



The Discipline of Discipleship

Taken from V. Raymond Edman's book, The Disciplines of Life, Van Kampen Press, Wheaton, IL, 1948.

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If any man will come after me" (Luke 9:23)
Discipleship means "discipline!" The disciple is that one who has been taught or trained by the Master, who has come with his ignorance, superstition, and sin, to find learning, truth, and forgiveness from the Saviour. Without discipline we are not disciples, even though we profess His Name and pass for a follower of the lowly Nazarene. In an undisciplined age when liberty and license have replaced law and loyalty, there is greater need than ever before that we be disciplined to be His disciples.

Discipleship requires the discipline of conversion, wherein we recognize our lost estate because of rebellion against God, and with repentance come to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We assent from our hearts that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6), that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), that "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin" (Gal. 3:22), and that we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others . . . strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:3, 12).

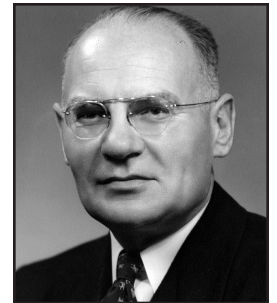
This discipline is difficult for the natural heart of each one, for we will not humble ourselves to admit our sin and shame; but it is easy for the honest and good heart that sees itself in the light of Calvary's Sacrifice for sin. In the dispensation before the Cross, David, seeing himself, cried, "I have sinned against the Lord"; to which God replied through His servant, "the Lord also hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13). When Peter saw himself in the light of the Lord's presence and power, he fell down saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). A woman wept as she stood by His feet, which she washed with her tears of repentance; and she heard the Saviour's

word, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:48, 50). The penitent Publican smote his breast in genuine sorrow for sin, and prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), and went home justified.

Thus it has been down the ages; the despondent, despairing of themselves, have come to the Saviour for mercy, and have been saved. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Without salvation no sonship; without sonship, no discipleship!

It is His sons whom God disciplines that they might bring honor to His name. He wants to teach and train them, to soften and sweeten them, to strengthen and steady them, that they may show forth the excellencies of Him who told them, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). Without discipline we are not His sons; but as His own we need the exhortation, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son who he receiveth" (Heb. 12:5, 6). This discipline at the moment may not seem "to be joyous, but (rather) grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (12:11).

Discipleship requires the discipline of cost. Our Lord's words search deeply into the depth of our souls, as He says, "He that loveth father or mother



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(1900 – 1967)*

more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). On a later occasion He amplified that statement to divine principle by saying, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

What can be the meaning of this strong, unsubdued standard, to "hate" all, even one's own life? We are to love and cherish parents, brothers, children; we love others more because we belong to Christ. What then, does our Lord mean? Is it not, that we all, like Saul of Tarsus, truly "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8)? We are to make our Lord Jesus supreme, permanent, pre-eminent in our hearts, so that no person nor anything shares that place in our lives. No price of parents or loved ones, possessions or life itself, is too great for His sake.

This denial of all, including ourselves, is the deepest discipline of discipleship. There are those who are dearer to us than life itself; but they should not be dearer than the Saviour. For Him and His cause we have died to them and every other earthly creature or pleasure—it is Jesus only! Our Lord does not desire that we take this discipline lightly or thoughtlessly. He gives two strong illustrations about counting the cost (Luke 14:28-33), concluding, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

One remembers an earnest and effective layman in Ecuador who felt called to God's service in the ministry; but his wife would not hear of it. She threatened all manner of reprisal if he should leave his lucrative employment to become a servant of the Lord Jesus. One evening he came to me, with a bundle under one arm, and tears in his eyes. I turned to Mark 10, and read to him verses 29 and 30: "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

After prayer and tears, I inquired, "And what have you in the bundle?"

"It contains my working clothes. I left my employment today." He had counted the cost, and had set himself to leave all, and to face whatever persecutions might come; only that he might be Jesus' disciple. And do we wonder that he won his wife to full allegiance

to the Master, and that together they became pillars in the house of God?

Discipleship requires the discipline of cross-bearing. Three things seem to be necessary for us each day: our daily food (for which we are to pray, Matt. 6:11); our daily work (in which we are to be faithful, 1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 2 Thess. 3:10-13), and our daily cross. Our Lord said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23), "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27; Matt. 16:24).

This cross is not that of our Saviour, who suffered once for our sins upon the Tree, for we add no part to the price of our redemption; and least of all, is it bearing an outward cross, around one's neck as we see in America, or on one's shoulder, as I have seen in Ethiopia. It is the denial of self, in the deepest meaning of that word, and of all that life has to offer, in full surrender to the will of God; in the spirit of Calvary's Cross, to be sure. I find its depths to be plumbed in the experience and language of others:

*"I take, O Cross, thy shadow for my
abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine, than the
sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by, to know
no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame, my
glory all the Cross."¹*

*"Whatever else Thou sendest, oh, send this—
Not ecstasy of love or lover's kiss,
But strength to know the joy of sacrifice,
To see life deeply as with opened eyes!
Oh, grant me this, dear God,
Through tears or loss—
To know the joyous secret
of Thy Cross."²*

Because of His cross, not in addition to it, we are daily crucified unto the world and all that is therein of good or evil. To bear our cross, because of His, is to learn of Him, the Meek and Lowly in heart, and to be His disciples.

One kneels humbly, perhaps bewildered and blinded with tears, beside the Teacher, who in tenderness and true love for our souls desires to teach us this discipline. The world dazzles us, but is dim in comparison with Him; loved ones allure, but He is the altogether Lovely One. His love has broken every barrier down, and we whisper, "Lord Jesus, at any cost, by any cross, make me Thy disciple."

Pressed

*Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length,
Pressed so intently, it seems beyond strength,
Pressed in the body, and pressed in the soul,
Pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll,
Pressure by foes, and a pressure by friends,
Pressure on pressure till life nearly ends
Pressed into knowing no helper but God,
Pressed into loving the staff and the rod,
Pressed into liberty where nothing clings,
Pressed into faith for impossible things,
Pressed into living a life in the Lord,
Pressed into living a Christ-life outpoured.*
—Selected

Notes

1. "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," by Elizabeth C. Clephane.
2. "At Calvary," by Ralph Spaulding Cushman. *Hilltop Verses and Prayers* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), p.99.

Dr. V. Raymond Edman (1900 – 1967) V. Raymond Edman was a WWI soldier, missionary, pastor, college professor, writer, fourth president of Wheaton College, and mentor to Billy Graham. His devotional writings reflect the intimate relationship he had with God, borne out of a personal resurrection experience in Ecuador, and a life of spiritual discipline. While giving a Wheaton chapel talk entitled, "In the Presence of the King," Edman collapsed on stage and entered God's presence. For more on the life of Dr. Edman, see the Winter 2011 issue of *Knowing & Doing*.

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