering is because of some 'secret sin' or because the sufferers are out of God's will and somehow 'deserve' the trials. How wrong that attitude is!

Righteous Job was misjudged in this way by his so-called friends (Job 22:4 & 5; 32:3; 42:7) and poor Job was forced out of the city to sit alone on a pile of ashes (Job 2:7 & 8). 'I am decaying like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten' (Job 13:28). He was not happy but God considered him righteous! 'Job said to his wife, "Should we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" In all his suffering Job did not sin with his lips' (Job 2:10). As time went on, Job began to wither. He cursed his conception, birth and the day he was born. 'After this Job cursed the day of his birth ... "Let the day I was born perish, the night which said, 'There is a boy conceived.' Let that day be darkness. Do not let God from above seek for it neither let the light shine on it. Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for their own. Let a cloud dwell on it. Let all that blackens the day (I was born) terrify it. As for that night, let thick darkness seize on it. Let it not rejoice among the days of the year. Let it not come into the number of the months. Behold, let that night be barren and let no joyful voice come there. Let them curse it who curse the day ... Let the stars of its twilight be dark. Let it look for light but have none, neither let it see the eyelids of the morning, because it did not shut up the doors of my mother's womb nor did it hide trouble from my eyes. Why was I not stillborn? Why did I not give up the spirit (of life) when my mother bore me? Why did her knees receive me? Or why the breast receive me ... For now would I have lain down and been quiet. I should have slept (died) then I would have been at rest ... or as a miscarriage, hidden as infants who never saw light ... Why is light given to him who is in misery. Why is life given to the broken soul who longs for death but it does not come ... My

sighing comes before I eat. My groanings are poured out like water ... I am not at ease, neither am I quiet, neither have I rest but trouble comes” (Job 3:1 to 26).

Lot was alone when he was living amongst the most depraved of people in Sodom and Gomorrah. ‘God delivered righteous Lot who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked. That righteous man dwelling among them was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing lawless deeds’ (2 Peter 2:7 & 8). Jacob had his life threatened by his twin brother Esau. ‘Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing he received from their father (Isaac). Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then I will kill my brother Jacob” (Genesis 27:41). Joseph was alone when he was taken by his wicked brothers and sold into slavery (Genesis 37:23 to 36). ‘God sent a man before them. Joseph was sold for a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles. His neck was locked in irons’ (Psalm 105:17 & 18). Elijah felt terribly alone so God sent an angel to comfort him. ‘Elijah went a day’s journey into the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree. He asked that he might die and said, “It is enough. Now O Lord take away my life for I am not any better (no more special) than my forefathers.” He lay down and slept under a juniper tree and behold an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” Elijah looked and behold there was at his head a cake baked on the coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The Angel of the Lord came the second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” ... He said to the Lord, “I, even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away” (1 Kings 19:4 to 7 then 10 & 14). Jonah was alone when he was told to go and preach to Nineveh. He too was miserable. “Lord, I beg you, take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live.” The sun beat on Jonah’s head so that he fainted and requested he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3 & 8).

John the Baptist was alone in the desert when he began preaching the Gospel (Luke 1:80) and we know by reading the Scriptures, John was chosen before he was born to be the voice for Jesus. His mother Elisabeth was Mary’s cousin. “You child (John the Baptist) will be called a prophet of the Most High for you will go before the face of the Lord (Jesus) to make ready His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people (Jewish people) by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:76 & 77). How lonely John must have felt when he began questioning the purpose of his life while he was in prison awaiting execution. He wondered if Jesus was actually the Messiah. ‘When John heard in the prison the works of Jesus he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you He who comes or should we look for another?” (Matthew 11:2 & 3). Apostle John was also a cousin of Jesus. John’s mother Salome was a sister of Mary. John was forced into exile for years and lived alone on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) but in his darkest hours, he experienced the visions and dreams from God and he had the privilege of speaking with angels then wrote the wonderful Book of Revelation plus the three epistles that bear his name.

The Apostles were walking right inside the will of God and knew Him intimately, yet they suffered constant persecution and numerous difficulties. Look at Apostle Paul’s trials. ‘Are they servants of Jesus? I speak as one beside himself for I am more so, in labours more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes (whippings) above measure, close to death often. Five times from the Jews I received thirty-nine stripes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered shipwreck. I have been a night and a day in the deep sea. Often when travelling I have often been in perils of rivers, perils of robbers, perils from my countrymen, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brothers, suffering in labours and travail, often in watching (the enemy to avoid them), in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness’ (2 Corinthians 11:23 to 27). Apostle Paul not only suffered trials, he suffered derision from fellow believers who considered him inferior because he suffered more than they did. “I ought to have been commended by you, for in nothing was I inferior to the very best apostles” (2 Corinthians 12:11). The other believers were ashamed when Paul was imprisoned except one man. “May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains” (2 Timothy 1:16). Paul gave us the reason why God made him suffer so much. The suffering was to keep Paul from become too proud of the revelations God was giving him that were recorded and given to us as part of the New Testament (2 Corinthians 12:7 to 9). Apostle Paul wrote, “I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus my Lord, for Whom I suffered the loss of all things and count them nothing but rubbish so I may gain Jesus and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own but through faith in Jesus, the righteousness from God by faith so I may know Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead ... I press on so I may grasp and make my own, like Jesus has made me His own. One thing I do, forget the things that are behind me and stretching forward to the (wondrous) things which are before us ... I press on toward the goal for the heavenly prize of the High Calling of God in Jesus. Let those of us who are Spiritually mature think this way. If you think otherwise, God will reveal it to you” (Philippians 3:8 to 15).

The One Who suffered most of course, was our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah. Notice how alone He was and how lonely He felt, requiring God had to send a holy angel to strengthen Him. 'Jesus was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw and He knelt down and prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup (the agonies of the crucifixion) from Me, yet not My will but Yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to Him strengthening Him. Being in agony (of Spirit) He prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground' (Luke 22:41 to 44). That rare condition is called 'Hemathidrosis' and only happens when the sufferer is under great stress. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Sometimes carrying that cross can be very lonely. Jesus was often alone. 'After Jesus sent the multitudes away He went up into the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone' (Matthew 14:23). His trusted friends, the disciples fell asleep and left Jesus all alone again. 'Could you not stay awake with Me for just one hour?' (Matthew 26:40). Jesus never married, never had a wife and family and never owned a house. In fact at one time, He had nowhere to live. 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head' (Matthew 8:20).

Jesus had no outward credentials but Himself and His constant prayer to God the Father (Luke 6:12). Even though Jesus came from a large family and was the eldest of at least seven or eight children, He also suffered from loneliness due to His calling. No one could really understand Him, just as other weaker Christians cannot understand unwavering Discipleship. Even with family around us, sometimes the call of God and the service He chooses for us can be very isolating. Jesus experienced that too when His own four brothers mocked Him. 'Jesus went from place to place in Galilee but He would not travel to Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. The Feast of Tabernacles was drawing near. Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea so that Your disciples may see the works You do, for no one does anything in secret when he wants to be conspicuous. If You must do these things show Yourself publicly and make Yourself known!" His brothers did not believe in Him either. Jesus said to His brothers ... "Go to the Feast yourselves. I am not yet going" ... Jesus went alone because He did not want to be seen ... Suddenly, when the Feast was already half over, Jesus went up to the temple and began to teach' (John 7:1 to 14). We can identify with Jesus' isolation here. Jesus' brothers told Him to go to Judea where they knew the Jews wanted to kill Him. There did not seem to be a lot of brotherly love shown to Jesus by His brothers before His crucifixion but afterwards, they all repented and became true Disciples. It was not until Jesus died and rose from the dead, when His family finally accepted Him as their Saviour (Acts 1:14). Two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude wrote the epistles bearing their names. Many modern Disciples have experienced the same resentment from our families.

There is another very telling verse that seems to imply Jesus and His stepfather Joseph were estranged because of His ministry and teaching. 'The Jews murmured (criticised) Jesus because He said, "I am the Bread that came down from heaven." The Jews said, "Is this not Jesus, the Son of Joseph Whose father and mother we know? How then can He say He came down from heaven?" Jesus said to them, "Stop grumbling and saying these things against Me" (John 6:41 to 43). So we can see the Jews knew Joseph and Mary, but it is not recorded in the Scriptures Joseph ever acknowledged Jesus' ministry. When Jesus was young, it was always Mary who pondered things in her heart about Jesus but never Joseph (Luke 2:19 & 51). Another verse shows us Jesus' ministry was not accepted by His family and He was saddened by it. He said, "Solemnly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his own town" (Luke 4:22 & 24). "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own household" (Matthew 13:57). The level of resentment experienced by His family could explain why Jesus had nowhere to live.

The Jews of the day had no part in the death of Jesus. The Roman soldiers were the ones who killed Him. When we consider what Jesus went through for us, it is horrifying. 'Pilate had Jesus flogged (with dozens of lashes with pieces of bone attached to the whip) and delivered Him to be crucified. The governor's (Roman) soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison (one thousand violent men) together against Him. They stripped Him of His clothes and put a scarlet robe on Him, and weaving a crown of thorns they put it on His head and a reed in His right hand. They knelt down before Him and mocked Him saying, "Hail King of the Jews!" They spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head and when they finished mocking Him they stripped Him of the robe and put His own garments on Him and led Him away to be crucified' (Matthew 27:26 to 31). We can try to put ourselves in His situation. Imagine how terrifying it would be to be surrounded by up to one thousand violent men – and He was alone with nobody standing up in His defence. His beard was torn from His face, He was lashed, stabbed and mocked, then after He had the crown of thorns put on His head and they had mocked Him again, His own clothes were put back onto His bleeding body then He was nailed to the cross with huge iron nails, penetrating his hands, feet

and ankles. Imagine the agony! The prophet Isaiah wrote this about Jesus. 'I gave My back to the strikers and My cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I did not hide My face from shame and spitting' (Isaiah 50:6). Imagine being beaten up by a thousand men! It must have been absolutely terrifying for Him. Jesus commented four times, He had to endure the crucifixion alone but He knew God was always with Him (John 8:16). Isaiah wrote of Jesus, "I have trodden the winepress (crucified) alone and there was no one with Me. I looked but there was no one to help. I was appalled there was no one to uphold Me" (Isaiah 63 3 to 5).

None of His disciples, family or friends helped Him or supported Him, even though He looked for someone – anyone, to uphold Him in His hour of need. Although Jesus had a large family and many friends, His life was solitary. He had a lonely ministry that was filled with both rewarding and frustrating moments, and He had little support. Indeed, He often chided His disciples for their lack of belief, courage, support and faith. That does not mean He felt lonely all of the time, but there are verses that show us He was looking for support from His friends in His darkest hour. He was betrayed, denied, abandoned and let down by His friends. His family rejected His ministry and were sometimes unkind to Him about it. While hanging in agony on the cross, Jesus felt abandoned by God the Father. He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). How many of us could endure that level of intense isolation? Jesus knew all this was going to happen to Him because it was written in the Bible long before He was born.

Our walk with God can bring us face to face with evil just as Jesus faced in the wilderness soon after He was baptised when He had to rebuke the devil three times (Matthew 4:1 to 11). Our natural instinct is to desire companionship with other like-minded people who understand our dedication, our longing for a deeper relationship with the Lord and our deep love for Jesus with the gratefulness we hold for His amazing sacrifice. Because there are few who share our Spiritual experiences, we often have to walk alone just like most of the prophets had to. Look at what some of the early church had to endure. 'Some women received their dead by a resurrection, but others were tortured to death with clubs refusing to accept release (if they would deny their faith) so they might be resurrected to a better life. Others had to suffer the trial of mocking and scourging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were lured with tempting offers (to renounce their faith), they were sawn in two, they were slain by the sword, they went around wrapped in the skins of sheep and goats, utterly destitute, oppressed, cruelly treated, people of whom the world was not worthy, roaming over deserts and the mountains, hiding in caves, caverns and holes of the earth. All of these won divine approval by their faith' (Hebrews 11:35 to 38). Could modern-day Christians endure this?

Our God is supreme and should be the total object of our desire. All earthly things should take second place to the Lord or He will declare we are not worthy. Often our families will reject us because they resent our stand for God. It is hard when one's own family tell us to choose between them and the Lord. When we choose the Lord, our family may refuse to have contact with us. That can be devastating but Jesus said if we put anyone before Him we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37) so we must put the Lord first even if it does cost us our family. Although Jesus had several younger siblings (four brothers and at least three sisters), they deeply resented His ministry which isolated Him from them, to the point where on one occasion, Jesus ignored their requests to see Him. 'The mother of Jesus and His brothers came toward Him but they could not get to Him because of the crowd. Jesus was told, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside wanting to talk to You." He answered, "My mother and My brothers are those who listen to and obey the Word of God"' (Luke 8:19 to 21). It seems there was resentment in the family of Jesus because of His ministry, but it got worse. His own people sought to kill Him and His brothers mocked Him. To grow in God and later receive the rewards He is keeping for us, we need to give ourselves over to Him even if we are painfully lonely. When we feel lonely, if we spend time in worship, prayer and reading the Bible, the feelings of isolation will be replaced by joy and anticipation for our final destination – heaven.

The life we live as genuine Disciples is a very narrow, restricted life. Jesus said, "Enter in (to heaven) by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to eternal destruction and many are those who enter in (to a lost eternity) by it. How narrow is the gate and restricted is the way that leads to eternal life! Few are those who find it' (Matthew 7:13 & 14). Those who obey the calling to live a righteous life will be led into service to Him and to other people, in ways that make others cringe. We are often called to do things other people question. Jesus defended unpopular causes or people who were sometimes shunned by society. Jesus counted among His friends the poor, the weak, the outcast and the lawbreakers. We are sometimes called to a life of solitude and we are to go where and when God tells us to go. Disciples are not to blithely follow other Christians but we must stay on the very narrow path He has lit up for us so we will in due time be able to enter the narrow gate of heaven that brings eternal rewards.

We must never measure our walk with the Lord by other people because our individual walk is unique to us. Many times we will see the Lord allowing other people to do things He has told us not to do. Other times we will see others do really good things for the Lord but He will say that is not for us because He has other plans for us. Many Christians stand up in church and boast about themselves, their work for God and their successes but the Holy Spirit keeps us quiet about our ministry. The Lord may allow others to be honoured but He may keep us hidden so our fruit produces more fruit quietly in the shadows of other ministries. Other people may even receive credit for our hard work, but that is okay because God knows all our works and we will be rewarded in due time. Some people may be great speakers and draw a crowd of thousands but the Lord keeps us small, humble and out of the limelight. When we seem to be forgotten, neglected, silenced, overlooked or disregarded, we can rejoice because we are counted worthy to suffer with Jesus. Some people are wealthy but it is possible the Lord will keep us poor so we will have to depend on Him for our every need. Jesus said, "Be careful you do not do your charitable giving before people, to be seen by them or else you will have no reward from your Father Who is in heaven. When you do merciful deeds, do not blow your own trumpet as the hypocrites do so they may receive glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward in full already. When you do merciful deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand does so your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father Who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:1 to 4). The Holy Spirit keeps a strict watch over us and may rebuke us for the smallest things other Christians do all the time and they never feel convicted. He deals with us in ways He never seems to deal with others, but we need to keep in mind, God is sovereign and He owns us. He has a right to do with His own children whatever He pleases and He does not have to explain His actions to us, although when we perpetually live in His close inner circle, He almost always tells us what He is doing and why. 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants' (Amos 3:7). Sometimes the things Jesus did and said were scorned by people and actually considered to be evil (Mark 3:21 to 26). Often our good works are regarded as evil by ungodly people who have their own Godless agenda, but woe to them. 'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness' (Isaiah 5:20).

Some people who live righteous lives find it very hard to fit into a modern church that preaches a watered down Gospel with no anointing, ignores the needs in Israel, teaches about the 'rapture', prosperity teaching, hyper-grace teaching, King James only theology or the replacement theology. Those churches are in apostasy and the congregations are sometimes angered by people who stand for the truth. They are more like hyped up circuses than church services that are meant to be based on the Bible. Those churches and the congregations are often watered down, lukewarm Christians who live carnal lives, turning the genuine, deeply committed Disciples away. What can the genuine Disciples do? We must realise, our relationship with God does not depend on any church. Our relationship with God is based on Jesus and depends on our willingness to seek God for ourselves. It is good to fellowship but when there are no genuine Disciples around, we must rely on the Lord for our fellowship. Some genuine Disciples have actually been 'cursed' by pastors because they chose to leave the church rather than be tainted by the sin in the church. Those lukewarm churches sometimes have homosexuals in leadership or demon-possessed people in charge of prayer groups. One church had a paedophile as the head pastor and another in charge of the teen church. Those weak, powerless churches were prophesied about by Jesus. He warned us some people would suffer terrible oppression, persecution, many would fall away from God, they would betray the genuine Disciples and only those people who endure to the end will be saved. 'They will deliver you up to oppression and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for My name's sake. Many will stumble and fall away, and will deliver up one another and will hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will lead many astray. Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold but (only) those who endure to the end will be saved' (Matthew 24:9 to 13).

All Disciples are tested and tried with fiery trials during our walk with God. 'Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you to test you as though a strange thing happened to you. When you are partakers of Jesus' sufferings, rejoice because at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice with exceeding joy. If you are insulted for the name of Jesus you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part Jesus is blasphemed but on your part He is glorified' (1 Peter 4:12 to 14). 'I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us' (Romans 8:18).

Amen and God bless you.

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