



YAKOV SMIRNOFF

- When comedian **Yakov Smirnoff** first came to America from Russia, he was not prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in American grocery stores.
- He says,
 - “On my first shopping trip, I saw **powdered milk** where you just add water, and you get milk.”
 - “Then I saw **powdered orange juice** where you just add water, and you get orange juice.”
 - “And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to my self, **What a country!**”



POWDERED CHRISTIANS

- No doubt, Smirnoff was joking . . .
- But we often make these kinds of assumptions about Christian transformation and spiritual growth—believing that people are changed instantly at salvation.
- According to this belief, when someone gives his or her life to Christ, there is an immediate, substantive, in-depth, miraculous change in habits, attitudes, and character.
- We go to church as if we are going to the grocery store:
Powdered Christian. Just add water and **disciples** are instantly created not made.

HOW DISCIPLES GROW

- Unfortunately, there is no such powder and disciples of Jesus Christ are not instantly born.
- They are **slowly raised** through many trials, suffering, and temptations.



TRUE-LIFE TRANSFORMATION

- In the book, Rethinking the Church, **James Emery White** discovered the following ...
 - Only 11% of churchgoing teenagers have a well-developed faith.
 - Among adults, this statistic only rises to 32%.
- Why ...?
- According to the author, **true-life** transformation and growth is all about training, trying, suffering, and even dying.



THE PLAN OF GOD

- He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. **He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.** (Mark 8:31–32 NIV)
- In this passage, Jesus spoke plainly about the events that soon would transpire.
- However, it wasn't plain enough for Peter who couldn't shake his understanding of victory and ended up **rebuking** the Son of God for a bad strategy.
- To dispel this error, Jesus doesn't sit down and explain everything to his disciples, piece by piece, instead he indirectly **rebukes** Peter for giving the devil a foothold.
- But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. **“Get behind me, Satan!”** he said. “You do not have in mind **the things of God**, but the things of men.” (Mark 8:33 NIV)

A REAL FOE

- In Matthew's Gospel account, Jesus not only rebukes Peter, but tells him, **"You are a stumbling block to me . . ."** (Matthew 16:23 NIV)
- In other words, **Satan** was using Peter's lack of understanding to the things of God, to tempt Jesus not to go to the cross.
- So then Jesus' biggest problem wasn't the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, Sadducees, or even Pontius Pilate, it was the **lack of understanding to the things of God**, which caused people—even his disciples to be in sympathy with the Devil.
- This is why Jesus said, *"a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."* (Matthew 10:36 NIV)

REAL LIFE

- To address this **formidable foe**, Jesus informs his followers of the real marks of being one of his disciple.
 - *Then Jesus said to [them], “If anyone would come after me, he must **deny himself** and **take up his cross** and **follow me**. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”* (Matthew 16:24–25 NIV)
- So in one fell swoop, Jesus confronts his disciples' understanding to the things of God.
- He does this by informing them that it is in the giving up of our comforts, ambitions, and wants that is the **key** to real life.

WHY MUST WE CARRY A CROSS?

We must carry a cross . . . to remind us that we are not the center of the Universe.

- Our willful suffering is part of our discipleship as Christians who are called to serve not to be served.
- It is characteristic of great leaders to make demands upon their followers.
 - When **Winston Churchill** became Prime Minister he told the British people that he had nothing to offer them but “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”
 - The Italian freedom fighter **Geribaldi** told his followers that he offered them only hunger and death.
 - These were demanding leaders, but **Jesus** was a thousand times more demanding than they were.

DEFINITION OF A DISCIPLE

- *“In the same way, any of you who does not **give up** everything he has cannot be my **disciple.**” (Luke 14:33 NIV)*
- *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my **disciple.**” (Luke 14:27 NIV)*
- Even something as noble as the love of family, as good and right as that is, cannot stand in the way of commitment to the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus is not some wishy-washy little fellow coming up to us, hat in hand, hoping to win our favor; saying softly: “Please sir, may I have a word with you.” He comes to us as the Lord of History and makes His demand.

SERVANTHOOD THE GOAL

- The number one thing that Jesus wants his disciples to know is that being a **servant** is our number one job description.
- *Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become **great** among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but **to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25–28 NIV)*
- So suffering as a servant for the good of others, so that the purposes of God can be fulfilled is our **highest calling**.

WHY MUST WE CARRY A CROSS?

We must carry a cross . . . or we will not grow spiritually or inherit the kingdom.

- Spiritual Growth is not the byproduct of time. Instead, it builds and grows as we seek not to please ourselves, but our Father in heaven.
- As the Apostle Paul says, *the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* (Galatians 6:8 NIV)
- “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive **many times as much** in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.” (Luke 18:28–30 NIV)
- In Matthew’s Gospel account of the above verse, it says, “will receive a **hundred times as much** and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29 NIV)

THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

- We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.
- Rather, as **servants of God** we commend ourselves in every way:
 - in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots;
 - in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness;
 - in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God;
 - with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;
 - through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report;
 - genuine, yet regarded as impostors;
 - known, yet regarded as unknown;
 - dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor; yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:3–10 NIV)

MORE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

- *But whatever was to my profit **I now consider loss** for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have **lost** all things. (Philippians 3:7-8)*
- *I want to know Christ and the **power of his resurrection** and the **fellowship of sharing in his sufferings**, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11 NIV)*
- *All of us who are **mature** should take such a view of things. (Philippians 3:15 NIV)*

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

- For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as **enemies of the cross of Christ.**
- Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. **Their mind is on earthly things.**
(Philippians 3:18–19 NIV)



ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

- Even in Paul's day, many not just a few, lived as **enemies of the cross**.
- Not only was their destiny destruction, but their god was their stomach.
- Here Paul is not just talking about our physical appetites, but our **passions** and **sensual desires**.
- In other words, **enemies of the cross of Christ** live to please themselves, not God.
- They live to serve self and focus on what brings pleasure, comfort, security, fun and the praises of men, which leads to spiritual death and shame.



THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

- Your **attitude** should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
 - Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a **servant**, being made in human likeness.
 - And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!
 - Therefore God **exalted** him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11 NIV)

LIVE TO PLEASE GOD

- You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the **oil of joy.**" (Hebrews 1:9 NIV)
- Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)
- I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your **joy** may be complete. (John 15:11 NIV)
- "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of **my joy** within them. (John 17:13 NIV)

SUMMARY

- As we have read, **true-life spiritual growth** is not about quick fixes and instant transformation.
- It takes place as we yield to being a **real disciple** of Christ and live to serve God's will and not our own.
- If we take up our responsibilities as Christians and be servants to the needs of others around us, not only does this satisfy God's will for us, but we are **greatly rewarded** as well.
- In fact, the Bible says, we will have **joy** and our joy will be complete.
- So then, let us by **faith**, seek to be servants and look for opportunities to help the body of Christ.

SUMMARY

There are all kinds of ways we can fulfill our responsibilities to God by serving in the church:

- Help with the setups and takedowns for our Celebration Services.
- Serve in the Nursery, Kinderchurch, or Kid's Church.
- Host or lead a Cell Group.
- Visit those in our fellowship who are ill or can't make it to church.
- Don't let just a few in our church inherit all the blessings, for God has plenty of blessings to pass around.
- Be blessed by being a blessing.

