
Spiritual Formation Part 34

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Matthew 16: 21-28

Spiritual Formation is about Following Christ! Part 1

Peter faced a crisis and a challenge. He, who just had boldly proclaimed his faith, quickly forgets it and stumbles to his own will. He sees that the Lord is in danger and thinks it is his role to protect The God of the universe. He does not see Jesus' will and plan, and desires to protect the Lord from His willful destiny. Peter, *the stone* is now Peter, *the stumbling block*.

- Peter knew of Jesus "secret identity," secret, because people would try to use Him for a mission for which He was not meant, or shape Him into something that He was not. Hence, we understand the following verses that tell us we must deny ourselves to be real in Him. Peter had a defective perception of who Jesus was. Peter knew Jesus was God, but did not treat Him as so. He tried to protect Jesus, a noble concept; but Peter, who knew Jesus was the great I AM, must have realized He did not need protection.
- Jesus goal was martyrdom (Matthew 20:28). This goal was necessary to pay our debt of sin, and He became the Ultimate Servant! Most OT prophets had a level of self preservation and did not seek martyrdom; but, if it came, they were willing (1 Kings 19: 3-4; Jer. 20:7-18).
- Peter tried to superimpose His plan upon our Lord's. This is an act we often try to do! So Jesus, *rebuked Him*. It was tradition that sought a militant Messiah, not Scriptures. Peter was standing up for His tradition of a Messiah that triumphs for the people, and did not understand Jesus' true role, even though He had just told him. His Triumph was a million times greater than their expectations. Peter publicly criticizes his teacher, a cultural "no-no;" a teacher or rabbi was never to be criticized—especially publicly.
- *Stumbling block*. Jesus continues to play on the word "petros," Greek for Rock, as a humorous witticism or pun. In the previous passage, Jesus is the Rock that cannot be moved, and Peter is the little stone that was to set on His foundation—as we all are living stones on His foundation. Here, Peter goes from lying on the foundation to lying on the ground, causing himself and others to trip and fall (Mark 8:30-32). This image of a stumbling block is also an illustration of sin and losing one's way. So many things can get in our way and cause us to stumble unless we remain on His Rock, our foundation.
- *Satan* here refers to adversary; Jesus is probably not calling Peter a devil. Jesus identifies Peter with Satan, meaning they are both tempting others (Matt. 4:7-10). Both wanted the Kingdom of God without the Cross. But, the cross was the

essential component for the Kingdom as this was the only way we could be allowed into the Kingdom; His cross covers our sin so we can be in God's presence. Jesus, making the connection to Satan, shows the severity of Peter's error. To us, it is the seriousness of authenticity and obedience!

- *Get behind me* meant, get in line, shape up, and know your place. Our chief oppression is sin—not who occupies the neighborhood.
- *Deny himself* is the stance of real commitment. Commitment is remaining obedient in our trust and faith regardless of our feelings, false opportunities, or oppression.
- People then, as now, did not want suffering, even though the Bible warns us that suffering precedes the Kingdom—for Him, and, for us, to a much smaller degree. They wanted the triumph without the cost. We can take comfort in our setbacks and sufferings when we are obedient, as it brings Him glory and prepares us for the reality of the Kingdom (1 Peter 4:19; James 1:2-4).

We need to hear His call. Christ calls us to take up the cross and deny ourselves; this is extreme discipleship, a call that is to cancel out our will so we can submit to His. When we confess Christ as our Savior, it means He is our Lord. We are to surrender to His direction, call, and purpose. When we claim to be His, we need to commit and follow, leaving behind all that hinders and causes us to go astray. This goes against our will and our culture that says, *you are number one, and you deserve whatever you want*. But, usually what we want is not what is best. Yes, we deserve better; and better is to be in Christ and to follow His ways. When we deny ourselves, we are liberating ourselves from misdirected ways to His way, from temporary, skewed fun to eternal wonder.

Questions

1. To you, what would be considered *extreme discipleship*?
2. What hinders you or causes you to go astray from the principles to surrender, submit, and commit?
3. How, and why, does sin cause a person, you, for example, to lose his or her way? Why is sin more attractive than the eternal Truth and Way of God?
4. Our chief oppression is sin, not who occupies the neighborhood. Can you expound on this? How, and why, is this so?
5. Explain what *deny himself* has meant to you? What should it mean; what can it mean?
6. What is your greatest struggle in surrendering and being more committed to Christ as Lord?

7. What does *take up the cross* mean to you? What should it mean? What can it mean?
8. How is it that the ultimate battle in life is not with arms, it is with wills?
9. Where are you in the process of redemption and growth? Such as, what are the things that hinder you? How have you been transformed so far? Where do you still need to be transformed?
10. Do you realize and see what Christ is doing in your life? How so? What not? What do you need to do to see that His truth and plan is for you today?
11. Why is it the only way to be a real, authentic follower of our Lord Jesus Christ is to deny what we want and pursue what He wants? Why is this so hard? Why do so few Christians do this? Have you?
12. What do you need to do to be focused upon building your life on His precepts? Can you benchmark some goals? What can you do to see that these goals turn to reality and not trash?