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ALEJANDRO BULLÓN

# AS WE GO

BECOMING LIKE THE MASTER  
THROUGH AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP

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# | F O R E W O R D |

*As We Go: Becoming Like the Master Through Authentic Discipleship* is your definitive guidebook to a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ! Through these pages our friend and pastor Alejandro Bullón demonstrates that being a disciple of Jesus is more than attending church once a week or reading the Bible occasionally. He proclaims that the lives of authentic disciples of Jesus will not be periodically but continually growing in the image of the Creator God.

Communion with God through prayer, Bible study, and involvement in mission are essential for the growth of a Christlike character. This character-transforming communion must be a priority in the life of the disciple of Jesus, who answers God's call to mission by saying, "I will go." Ellen G. White says, "Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them."<sup>1</sup> Such is the privilege of every disciple of Jesus. Communion with God is not just about enjoying His presence, but about empowering mission!

The hope, goal, and glory of every authentic disciple of Jesus will be to become like the Master. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Prayer* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), p. 157.

teacher” (Luke 6:40, NKJV). No one will argue the fact that Jesus was a spiritual man. He was a godly man; He was in tune with the Holy Spirit from the day He was born until He died. Jesus knew that He must be in constant connection with the Father to succeed in saving humanity. The Bible tells us that Jesus got up every morning before sunrise to pray. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). The Gospels tell us that Jesus not only got up early to pray, but spent whole nights praying (Luke 6:12). And He not only prayed for the entire night—the Bible says that He prayed “earnestly.” Jesus gave us the perfect example of prayer as He carried out the mission of the Father. Likewise, when we say “I will go” to the call of mission, *as we go* we must be in constant communion with Jesus.

A life without daily communion with God is not a spiritual life, because it is through prayer that we connect with the Holy Spirit. The disciples followed Jesus’ example when they prayed for 10 days between Jesus’ ascension and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). In the same way, we too may become fruitful and productive servants of the Lord by abiding in Jesus. We grow and multiply when we are connected to the Vine. That connection is made possible through a consistent life of walking with Jesus in prayer, Bible study, and making disciples.

Prayer was very natural for Jesus; He did not have to drag Himself out of bed to pray. For Him, prayer was not a dreadful exercise. He loved to pray. He enjoyed communion with His Father. He never embarked on a mission to preach, teach, and heal before spending time with His Father. Prayer for Him was communication with His Father; prayer was a pleasant conversation with the Divine. Prayer is unnatural for us because we are

not used to praying. It is also unnatural because we are more connected with sin than we are connected to God, and therefore we tend to reject the heavenly atmosphere that prayer brings. However, we can teach ourselves to be like Jesus. We can train ourselves to enjoy prayer and to long for precious moments of communion with God.

The Bible is clear in reminding us that God's ideal is to help us develop a Christ-glorifying character. That is why the apostle Paul tells the church in Colossae that he is praying for them so that they may get full knowledge of God's will: "We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience" (Colossians 1:9-11). It is by spending time with Jesus—learning and following His teachings—that we become like Him.

My prayer is not only that you are challenged and encouraged by reading this book but that you will learn to enjoy communion with Jesus—that by abiding in Christ and partnering with Him in His mission you will grow to mature fullness in Christ. The heart of *I Will Go* is not what we do, but who we are *as we go*. And who we are is determined by the relationship we have with our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Ramon J Canals**

# I I N T R O D U C T I O N I

The people of Judah were going through one of the most dramatic moments in their history. King Uzziah had just died, consumed by leprosy. As if that were not enough, the Assyrians were approaching dangerously, destroying what they found in their path. The people of God were ashamed. The death of their king caused them to be fearful of their enemy.

Although things on earth were apparently out of control, Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne, ruling the destinies of nations and the universe. God never loses control. There is no reason to fear even if things on this earth seem, from a human perspective, to come to a dead end.

That day, God presented Isaiah with the mission as the remedy for fear and uncertainty. That is why He asked, “Who will I send?” The prophet did not hesitate, and answered immediately, “I will go.”

Today, as in those days, we live in an awe-inspiring moment in history. The world seems to be falling to pieces—tragedies, pandemics, financial crises, a divided society. The church faces the challenge of preparing for the last battle of the centuries. It is not a war with tanks, cannons, or missiles, but a spiritual struggle to rescue people from the power of the enemy of souls.

The best way to deal with the moment of crisis today, as in Isaiah’s day, is the fulfillment of the mission. That is why God asks, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8).



And from all the continents of the planet, you can hear the tremendous response of the children of God saying, “I will go!”

As I write this, I close my eyes and see many people rescued from sin, invoking the name of Jesus. But then I hear the apostle Paul ask, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14, NKJV). Then the answer of the remnant from the four sides of the earth comes to my ears: “I will go!”

But how will we go if we do not enjoy the joy of salvation in Christ? This book aims to raise awareness among God’s people of the pleasure of living in daily communion with the salvation source that is Jesus. Communion with Jesus is not just going to church once a week or opening the Bible from time to time. All of this may be part of communion, but it does not replace it. Unfortunately, the human being prefers the simple outward expression of religion to the essence of Christian life, which is daily and personal communion with Jesus Christ. Ellen G. White wrote: “In his sinless state, man held joyful communion with Him ‘in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2:3). But after his sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him.”<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus said, “Abide in me,” He was inviting His disciples from all times to live a permanent experience of fellowship with Him. The Christian life is not sporadic but constant: 24 hours a day, all year round, all the time.

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956), p. 17.

The concepts presented in this book will help you understand and practice the most beautiful of all experiences—to walk with Christ and to find joy in communion with Him. It is only as we live a life of communion with Jesus that we become His disciples. The natural result of walking with Jesus is the transformation of our character into the image and likeness of Jesus. Ellen G. White says, “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”<sup>2</sup>

May God’s people rise in unity and cry out with a loud voice, “I will go!” And *as we go* may we live the wonderful experience of authentic discipleship through daily communion with Christ—becoming like the Master.

**Alejandro Bullón**

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<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1992), p. 39.

# 1

## CHAPTER 1

# GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES!

SOME TIME AGO, BEFORE GETTING INTO MY SERMON, I asked a congregation the following question:

“How many members does this church have?”

A woman raised her hand and replied:

“In this church we no longer have members; we are all disciples.”

The noble woman’s response impressed me, and I asked again:

“And how did you achieve something so extraordinary?”

Before she replied, the church elder sitting by me on the platform leaned over, and quietly, almost whispering, said:

“Last year we took a vote to call ourselves disciples.”

This anecdote reflects, in one way or another, a recent trend in religious circles. Many congregations are beginning to place more emphasis on discipleship. At the very least, the term *discipleship* has gained in use. We talk about disciples more frequently. We attend classes on discipleship, we participate in seminars and symposiums, but we return to the church and go back to

worrying about how to increase our numbers and baptize people to reach a certain target.

When Christ told us to go and “make disciples,” He was not thinking of the terminology; rather, He was referring to the very essence of the Christian life. Something that would revolutionize the world through the ages and generation after generation.

## THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The purpose of discipleship is not to baptize more. The Greek word *mathitis*, translated “disciple” in English, literally means “a person who follows a teacher to learn and become like him or her.” In Greek culture it was used as a technical term to refer to an institutional student under a teacher. Over time the concept of “disciple” was also applied to the devotee of some intellectual or religious leader, and by the third century A.D. it had become a term used to refer to the follower of a religion.

But for Jesus, a disciple was not just any follower of a religion but a faithful follower of His. He did not come to this world to establish a new religion but to seek and save what was lost. Human beings had turned away from the Father, their original character had become deformed, and Jesus came into the world to take them back to the wonderful experience of communion with God and to restore His character in their lives.

## DISCIPLESHIP SEEKS TO TEACH US HOW TO WALK WITH GOD

Discipleship is nothing but an attempt to bring people back to their Creator, and to teach them to walk again with Him. “Christ proposed to reach to the depths of man’s degradation

and woe, and restore the repenting, believing soul to harmony with God.”<sup>1</sup>

Most people today are no longer in harmony with God. They are far from Him. They often walk on a path of destruction and death, while Christ came to take us back to the Father. For this reason discipleship has its origin, its means, and its end in Jesus Christ. He is the teacher. We are His students and followers. We walk together to be, every day, more like the Master.

Jesus is our master not only because He knows the way, but also because He is the Way. Walking with Him is walking in Him. Jesus said to His disciples: “‘You know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:4-6).

When I was a young missionary in the jungle of my native country, Peru, I walked one day following my guide, a native of the Asháninka tribe. Suddenly I noticed that he was disoriented. He stopped and looked from side to side, worried.

“I think you’re lost,” I said.

“I never get lost,” he replied.

“Then show me the way. Where is the way?”

He looked at me with a subtle look of superiority, and in a somewhat sarcastic tone he said:

“We are in the middle of the dense jungle; there is no road here. I am the way; you follow me.”

We live today in a world full of confusion. We constantly make wrong decisions that make us suffer and hurt the people

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964), p. 18.

we love. Apparently there is no road that takes us safely to the place we yearn for. In the midst of all this confusion, we hear the clear words of Jesus: “I am the Way.”

The essence of discipleship is to follow Jesus, and to walk with Him. That is why Jesus developed His ministry by calling people to follow Him. They were rude people, hurt by life, selfish, ambitious, and with a character deformed by sin. The Master walked with them, lived with them, reproduced His character in them, and then sent them to make other disciples. We find the invitation “Follow me” 11 times in the New Testament. Jesus invites, and people accept or reject. “My sheep hear my voice, . . . and they follow me,” He said one day (John 10:27).

## INVITATION TO COMMUNION AND LEARNING

The purpose of Jesus’ invitation to follow Him was not intended to grow a church numerically. It was an invitation to fellowship, communion, and personal learning with Him. The ultimate goal was to implant His character in the disciples. The learning was practical. It affected life as a whole. It transformed the whole being. Jesus wanted His disciples to possess such a meek and humble character that when others saw them, they would see a reflection of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Through discipleship, the character of the Master is revealed in the life of the disciples. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,” says Jesus in Matthew 11:29. Meekness and humility are not theoretical concepts. They are virtues of character. Come and learn! Follow Me and learn! Walk by My side and

learn! This is the basis of discipleship. Follow Jesus to learn from Him and be like Him.

A few days ago a 19-year-old girl was found dead in a suburb of Chicago. A ruthless couple had doped her and opened her belly to keep the child she was expecting. The police caught the killers, but the young mother died a few days later in the hospital. Hearing news like this makes us wonder, What is wrong with people? How is anyone capable of committing such an atrocity?

## WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN RACE?

Obviously murderers don't reflect at all the character of God. Humanity has become evil and perverse. But to understand how we got to the present situation, we need to look at how it all began.

Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of the Creator (Genesis 1:26-31). Their character was similar to that of their Father. There was no inkling of selfishness in them, no pride, no violence, no such thing. To borrow from the words of Paul as he described the nature of God's church, their character was "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, . . . holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

Ellen White writes, "[Man's] nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1890, 1908), p. 45.

Our first parents could have been eternally happy while harboring “pure affections.” They would never have known sadness, pain, illness, or death. However, something deeply disturbing happened, and the human condition collapsed into chaos.

## THE “TRAGEDY” OF FREEDOM

Human beings were created as free creatures. They were free to stay with their Creator or to move away from Him. Decision-making is the privilege of free beings. Unfortunately, the freedom that could have been their greatest blessing became the path to their misfortune. They decided to turn away from God and choose their own path of destruction and death.

They did not die instantly, but continued to live. But from that day on, their lives would not be the same; they would disintegrate spiritually, and consequently, their character would no longer reflect the character of their Creator. They started to slowly become something different, and the more they turned away from God, the more disfigured they would become.

“The human character is depraved, deformed by sin, and terribly unlike that of the first man as he came from the hands of the Creator.”<sup>3</sup> The words “depraved” and “deformed” seem harsh, but they are hardly exaggerations when applied to monsters like the murderous couple in Chicago.

## A SAD SITUATION

This is the unfortunate situation of human beings at present. Their character is but a cartoonish representation of God’s

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<sup>3</sup>Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995), p. 57.



holiness, a grotesque imitation of Adam and Eve's pristine condition. Worst of all, their journey away from God continues. Like Adam and Eve, they no longer feel joy in fellowship with their Creator. In the Garden of Eden the first human beings hid from God, and since that day, they continue to hide, so that no one perceives the deformity of their character.

Ellen G. White writes: "In his sinless state, man held joyful communion with Him. . . . But after his sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him."<sup>4</sup>

## GOD CREATED US TO LIVE WITH HIM

The Lord created Adam and Eve, and intended to live with them the most beautiful experience of communion and fellowship. He wanted to "be" with His children and "walk" with them. This divine purpose is expressed clearly in the Old Testament. "I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:11, 12).

God's desire to live with His children and to walk with them is the essence of the God-human relationship. The idea comes from Eden, where God "walked" at dusk with Adam and Eve. The Hebrew verb *halak*, which is translated as "walked" in Genesis 3:8, can also be translated as "to follow." The root word in *halak* describes the idea of walking by or with someone, and discipleship is nothing more than the experience of walking with

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<sup>4</sup>E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 17.

Jesus in a daily learning experience. God is the guide, the master, the driver. The human being is the disciple who follows the Master and learns from Him.

Discipleship—“following” Jesus, or “walking” with God—began at Creation. It is true that the term *discipleship* is found only twice in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 25:8 and Isaiah 8:16). But the idea of a Teacher who guides and teaches, and a disciple who follows and learns, comes from Eden. “Face-to-face, heart-to-heart communion with his Maker was [Adam’s] high privilege. Had he remained loyal to God,” “more fully would he have fulfilled the object of his creation, more and more fully have reflected the Creator’s glory.”<sup>5</sup>

## THE TEACHER’S ORDER

The Master’s order to His disciples before ascending was that they too were to make new disciples, new followers of the Master (Matthew 28:18-20). The instruments to fulfill that mission would be preaching, teaching, and baptizing. This was not an order that the disciples could fulfill at their discretion. They were to follow the divine instructions.

Luke begins his story of the book of Acts, saying: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen” (Acts 1:1, 2). The instructions given referred to the fulfillment of the mission.

The first disciples were clear about the concept of the mission and how to accomplish it. They were not only concerned

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<sup>5</sup>Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), p. 15.

with increasing the number of church members—they were to live the experience of discipleship. The Bible describes the ways in which they grew up: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

The Lord added to the church those who were to be saved because the church lived the experience of discipleship: They persevered in the doctrine, studying the Word of God. They maintained communion, made new disciples, and lived in a spirit of prayer. The numbers were the result of following the instructions of the Master. And the numbers were considerable (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14).

The temptation we have today, as a church, is to observe the extraordinary way in which the early church grew, and to believe that we urgently need to establish “a discipleship program” with the sole desire to increase the number of baptisms. That way of thinking was not on the first Christian’s agenda.

## DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT A METHOD

Discipleship is not a method devised by some church growth expert. It is Christ’s master plan intended to prepare a people that reflect His character to meet Him (Ephesians 5:25-27).

If humanity had not separated from God, they would have always reflected the character of their Master. But in Eden, man and woman decided to move away from the Creator, and complications ensued. Today humanity’s deformed character is at the root of all of its problems. We live tired, overwhelmed, afflicted, and stressed lives because of the problems that our misshapen

character brings to all areas of life: family, personal, professional, financial, etc.

Christ's remedy is simple: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." But how does He give us rest? He answers this question by saying: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

Jesus takes a scene from the daily life of His time to teach His disciples that the only way to reflect His character, to be meek and humble of heart, is to walk with Him, to "take His yoke" as part of an ongoing learning experience.

The problem with us human beings is that we confuse things. The Word of God comes into our lives, we learn about the gospel and the body of doctrines, which are in essence the teachings of Jesus, and we come to believe that we have been converted. But the question becomes: Did our character really change?

Our thinking changes, for sure. We now know that the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. We also have a new understanding of the state of the dead: we now know that the soul does not wander off at the time of death, that the person rests in their tomb until called back to life at the Second Coming. But what about our character? Have we stopped being angry, proud, or selfish, and become meek and humble in heart, like Jesus?

Upon witnessing church meetings where "pious" Christians almost devour each other alive "in the name of God," where stubbornness poses as conviction, can we say that this is the church of Jesus' disciples? To what extent do these people reflect the character of Jesus? To what extent does an aggressive husband and father reflect the way of the Master?

## A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

When the apostle John sees the redeemed, he describes them in an admirable way: “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Revelation 14:1).

The redeemed in heaven have the name of Jesus written on their foreheads. In the Bible a person’s name is not an arbitrary designation, or a phonetic expression employed to call someone’s attention. A person’s name expresses the nature, essence and history of that person. In other words, their character. It means that the redeemed are in heaven because they reflect the character of Jesus. And how did they achieve that ideal? John himself explains: “They follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (verse 4).

This means that if the redeemed will follow the Lamb for all eternity, they will have learned to follow Him on this earth. And if they followed Him here, it is because they entered into the wonderful experience of discipleship, or the following of the Master.

Sometimes we live worried about doing this or that, because we believe that our entry into eternal life will depend on our behavior. It is a natural human concern. One day a rich young man introduced himself to Jesus and asked Him what he would need to “do” to have eternal life. His concern was what “to do.” Jesus’ response was that instead of being concerned with “doing,” he should be more concerned with “being” (Mark 10:17-22).

“Doing” has to do with behavior. “Being” has to do with character. John sees the redeemed in heaven, not because they “did” this, or “stopped doing” the other. Surely their life has been

a life of coherence with the eternal principles of God, but they are there because they reflect the character of Jesus. “We should never forget that we are placed on trial in this world, to determine our fitness for the future life. None can enter heaven whose characters are defiled by the foul blot of selfishness.”<sup>6</sup>

Ellen G. White adds: “To be like Jesus in character is God’s aim for his people. From the beginning it was God’s plan that members of the human family, created in his image, should develop God-like characters.”<sup>7</sup>

If our understanding of discipleship is limited to a method by which we grow the number of people who accept our teachings, we need an urgent recalibration of ideas. That certainly was not what Jesus had in mind when He invited people to follow Him.

## DISCIPLESHIP IS TRANSFORMATION

Discipleship is not just an informative experience; it is also transformative. The information is aimed at transformation. Walking with Christ is a practical experience that makes us more and more similar to Him. We accept to be disciples of Christ because we want to be like Him. We walk with Jesus because He is the only one capable of shaping us into His likeness.

Ellen White advises: “God gives men opportunities to become one with Christ and one with Him. Those who walk in the fear of God, meditating upon His character, will daily become more and more like Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Ellen G. White, *This Day With God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), p. 40.

This is the church's challenge! To be a people that reflects the character of Jesus to the world. The danger we face is to believe, unconsciously, that the church is a religious enterprise, or a human institution. Impressive numbers and statistics are encouraging. Growth we can measure brings contentment. But it does not prove true spiritual growth.

Why are we still wandering in the desert of this life? How much more are we to wait to enter our heavenly home? Ellen White replies: "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."<sup>9</sup>

We will analyze Christ's words regarding this challenge in the following chapters.

## PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- 1.** Give your own definition of what it means to be a disciple.
- 2.** According to your definition, are you a disciple of Jesus, or just a church member?
- 3.** What do you think you need to become a disciple?

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<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1900, 1941), p. 69.

## CHAPTER 2

# WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER WE SAW THAT OUR basic problem as humans is the defective nature of our character. Our first parents were created in the image and likeness of God. After the arrival of sin, their character became deformed. Within one generation, misfortune, betrayal, and death had taken over the human race.

The degradation started almost immediately. “When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1). But Adam voluntarily turned away from God. Soon after, “he [Adam] had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth” (verse 3). Please notice that even then, Adam’s likeness had already been impaired by sin.

## SIN SEPARATES AND DISFIGURES

One of the Hebrew words that describes sin involves precisely the concept of “abandoning” God. The *awôn* root indicates the loss of the good path, an estrangement from God, and turning one’s back on Him. While God created human beings to live the



most beautiful experience of love and communion with Him, *awôn* expresses quite the opposite: rebellion and separation.

God's yearning was always been to live in communion with His children. The Father wished that they would never forget that they had been created to live with Him, walking, learning and reflecting His character. God would be the Master, and human beings were to be His disciples. A disciple is one who follows the Master wherever He goes.

That desire is expressed strongly in the Old Testament: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12).

## SERVICE: THE RESULT OF WALKING WITH GOD

To "fear the Lord" and "walk in obedience to him" is an eloquent expression. The son would serve the Father as a result of loving Him with all his heart and with all his soul. His service would be a complete commitment. It would not be just about doing the right things, or behaving when people observe, but about serving God at all times, voluntarily, and for love.

God's wish is repeated again and again. "It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 13:4). Serve and follow. Follow and serve. Observe once again that keeping His commandments, and hearing His voice, is directly connected to walking after God and following Him. The Hebrew word *têlākū*, which is translated in this text as "follows,"

has the meaning of walking in someone's steps, in this case in God's steps, and with Him.

## WALK IN LOVE

We are fruits of God's love. Created in love, and for love, to walk in the ways of love. God desires to live with His children the most beautiful experience of love and companionship. That is the reason for our existence (1 John 4:16, 18). We were meant to walk safely, being led by the Father. "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:21).

And if we listen to the good Shepherd's voice and allow ourselves to be led by Him, without deviating to either right or left, we would avoid much pain and suffering. David learned with tears and failures to allow himself to be guided by God and not become separated from Him. That was his inspiration when he wrote:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me" (Psalm 23:1-4).

The Shepherd stays with His sheep and guides them. Thus, they can enjoy green pastures and calm waters, and even when they travel through the valley of shadow and death, they are not afraid.

## A SAD STORY

James was a faithful church elder, an exemplary man, a model father, and an extraordinary husband. The church admired and loved him. He was not one of those leaders who make it their ministry to spy on the lives of others. He was the real thing, someone who inspired people wherever he went. Precisely because of that, no one could believe the news when it was made public. James had abandoned the family and run away with a woman 20 years younger than his wife.

The church was hurt; the brothers mourned the loss of a valuable leader. The pastor visited him several times, but he did not want to talk with anyone. He moved from town, and nobody knew about him for a few years.

One day, while waiting for a traffic light to change, he saw my name on a banner and learned that I was going to preach at the city stadium. The Spirit of God worked in his heart, and that night he went to the stadium. In the dark of the night he settled into a corner and watched everything while hidden in the crowd. The Word of God shook his heart. He remembered his life in the church, but what impressed him that night was that he understood the reason for his present state. He wept bitterly. The message opened his eyes to his sad reality. He had known the church but had never known Jesus. He had been a good man in the moral sense, but not in the spiritual.

That night he left the stadium and wandered through the dark streets shedding tears of regret. He raised his eyes to heaven and apologized to God. The next night he returned to the stadium. On Friday night, at the time of the call, he came forward and gave his life back to Christ.

His is a long story. He had a small daughter with the young woman who was his partner, but he was still married to his wife, with whom he had two daughters. He knew that his return journey would be long and thorny, but nothing else mattered more than to repair his relationship with God.

I tell his story because of what he told me:

“Pastor, please, keep teaching people that it is not enough to be in the church, but that we need to walk with God in a real and practical way. I never experienced this. If I had, perhaps I would not be regretting the sad situation in which I find myself.”

## HUMANITY HAS GROWN APART FROM GOD

The truth is that all of our problems as human beings begin when we stop walking with God. When humans turned away from God and chose their own path, from then on they became wandering pilgrims, sad and lost (Genesis 4:14). Why? That had never been God’s plan for His children. Worst of all, later generations would be born with a deformed character. Injustice, violence, selfishness, and pride would spread like floods of destruction.

Centuries later the prophet Jeremiah, seeing the dramatic situation in which men and women were, wrote: “Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

No! No man or woman is in control of his or her own path. Human ways are deceptive. “Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe” (Proverbs 28:26). Walking wisely is walking with God. The result is that your steps will be affirmed and you will be “kept safe.”

Sometimes your path may seem attractive, seductive, and wonderful. But don't trust your judgment. “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12). Our thoughts, convictions, and even our impressions may be wrong. Sometimes you can't trust your own way of thinking or your particular taste. “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this” (Psalm 37:5). This is not a verse to merely ponder. We ought to live it in our daily experience of discipleship.

## GOD CALLS THE REBEL SON

God knows that human ways are ways of death, and that is why He calls to His children again and again. “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).

The wicked mentioned in this text are not the people who never heard of God, but the members of God's church. “Why will you die, O house of Israel?” asks the Lord. Is it possible to be a church member and yet be “wicked”? This text is clear. Everyone who does not follow Him is on an evil path, regardless of whether they are in the church or not.

However, the church seems not to understand. It believes that because it meets every Sabbath and carries out a beautiful worship program, God feels satisfied. Church members often don't understand that God not only wants His people to congregate to celebrate, sing, pray, and study the Bible, but that He wants His children to learn to walk with Him. That is why God laments: "It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them" (Hosea 11:3).

In the time of Malachi the Lord again warns His people: "'Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty" (Malachi 3:7). In the book of Malachi the people of God ask the same question five times, and each time the Lord asks them to return to Him. What is the reason for this question? They seem to lack understanding. Could it be that worshipping on the Sabbath, following instructions and ceremonies, does not necessarily mean that they walk in the ways of the Lord? Notice what God says: "Return to me, and I will return to you." Only those who are away can be asked to return. They may have been in God's house, but their hearts were far away. Could the same happen to us today?

## AN INSISTENT AND FORCEFUL CALL

Upon the apparent lack of understanding of His people, God speaks to them with words full of pain.

"Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth!  
For the Lord has spoken:  
'I reared children and brought them up,  
but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its master,  
the donkey its owner's manger,  
but Israel does not know,  
my people do not understand.'

"Woe to the sinful nation,  
a people whose guilt is great,  
a brood of evildoers,  
children given to corruption!  
They have forsaken the Lord;  
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel  
and turned their backs on him" (Isaiah 1:2-4).

Again, notice the sadness in God's words. "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." "Israel does not know, my people do not understand." "Children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord." His church "does not understand" His children chose their own paths. They "have forsaken the Lord"; they "turned their backs on him." And consequently, they became "children given to corruption." Now compare these words to what Ellen White says: "The human character is depraved, deformed by sin, and terribly unlike that of the first man as he came from the hands of the Creator."<sup>1</sup>

God feels sadness in comparing His children with irrational beings. "The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." This is not the only time that God expresses the desire for His church to understand that it is not enough to worship on Sabbath. He wants to make us understand. He says: "I will instruct you and

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<sup>1</sup>E. G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 57.

teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you” (Psalm 32:8, 9).

What a terrible situation! God offers to teach and guide His people, yet they ignore His loving care. And God again repeats His complaint in the psalmist’s words: “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior” (Deuteronomy 32:15).

In the Septuagint “Jeshurun” is used as an affectionate term applied to Israel, and is translated as “beloved.” While it should remind Israel of its call to walk with God, it also carries a hint of irony in this passage. Instead of living in harmony with what its name indicated, Israel became ungovernable, abandoned its Maker, and walked in its own paths.

## RETURN AND REST

God’s insistence that His people would return to Him is a reflection of His desire for them to live happy and victorious, as they reflect His character. “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Rest. Isn’t it one of humanity’s greatest needs? And this is precisely what the Lord offers. Rest for our souls. But this rest can be experienced only when we abandon our ways and seek His. He advises: “Ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it.”



Centuries later the God of Israel, incarnate in the person of Christ, would repeat the same invitation. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28, 29).

In the words of Jeremiah there will be rest for the soul of those who walk in the paths of God. In Jesus’ words there will be rest for those who “take His yoke.”

A yoke is a piece of wood that is used to tie two oxen or mules together so that they can join their strength. Generally, one end of the yoke is placed on the neck of an experienced ox, and the other on the neck of an inexperienced young ox that will learn to plow. At first the young bull, used to living and walking by himself, is very uncomfortable and tries to get rid of the yoke, but finally learns to go along with the adult bull and to plow correctly.

Jesus states that those who carry His yoke will find rest for their souls. But before finding such rest, it is necessary to do three things: First, we are to go to Him. Second, we are to accept His yoke and stay by His side. Third, we are to learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart. Then, and only then, will whoever goes to Him and takes up His yoke find needed rest.

## THE PROBLEM WITH HUMANS IS OUR CHARACTER

The cause of fatigue and overwhelming despair felt by so many is their lack of humility. If they were “meek and humble,” they would not be tired. Here is why. The opposite of meekness and humility is anger, pride, and arrogance. This is the true cause of many of our problems. Jesus knows this; therefore, He comes

to us and invites us to return to Him, walk in His ways, and allow Him to transform our characters in His image.

Herein lies the biggest problem of human beings: a character disfigured by sin. Most of our difficulties stem from our character. Men and women have turned away from God, and consequently their character has lost its likeness to the Father's character. They often perceive this reality and try to change, but cannot.

Ellen G. White says: "It is impossible for any of us by our power or our own efforts to work this change in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, which Jesus said He would send into the world, that changes our character into the image of Christ; and when this is accomplished, we reflect, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. That is, the character of the one who thus beholds Christ is so like His, that one looking at him sees Christ's own character shining out as from a mirror. Imperceptibly to ourselves, we are changed day by day from our own ways and will into the ways and will of Christ, into the loveliness of His character. Thus we grow up into Christ, and unconsciously reflect His image."<sup>2</sup>

Let's look at the ideas in this text:

**1. "It is impossible for any of us by our power or our own efforts to work this change in ourselves."** To understand in a practical way what the word "impossible" means, try to keep your head submerged in a bucket of water for a half hour. That's impossible.

In the Garden of Eden the devil made Eve believe that she "could." "If you eat of the tree that God said 'You will not eat,'

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<sup>2</sup>E. G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 63.

your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,” he said. And Eve believed. The idea of being like God and doing everything she wanted seemed extraordinary.

That way of thinking is the essence of humanism. Humanism began in Italy in the fourteenth century with the Renaissance, and spread throughout Europe, and the world, as a reaction to the dominance of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. The people, in their eagerness to free themselves from the tyranny of the Roman church, began to reject God. Theocentric thought, which conceives God as the center of everything, began to be set aside, giving rise to anthropocentrism, in which humans occupy the center of life and determine what is good or bad for them.

Humanism has infiltrated the ranks of Christianity. When Christians believe that, in some way, they can live a victorious life through their own efforts, they have fallen, without realizing it, into the clutches of humanism, with failure and frustration as its result.

**2. “It is the Holy Spirit . . . that changes our character into the image of Christ.”** If this is true, all you need to do is to turn to Jesus and allow His Spirit to operate the transformation of your character. How does He do it? Paul responds: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). How do you walk by the Spirit, or with the Spirit? This question will be answered later.

**3. “Thus we grow up into Christ, and unconsciously reflect His image.”** To reflect the image of God is to reflect His character. This is not a mystical experience, but real. Speaking of the incarnation of Christ, John said: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory

of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Human beings saw the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ, because they saw His character of grace and truth. If we learn to walk with Jesus, we will reflect the character of the Master in us.

**4. “The character of the one who thus beholds Christ is so like His, that one looking at him sees Christ’s own character shining out as from a mirror.”** The apostle John, speaking of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit, says: “After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor” (Revelation 18:1). This fourth angel symbolizes the remnant church, and when the church reflects the character of Jesus, the earth will be illuminated with the glory of God, because the person who beholds Christ will carry a resemblance to the Master.

**5. “Imperceptibly to ourselves, we are changed day by day from our own ways and will into the ways and will of Christ.”** The disciple intends only to attain daily fellowship with Jesus. They do not boast about what has happened in their lives, but those around them realize that something has changed. The husband begins to see a difference in the wife’s demeanor; she perceives a change in him. People who know you want to be like you, because they imperceptibly see Jesus in you.

**6. “Thus we grow up into Christ, and unconsciously reflect His image.”** This is the only way that Christ has to transform our deformed character. He invites us to a life of fellowship and communion, He offers us His yoke, and those who accept the invitation learn to be meek and humble of heart.

Walking with Christ is the divine solution to the problems of humanity. But what does it mean to walk with Christ? We

cannot physically walk with Him as the disciples did. So what are the means provided by God to allow us to experience a transformation of our character? That is the subject of the next chapter. Keep reading, and you will be surprised at what Jesus has in store for you.

## PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- 1.** Write out two character defects that have created problems for you.
- 2.** Think of one of those problems and try to imagine how Jesus would have reacted in your situation.
- 3.** Do you think your church cares about following Jesus, or is it mostly concerned about having a nice Saturday worship program?