



"Snapshots of a Disciple"
 (Taking the Bible literally and growing in it)
Any teaching: Make sure you are building on God's Word, not on man's crumbly clay.
 "... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit..."
 (2nd Peter 1:20-21)



What to do in trials?

(A Snapshots of a Disciple study)

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Good morning brethren, greetings from central FL. I'm Steven and I have been pondering this study for a few years. I've done a few snippets... and it's one of those topics that almost seems to need to be repeated once or twice a year. But, the how to is the hard part. We live in a nation (the US) where cheap grace is sold and peddled everywhere, and is slightly more plentiful than the "earn your salvation" myths. I pray in time that this becomes a teaching series, but this is just a very short sermon to get a good start and encourage some who ask me such good questions regularly, and I thought I'd make it a study that others could read if they wish to encourage their hearts too, as many of us seem to find ourselves in some sort of storm these days.

And because seemingly 100% of the US "pastors" are teaching lukewarm doctrines that let people sit in front of sin-entertainment in front of their "trash vendor" (TV) without conviction, yeah... they don't want to hear anything, and in some ways – they also are ignorant, because they are not being taught well. That's the damage that 501c3s do. The devil limits what they can say, so they skip 90% of the Bible and reduce the parts they do teach of the Bible to stories and good moral lessons that won't "offend" (notice that key unbiblical word) the masons and jesuits and other unrepentant people, including those living in some form of active sexual immorality rebellion against God. These so-called pastors won't, or even can't, talk to people about the eternal Heaven or Hell & the Lake of Fire either. They are quite literally clouds without rain – offering/selling people fake liberty, while they themselves are bound by corruption and intentional iniquity and active rebellion(s) against God. As Jesus said though, when the blind lead the blind, they will both fall in the ditch – and at some point, people will stop following those blind and unsaved "pastors" and go find someone who does know God, not just a magician who puts on a show, or a storyteller or wordsmith who knows a lot about the Bible and refuses to obey what he knows.

"39 And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? 40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. 41 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye." (Luke 6:39-42)

> So, take that log of sin out of your active life, work on becoming dead to that sinful desire, and grow in holiness so that you can with boldness, grace, and gentleness help others to remove the active sin from their lives and eyes. Amen? Good. Let's continue.

This whole next passage is talking about those who make themselves spiritual leaders over a group of people and yet do not obey the Word of God that they teach:

"12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, 13 and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 20 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning." (2nd Peter 2:12-20)

> Have you ever followed a liar like that? So have I. What do we do? Well, Jesus explained that we need to get away from those voices of the "stranger" and learn to just follow His voice. I was an active growth Jesus was always talking about – an active discipleship – an active nurtured covenant with Him that He was talking about in everything He taught, and it shows up in the Greek, but most people don't realize they can study it themselves and find that themselves, cause most "pastors" teach to corral converts and disciples after themselves, not Jesus. Read John 10, it will clarify some really deep mysteries – I believe it to be foundational for everyone.

Okay, so with that short intro, these liars, who excuse sin and flatter souls including honest followers of Christ and false converts, is it any wonder or surprise that they also don't teach about how to stand in trials? No, it's not. These liars say all the nice stuff anyone would want to hear... and yet they lie at the very same time. For instance – do you know Biblical definitions by listening to them? Are they quoting God's Word to prove their definitions? Extremely few do. They teach you to wow you so that you, knowingly or unknowingly, become their new little student – quoting every word they say as "amazing". Honest Bible teachers aren't trying to lure a crowd. They just want to see people grow closer to God and stay actively close to God – when they feel like they are close to God and when they are not feeling it because God is using trials to refine them and correct their character choices. That's why an honest follower of Christ who serves God as an under-shepherd of Christ will be active in teaching God's Word in season and out of season – when it's popular and when it's not. Or get this – when they want to teach that and when they don't. And, if they are a honest of Christ – just like you, then God will discipline and teach them too. There is so much more to say here. But, suffice it to say – a false teacher and false prophet can only flatter you, they cannot tell you how to grow in holiness or what to do in times of trial, chastening, or active persecution (remember, according to Jesus, persecution has multiple levels).

Let's look at a familiar text to some – but sadly, many times that is because they've let their heart grow hard to truth and have stopped digging deeply into it. So, with our hearts tender and allowing the Lord to point out sin in us, let's read it afresh.

"12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

That's where many people stop. But, that's not where this text and the context stop, so let's continue – shall we?

"3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons."

Did I just hear a gulp? Cause yeah, we all gulp when we grasp this. God doesn't show up and stand in front of us and give us the consequences in person... no, He just arranges consequences that help us see ourselves honestly and see what level of growth we are practicing on any given sin or character piece, then He arranges tests and trials to teach us one step of the way to grow forward. These trials aren't to prove how great we are, or even how great He is – they are specific to us – yes: us, to teach us, or prove that we are falling away. The solution is always found in 1st John 1:9 – always. If we are genuinely saved, we will plead with God for His grace, ask Him to teach us how not to do that sin again, and then work on becoming the next 1+% dead to that sin as well as the others that He is working on. It's simple called: spiritual growth, and it's only able to be done by honest followers of Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of promise, our seal of salvation (John 10:27-30; Ephesians 1:13-14)

So, back to Hebrews 12. Let's keep reading:

"9 furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (full text was Hebrews 12:1-11)

I would be amiss, though time is short, to not briefly reference Peter on this too. **"12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.[d] On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."** (1st Peter 4:12-15)

So much could be and should be said from this passage – such depth and riches and maturity here and in both 1st and 2nd Peter. But, for the sake of time, I'll just leave that text in our minds.

So, you see? It's really not that hard. It just requires active change and is an active conversation or debate with the God who created you and me, teaching us to let go a little more of the love of this world and its pleasures and trinkets, and become more firmly chasing and actively doing and living more holiness. You can look at it this way – every day, you and I are growing closer to God – in our actions, feelings are like clouds: you can't pin them down and don't try to sit on them – they won't hold you. Learn holiness the Bible's way – active, measured growth that you can look back on and go okay, God is working in me and on me, and moving me to maturity as a spiritual father and/or spiritual mother – from spiritual child thru spiritual young man/young woman (1st John 2:12-14). God doesn't flatter us. But, He does encourage us when we are walking as faithfully as we can. Remember, satan comes with three types of attacks: condemnation to get us to stop growing in active obedience, and flattery that we're doing better than we think so that we stop growing in active obedience, and temptations for the sin-fun things that we know we shouldn't do to get us to stop growing in active obedience. Did you notice the common denominator? So that we – what? That's right – so that we stop growing in active obedience to Christ. Pretty simple isn't it? It is indeed, but only for those who are genuinely saved. Let me leave you with 3 passages.

“7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:7-9)

God commands us to not be deceived because we can be. So, we need to be careful to let the stable foundation of the Bible, especially the New Testament, be our balance meter – not our feeling of closeness to God, or how we're doing compared to others. My suggestion is keep a log of your progress – it will be depressing at times, but if you log it – in your mind or in a prayer journal, you will – if you are a genuine follower of Christ, see measured growth in maturity in some area of your life. Remember not to let one stumble make you think that you've lost all ~ God's covenant doesn't fail on one error or mistake. If you are saved, He has promised to keep growing you – working with you, to teach you His righteousness and His character. Amen?

“15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” (1st Timothy 4:15)

“5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2nd Peter 1:5-11)

These are not character qualities that can be fake easily – only look good from a distance. But, honest followers of Christ are being actively grown in them – a maturity that shows more and more as time goes on. Remember, the trials, temptations and the persecution for the sake of obedience to Christ is what causes the 2nd and 3rd unsaved soils to fall away. But, God helps, presses, and teaches His children to go forward anyway – one step at a time.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank You that You do not give up on us. I daily find it amazing how You actively work in and with those who make a covenant with You, whom You have drawn to Yourself.

Teach us. We're just sheep. But, we don't want to be gullible and naïve as the world around us. We want to grow daily (even if we can't see it) faithfully leaving another percentage of active sin behind as we see in Romans 1 and Galatians 5 – becoming dead to this world and its useless cares and entertainment and trinkets – no matter how big or small. Father, all of us are struggling with something – You are actively working on all of us. Help us make sure that we keep pleasing You as first and foremost in our lives and in our hearts and homes and families. Help us to keep growing away from caring what the world thinks or the false converts or other Christians. Caring about them, but not putting their opinions above Your teachings. Keep, by Your mighty and gracious Hand, growing us to be more like You, to think more like You, to act more like You, which means we also need You to keep growing us to have the same desires as You. We pray this in faith – knowing that You answer the prayers of those who diligently seek You, as You say so well in James. Help us to not flatter ourselves but to not diminish the spiritual growth You are doing in us. Keep, by Your power, growing us away from sin and in hunger and thirst for Your Word, a humble and bold active obedience to You, and in boldness and grace and gentleness in sharing Jesus' teachings, Jesus' gospel, and Your whole counsel of Your Word (the Bible) to all we can reach – even if we can't tell if they are listening, for only You know that. ~ We look forward to seeing how You keep working in our lives and in the lives of those around us. We love You and praise You and thank You, in Jesus' Name, amen.