



Dear Friends,

I have been a Christian since my teenage years. Even though I have followed Jesus for more than four decades, it doesn't get any easier.

I can still recall feeling exhilarated when Jesus first saved me. I was prepared to do anything for him. I began to attend a Protestant church despite knowing Dad would disapprove because it wasn't Greek Orthodox. I gave up playing rugby for the First XV to prioritise going to church and youth group. I told my school mates about Jesus even though they ridiculed me.

Because I hadn't regularly gone to church whilst growing up, I was hungry to learn and be among Christians. Early on, I recognised that following Jesus was not a solo activity. I needed the fellowship, encouragement and example of fellow believers to stay the course. That's why I prioritised church and youth group, even if it cost me. I have lived that way ever since.

When Jesus first saves you, you assume the inexpressible joy and profound peace you feel may last forever. But the glow of that first love gradually fades as following Jesus becomes an ordinary part of daily life. As the glow dims, it can be disorienting, discouraging even. So, I was thankful to my pastor for introducing me to two books on Christian discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a Christian classic. There is a line in it that struck me like an icepick to the brain, and has stuck with me ever since.

When Christ calls a man, he calls him to come and die.

This line paraphrases Jesus' words in Mark 8:34: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Bonhoeffer's words made a deep impression on me because he lived them out, ultimately dying for his faith.

The other book was written by Eugene Peterson. Peterson served as a pastor in the same church for twenty eight years. It is therefore no surprise that he wrote a book entitled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. The book is about discipleship in an instant society.

More than forty years later, I am grateful to these two believers for their wise teaching on the nature of true discipleship from Scripture, from their own lives following Jesus and from pastoring churches. It has shaped my understanding, expectations and practice of discipleship.

Peterson's book has been helpful in a couple of ways.

Firstly, he uses the Bible - the Psalms of Ascent (Ps 120-134). The Bible is fundamental to following Jesus. These psalms were likely sung by Hebrew pilgrims as they went to worship in Jerusalem. They are songs for the road. They cover the broad scope of the Christian life.

Second, he likens discipleship to being a pilgrim rather than a tourist. It's a long obedience in the same direction. Discipleship is not a holiday. It's all of life. And unlike a holiday, it's not a jaunt. Rather, as Peterson says, discipleship is hazardous work. I need to keep hearing that!

Peterson says: "It is not difficult to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is dreadful attrition rate."

How will you keep following Jesus and mature to become more like him? God gives us his Word, prayer and church as the basic tools for discipleship. He also gives us the wisdom of others, like Bonhoeffer and Peterson. So, I encourage you to read one of these books. We need all the help that we can get!

God Bless,
Mark Adams