

Follow Me

It was just a few years ago, as I was lying in bed, talking to God as I so often do, when I stopped to listen for His response and received this vision in reply.

It was as if I was transported back 2000 years ago, and I found myself walking down a dusty road with Jesus and His twelve disciples. Actually, it's more like we were skipping down the road, with arms linked together, laughing and playing and just having fun together.

I still remember the feeling. It was just Jesus and the disciples and me. Nothing was wrong with the world (or at least it didn't seem that way to me). There were no bills to pay. There were no deadlines to reach. There wasn't a worry in my heart.

As we skipped along, we saw another man, trudging down the road with his head down, with weariness and sorrow painted across his face. I detached myself from the group and skipped over to him.

"Hey, how's it going?" I asked him with a big grin, full of excitement.

He looked up at me, but there was no answer.

I stuck my hand out and introduced myself. "I'm Matthew. Who are you?"

"James," he said.

"Well, c'mon James! Come skip with us!"

And whether he wanted to or not, I took him by the arm and brought him over to the group, and we continued on our way, skipping and laughing and playing and having a great time.

But within a couple of moments, there appeared two Roman soldiers in the middle of the road. They taunted us, warning us with their grins that they were up to something. We came to a stop not too far in front of them, and they came and grabbed James and pulled him aside. I couldn't tell what they were saying, but they were quite rough with James, and I could see that it wasn't a friendly meeting.

Without a second thought, I skipped over to the soldiers, who quickly drew their swords.

"Aww, c'mon guys, leave him alone," I said, almost in a joking manner, still laughing, with a huge smile on my face. "Why, I've known this guy all of five minutes, and he seems like a good guy! Leave him alone."

The soldiers were getting angry, and I heard Jesus behind me clear his throat, motioning to me that now might not be the best time for me to get involved.

I don't remember what happened next, except that pretty soon we were alone in another place, hanging out by a fire, just talking and sharing life together (still Jesus, the twelve, and me).

As we were talking, Jesus stopped me and said, "You know, Matthew, I love seeing you like this. You're so carefree, so joyful – not worried about anything. You're just enjoying life. Even when faced with danger, you weren't afraid. You just trusted me and acted with confidence, not only in who I am, but in who you are as well."

I thought about it for a moment. I hadn't noticed to that point, but He was right. Despite my past social anxiety, I walked up to a complete stranger, without even thinking about it, and made a friend. Without fear or any concern for my well-being, I just waltzed up to those Roman soldiers, with their weapons drawn, and laughed with them, fearing no opposition.

And then came the question, "But Matthew, why aren't you like this in *your* time – in *your* world?"

And without hesitation, I said, "Cause you're not there!"

As soon as I said the words, I came out of the vision. Each word hung in the air around me, and each one cut to the very core of my being.

When I was around Jesus, nothing else mattered. Everything else faded away, and being there with Him, I could trust Him fully. I had no worries, no fear, no anxiety. Everything was right with the world when I was with my Lord.

And that's just it. He's never left me or forsaken me. He's here with me today, perhaps more real than he was in my vision. The issue is not that God is not with *me*, but that I am not with *God*. How much time did I spend worrying about my life instead of turning to God? How many opportunities did I miss because I was afraid? How many days did I spend trudging down the road of life, like James, instead of choosing to walk with my Lord?

Those words, "cause you're not there," were *my* fault! Even today, after nights when I just can't sleep, or when the bills on my desk are piling up, or when God's call seems too impossible or uncomfortable for me, I have to pause and say, "how much time am I spending with God?"

It doesn't matter that I'm a missionary or that I've given my life to the work of full-time ministry. It doesn't even matter that I spend anywhere from 8-12 hours a week in regular prayer services. You can *do* ministry without God. Remember that verse in Matthew 7:21-23?

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

God is looking for relationship. He's looking to know you and to be known by you. He doesn't just want your obedience. You're His *child*, remember? Not a slave. It doesn't matter how much time you spend working for Him if you're not taking the time just to *be* with Him.