

DEEPER:

A Return To The Open Water

November 7, 2010

Good Morning. OK we are streaming through this series called DEEPER. It is a series based on the biblical assumption that we are all on a Spiritual Journey and that we are being made into something. God desires that we be made into Disciples of Jesus Christ.

However, there is an enemy to that plan, today's message is about that and the principle that a fully committed follower must live by in order to overcome that enemy and move forward.

I want to us to remember the first four principles, here they are

A fully Committed Follower

1. Deflects a cynical worldview with the Word of God
2. Extends Authentic Hospitality as a result of a forgiven life
3. Embraces Transformation and moves beyond personal comfort
4. Pursues God's purposes in spite of fear

Today we look at the 5th principle

*How does a fully committed follower of Christ live, so as to become an effective witness to those at **Stage FIVE?***

A Fully Committed Follower:

5. Excels in focus and discipline and does not personalize suffering

A follower of Christ understands that living out God's purpose brings engagement with a spiritual enemy who seeks to tempt and distract, and destroy effective ministry. As a result, a follower practices a lifestyle of spiritual discipline that keeps him/her focused on God and his/her calling, and accepts suffering as part of the journey of faith.

Living out God's purpose for your life is the most powerful thing you will ever do in your life. It will bring life to a part of the world that will never be the same had you not followed his call, along with fulfilling your own life with purpose and significance.

Jim Elliot and 4 other men were missionaries in Ecuador to the Waodani tribe. In 1956, as they were making in roads into the lives of these people with the Gospel, something happened and they were all 5 murdered by the tribe on a river near the village.

Jim Elliot's journal had this quote:

I may no longer depend on pleasant impulses to bring me before the Lord. I must rather respond to principles I know to be right, whether I feel them to be enjoyable or not.

As a person launches out following God's purposes they must be ready for the price they are about to pay for following that calling. A fully committed follower is not only aware of the price but has prepared him/her self with 3 different weapons.

1. Focus
2. Discipline
3. Not personalizing suffering

Peter shares this haunting but very real message:

*Be self-controlled and alert.. Your **enemy the devil** prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.* *1 Peter 5:8-9*

Although this is a message for all of us, it is particularly a message for those seeking to do what they believe God is calling them to do. In essence Peter is saying, Be Focused and be Disciplined. Why? Because we have an Enemy, that is seeking to devour any who would follow the way of the cross, the way of Jesus. The word.....

Enemy – The Accuser of the Brethren

The way the enemy seeks to devour is in his name. If he can pit one against another then he can work is mayhem. It also seems he does his best work in the church. There is one church I became aware of that was known as the 'fighting church'. Each month, at this church they would have a board meeting. At the end of almost every board meeting it would end with a fight, a fist fight that would end up in the parking lot. It was so frequent, that the local newspaper would have a reporter stationed outside the church, to capture pictures of the church board members in fist fights so they would appear in the newspaper the next day.

Peter goes on to name the enemy, the Devil...

Devil – Diabolos – To Cast; To falsely accuse and divide people without any reason

The point Peter is making is we have an enemy the devil, who if he can falsely accuse and divide people, then he will have succeeded in distracting us from the mission. But focus (being spiritually alert) and Discipline (practicing self-control) are the 2 things that if practiced in the life of a follower of Christ stay the strongest chance of overcoming this ploy of the enemy. It allows us to resist the temptation to verbally or otherwise destroy each other. I have watched groups of people in the church, who were bent on tearing the pastor or a ministry leader up there group sessions, feeling totally justified in doing it. Someone in the group speaks up and says “I will not participate in this any more. Everytime we start moving into tearing down the people of this church or school or town. I am going to starting praying out loud. Notice the greek word here for devil – Diabolos. It is where we get our English word, Diabolical.

The second passage, which is from the book of James says this:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4

What James is introducing us to is the biblical perspective of suffering.

Trials – Temptations; Depends on who is doing the testing

Trials bring suffering into our lives and can come from the devil or they can come from God. God brings trials in our life to make us into stronger people. The devil brings trials into our life to break us to pieces and causes us to divide away from others. Our loved ones, our friends, anyone. What James is saying is if we have a proper perspective of suffering and do not personalize it when it comes, then no matter who the trials are coming from, whether God or the devil, they both are in our life to produce the same result and that is to produce perseverance. That is the ingredient, that if present in our lives will cause us to finish the race, to win the prize.

Focus - is about fully committing to one thing and not taking your eyes off of it.

Discipline – is about training yourself to do the right things over and over again

Not Personalizing suffering – is about understanding that the only way we grow is through difficulties. If we are always about minimizing the suffering in our lives then we will not be able to last very long under the strain of fighting the battle God has for us to fight.

I want to end with this story from the Book of Judges. Gideon was a guy who was just like many of us. He was very aware of everything that was wrong with his nation and in fact he harbored in his heart that God pretty much had abandoned them. But God, through an angel spoke to Gideon of the key role that Gideon would play in saving the nation from the oppressive power of the nation of Midian. Gideon accepts the calling on his life. Fast Forward to this story. Gideon is now a fully committed follower and the battle is on between the nation of Israel and the nation of Midian. As this story unfolds we are given a front row seat in watching how God selects those

warriors he wants to fight the battle. The story starts out with Gideon having 32,000 fighting warriors, then God speaks up, listen to this:

God's Selection Process

The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. Therefore, tell the people, 'Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.'" So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.

saved themselves by their own strength Notice the motive behind God thinning out the warriors, they would boast that they would have done it under their own strength. In order for us to see God deliver us, we have to surrender to him. This is not about becoming wimps, this is about bowing our knee to an authority greater than us.

Then came the first thinning out. *'Whoever is timid or afraid may leave'* This is the barrier at stage 4. Remember, Fear. God appeals to the Fear barrier. Another version says. Any who tremble with fear. Meaning a fear that paralyzes. 22,000 warriors left. Can you imagine Gideon's face. There goes 2/3 of his church.

Then came the second thinning

But the LORD told Gideon, "There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not." When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the LORD told him, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream." Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream. Judges 7:2-6

This had to do with getting a drink of water. Another 9,700 left and Gideon was left with 300. That is less than 1% of his original fighting force. God has made it very clear, it is not that God is not interested in the masses, but God's top priority is to develop in us certain very clear attributes. Focus – Discipline and a proper perspective on suffering.

As we approach this table today we must understand that Christ had one mission and he was focused. When he said his work was finished he was referring to all of humankind but he was specifically referring to those 12 men, and he remained disciplined to the end. When he was hanging on the cross, even in death he did not personalize rejection and suffering and neither can we if we are going to have any lasting influence for the kingdom.