

**“WANTED: MEN WHO WILL MODEL CHRIST —
AND MEN WHO WILL FOLLOW THE MODEL”**

(Philippians 3:17)

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (King James Version)

“Brethren, together follow my example and observe those who live after the pattern we have set you” (Amplified Bible translation)

This text might immediately throw a shallow Christian into protest. He might say, “Who but an egotist would say, ‘Brethren, join in imitating me?’” However, this assessment overlooks several very important facts from the life of the Apostle Paul, as well as several important facts revealed in the context of this verse.

Fact Number One: the moral confusion of the world of Paul’s day is known to have been very great. *People needed moral and spiritual examples that could be trusted.* Paul did not back down from this duty, and he encouraged other believers to also assume the responsibility of Christian example.

Fact Number Two: the *context* of this verse corrects the possibility of a charge of egotism against the one who wrote these words. Paul has just stated in no uncertain terms that he was not perfect. “I have not already reached the goal of the Christian life, nor have I become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (verse 12). In fact, Paul clearly indicates that the only worthy example of a Christian is the person who admits he is *not* perfect but is nonetheless pressing on. He has just said that he personally has no righteousness of his own, that any righteousness he has is provided by Another (verse 9). Thus, the only righteousness others are to respect in Paul is the very righteousness of Christ Himself.

Then, look just beyond our text (verse 17), and read verses 18 and 19: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now in tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” After reading those words, it becomes quite obvious why Paul wrote what he did in verse 17. There were plenty of *bad* examples to observe, but all men (including Christians) need *good* examples.

Fact Number Three: in this verse, Paul called on the Philippian Christians to imitate *not only him, but also other exemplary Christians.* Hear the words again: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark *them* which walk so as ye have us for an example.” The New American Standard Version says, “And observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” So Paul guards both himself and his disciples in this statement. He guards himself against the pride of thinking that he is the only exemplary Christian on the premises, and he

guards them against following him exclusively, which might tend to create a cult. Nevertheless, Paul lovingly and boldly asks them to imitate and follow him.

I. THE PRACTICAL METHOD OF MAKING DISCIPLES

Here we see *the practical method of making disciples*. Just as it did with Jesus, disciple-making begins with a *model*, a *mandate*, and a *method*. The *model* provides the *incarnational example* of the process. The *mandate* clearly shows that disciple-making is the *responsibility of each Christian*. The *method* combines the model and the mandate in a *practical procedure*, and shows how disciple-making is to be accomplished.

A. The model is in personal example

The New Testament *model for disciple-making is in personal example*, and each Christian is expected to supply such an example. Christian, the truth is that *people will either take you as an example of Christ, or as an exemption from Christ*. You cannot escape the exerting of influence, the setting of example. D. L. Moody was probably correct when he said, “Of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, and the other ninety-nine will read the Christian.” You see, everything we *say* is a *profession* of faith, and everything we *do* is a *promotion* of faith—or these things are *preventions* of faith in the lives of others. Our words and works are either an encouragement in favor of *good*, or of *less good*, or of *evil*. We daily influence our intimates and the immediate circle of associates just beyond them, whether we are conscious of our influence or not. A stone thrown into a pond does not merely disturb the water in the spot where it hits it. Around that point of impact, great concentric circles form. We simply cannot control our influence, though we certainly can largely control the kind of influence we exert.

“I have a little shadow, That goes in and out with me;
And what can be the use of him, Is often more than I can see.”

Behind these ideas rests a gigantic law of spiritual life, and it is this: Christianity is *propositional*, to be sure, but its first attraction to human beings is generally *personal*. It is *instructional*, but it is *first incarnational*. Historian Robert Wilken said it wisely when he said, “Before people are *doers*, they are *first spectators*.” Christianity is not merely *audible*, it is also *visual and tangible* (see I John 1:1-3). So *it must have models* as well as mouthpieces; *it must have pacesetters* as well as proclaimers; *it must have examples* as well as exhorters. This is one of the roles Jesus plays for mankind — “leaving us an example, to follow in His steps” (I Peter 2:21).

This is a key role, also, for every disciple-maker. He cannot expect his disciples to be what he is not, or to do what he does not do, or to go where he does not go. It is true that the disciple-maker’s life must not be the *end* of the disciple’s quest, but merely the *example* of one seeking to be a follower of Christ. But *it is example that gives credibility to leadership*. Jesus *exemplified* the standard of disciple-making before He *exhorted* it.

Reconsider for a moment the characteristics of a disciple. A disciple is one who: (1) has a *regular relationship* with his disciple-maker, his teacher (compare Mark 3:14a); (2) *receives*

revelation (systematic truth) from his disciple-maker, his teacher (see Matthew 10:5); (3) *repeats* the truth received to other potential disciples (II Timothy 2:2); (4) shows increasing *resemblance* to his disciple-maker, his teacher (see Luke 6:40); and (4) becomes a *reflection* of his teacher in both concept and conduct. So a disciple-maker must be a model and a pace-setter, and he must expect his disciples to follow him and his example. Indeed, he must humbly *invite* them to do so, as Paul does in our text.

B. The mandate is in personal exhortation

Clearly, the New Testament *mandate* to disciple-making *is presented in the form of personal exhortation*. Let's examine our verse more closely, in order to be sure that we understand the dimensions of responsibility that are presented here. Indeed, we must recognize that the responsibility is two-fold. Paul had to *show* it and *say* it, and the Philippian readers had to *see* it and *submit* to it. The two key verbs, "join in following my example," and "observe those who so walk," are both in the present tense. Again, we must note that Paul boldly urged Christians to follow the example of the testimony and technique of other Christians. This means that the following of right examples should be the consistent and continuous activity of every Christian. It also suggests that most Christians need to be encouraged by another Christian to do this, or the concept will lapse in their minds.

Pastor Rick Yohn, in his book, *Living Securely In an Unstable World*, wrote, "In my later teen years, I had the privilege of being supported by a number of mature Christian men. They spent time praying with me, counseling me, and encouraging me in my Christian walk. I developed a boldness for witnessing by following the example of one man. I established a consistent prayer life by following the example of another. I developed a deep desire for studying the Scriptures by following the example of a third. *The more I associated myself with such men, the more I experienced a personal spiritual growth and the sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit.*" (The italics are mine, not the author's). Christian, you are following somebody's example at this very moment. You spend your minutes, days, weeks, months, and years living out the influence that people have exerted on your life.

Note that you are to give positive and selective attention to those who set the right example for you and others. "Mark them which so walk," Paul says. The Greek word translated "mark" is the word "skopos," from which we derive our English word, "scope." Perhaps you have heard someone say, "We scoped it out," referring to a careful and critical examination of a certain object. The word means to "keep an eye on." In Romans 16:17, this word is used for an examination that leads you to *avoid* something, but here, the examination is made in order to *appreciate* and imitate something.

Look also at the word, "example" in our text. It is a big, big word. The Greek word is "tupon," from which we get our word "type." The word "type" is a special word, and it has a specialized meaning in the New Testament. It comes from a root that means "to strike," and it describes the creating of an impression by striking the image into a receptive surface. Technically, it was the impress or figure made by a seal or a die, such as the die that is used in minting new coins.

This was the same word Thomas used when he said about Jesus, “Except I shall see in His hands the print (the ‘tuon’— the “impression”) of the nails, and put my finger into the print (‘impression’) of the nails . . . I will not believe” (John 20:25). Thomas was saying that the marks of crucifixion in the body of Jesus were all he had to go by, and all other impressions were not to be trusted. This is the word translated “example” in our text. The example of a Spirit-walking Christian is the only trustworthy impression most people will ever have. However, it is evident that Christians do not automatically set a Christian example for others to follow. Unless we are “imitators” of Christ in the fullest New Testament sense, we will leave false impressions with others as to Who Jesus is and what Christianity is all about. And note this: *the impressions we make are the result of a die already cast, a Life already lived — and we have been stamped with the Image of it!*

So a Christian must constantly ask himself, “Is my life worth copying?” *Would I want to live in heaven among a society of Christians who have lived their lives by the impression I have made on them?* The word translated “example” suggests a “copy-pattern” or a “mold.” Close examination of Paul’s letters in the New Testament will disclose that this idea is quite common in his writings. In I Thessalonians 1:7, Paul says, “You were *examples* to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia.” He made the same appeal to the Corinthians that he presents in our text when he said, “I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (I Corinthians 4:16). And again in I Corinthians 11:1, which proves the point we made earlier about Paul’s humility: “Be ye followers of me, *even as I also am of Christ.*” There is Paul’s guard, there is his proviso, there is his protection, there is his qualification — *follow me, but only as I follow Christ.* In II Thessalonians 3:7-9, Paul put the appeal even more powerfully: “You know how (why) you ought to follow us: for we did not behave ourselves in a disorderly fashion among you: neither did we eat any man’s bread without return; but we worked with labor and pain night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Nor because we have no rights, but *to makes ourselves an example unto you to follow us.*” So the Christian disciple-maker and teacher should make self-conscious effort to provide the right example, and to appeal to his disciples to follow that example. Like the teacher who writes the “copy-pattern” on the chalkboard and assigns the pupils to copy it, Paul places the pattern of his own life in Christ before the Philippian Christians, and asks them to “copy” it.

Johann Gutenberg is credited with building the first printing press. Living and working in the Rhineland of Germany in the 1440s, he gave to the world one of the most important tools ever invented. Before that time, all copies of information — records, facts, etc. — were made by hand. You see, Mr. Modern, there was a time when fax machines did not exist! I heard about a man in a Memphis business who was trying to fax a message to the west coast, but he accidentally got his tie caught in the fax machine—and ended up in Los Angeles himself! Before moveable type, before typewriters, before Xerox, before computers, before fax, there were people who had to copy documents by hand if the documents were to be preserved. This is the way the earliest transmissions of the Bible were made. The copyist had to be very careful to copy everything correctly. In Jesus’ time, the scribes mentioned in the Bible were very important people. They were the copyists who were responsible to preserve and transmit the text of the Bible.

The scribe was himself carefully trained for this task. Jesus referred in Matthew 13:52 to “the scribe who is instructed,” and the word translated “instructed” is the verb form of the word “disciple.” “Every scribe who is *discipled*.” Intensive training was required for the copyist’s technical job to be done well. In his training, the master scribe or teacher would give the disciple, the apprentice, the aspiring young scribe, a piece of paper with the letters of certain words written picturesquely across the top. These letters contained every “stroke” (remember the word, “tu^opon”) that the copyist would be expected to make. The young copyist would practice copying the words again and again, until he had mastered the printing of those letters. He literally *followed the “example” (copied the “tu^opon”) that was set before him*. After he had followed the example enough times, the stroke of the pen came naturally to him.

Dear Christians, *all of us are **copies**, and **copyists***, and then we are responsible to be *copy-patterns for someone else to copy!* We are to follow the examples of worthy Christians until the “tracing of the strokes” of the Christian life become natural and automatic in our own lives. We are responsible to carefully choose the examples we will follow. These examples will play an incredibly large part in making us who we will finally become.

So we see that our text combines the proper model (Paul and others) and the proper mandate (the urgent encouragement to follow their example) for making disciples. Both the model and the mandate are essential. If I only see a model of the Christian life, I will not be able to follow it with full intelligence. If I only hear the mandate, I will think it is too visionary and impossible to receive my serious consideration and commitment. Both are essential.

II. THE PERSONAL MODEL FOR DISCIPLE-MAKERS

This text also suggests that *disciple-makers also need (and have) personal models*. The original model of disciple-making was Jesus Himself. From all eternity, He had been His Father’s disciple. When He came to the earth, Jesus taught a small group of men and made them responsible to teach others. He made disciples, each of whom was then responsible to make other disciples. We could say that He not only made disciples, He made disciple-makers, and they then trained other disciples, who in turn would also become disciple-makers. So an ever-enlarging network of trained disciple-makers emerged from the training process which Jesus initiated with His Twelve.

A generation later, a disciple-making leader emerged in the Christian movement who functioned in the Spirit and Vision of his Master. Though Paul had apparently never seen Jesus in the flesh, he was so influenced by His disciples that he learned about *being* a disciple of Christ (remember Stephen, Acts 7) and *building* disciples (remember Barnabas, Paul’s disciple-maker) *from them*. In turn, he said to a young disciple-maker, “The things which you have heard from me, the same things commit to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). We must see this as simply an extension of Jesus’ own life. Jesus said, in effect, “The things that I, Jesus, have heard from My Father, I have committed to (invested in) twelve faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Our text for this study was written by that second-generation man who was a crucial “link” in the chain of disciple-making. Just what kind of example did he set? What kind of model was he? What copy-pattern can we detect in him? Well, it is very interesting that you asked that question! The third chapter of Philippians gives us

a profound portrait of Paul. In order to see the dimensions of his example, let's see what kind of man he was. We will use the verses preceding our text as our foundation.

In verses 12-15, Paul said, "I am not as one who has already 'arrived,' nor am I anywhere near perfection: but I am following hard after God, so that I may fully 'grasp' that for which Christ Jesus has grasped me. My brothers, I have not fully grasped it yet: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are past, and reaching ahead toward those things that are still before me, I strain toward the mark for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. As many as are maturing in Christ, I ask them to join me with the same mentality."

Here is a veritable world in words! Each sentence is an ocean of content, enticing the swimmer-in-training to dive in and exhaust himself. However, because of the nature of our study, we will focus our attention on *the kind of man Paul was* — in order to see the model he gave, the example he set, before disciples and disciple-makers.

A. Healthy Dissatisfaction

First, Paul was a man of *healthy dissatisfaction*. Anybody who has studied the life of Paul extensively has become aware that Paul was very dissatisfied *before he became a Christian*. And his dissatisfaction had been extremely intense! Someone said, "A psychotic is a person who says that two plus two is five; that is, a psychotic is really out of touch with reality. However, a neurotic is a person who says, 'Two plus two may be four, but *I don't like it!*'" In other words, the neurotic is in touch with reality, but it does not suit him. Before he became a Christian, Paul was something of a religious neurotic.

Winston Churchill often told the story of a family who was picnicking by a lake one day when their five-year-old son accidentally fell into the water. A stranger passing by saw the situation and, at great risk to his own safety, dived in, fully clothed, and rescued the child from drowning. The rescuer presented the boy back to his mother, but instead of thanking the stranger for his heroic deed, the mother snapped feverishly, "*Where's Johnny's cap?*" Out of all the possible facets of this traumatic event, this was the detail the mother emphasized. There are some people, no matter what is done for them, who choose not to be satisfied. They are perennially unhappy with themselves, with others, and with reality itself. I strongly suspect that Saul of Tarsus fell into this group before he was saved. But this is the same man who in Philippians chapter four declared himself to be "content in any circumstance where I find myself."

But Paul was not only dissatisfied *before* he became a Christian. He was also marked by a *healthy dissatisfaction after* he became a Christian. Indeed, any true Christian is a profound mixture of *happy satisfaction* and *healthy dissatisfaction*. It is crucial that a Christian keep a wholesome balance of these two things in his life. Someone wisely said, "A Christian cannot recommend the Bread of Life or the Water of Life to others *if he himself looks as if those foods disagreed with him!*" But we still must recognize that healthy dissatisfaction is a vital part of the Christian life. The Christian has had a deeply satisfying drink of the Water of Life, but he is always thirsty for more! He became an instant winner in Christ, but he then realized that there are a lot of other races to be won and fights to be fought since he got his first gold medal. The

Christian life involves a sanctified dissatisfaction as well as a settled contentment. Why? Because, though I am *positionally perfect in Christ*, I am still *very imperfect in my daily practice* as a Christian.

Paul expressed this creative tension between positional perfection and practical progress in these words: “I am not as one who has already arrived, nor am I anywhere near perfection . . . but I seek to know the Person of Christ better and better, and to ‘grasp’ His purpose for me with a more complete grip each day.” It is this healthy dissatisfaction that keeps the Christian moving ever deeper into the Treasure and the treasury of the Christian life. Paul modeled this healthy dissatisfaction, and every Christian should reveal it as well. Christian, just remember that wherever you are at present, it’s not where you *could* be. Then let the margin of difference between what you are and what you could be provide the dissatisfaction that moves you toward the desirable goal.

B. Heart-felt Devotion

Second, Paul was characterized by a *heart-felt devotion*. “This one thing I do,” he said. We would call this *concentration* or *focus*, and that is what Christian devotion is. Vision, focus, and concentration are indispensable ingredients of every Christian’s daily life. Paul was a specialist, and so should every Christian be. His focus was not on a dozen things, or even two, but only on one. His *vocation* was Christ and His Purpose; his *avocation* was anything else that called for his attention and effort. Vance Havner once said, “Most Christians could be called ‘hypodermic saints,’ because they run as if they are energized by ‘shots’ of the Gospel. They live the Christian life by spurts, spasms, or turns, but not consistently and continually.” Then he divided Christians into three categories — workers, shirkers, and *jerkers* — and he said that most Christians are jerkers whose devotion is unsteady and unreliable.

When a lion-tamer at the circus allows himself to be locked in with all those vicious lions, why does he carry a three- or four-legged stool in his hand? This is not an arbitrary act. The person who holds the chair knows something very important about the constitution of a lion. He knows that when you put several points of focus before him, the constitution of the lion requires him to try to focus on all of them. Thus, his attention and energies become fragmented and divided, and the lion is largely neutralized. In the Bible, Satan is described as “a roaring lion” (I Peter 5:8). Christians could easily neutralize Satan *by simply striking on all assigned ‘fronts,’ on all commanded points of focus*. Jesus was a wise strategist when He commanded us to witness “*both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*”—*striking with equal force and efficiency at all times on all of these assigned fronts*. Instead, however, our attention has been introverted into our own lives and our local church situations, and even there, our attention is divided to a thousand petty things — and thus Satan has divided us and neutralized us. Our “one thing” is the pursuit of Jesus Christ and His purpose of *total world impact*. This goal is worthy of the heart-felt devotion of every Christian.

There is great power in concentration. Let the sun disperse its rays over the earth, and it has a substantial power. But let a few rays of the sun’s light be focused through a powerful magnifying lense, thus concentrating it, and that concentrated light and heat can burn its way through a sheet of solid metal! If each Christian would practice heart-felt devotion to Jesus

Christ and His purpose to make disciples and impact the whole world, and join with a few others of similar devotion, the impact would be enormous! Paul was the walking model of such whole-hearted (concentrated) devotion.

C. Heavenly Direction

Third, Paul lived a life of *heavenly direction*. “Brethren, . . . I forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before” (verse 13). Throughout this passage, Paul employs another sports illustration. He sees in his mind’s eye a sports stadium, a running track, and a corps of runners sprinting for the finish line. Each runner is exerting maximum effort to reach the finish as the winner of the race in order to receive the victor’s reward.

Every runner on a track team is mindful of two foundational rules in running a race: (1) Don’t look back; and (2) Focus on the finish line. *Don’t look back!* “Forgetting the things which are behind.” When hurdlers in a track meet hit a hurdle while running a competitive race, they don’t turn around to look at the hurdle, nor do they stop and go back and pick it up. Any sports fan knows how ridiculous it is to suggest such action, but Christians are usually not as wise as hurdlers on a track team. They often stop to look back, and break their momentum toward the finish line.

Paul says that Christians should *forget the things that are past*. Someone outlined this responsibility toward the past in these points: (1) Past *sins* must be *forgiven*; (2) Past *sorrows* must be *forgotten*; and (3) Past *successes* must be *forsaken*. An 80 year old man facetiously said of his feeble mind, “My memory is what I forget with!” The Christian must deliberately use his memory to forget the past.

Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, received much criticism, but she bore the burden of it cheerfully. One day a friend reminded her of a particularly mean thing that had been done to her. When Clara’s face showed a blank expression, the friend exclaimed, “Surely you remember that, Clara!” “No,” Clara Barton replied, “*I distinctly remember forgetting it!*” Every Christian should be marked by such distinct and discriminating forgetfulness.

“We thank Thee, Lord, for memory To live again the past;
That in remembering bygone days The fruits of joy shall last.
But for the power to forget We thank Thee even more:
The stings, the slights, the hurts, the wounds Can never hurt us more.”

Most of all, the Christian must forget all failures of the past, whether they be sins of omission or commission. David committed several crimson sins as king of Israel, but when he had “come clean” with God and sought His forgiveness, he prayed, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee*” (*Psalms 51:12-13*). David rested in the mercy and grace of God, and refused to allow a sad history of failure to determine his future life.

In the 1986 major league baseball season, Bob Brenley, catcher for the San Francisco Giants, set a major league record when he made four errors in one game. However, in the same game, in the last of the ninth inning, the same Bob Brenley came to bat with the score tied. Brenley hit a home run for the Giants, and they beat the Atlanta Braves by a score of seven to six! Dear Christian, no matter what errors are behind you in earlier innings of the game, you still may deliver a winning hit for God's side if you will forget the failures of the past and focus on the responsibilities and possibilities of the present and the future. A disciple-maker who stops to pick up the hurdles he has knocked down will never win the race. A batter who is dejectedly focusing on earlier errors will not likely deliver a winning hit. *Don't look back!*

Then, the disciple-maker must be sure that he keeps his attention on the clearly defined goals of Total World Impact, the Building of an Army of Disciples, and the Training Process by which the soldiers in that army train others. Paul followed his athletic metaphor still further when he said, "Strain forward toward those things that are before you." One can see the runner with every muscle straining toward the tape, his total focus on the finish line, and his full effort given to the race. He knows that he cannot allow distractions to divert his attention from the running of the race.

A Christian should look at the past in just about the same proportion as a driver glances in the rear view mirror while driving an automobile. The rear view mirror is a handy instrument to have in the car for the sake of safety, but there is no safety in the driver keeping his attention focused through that mirror on objects behind the vehicle! *Christian, through which do you look the most — the rear view mirror, or the windshield?*

There is an old parable which I have read and studied many times. It is called "Atalanta and the Golden Apples." It is the story of a king's daughter named Atalanta, who was blessed with the gifts of beauty and fleetness of foot. When she had matured into a young woman and her gifts were well known far and wide, her father the king offered her hand in marriage to any man who could beat her in a prescribed race on a racecourse. Many tried and failed, and, as a consequence, forfeited their lives. At last a young Greek named Hippomenes applied to run the race against her. When he arrived on the day of the race, he was wearing a small sash around his waste, and a small sack hung from the sash. When the race started, she teasingly slowed her pace to let him get ahead. Then suddenly, she put on a burst of speed and started to pass him. However, as she did, he reached into the small bag and pulled out *a golden apple*. As she went by him, he rolled the apple diagonally across her pathway. The gleam of its beauty attracted her eye. When she saw the flash of gold, she knew it also had a great value. So she stopped and turned aside just long enough to retrieve it, quickly returning to the course to resume the race. She easily caught Hippomenes again and threatened to pass. Again, he rolled an apple across her path, and again she turned and quickly retrieved it. She returned to the race and caught him again. As she began to pass, he threw the final apple across her course. Again, she turned to retrieve the apple, thinking she still had enough time to make up the distance and win the race. But he had calculated correctly, because he breasted the tape at the finish line as she trailed by a step. Hippomenes won the race and the beautiful maiden — and the kingdom — not by his superior speed, but by the cunning of distraction. She lost because of her own folly in leaving the course for a mere trinket. Even so, it has often been the ruin of many a saint in the most

glorious race of all that, for the three golden apples of the enticements of the world, the seduction of the flesh, and the allurements of Satan, he has failed to “strain toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The disciple and disciple-maker must maintain his heavenly direction with consistency throughout his Christian life.

D. Holy Determination

Finally, Paul was a man of *holy determination*. Isolate the words, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul is not picturing a quiet stroll in the park, but a vigorous and draining run. Objects held in the hand might not be noticed in a stroll in the park, but such objects become a hindrance when one is running. One of the great tragedies of the Christian life is that many Christians never win any significant victories for the cause of Christ, never capture any enemy territory or troops, never destroy any strongholds of the enemy in their homeland—in short, they never win any real victories in spite of the extreme and aggressive language that is used again and again in the New Testament. The words used in our text and in countless other similar passages in the New Testament are far too vigorous to describe the casual, relaxed, easygoing type of Christian life that is so often exemplified among us. We must not sit back on padded seats in an air conditioned building and listen and look. We must strain every nerve of our moral and spiritual being to run this race and win this prize.

Paul said elsewhere, “The pioneers who have blazed the faith-trail, the veterans that have run the race before us, are like spectators in a heavenly grandstand, loudly and lustily cheering us on as we run the same race today. We must strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual weight is permissible, and no parasitic sins. We must deliberately take our eyes *off* of everything else, and keep them fastened *on* Jesus, Who not only started the race but knows how to triumphantly finish it as well. *Study how He did it!* He never lost sight of where He was headed. Because of the anticipation of an exhilarating finish, He could put up with anything along the way—the cross, the shame, whatever. And now He’s *there*, in the place of honor, beside the King’s throne. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item. That will shoot adrenalin into your souls! And keep running! It will be worth it all when you, too, are invited up to sit with Jesus beside the King’s throne.”

In conclusion, pause just a moment and remind yourself of our theme—disciple-modeling, disciple-making, and disciple-multiplying. And remember that God has placed *you* in Square One to begin the process. Remember, too, that the product of your ministry with your disciples is to create *impact that extends to the ends of the earth until the end of time*. Place yourself in our text—and move out for Jesus.

A middle-aged man and his wife had walked out on a long dock that extended into the Mississippi River at Vicksburg, Mississippi. They had seated themselves at the end of the dock, and were dangling their legs over the end as they held hands and “whispered sweet nothings” in each other’s ears. Suddenly, their romantic absorption was broken when they heard running footsteps on the dock behind them. They both looked back and saw a man dressed in a business suit, running as fast as he could toward the end of the dock. They thought he was running to them, but as he reached them, he maintained his fast speed. They parted just in time for him to leap from the end of the dock. With a “wahoo” yell, he sailed through the air and splashed into

the water several feet from the end of the dock. Alarmed, the couple raced out to the end and helped him out of the water. The woman asked, “What in the world are you doing?” Panting and spitting water, the man answered, “Do you see that man back up there on the hill? Well, he just bet me a million to one that I couldn’t jump across the Mississippi River. Now, I knew within reason that I couldn’t *do it—but at those odds, I couldn’t just stand there and not try it!*”

This disciple-making task may seem exceedingly difficult to us, if not altogether impossible. The task of total world impact is indeed a formidable assignment. A world full of lost people is a forbidding concept. ***But in light of what is at stake, can we simply stand still and do nothing???***

SPIRITUAL LIFE MINISTRIES
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