

“Let’s Grow in Our Discipleship”

By Rev. Edgar F. Solís R.

Look at this photo. Do you see? It is a huge elephant tied by a rope to a stake in the ground. You might wonder how that tiny stake and rope could hold such an enormous, powerful creature?

You might think it was some high-tensile steel rope with the stake buried 10 feet into the ground. But then you look, and no. It’s just a wooden stake and a frayed-looking rope.

How can this be?

While young and weak, an elephant is tied by a heavy chain or just a rope to an immovable steel stake. No matter how hard the young elephant tries to pull the stake from the ground or break the chain, it cannot. From then on, no matter how big and strong the elephant gets it believes that when it’s tied to a stake, it cannot move.

If the stake is there, it is powerless.

I can say that this example could be a parallel or an illustration of our Discipleship.

Following Jesus certainly has many challenges. Discipleship implies more than following Jesus from afar. As believers, we sometimes hesitate to grow in our discipleship just because of life or hard circumstance, failures, or weakness.

Christian author and communicator Rob Bell presents the Jewish cultural and religious context in which Jesus grew up. To follow spiritual leaders was a common practice and a reality before, during, and after Jesus.

Education was huge in Jesus' day, and there was an ongoing argument as to which age a Rabbi would receive a youth as a pupil. Jewish education was made up of three primary sections:

Bet Safar, Bet Talmud, Bet Midrash,

Bet Safar

Usually, from the ages five to ten, is a time taught in the synagogue by the Rabbi. During this time, good Jewish boys memorized the Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - memorized by the age of ten!

Bet Talmud

Progressing on from Bet Safar, it continues from the age of ten on to fourteen.

During this time, the student would continue his memorization of the Psalms, prophets, and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). It wasn't uncommon in that day for a good Jewish boy to have the Old Testament memorized by the age of fourteen.

Bet Midrash

At the age of fourteen, Rob Bell says that the best of the best would continue to apply oral and written law from the Talmud, the Mishna, Sages, and years and years of commentary on the scriptures.

Each Rabbi would have their own interpretation of how to live out the Torah. You have the law itself and then the Rabbi's interpretation of the rules required to obey the law.

The Rabbi's rules were called "his yoke." When you studied under a Rabbi, you took his yoke upon you.

But Jesus came and said His yoke was easy. He's speaking as a Rabbi would.

So, at the age of fourteen, the best of the best, the Harvard and Yale of the Jewish boys took another step.

All Jewish boys wanted to be Rabbis, because teachers were the most respected people of the day. At fourteen, the Harvard and Yale boys would approach a Rabbi and request to become his disciple.

If the Rabbi tested you and determined that you were good enough, that you were indeed really good enough to follow him, he would say, "Come, take my yoke upon you and become my disciple." And at that time, the boy would leave everything (home, mother, father, synagogue, community...) and devote his entire life to being just like the Rabbi.

This system continues today to some extent in Israel.

One of the Sages from the Mishna is quoted as this, "May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi." Rabbis would spend their days taking their disciples around and teaching them, and as they traveled from place to place, they would literally kick up a cloud of dust. And because the disciples were following the Rabbi, at the end of the day, they would actually be covered in the dust their Rabbi kicked up - May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi...

Now there is always the possibility that the Rabbi might decide while quizzing you that you are not good enough to follow him. He would say, "Obviously, you know Torah, but you don't have what it takes to be just like me. Go, make babies, pray that they become Rabbis, and ply your trade." Go learn the family business and live a good life that your sons may grow up to be better than you.

And that brings us to the image of Jesus calling his disciples. (Matthew 4:18 - 22 and 16:13 - 20) As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. What were they? Fisherman, Why? Well, because they didn't make the cut! A Rabbi had probably told them they weren't the best of the best and sent them to "ply their trade".

So yes, Jesus goes to the losers and rejects and calls them!

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Many of us have thought about it. This man comes walking up and says, "Come follow me." They drop everything and do it! Yes, simple Jesus calls them out, and like he has some mystical power, they jump out of the boat and chase after him.

Jesus was a Rabbi! He is calling disciples! He thinks they are good enough, even though others did not. He's giving them a chance to fulfill their dream. So of course, they drop what they're doing and follow the Rabbi.

Do you really think Jesus thinks you can do it? That's the whole premise of the system.

The Rabbi won't accept someone who can't make it.

We can tell, based on the context that several of the disciples were in their late to mid-teens. Peter had a mother-in-law, and usually by the age of eighteen, a boy would be married.

Jesus calls teenage rejects and second-class to be his disciples. And He continues to call them today!

Christ is walking down the beach towards you. He's calling out, "Come and follow me." What will your answer be? **MAY YOU BE COVERED IN THE DUST OF YOUR RABBI!**

Do you remember the illustration at the beginning of my message?

The elephant and the stake story relate to mindset and many people act like that.

They see an imaginary stake in the ground and relate it to a heavy chain they couldn't break, you probably want to follow Jesus, but something is telling you that you cannot.

You may have many stakes for your past.

You must question yourself so you know what and where those stakes are.

With God's help, start pulling them from the ground and grow in your discipleship!

Be free to follow Jesus! Amen!