

My greatest trial of faith became the best lesson on discipleship I could have received.



Mountains and Sermons, Trials and Faith

Name withheld

As a full-time missionary, I had a companion who was very difficult for me to get along with. She was an excellent teacher and loved missionary work, but she was also flippant and sometimes even cruel with her criticism. She disparaged everything from my eating habits to my meager language skills to pictures of my family.

I began to feel weighed down by a fog of depression and self-doubt. Although I continued to serve and teach, my actions became more rote than sincere. I started to doubt some of the beliefs that I had clung to all my life, and I felt a rising bitterness enter my thoughts. Why would a loving God subject me to such a difficult situation? Why would He test my faith when I was already sacrificing so much and trying so desperately to do everything right?

Climbing Mountains: The Curious and the Serious

One morning, I stumbled upon a thought I'd recorded in my journal from my branch president in the missionary training center. His thought referenced Matthew 4, around the beginning of the Savior's

ministry, when His miracles began to draw people's attention. The end of the chapter describes the multitude of people who followed Him (see verse 25).

The narrative continues in Matthew 5: "And seeing the multitudes, [Jesus] went up into a mountain" (verse 1). A question arises: Why would Jesus climb up a mountain? The crowd of people was already right behind Him. He could have turned around and taught the multitude right where He was.

One possible answer is that He could have climbed the mountain for the spiritual setting and closeness to God. Throughout the scriptures, mountaintops often symbolize temples, and many prophets—Nephi, Moses, and the brother of Jared, to name a few—have climbed to the tops of mountains as prelude to spiritual experiences. Jesus often went to mountains to commune with God.

However, my branch president speculated that there was another reason why. When Jesus saw the multitude behind Him, He knew that people were following Him for different reasons. Some were curious—they had heard about His miracles

and wanted to see something miraculous themselves. Others might have seen the growing crowd and trailed along like sheep in a herd. A few in the multitude were serious followers; they followed to hear Christ's teachings and learn of Him.

The rest of the first verse in Matthew 5 reads: "And when [Jesus] was set, his disciples came unto him." Although this certainly includes Christ's chosen Apostles, the word *disciple* could encompass more people than the 12 men alone. *Disciple* means "a follower of Jesus Christ who lives according to Christ's teachings."¹ These dedicated disciples of Christ were the ones willing to climb the mountain to hear the Savior—not the curious miracle-seekers or the sheep-like tagalongs—and they were the ones who got to hear the Sermon on the Mount.

God does not just want bystanders; He wants disciples. He

wants us to live the gospel because we love and want to serve Him. So, to separate the *curious* from the *serious*, He will allow us to climb a "mountain"—He will give us trials that will test our faith.

Discipleship despite Trials

The thought resonated with me, and I realized my problems had little to do with my companion and everything to do with my attitude. I recognized that a part of me had decided to serve a mission because I was curious. I had wanted to learn a new language and visit new places. I had been caught up in the excitement and was not as resilient as I could have been. Therefore, when the first mountain to climb came, I had been spiritually unprepared. I had allowed my testimony to be influenced by those around me because my own foundation of faith wasn't strong enough.

In that moment, I promised

Heavenly Father that the actions of others would not influence my faith anymore. I was in charge of my own discipleship, and I should not let my companion's actions or criticism affect my testimony. I decided to be a serious disciple instead of a curious bystander. I prayed that the Lord would help me gain a stronger testimony so I would not doubt again, even when times were hard.

My missionary service became easier from that moment on. Although my companion and situation did not immediately change, my attitude toward discipleship did. I left my mission with a stronger testimony and an assurance that all the trials I had experienced were "for [my] good" (D&C 122:7). God had led—and continues to lead—me to my personal Sermon on the Mount. ■

NOTE

1. Guide to the Scriptures, "Disciple," scriptures.lds.org.

