

We rejoice greatly to see someone accept the Lord Jesus, continue to grow in Him, follow Him devotedly, and soon serve their friends to know Jesus as well. Lives transformed by Jesus are simply wonderful! Every now and then, however, it happens that some George starts making excuses or stops communicating altogether a few weeks or even months after his / her conversion. I pray, I think, and if possible, I seek him out and ask, „I would really like to understand what is going on in you...” The answer tends to be rather vague or apparently evasive. For example, one told me he needed to focus on the school he was doing while working. However, after a year and a half, he finished the school and still did not respond to repeated invitations.

When one of Georges disappears, the first thing I think about is what we could have done differently, how we could have been kinder, more effective, more courageous, more sensitive. Did we pray for him enough? Did we communicate in the language of his heart? Did we win him over to a clear and appealing vision, to the hope of developing his own life and relationship with Jesus? Did we provide enough stimuli and opportunities, or did we expect more than he found motivating? Were we sensitive to his temperament and personality? Often there is a relationship (spouse or partner) or other - in a way natural - areas of life that overwhelm his attention.

Surely we can learn from any such story. After all, caring for a new disciple is not just about bringing him to the Lord Jesus and then letting him go to a meeting or youth or fellowship group. The personal care of a disciple is an investment on our part. Yet it doesn't have to be all that demanding - time or otherwise. Discipleship is a topic for a whole series of other lessons.

We've had plenty of these sorrowful experiences over the past few decades. I always pray and ask Jesus questions again. But I worry only moderately. In fact, incidents of this kind have happened to Jesus Himself and to many others. John says, „Many of His disciples went away and walked with Him no more.” (John 6:66) The apostle Paul recalls, „Demas left me because he loved this world more.” (2 Timothy 4:10)

Jesus' parable of the sower gives us some explanation as to why some of the Georges fade away. (Mark 4:2) In the second and third soils, where the grain falls, while it is nice that the seeds have come up, the harvest does not occur there. This is the stony ground - or the

person who does not go deep with Jesus, and so is fickle and easily succumbs to outside discouragement or ridicule; and the thorny ground - or the prevailing „cares, seduction of riches, and lusts after other things.“ If we stay with the idea that the grain of God’s word is evenly scattered in all four soils, then in three it will indeed come forth, but two-thirds of what has come forth will not produce the next generation of grain! Only the last part matures and produces real harvest. Mere sprouting of the grain does not guarantee a harvest! That’s just the way it happens...!

Lord Jesus leads us to seek and encourage reproduction! That is, that from one grain comes many more grains. That is where our main focus is to be directed.

I think about the stories of loss that have happened to us. In addition to those where the further fate of a George is kept secret from us, we also have those about whom I hear after a year and a half that he is somewhere else in a church. Good...! The important thing is that he is not lost to Jesus.

John Mark left Paul, too. There was even a serious dispute between Paul and Barnabas over him. (Acts 15:36-40) But at the end, Paul says, „Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in my ministry.“ (2 Timothy 4:11)

Some of the Georges will disappear from our scene. Some will reappear again after a time. Sometimes with scars, but that’s the way it goes. None of this should deter us from sowing abundantly and diligently caring for the disciples Jesus has entrusted to us. The goal of our care is that they may live healthily for the Lord and bear fruit. That is, they will soon have other disciples to help in making disciples...

*I am fascinated, Lord Jesus, - when „many disciples“ left You and no longer walked with You - that You asked Your remaining twelve, „Do you also want to leave?“ I identify with their answer, „To whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life...!“*