

Module 3: Growing as a Disciple

Finding a balance in Spirit and Word

It seems today the Church wants the gifts and the ministry, but we are not willing to allow God to change us so that our character glorifies Him. To grant gifts and to awaken callings is easy for the Lord, but to build character speaks of a journey and it speaks of self-sacrifice, obedience, faithfulness and a deep submission.

This we need to understand – God can instantaneously heal, deliver and redeem, but He cannot force our character to change. We have a free will, and it takes plenty of time and staying close to God in order to grow in your character.

Character along with the gifts implies leading a balanced spiritual life as a disciple. A disciple needs to be wary of leading a life of extremes, where he walk in the Spirit at the expense of the Word, or being too grounded in the Word without walking in the reality and presence of the Holy Spirit.

We live in troubling times and these are also troubling times for the believers. Part of our growth as a disciple is to learn to lead a balance in our spiritual walk. It seems these days that some in the church has given themselves solely over to a spiritual life based on the sensory experience, while others have rather chosen to follow a different route and followed a path of quenching the fire of the Spirit for the mere sake of just focussing on the Scriptures.

We need to wake up for today's new brand of Christianity presents a different gospel and is targeting thousands of the younger generation with a so-called hip, cool, experiential spirituality, much of which is embracing a form of mysticism and philosophy of uniting people from all faiths to work together and bring about a new world of peace and harmony.

Over the last 2000 years we have seen many movements in the Church that has led to our dilemma in this day and age. From the more conservative and 'intellectual' approach of the Catholics to the modern-hype of the Charismatic/Pentecostal movements, it seems believers are caught in the grey areas of extremism. Either we are too intellectual, seeking Truth through logic or rationalism, or we are too spiritual, breaking free from being grounded in the truth (Scriptures) of the Lord.

For those who pursue the more 'intellectual' route of only focussing on the Scripture, therefore a life dictated by Logos, run the risk of suppressing the move of the Holy Spirit, leaving no room for the Rhema Word, or for the supernatural that defies logic or reason. So often we see today that those in this camp are dismissing the manifested presence of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, of being slain in the Spirit, of laughing or dancing in the Spirit. Such spiritual manifestations tend to defy logic and reasoning and do not always fit into the neat world of Scriptures.

For those who pursue the other route of Charismania is in danger of falling prey to emotionalism, where emotionalism is mistaken for a true and real Holy Spirit life. Charismania after all has become a journey of the senses, which feeds directly into our emotions.

So often we see with the hyper-spiritualism movement only an emphasis on the 'moment', the 'experience' and the 'emotion', and so people crave for the touch of the Holy Spirit and to be swept aside by the worship. Yet the danger comes in when this define their spiritual

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growth. While we need to seek the spiritual and the move of the Holy Spirit, at the same time we must seek to GROW in truth by learning, knowing and studying the Word.

For Jesus when tempted spoke three times to the devil “it is written”. There was nothing hyper-spiritual about the temptation of Jesus and about how the Lord overcome the devil. The Lord was grounded in the Word for He is the Word, and He overcame by the Word and not by the senses or the emotions.

For this reason Charismania will focus heavily on the ‘experience’ or the ‘feeling’ of the moment. Charismatic churches are known for its larger than life experiences of worship, of sermons driven to touch our emotions and creating an ambience. Within such environments the sensory experience is of prime importance, where people’s senses of touch, hearing and seeing are stimulated. The problem again is that so many times there is very little depth to such a spiritual walk and the pitfall remains that there is little depth concerning knowledge of sound doctrine and the Scriptures.

Without a doubt, the disciple of the Lord these days need to be able to lead a balanced spiritual life where the disciple is able to embrace both the Rhema and the Logos, both the intellectual and the sensory, both the Holy Spirit and Word, and where the experience and the reasoning exists side by side.

The reality is that our spiritual walk as disciples should not just be about the sensory without a solid understanding of Scripture, and neither should we commit to Scripture in such a measure that the Holy Spirit has no room to move. This is ultimately the balance that we need to find. This challenge also translates how to balance living in the liberty of the Spirit while not flowing into legalism and license [freedom to sin].

For example, is it good to walk in strict observance to His commandments, or is good to allow some room for enjoyment? Will allowing some liberties not lead not a licence to be rebellious and sinful, while will not walking according to strict observance cause legalism and a religious heart to set in? Can we see how difficult it is these days to make sure we must walk a balance life, because God is one of order and balance, not of disorder and extremes.

Ultimately our relationship with God should be one of balance that comes from a sound mind, and yes, the Scriptures does say the Lord has given us not a spirit of fear but of a sound-mind, faith and love (2 Timothy 1:7). In order to walk in a life of balance requires wisdom, it requires maturity, and it requires humility and a keen walk with the Spirit. The Lord calls us to lead balanced lives, not one of extremes, for extremes in any measure causes us to be out of balance. We are called not to walk in the extreme of liberty or legalism, but to walk by Grace in the Spirit of God so that we can manifest fully His holiness and glory.

This walk of a disciple is thus a walk of balance, of a sound mind, of being grounded in Jesus who is the Word yet a walk led also by the Spirit and by Truth.

It says in 1 Timothy 6: 11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

And also in 2 Peter 1: 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the

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knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Both Paul and Timothy spoke about a process of pursuing and adding, meaning growing spiritually so that we become more like Jesus. And we can only grow in the fellowship of the Lord when we listen to the Lord, when we are led by the Holy Spirit and when we are grounded and rooted in the Word.

And remember John 1:1 which says *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Jesus is the Word, and we are also called to be built our lives on the Rock, being Jesus, according to Matthew 7. So our entire spiritual walk must be one of being grounded upon the foundation of Jesus and the Truth and the Way of the Kingdom.

The balanced life of the disciple is sadly under attack because liberty is so often found in the Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, where the sensory experience negates the need for sound knowledge of Scriptures. There is only one way to follow a true path, and that is following the Spirit. Remember what 2 Timothy 4 says: *3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

Yes, the time is here where so many are turning away from sound gospel, and would rather listen to fables and myths. Why? The answer is found in *1 Timothy 4: Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

We will be deceived and be led astray if we are not led by the Spirit, when we are not grounded in the Word, when we do not abide in the Lord and when we fail to walk the path of both Logos (the written word) and Rhema (the uttered word). This is when we turn away from sound doctrine to listen to fables which sadly abound in churches today, causing the disciple to walk an unbalanced spiritual life.

As human beings created in the image and likeness of God, we are all endowed with these wonderful things called emotions. Emotions are an internal thermometer inside of us which activates a neurological sensory response to the world around us. We also have five fantastic physical senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch through which we interpret our surroundings as well as communicate and interact with others.

The vast majority of what we see being called faith today and what we hear being labelled as a “move of God” is rooted not in truth but in experience. Closeness to the Father is measured in feelings, sensations, impressions, “divine hunches” and the way a certain spiritual encounter made one feel. The closer we feel to God, the closer we think we are.

Emotions and senses are truly awe inspiring things but when they are misdirected or used to navigate our lives and choices, they have a power and will all their own and become fuelled by the soulish drives of our carnal humanity. Emotions and senses can be manipulated. They are like the variable “x” in an algebra equation. When they are not under the direction of the Spirit of God, by default, they become yielded to the flesh... which is Satan’s playground.

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When we do not submit ourselves to the Lord and filter our experiences through the truth of His word, we all too easily will yield to the temptation of trusting what we felt or experienced over what scripture teaches to be immovably solid and true. Emotions, thoughts and sensory experiences that are not completely yielded to the Lord become loose cannons and we will be deceived when we use these highly unpredictable wild cards to navigate our choices and beliefs.

So often this is called “feels good faith.” It is in effect not truly faith at all because it is based upon the foundation of personal spiritual experiences and emotions. True faith is to put our total and complete trust in God...the creator and sustainer of all life. It is a trust in the nature and character of the one true God who is the same yesterday, today and for all of eternity. It is not a trust based upon feelings, warm fuzzies or senses. We trust because He is supremely trustworthy and binds Himself to His own covenant and fulfills to the letter every word He says He will do. His love and faithfulness are everlasting and He is not like man that he should lie or wake up one day and have a personality makeover. After all, how can we prove the accuracy of our experiences when they dwell in the realm of emotional variables?

And the only problem to negate a spiritual realm purely based on the emotions is when we fellowship with the Lord so that we may know Him intimately, know His Word, His Truth and Ways so that we are not led astray by all kinds of feelings, emotions and senses. The Christian life is not one of feelings but of spiritual certainty and absolutes.

Herein lays then one of the greatest dangers of having an experienced-based faith. It is our human nature to base reality on feelings. If we felt it, then it must be real. We become one with our experiences and when someone disagrees with our experience then they have disagreed with us. It's dangerous because if someone challenges what we are sure we have experienced and that experience is the foundational basis of how we relate to God then one tiny kick to the side of our “faith” will send that house, made of straw, falling down around us.

Then you also get those who think they have no authentic relationship with God because they lack these feelings, manifestations, experiences. So if they didn't feel warm fuzzies or have goosebumps or feel a warm sensation or the like, then “something must be wrong with me.” Can you see what a dangerous dichotomy has now been created because experiences have defined reality?

Emotions and experiences can be moved and manipulated. You can be having a glorious and wonderful day and feel on cloud nine and one bad experience can immediately and involuntarily alter your emotional state in a fraction of an instant. If natural events can manipulate emotion and change how we feel about our lives (even momentarily), how much more potentially destructive can a change in feeling or experience rock our spiritual worlds when we let that define our reality in God?

A balanced life calls for us to put our wholehearted trust in the nature and character of God and allow the truth of His word to be the plumb-line which we measure our experiences up against.

We have a responsibility to diligently guard and keep our hearts in check and filter our emotional and experiential messages through the truth of Scripture which is never wrong and will never change. This produces a trust that is not easily shaken because it is built on the

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foundation of a God whose faithfulness never changes, whose love never runs dry and whose character is more dependable than the sun.

Jesus is our rock and the fortress upon which we must build our lives. Experiences will change. Emotions will fluctuate. If we evaluate reality based on things that move, then we will totter to and fro based on this variable environment. If we are firmly rooted in truth, we can build a trust that is tried and true and that will carry us through any storm we face in this life.

While hyper-spiritualism is a huge problem in the Church today, driven by emotionalism, it's opposite yet equal, anti-spiritualism, is just as prevalent and just as destructive. This is when we move in the extreme of logic, reason and rationalism.

So why is Intellectualism dangerous? Intellectual Christians place far more value on the knowledge which they perceive to be true than the souls of those whom they are attempting to pass that knowledge on to. Often times others will reject this knowledge, even if that knowledge is indeed true, simply because the person presenting such knowledge is doing so in a prideful, uncaring manner thus they make the person they are attempting to minister to feel unloved and unimportant.

In Christianity, any truth that is not accompanied with love and humility is no truth what so ever. In other words, you can possess all the right doctrine but without love your doctrine is rendered useless to you as well to others. You see, it is our compassion for others with keeps our passion for knowledge in check thus keeping us from falling into pride and self-righteousness. Without love for people, our love for knowledge is nothing more than useless dead religion that can become a serious stumbling block.

Jesus showed us how to lead a balanced life. Firstly, He was no intellectual elitist. It is said of Him: *"How is it that this man has learning, when He has never studied?" (John 7:15)*. He lacked advanced, formal training (unlike Saul of Tarsus, of course for He was a carpenter). But Jesus' lack of academic pedigree did not make Him anti-intellectual. He did not tolerate a lack of knowledge of Scripture for He Himself said "have you not read ...?" (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31.). He also did not put up with slowness of understanding - "do you not yet perceive or understand?" (Mark 8:17).

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus answered by quoting from a passage in Deuteronomy called the Shema which promoted hard, theological work: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:29-39).

You see, Jesus did not place much emphasis on signs, wonders and miracles. It is not character or faith building. He rather wants us to walk like Him in character and nature. When we become so hyper-spiritual that we ignore the importance of sound doctrine, the necessity for true character and the need for systematic spiritual growth through trials, tribulations and testing times then we are in danger of being out of balance.

Three times Jesus was tempted to betray the cross by the devil: in the desert, in the garden and on the cross. When He faced Pontius Pilate, Jesus did not act with power and glory. He was tempted by the government of this world and by the people to quickly fix His problems. Jesus didn't. He chose love and the cross. He chose character and faith and trust above the

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circumstances and above the ridicule. He chose to complete his journey despite the persecutions. Jesus held onto His path.

As in the desert when the devil wanted God to show His full power and betray the cross, so we want so many times for God to rather show up as the dominant, powerful and all-consuming fire. We want answers now, we want healing now, and we want deliverance now. We seek answers immediately, we seek signs and miracles, we want to see the sick healed now and we want to see Him move in enormous power. This is the world of hyper-spiritualism without sound doctrine. Jesus was tempted with this and in the desert as in the Garden of Gethsemane, but God did not move.

You see, we want the crown but not the cross. We want the shortcuts and the quick provisions and the quick solutions. Jesus didn't offer a quick solution in the desert. He rather showed that through the journey of character where we learn to love like Him, walk like Him and be like Him is where the truth lies to having a true relationship and to being a disciple grounded in truth.

Sound doctrine calls for a disciple with a character of Christ and that character is determined how much we have allowed for the Spirit to be God in our lives. In the desert God understood free will cannot be compromised and man's loyalty and obedience will not be brought through a display of power and brutal force. Man's obedience unto God has been brought by the shed blood of Jesus who chose to die on the cross as the Suffering Messiah so that we could be set free in righteousness.

Do we still serve today the Jesus who chose both the crown and the cross? Do we only want the cross? It seems man wants what the devil offered in the desert. Man wants the miracle, mystery and authority. He wants to skip the trials, tribulations, suffering and everything that goes with being human. Man wants to skip the responsibility of taking responsibility for his actions. God's children don't want the pain of being human. Man wants what the devil offered: provision of bread without the work, protection without the obedience and trust unto Him and man also wants the kingdom of this world by bowing to another master. Jesus chose the hard road and that drew people to Him and that pleased the Father.

Today, we want to serve a God who pours out all kinds of miracles, signs and wonders. We want that crown, yet we want to leave the cross. We want to serve the Jesus who is the mighty Teacher, but everything He did was a portrayal of the character of the Father. The entire Beatitude is a portrayal of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. It speaks of character.

The ideals of the Beatitudes and all that Jesus spoke and showed cannot be reached upon a journey where we only seek God as the Lord of wonder and miracle. Such ideals we can strive for when we choose to walk the road that Jesus did, meaning taking that walk to Calvary and resisting the temptations of the devil and this world. Quick solutions, easy answers, powerful displays of miracles lead to weak faith and even weaker character.

The Lord wants strong character and strong faith. Jesus showed us how. He did miracles, but many times He wanted no one to know about it. He may have healed the sick, but Jesus' greatest purpose was the healing of the spirit and the soul. He reached out to the lost, the sick and the sinners because they had a different disease, namely rejection and that they were unloved and unwanted.

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Jesus restored love and acceptance unto them because of His character that was formed on his three-year journey. Jesus raised Lazarus unto the glory of God and displayed true power over death. Oh yes, the Lord still heals today divinely, but God seeks above all else the true healing of spirit and soul. Our greatest miracle is salvation. Love is God's greatest weapon on earth.

A man is truly tested by his character. This is the path of the disciple and the way to lead a balanced life. We want those quick answers and we want God to show up in fire and fury, but God wants sons and daughters who have sought Him earnestly, who held unto Him in truth and faith during all seasons, who have chosen both the crown and the cross, who have chosen character above wonderful works, who have chosen to resist the temptations of the devil and rather obeyed the Lord. Jesus chose twelve disciples of character. He chose not the rich, the powerful, the politicians or the even the religious. He chose mere men who were poor in Spirit, hungry for truth and righteousness.

Let us truly seek God, build a relationship so that we are grounded in Truth.

We must therefore strive as disciples to lead a balanced life of both Spirit and Word, where we remain rooted in sound doctrine but not quenching the fire of the Holy Spirit.

This is certainly not easy, but the Lord calls us to grow in such a manner which only comes by a relationship with the Lord and being led by the Spirit who leads us in all truth. Let us guard against a walk of extremes, and let us rather stay close to God and be moved in His power, passion, compassion and truth to His Glory.

For this is the path of the disciple and the path of growth – it is a balanced one of Logos and Rhema, of the liberty of the Spirit but also the obedience to His commandment.

Let us therefore pray for such wisdom, understanding and knowledge to be a true disciple unto the Lord.

Let us grow in balance in the will of the Lord to His Glory.