

Journey Into Discipleship

Volume 3

Sermon 21 through Sermon 30

Dr. L.D. Thomas

The *Journey Into Discipleship* sermon series, based on the so-called “Travel Document” in Luke 9:51-19:27, was originally preached by the late Dr. L.D. Thomas at First United Methodist Church, Tulsa, from 1979-1981. They are presented here in edited form in five volumes of ten sermons each. The introduction and the worksheets which follow each sermon were prepared by Mrs. Harriett Thomas and Mrs. Sandy Heiser.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture references throughout the *Journey Into Discipleship* series are from the Revised Standard Version. At the time of the original sermon series, the Revised Standard Version was the pew bible of the United Methodist Church of Tulsa.

Common Bible: Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright 2011 by First United Methodist Church, 1115 S. Boulder Ave., Tulsa, Oklahoma, 74119. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transcribed, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of FUMC, Tulsa.

www.fumctulsa.org

Foreword

Dear Class Member or Visitor,

Let us be the first to welcome you to your next steps on a continuing *Journey Into Discipleship*.

The Journey Into Discipleship (JID) 2011 curriculum began as a series of sermons preached by Dr. L.D. Thomas from 1979-1981, here at First United. Following Dr. Thomas' untimely death in 1986, his spouse Harriet along with Sandy Heiser re-fashioned these powerful messages into a small group study program. Then for quite a few years, *Journey Into Discipleship* lay dormant on a shelf.

Jerry Toops shares the next chapter in the life of JID:

I arrived at a place in my life of near total burnout in December of 2008. I gave all of myself to Jesus at that point and he led me to these sermons. As I prepared to teach the JID curriculum in 2009, I found new life and God sent just the right persons to walk with me in the process. *Journey Into Discipleship* has been a wonderful experience in my life for the past two years.

We wondered: might God also bless others in the church through JID? In late 2009 we began a "pilot project" with a few Sunday morning classes, using JID as the curriculum. They soon began to share about the transformation that was occurring in their classes, and they encouraged us to consider JID as a resource for the entire church. Over the last several months, we have been hard at work—both physically and spiritually—to make this material ready for our adult Sunday morning classes.

So here we are! *Journey into Discipleship 2011* has the potential to transform us as a church, as we learn once again to follow Jesus' example. This is no small thing.

We look forward to walking this journey with you. Please know that we are praying for you. As disciples ourselves who seek to grow in love, mercy and obedience, we ask for your prayers as well.

Dr. Wade Paschal, Senior Pastor
Dr. Jerry Toops, Director of Healing Ministries
Rev. Thomas Hoffmann, Minister of Adult Learning

From the Original Preface

by Sandi Heiser and Harriet Thomas

L. D. “Bill” Thomas preached this series of fifty sermons on discipleship over a period of eighteen months. Although he laid the discipleship theme aside for important occasions and for special emphases, Bill returned again and again to the personal, intimate lessons Jesus taught His beloved disciples — those who walked with Him then, and those of us who want to walk with Him now.

This sermon series, based on the so-called “Travel Document” in Luke 9:51-19:27, is presented in five volumes of ten sermons each. The introduction and the worksheets which follow each sermon have been prepared for use in personal devotions and/or as a catalyst for small group discussion.

. . . . The LDT Fund (L. D. Thomas memorial), . . . [originally] financed this project. In addition to the publication of *Journey into Discipleship* and *How the Bible Can Help You* (a book of L. D. Thomas’ sermons), LDT Fund allocations during the years have included:

- Canos [Brazil] VIM Trip
- Community Ministry
- Costa Rica Counseling Prayer Seminar
- Finance Ministry
- L.D. Thomas Healing Missions
- Ministry in the Spirit Seminars
- Stephen Ministry
- The Ministry of Counseling Prayer

The LDT Committee, which administers this fund, gave oversight, suggestions, corrections, and encouragement to us as we planned, researched, edited, created, designed, and yes, prayed together in preparing these sermons for you. In the closing words of the first sermon Bill expresses our hopes and our prayer as well as his own —

[May] we begin to rise above the misery, pain, and bitterness around us to experience the love, joy, and excitement that God wants to bestow. God has not left us desolate; through Jesus He has shown us step by step what it means to grow up, get off the bottle, and start eating meat. He has shown us how to become mature Christians so we can do something about this world in which we live. My prayer for you is that you will actually get started today on this exciting, joyful *Journey Into Discipleship*. Bon voyage!

**In memory of
Joe Hammond and Louise Cobb
True Disciples of Jesus Christ who completed the
Journey ahead of us.**

Table of Contents

		Assignment Date
Introduction	1	
Sermon 21: Eyes That See God	7	June 12
Sermon 22: The Spirit of Discipleship	15	June 19
Sermon 23: Your Purpose in Life	23	June 26
Sermon 24: Remember the Sabbath and Keep It Holy	31	July 3
Sermon 25: Disciples, Take Heart!	39	July 10
Sermon 26: Genuine Discipleship Is Contagious	47	July 17
Sermon 27: How to Be a Citizen of God's Kingdom	55	July 24
Sermon 28: The Risk of Discipleship	63	July 31
Sermon 29: The Secret to Being a Disciple	71	August 7
Sermon 30: How to Set Priorities	79	August 14
Appendix	87	
Steps in Praying God's Word	89	

Introduction

Purpose

You are invited to accompany Jesus and His first disciples as they walk from an area north of Galilee southward to Jerusalem. You can listen along with the Twelve as Jesus teaches what it really means to be His follower. Each chapter consists of one sermon and an accompanying worksheet designed to help you make your own personal *Journey Into Discipleship*. You can make this journey by yourself, but like the first disciples you may find that Jesus calls you to be a part of a small group and share your responses with others.

Three-Part Plan of Worksheets

- I. Explore the Sermon — The questions in the first section are designed to help you explore your personal responses to the Discipleship Lesson and the basic truths presented in the sermon.
- II. Search the Scriptures — In this section related scriptures are suggested along with questions for thought and personal application.
- III. Internalize God's Word — Suggestions are given in the final section for making the Word of God a vital part of your life.

Suggestions for using this material as a basis for your daily quiet time

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Day One | Read the sermon and begin the memory scripture. Continue scripture memory daily. |
| Day Two | Review the sermon and answer questions under section I — Explore the Sermon. |
| Day Three | Begin section II — Search the Scriptures. |
| Day Four | Conclude section II. |
| Day Five | Follow the suggestions in section III — Internalize God's Word. |
| Day Six | Review all of your work before meeting with your partner or small group. If you are working alone, review is still recommended. |

How to use this material as a basis for discussion in your small group

In advance of the meeting the designated leader should plan discussion questions in each area: I.—Explore the Sermon, II.—Search the Scriptures, and III.— Internalize God's Word. He may use questions from the worksheet, adapting them to the needs of his group, or he may prefer to plan his own questions. The following suggestions will be helpful.

NOTES

Planning the Discussion

1. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no response.
2. Design questions to elicit response to scriptural teaching, not merely surface expression of opinion (or prejudice).
3. Make sure that all know the Discipleship Lesson and basic truths (main points) of the sermon.
4. Include questions that call for an expression of personal response to the teaching
 - An applicable personal experience or that of an acquaintance
 - Relationship to current events or trends
 - Expressions of agreement, disagreement, confusion, doubt, etc.
 - Additional meaningful scriptures

Leading the Discussion

5. If the group is new and not yet ready to share freely, the leader may need to answer his own questions at first in order to get discussion started.
6. Be prepared with discussion questions in all three areas, but don't cut off a lively discussion in order to use them all. Beware of "Agenda Anxiety."
7. Give everyone an opportunity to respond to each question, but don't put anyone on the spot. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a gift of discernment so that the shy person will not be embarrassed and the aggressive one will not dominate or get the discussion off into time-consuming, unproductive argument or opinionating.
8. Trust God to use both your weaknesses and your strengths as you prepare and while you are leading the group.

Foundational Beliefs

These sermons and worksheets are based upon the following foundational beliefs about scripture:

God's Part

God's Word is Revealed, Inspired, and Illuminated by the Holy Spirit

The truths of scripture are not the conclusions reached by man's intelligence, but truths revealed by God Himself through the Holy Spirit.

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-10).

God's Word is Creative and Sustaining

God created the universe in the beginning through His spoken Word, and He sustains it through that Word.

And God said . . . (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 24, 26).

In the beginning was the Word . . . all things were made through him. . . (Jn 1:1-3).

[Jesus is] upholding the universe by his word of power (Heb 1:3b).

God's Word Accomplishes Purpose

God's Word always accomplishes His purpose. There is power in the Word of God.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:10-11).

God's Word is Living and Active

God's Word discerns what's in our hearts; it cuts out the malignancies that would destroy, and brings new life.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12).

"You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you" (Jn 15:3).

God's Word is Life-Giving

The new birth comes through the Word of God — the living Word of God in the Spirit, and the abiding Word of God in the Son — which we come to know through the written Word of God in the Bible.

You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; . . . "but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you (1 Pe 1:23,25).

God's Word is Healing

God heals through His Word.

He sent forth His word, and healed them (Ps 107:20).

"...only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8b).

Our Part

How can we tap into this power source? How can we internalize the Word of God so that God can accomplish His purposes for our lives—creating, sustaining, discerning, healing us and giving us life? God commands us not only to hide His word in our heart (Ps 119:11) but also to eat it. The scroll

NOTES

of the book was handed to Ezekiel and he was told to take and eat. Ezekiel said, *“Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey”* (Ezek 3:3). Jeremiah said, *“Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart . . .”* (Jer 15:16). Jesus tells us that man does not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4).

Just as different foods meet different needs in our bodies — building bone and muscle, providing energy and different kinds of nourishment — so the scriptures meet the different needs of our spirits — nourishing, empowering, guiding, enlightening, convicting, encouraging. God provides the food, but He doesn’t spoon feed us. Each of us must lift the spoon ourselves, take a bite, chew, swallow, allow the digestive process to take place and the scripture to do its work. In our *Journey into Discipleship* we use a number of methods to internalize God’s Word.

When we study the Bible we use the left brain to gain knowledge. It is absolutely essential that we do this; otherwise, our insights from scripture will be the product of our own imaginations, purely subjective. We’ll create God in our own image and scripture will tell us only what we want to hear (Prov 30:5-6). However, in addition to thoughtful study we recommend ways that use the right-brain, intuitive part of ourselves, and combinations of both. Remember God’s promises about His Word.

“If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (Jn 14: 23-25).

Methods

The following means of Internalizing God’s Word are used in Section III of the worksheets.

Scripture Memory

Some of us have the mind-set firmly established within us that says, “I just can’t memorize scripture.” But both the Old and New Testaments make it plain that God expects us to do just that.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut 6:4-9).

In His last hours with His disciples, Jesus emphasized again and again that if we love Him, His words will abide in us (see Jn 14:15-26 and 15:7-10). God does not command us to do anything He does not enable us to do. Moses gives us God's promise:

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it" (Deut 30:11-14).

When you memorize, remember it is between you and God. You are not going to have to recite a verse word-perfect before an audience. Your heavenly Father Who loves you has told you something He wants you to know. Of course you want to remember it. The Hebrews wrote it on the doorposts of their house. You can write it on a 3 x 5 card to carry with you to review throughout the day. Trust the Holy Spirit to keep His promise — *"The word is very near you, in your mouth, so you can do it!"*

Scriptural Journaling and Paraphrase

There is no right or wrong way to journal. Simply get a plain notebook and pen or pencil. Keep it in a place that's safe from other eyes. Write a note on the outside about privacy. Use it to write down thoughts that come to you as you read the Bible. Ask God to speak to your needs through His written Word. Listen for His answers. Write them down. Rewrite meaningful passages in your own words, making it personal, using your own name.

Praying God's Word

Scripture Prayer is more than a process of the mind, or even of the will and emotions. It is experiencing God's Word personally, using the God-given imaging process under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. **Steps in Praying God's Word** found in the Appendix will help you get started. (Worksheets make frequent references to this page.)

NOTES

Helpful Tool

See the back of each Volume for Discipleship Lesson and Scripture cards which can be cut out for personal use.

Sermon 21: Eyes That See God

To understand our scripture lesson, which is only 3 verses — Luke 12:54-56, we need to remember that at the time of Jesus the little country of Palestine was a pastoral and agricultural country. The people's very lives depended upon being able to read the weather signs. They knew that if a cloud came in from the west, it came from the Mediterranean Sea and would bring rain; but if the wind blew from the south it came from the Arabian Desert and would bring a dust storm and scorching heat. They were experts in weather signs, for their lives depended upon it. Jesus uses this truth to teach us a discipleship lesson about the powerful human faculty called "the mind's eye," or what I prefer to call "the inner eye." He uses it to teach us how to see inwardly as well as outwardly. He uses it to show us the importance of what we commonly call imagination or visualization. Jesus adds an entirely new dimension — the dimension of the gospel. He wants us to see the difference His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension make upon the use of our inner eye. This is what Jesus is explaining to the multitude when, after pointing out how expert they are in weather signs, He says:

"You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Lk 12:56).

Jesus is asking why we have not let His coming — His presence — sanctify our inner eye so we can see spiritually as well as physically. This is what Jesus came to this earth to do. He came to sanctify our inner eye so we can be spiritual beings as well as physical beings. He came to give this important human faculty within us a divine dimension. He came to sanctify our inner eye, so we can begin to see ourselves as God sees us, so we can see God as Jesus sees Him, so we can begin to visualize God's promises becoming a reality in our lives and in the lives of others. In short, He came so we can experience all of the blessings that God has for us.

What Jesus is talking about here is nothing less than learning to live in the spiritual world as well as the physical. Of course, we all know that in our physical world we are limited by time and space and physical laws. Across the centuries, through the use of our senses, through learning how to read weather signs, through the discoveries of science and the arts we have learned much about living in this physical world and experiencing its blessings. At the same time, Jesus is saying, we've progressed hardly at all in living in the spiritual world that God also created for us.

Why? Simply because we have not learned how to use the key that opens the spiritual world for us. The Bible calls this key "faith." Because of our tie to our physical world we've tried to see faith with our physical eyes — our

Scripture

Luke 12:54-56

Text

You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Luke 12:56

outer eyes; instead of seeing it with our inner eyes. It's the inner eye that opens the spiritual world for us. Jesus is telling us that God has enabled us to live the spiritual life even while we live in this physical world through, perhaps, His greatest gift of all—the gift of imagination or visualization. It is only through this gift of imagination or visualization that we can project ourselves into another realm, escape bondage to our physical world, and experience God's spiritual world. Only through permitting Christ to sanctify our imagination can we see in our inner eye the promises of God as an actual reality in our lives. Only through our sanctified imagination can we begin to live the spiritual life and experience these truths in our daily lives now. This is what the Bible means by the word "faith." This is exactly what the writer of the book of Hebrews is talking about when he opens the 11th chapter with these words:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1).

Faith concerns things not seen with the outer eye, but definitely seen with the inner eye through assurance and conviction. This is what he is talking about when at the beginning of the 12th chapter he writes about Jesus as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." Jesus brought us this key to the spiritual world, and He will perfect this key of faith for us if we will let Him. He will perfect it so it will open every room in the spiritual world for us.

Jesus is telling us that if we are to live in the two worlds which God has created for us — the material and spiritual worlds — and reap the benefits and experience the blessings of both, then it is essential that we first learn to see with our inner eye as well as with our outer eye. It is essential, because this inner visualization — this "faith" if you please — is the only way to appropriate the spiritual power that enables us to be what God wants us to be and to live the way God wants us to live. In order to see why this is true, let's look at life from three different perspectives: from the eternal perspective, from the perspective of our earthly relationship with God, and finally, from the purely physical perspective.

I. The Eternal Perspective

According to the Bible there is just one way we can experience eternal life, and that is through the gift of salvation. The Bible says that Jesus came to earth to give us this salvation and that we can accept this gift only through faith. Remember that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the assurance of eternal life; it is the conviction of this life with God. Although we can't see it with our outer eye, we can begin to experience eternal life right now through our sanctified imagination — through visualization with our inner eye. How? By seeing ourselves through our inner eye exactly like God sees us. That's how!

What do we see? First we see ourselves as forgiven and cleansed from sin. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, the Bible says, our sins have been forgiven, and we appropriate this forgiveness through faith — through seeing ourselves as a person for whom Christ died. Through our inner eye we actually see Jesus loose the bonds that tie us to sin. He sets us free! We see His blood cleansing us from all sin and guilt. Through our sanctified imagination we are able to connect our own lives right now with the promise of God — the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then, we see another picture. We see ourselves being raised into a new life — being re-created into the person that Christ wants us to be! Through this great gift of visualization we open our inner lives to the power of God's spiritual world, so His Holy Spirit can do His work in us. According to the Bible, His work is to change us into the likeness of Christ by giving us His inner character, described in the Bible as the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As His Spirit witnesses to our spirit, our inner eye begins to function the way it was designed to function and we begin to experience “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen!” We experience the fruit of faith!

Did you ever wonder why Jesus so often taught in parables? In both Matthew 13:34 and Mark 4:34, the Bible says: *“Indeed He [Jesus] said nothing to them without a parable.”* Why? What is a parable? A parable is a word-picture or an image of God's truth. Jesus taught in parables so we could literally see God's truth in our inner eye and begin to live the spiritual life now. He taught in parables to give us faith, that is, to enable us to connect our own lives to God's Word through the sanctified use of our inner eye. He taught in parables so we could begin to see God's spiritual world through our inner eyes as clearly as we can see God's physical world through our outer eyes. Jesus taught in parables to enable us to use this key of faith so we can open every door in God's exciting spiritual world beginning with the door of salvation and eternal life!

II. The Perspective of Our Earthly Relationship with God

How is it possible for us physical human beings to relate to God, who is Spirit, while we are still in our earthly bodies? Every sincere Christian knows the answer to that, doesn't he? God has made it possible for us to relate to Him through prayer! Because God loves us, He has made a way to be with us and for us to be with Him. Because God loves us and wants to meet our needs, He has made a way for us to share our soul's sincere desires with Him. He has made a way for us to come to Him with our petitions, our thanksgiving, our praise, our intercessions. Prayer is one of God's most precious gifts to His people.

NOTES

Jesus says that many of us, if not most of us, really miss the power in prayer because we try to restrict this communication of the spiritual world to the same limitations we put on communication in the physical world, to words — to verbalization. Jesus is telling us that the real power in prayer is not in verbalization; it is in visualization — the language of the spiritual world, the inner eye!

Modern psychology has taught us, that the image we hold in our minds about ourselves is what we actually become in our daily living. I have a shelf of books in my library several feet long verifying this truth. One popular book which has gone through 15 printings and sold millions of copies is *The Will to Live* by Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker, a leading psychotherapist; and one of the best books, in my opinion, is *Seeing with the Mind's Eye, The History, Technique and Use of Visualization*, by Dr. Mike Samuels. All of these books agree, strictly from scientific study, that we actually become what we see ourselves to be with our inner eye. I often encounter Christians who want desperately to change. They tell me that they pray daily for God to change them, but as I talk to them, it becomes apparent that despite their verbalized prayer they continue to see themselves in their inner eye as the same old person, in the same old rut! The real power in prayer is not in our verbalization; it is in our visualization.

Move one step further in prayer; move to intercessory prayer. Many parents tell me that they pray daily for God to change their rebellious child; yet when they focus on that child with their inner eye they see him or her as the same intractable, defiant rebel! I see the same thing in husbands and wives, who say they pray regularly for a mate from whom they are alienated. Now, which prayer has real power in it? — the prayer of words or the prayer of visualization? Why is this so? It is so, the Bible says, because faith is essential for prayer to be effective, and faith is connecting our lives with the promises of God in Christ through our inner eye. If we fail to make this connection, our faith fails no matter what words we use, and our prayer is powerless!

III. The Purely Physical Perspective

As we move through another door and see our lives from a purely physical perspective, let's consider God's promises to give His people health — both mental and physical health.

Last Wednesday evening at our Pastor's Bible Study, someone said, "I've heard a lot about 'claiming your healing'; will you explain what that means?" First of all, let's get it clear that it does not mean shutting our eyes to our actual physical condition and denying our sickness or infirmity. That's dishonesty and God never advocates that! Rather, "to claim your healing" means to open your eyes — your inner eyes — and begin to see God's promises of health actually become a reality in your own life!

Suppose you go for a physical check-up and your doctor informs you he has discovered a malignancy and recommends chemotherapy. Now, “to claim your healing” is not to deny the fact of the cancer and refuse the treatment. God forbid! In fact, it is just the opposite. You “claim your healing” in cooperating with your doctor by using both the power of faith and the power of medicine. You do this through your inner eye when you begin to connect your life to God’s promises of health by visualizing God’s healing power working in your own life.

To do this you need to find a quiet place several times each day and for at least 15 minutes each time actually see in your inner eye not only the chemotherapy doing its work, but also the white blood cells (which God has put in your body for this purpose) ingest the cancer. Actually picture the malignancy being dissolved and flushed out of your body. Actually see yourself healed in your inner eye!

Now is this just wishful thinking? Is this just preacher talk with no basis in fact? What I’ve just said is based solely upon medical case histories — dozens of them — in the book, *Getting Well Again*, by Drs. Carl and Stephanie Simonton. The Simontons are oncologists in Ft. Worth, Texas who have combined visualization with the best medical treatment. A large percentage of their patients are terminal and come to them as a last resort. For example, Bob Gilley, a 40-year-old executive, was given no better than a 30% chance of survival. After learning the Simonton’s visualization technique, Gilley used it faithfully along with his medical treatment for 10 or 15 minutes, 3 times each day. After 6 weeks the tumor had shrunk 75%, and after 2 months a cancer scan showed no trace of the disease left in his body. This, according to scientific test and medical history, is what can happen through visualization, from a strictly secular standpoint, that is, without even joining with this visualization the tremendous power of faith — the very key to the power of God’s spiritual world! Just think of what can happen when this natural power of the inner eye is combined with the spiritual power of faith; and we begin actually to see God’s promises of health become a reality in our own lives!

We use this truth in the inner healing ministry of our church which we call The Ministry of Counseling Prayer. To help those who receive this ministry “claim their healing” and go on to wholeness, I have prepared a 30-minute tape called *A Guided Prayer Time*, which is given to each person after his first session. On this tape, I help them learn how to pray in faith, that is, to see themselves and others in their inner eye as Christ sees them. In this way, they actually connect their own lives with the promises of God in Christ, and thereby make it possible for God to complete their healing and make them whole! They are asked to follow this guided prayer time each day. If they do I am confident that God will do His part and finish their healing, because the key to spiritual power is faith, and faith is connecting our lives to God’s promises in Christ through the proper use of our inner

eye. This is our 21st discipleship lesson.

Discipleship Lesson #21

The key to spiritual power is faith, and faith is connecting our lives to God's promises in Christ through the proper use of our inner eye.

I have told the secretary of our tape ministry to make this cassette tape, ***A Guided Prayer Time***, available to everyone who wants it. It can be purchased through our tape ministry like other tapes, for what it costs us. Although it was made especially for those who had already received Counseling Prayer, it can help all of us learn how to sanctify our inner eye, perhaps God's greatest gift to us, so we can see God and begin to experience the great blessings He has for us.

*Note: **A Guided Prayer Time** CD is still available in the tape ministry, located next to the church library.*

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #21?
2. What is the key that opens the spiritual world for us?

Perspective #1

Perspective #2

What type of prayer most enables us to relate to God while we are still on earth?

Perspective #3

3. Describe how you can actively participate with God in bringing about your own healing?

Search the Scriptures

4. Read Ephesians 1:1-14. List all that you are and have from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son according to this scripture. *Who am I and/or What do I have?*
5. With the emphasis of this sermon in mind, read Hebrews 11:1. Then write a paraphrase of this scripture.
6. Knowing who we are and what we have in Christ increases our faith. Look up the following scripture references and write out what you learn about yourself as one who is “in Christ.” Prov 23:7 (KJV) says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” In other words the image a man holds about “self” he becomes.

Col 2:13

Rom 8:14-16

Internalize God's Word

7. According to this sermon, the real power in prayer is not in our verbalization; it is in our visualization. Read the paragraph called Praying God's Word, on page 4 and Steps in Praying God's Word on page 5 for suggestions in practicing this powerful way to pray. Use these suggestions in praying Colossians 3:5-17, as you see yourself “put off the old nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (verses 9-10).

Memory scripture: Hebrews 11:1

Notes

Sermon 22: The Spirit of Discipleship

Let me remind you that we are on a journey together with Jesus and The Twelve He chose to be His first disciples as they walk along the Jordan Valley from Galilee to Jerusalem. As He teaches His disciples how to be the Church and carry on His ministry, we come to discipleship lesson #22, found in the last paragraph of chapter 12 of Luke, verses 57 through 59. Jesus is speaking to the multitude when He says,

“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?” (Lk 12:57).

Jesus illustrates what He means by asking them to picture themselves in their mind’s eye as a debtor being taken to court by their creditor. There is no doubt, He says, that as debtor you owe the debt and if you go before the judge there can be only one verdict: “You are guilty! You must stay in prison until the entire debt is paid.” The wise and right thing for you to do, says Jesus, is to settle with your creditor before you get to the judge. Here Jesus is dealing with the very heart of the Gospel. He is dealing with the one word with which Paul sums up the meaning of Christianity: The word “*reconciliation*.”

Jesus is speaking to the multitude; that is, He is saying to everyone, “You are debtors who cannot pay your debt, and what’s more you are on your way to the final judgment where you will be held accountable; so come to your senses and settle your debt before judgment.” He is saying to His disciples, “Here is your ministry, the ministry of reconciliation! To be My disciples you must understand what that means.” No one has ever clarified what the ministry of reconciliation means better than the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians:

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (II Cor 5:17-21).

This is what Jesus wants all of His disciples to see in discipleship lesson #22. He wants us to see that as disciples, our ministry is a ministry of reconciliation. He is telling us that the spirit of discipleship must always be a spirit of reconciliation!

Scripture

Luke 12:57-59 and II Corinthians 5:16-21

Text

Why do you not judge for yourself what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way ...

Luke 12:57-58a

All this is from God, who ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation

II Corinthians 5:18

Discipleship Lesson #22

As disciples, our ministry is a ministry of reconciliation.

As disciples, we are to be Christ's ambassadors — God reaching out to others through us. As His disciples, Christ Jesus has trusted us to be "reconcilers." That is what it means to be His disciples. That is why He created His Church — so we can complete His earthly ministry of reconciliation. How can we fulfill this calling today? From a practical standpoint what is Jesus telling us to do in this discipleship lesson?

I. Who sets the agenda?

First, Jesus begins by saying, "*Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*" (Luke 12:57). Jesus is saying, "To be My disciples you must stop letting the world set your agenda! You must stop letting other people tell you what to do! To be My disciples I must be your agenda; you must obey Me, not the world. Why don't you judge for yourself what is right, for you are a new creation? Why don't you judge for yourself what is right, for you have in you that mind which was also in Me? Why don't you judge for yourself what is right, for the very Word of God has become flesh and dwelt among you?" The point is: To fulfill this ministry of reconciliation to which we are called as disciples we must stop letting the world set our agenda and start being ambassadors for Jesus!

I recently attended the General Conference of our United Methodist Church, which is held every four years. The General Conference is the only body which can speak officially for our church, so the General Conference actually sets the agenda for our denomination. In many ways this General Conference was the most promising and responsible General Conference we have had for some time, and I thank God for that. On the whole, there was not the wild radicalism we have seen at most mainline denominational meetings in the past twenty years. Rather, there was a positive spirit of unity — a genuine desire to hear what the members of the local churches are saying. I felt a real concern by individual members of the Conference about our loss of membership, and a desire to see our church again become a leader in evangelizing the world. I want to emphasize that this was the most positive and responsible General Conference we've had for a long time.

Despite all of this, I left the Conference very frustrated and disappointed, because the basic problem with our church (which is also the basic problem with all mainline denominations today) was not addressed. Why are we losing members? Why are we divided as a Church? Why is there restlessness in the pews? Why has the average church member lost trust in the church bureaucracy — the boards and agencies of our church? Why

has the Church lost so much of its power, credibility and influence in our world today? The basic answer to all of these questions is the same: We have ignored our Lord's command, "*Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*" We have let the world set our agenda. We are following the world, instead of leading the world to Christ. That's the real problem!

Why should we spend almost 50% of the man hours at a General Conference of our church dealing with homosexuality, simply because our society has sunk to such a state of degradation that almost anything goes sexually in America? Why do we think that our church must speak out on every political and social issue, both domestic and foreign? Why do we permit such questions to take up most of our time at the top meeting of our church? We do it because we are letting the world set our agenda, instead of Christ! That's our real problem!

Can you imagine Paul spending half of his time debating the question of homosexuality as an alternate life style for Christians? Can you imagine Paul or Barnabas or Silas boycotting Corinth or Philippi or Lystra because of politically expressed views in those cities? At Lystra even after the citizens stoned Paul and left him on the road for dead, he got up and went back into the heart of the city and let Christ set his agenda by preaching the gospel of reconciliation more fervently than ever. The Church would have "died aborning" if Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, James, or Timothy had spent their time trying to reform the Roman government, appease the degenerates in Corinth, and speak to every political and social issue of their day. No! They claimed to be authorities and messengers of one thing and one thing only: the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! They knew that the only way to change governments and societies permanently is to change the hearts of men and women who will then change their governments and societies. The Church has lost much of its power and credibility in our world today because we have lost our first love, which is to share our faith in Jesus Christ with other people, so they might not perish, but have eternal life!

Historians agree that John Wesley, the founder of our United Methodist Church, did more than any other person to change the political, social and human rights climate in the 18th century. He didn't do it by trying to change governments, or boycott businesses or lobby for special legislation. He did it by fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord to go into all of the world preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, making disciples, and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus taught! To be the Church of Jesus Christ this must always be our first love. We must never permit the world to get us sidetracked from this primary task by substituting different political and social situations for our first love. Why? Because, according to the Bible, this is the only way there can ever be a spirit of reconciliation upon this earth! This is the only way to keep our world from perishing!

II. Reconciliation — because of Christ

Not only does Jesus tell us that, if we are to be His disciples, we must not let the world set our agenda; He goes on to tell us in our text what we must do: we must make an effort to settle things peacefully on our way through life before judgment time. He tells us that the spirit of discipleship is always reconciliation.

Now, this word “reconciliation,” as it is used in the Bible is a technical word with a very specific meaning. In fact, the word was a new word, coined by Paul to express the real difference that the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus makes for mankind. There’s no word in the Old Testament like it, and there is no word in the Greek religious language like it. When Paul uses this word “reconciliation,” he is saying that Jesus Christ brought about such a radical, complete change in the situation of the human race that we have to have a new and original word to describe it. Reconciliation means that because of Christ, we can now relate right to God and to each other! The unique part of that definition is found in the three words *because of Christ*. Reconciliation in the Biblical sense, is not concerned with what we do; it is concerned with what God has done for us in Christ. When the Bible teaches that the spirit of discipleship is reconciliation, it is not telling us to avoid confrontation with evil, nor to compromise what we know is right to get along with everyone in the world. It is not telling us to avoid conflict at all cost. It is telling us just the opposite. The spirit of reconciliation is not appeasement; the spirit of reconciliation is defeating evil with good. The spirit of reconciliation defines the power of Christ, not the compromise of man.

Because of Christ we can relate right with God, and God can therefore pour His love into our hearts so we can begin to relate right with people. *Because of Christ* God can give us the power we need to deal with evil in our own lives and in our society. *Because of Christ* we can face up to evil and be victorious over it. According to the Bible, *because of Christ* and only *because of Christ* reconciliation is possible between man and God and between man and man.

When the Bible says in our text that we must make an effort to settle things peacefully on our way through life before judgment time, God is not telling us to compromise our faith just to get along with non-believers. God forbid! He is not telling us to appease groups like the gay caucus by agreeing that homosexuality is an alternate life style for Christians. He is not telling us to give up and let terrorists and irresponsible governments push us around. He is not telling us to be so pluralistic in order to get along with others that we don’t really believe in anything. No! Just the opposite!

Rather, the Bible is saying, *because of Christ* we can know what we believe! *Because of Christ* true reconciliation is possible. Make an effort to bring Christ into every situation in life, including the evil with which you are

confronted. Christ died for the homosexual, the adulterer, the terrorist, the non-believer, just as He died for you and me. He died for the whole world. Make an effort to bring Christ into every situation in life so all men might confess, repent, be forgiven, and become a new creation in Christ. This is the only kind of reconciliation the Bible ever speaks about — true reconciliation; that is, reconciliation because of Christ, not because of our compromise and appeasement.

When Jesus in discipleship lesson #22 tells us that the spirit of discipleship is always reconciling; He is simply reissuing His Great Commission. He is saying, “Now, take Christ into all of your world so that your world might not perish.” He is simply telling us that because of Christ we don’t have to compromise with evil, but must make an effort to let Christ redeem the world and make it into the new creation He wants it to be! That’s true reconciliation and that’s our Lord’s call to all of His disciples. We are called to be *“ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us ...”* (II Corinthians. 5:20). He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation, which is the very power of our crucified and living Christ to redeem this world!

Oh how our world needs this ministry today! Look around you. What do you see? Confused men and women perishing in immorality! You see the Church losing power and credibility as it compromises with evil, calling “reconciliation” that which is really appeasement. What the world needs today is true reconciliation; that is, the world needs to become a new creation *“because of Christ”* and, Christian, you are the only means God has for doing this in our world today!

I beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God, and as you go out into your world this week, be an ambassador for Christ, so God can make His appeal through you. Through you the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will become the transforming and reconciling power that will turn our world right side up again! May God bless you as you do it!

Discipleship Lesson #22

As disciples, our ministry is a ministry of reconciliation.

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #22?
2. How can we fulfill our calling to be ministers of reconciliation?
3. Reconciliation means that because of Christ, we can now relate right to God and to each other. What are some possibilities that are ours now because of Christ?

Search the Scriptures

4. Read the following scriptures about our ministry and answer the questions.

2 Cor 1:4 *What does God do for us? What does He expect of us?*

2 Cor 3:4-6 *As disciples, we are competent to minister because our competence comes from _____. Our competence is not rooted in the Old Covenant based on _____; we are ministers of a new covenant of the _____. We do not fill others with "oughts;" we offer them _____ in the Spirit.*

2 Cor 3:12-16 *We do not need to hide behind a veil like Moses to keep others from seeing our humanity. What makes it possible for us to be open and real?*

2 Cor 3:17 *The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of _____. If Jesus abides in me, so does _____. I am not bound to my own sins and weaknesses; rather I am _____.*

2 Cor 3:18 *As disciples, we are in the process of being changed to be like _____.*

Internalize God's Word

5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. Pray this scripture visually, allowing the Holy Spirit to show you situations in your own life where you have been — or could have been — involved in the ministry of reconciliation. Anticipate opportunities in which you could be an ambassador for Christ. See God ministering His peace through you. (See *Steps in Praying God's Word* in the Appendix)

Memory scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:18

Notes

Notes

Sermon 23: Your Purpose in Life

At times we all ask ourselves — and if we're Christian, we go on to ask God — "What is my purpose in life? What does God want me to do with my life?" Fortunately for us, Jesus answers this question in discipleship lesson #23, found in the first nine verses of chapter 13 of Luke. The answer came in response to comments about two local tragedies: A group of Galileans had been killed by Pilate's soldiers while they were offering sacrifices to God. Also, eighteen men had been killed in Jerusalem when the tower of Siloam fell upon them. The people commented that, no doubt, both groups had perished because they were sinners and were being punished for their sins. Jesus says, "No, you are wrong! What you need to see is that all of you are on the same collision course and doomed to perish, unless you repent and get about your purpose in life!" Then Jesus tells them a parable to explain what He means.

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, "Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?" And he answered him, "Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down" (Lk 13:6-9).

The point of the parable is obvious: Our purpose in life is to produce fruit for our Lord! This is our Lord's discipleship lesson:

Discipleship Lesson #23

Our purpose in life is to produce fruit for our Lord!

To understand the full meaning of this discipleship lesson let's turn to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus expounds upon this truth. In the 7th chapter of Matthew, verses 15-20, Jesus says this:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:15-20).

In this parable in Luke 13 and this saying in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is telling us how we can fulfill our purpose in life and produce fruit for our

Scripture

Luke 13:1-9 and
Matthew 7:15-20

Text

And if it bears fruit
next year, well and
good, but if not, you
can cut it down.

Luke 13:9

Thus, you will know
them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:20

Lord. He is telling us basically two things: first, the kind of fruit we are supposed to produce and second, how to produce it.

I. What kind of fruit?

Jesus is very specific in answering this question for us. In the passage in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that grapes aren't gathered from thorns nor figs from thistles. Jesus is saying that the fruit we are supposed to produce is the fruit which is indigenous to our own lives. We are supposed to produce our own kind of fruit, not someone else's fruit! No one but a fool, would expect to get apples from a pear tree, or plums from a peach tree. No, each tree is supposed to produce its own unique kind of fruit.

I am confident that much of the confusion and trouble we find in the Church today stems directly from the turmoil and confusion generated during the past two decades by the unrealistic and unbiblical philosophy that everyone in the Church should be involved in certain specific social action programs. During that time, thousands of sermons were preached and hundreds of books and articles were written declaring that you are not really a Christian if you aren't taking part in this social program or that — and of course you can name those programs as well as I can. Thousands upon thousands of sincere Christians swallowed this hook, line and sinker, and actually did become involved in the particular programs being pushed, only to find out that this was really not their thing, leaving them with either a deep sense of guilt or total disillusionment. Consequently, many Christians have become inactive in the Church during the past two decades, and many more have revolted against this philosophy and have abandoned their faith altogether. How sad! For Jesus says it is ridiculous to try to push all Christians into bearing the same kind of fruit; it is as ridiculous as saying that every fruit tree is supposed to bear the same kind of fruit. We are supposed to produce our own kind of fruit. We are supposed to produce the fruit which is indigenous to our own lives!

Paul, in speaking about the spiritual gifts which God gives us, specifically says that some of us are supposed to preach, others to teach, others to serve, others are to be evangelists, others are to do acts of mercy, etc. Of course, Paul is listing only a few of the things we are to do as illustrative of the many ways we can serve our Lord. The point is: the fruit we are supposed to produce depends upon the kind of tree we are. The fruit we are supposed to produce depends upon the spiritual gifts and the talents our Lord has given us, and the training we've had. All of us are not supposed to do the same thing.

I remember in one of the churches I served, one Sunday evening during Advent, we had a family songfest. Each family had an opportunity to "do its own thing" in song, to sing together their favorite Christmas carols and hymns. Without consulting me, my family decided that our family should

do our thing too and sing a song together. They especially decided that Dad should be a singing member of the family.

Now, it just so happens that when the Lord was passing out talents and said “sing!” I thought He said “spring!” — and I ran from that talent. That made no difference to my wife, my oldest son who was in junior high school then, my daughter and younger son who were in grade school; they had already decided that Dad was going to sing with the family. They chose the simplest song they could think of — “Jingle Bells” — and began drilling Dad on his part. Finally, very diplomatically, my wife said to my older son, who has a rather good voice: “John, I think it would be better balanced if you stood over here by your Dad and sang the same part he is singing — sing right into his ear!” Well, he did and I guess I parroted back fairly well. At least we got through the evening. All the time I knew I was being manipulated and I knew I wasn’t contributing my best talent to the Lord. In fact, I was miserable during the whole thing and knew I was being unproductive.

The point is: All of us are not supposed to do the same thing! We are supposed to produce our own kind of fruit for our Lord, the kind of fruit that is indigenous to our own lives. We are to use the gifts and talents that God has given us, not parrot the gifts and talents of others.

II. How do we produce good fruit?

Jesus says that it takes three things for a tree to produce good fruit.

- You must plant the right tree in the right soil.
- You must nurture it — that is, cultivate, prune, water, and feed it.
- Give it time.

This, says Jesus, is the way to produce good fruit for our Lord, too. Just as you must plant the right tree in the right soil before it will produce good fruit, so before we can produce good fruit for the Lord, we too must first know the kind of tree we are and then plant ourselves in the right soil. How can you know what kind of tree you are? You look at the talents and the gifts that God has given you, the training you have, what do you enjoy doing, what do you do well, what fulfills you. It’s ridiculous, says Jesus, for an apple tree to try to produce pears. It’s just as ridiculous for a person without the spiritual gifts and natural aptitude to try to be a preacher, doctor, lawyer, engineer, business man or secretary.

It really doesn’t matter whether you’re a doctor, lawyer, engineer, teacher, business man, accountant, secretary or preacher any more than it matters whether it’s an apple tree, peach tree, pear tree, or fig tree. Each tree has a different function, but who is to say which one is most important or most beneficial? It all depends upon the particular need at the time. So it is with us and our vocations. God doesn’t want us all to be preachers

NOTES

or missionaries. He needs all kinds of vocations to get His work done. He does want all of us, no matter what our vocation is, to produce fruit for Him. That is our ultimate purpose in life!

Just as each tree will produce its own kind of fruit, so will each of us; but just as that tree must be planted in the right kind of soil before it can produce fruit; so it is with us too! We must plant our life in God's soil. Just as a seed gives itself to the soil, we must give ourselves to God! God is not so much concerned with whether you are a business man, secretary or preacher, as He is with whether you give yourself and your vocation to Him! God can use business men, doctors, lawyers and engineers just as much as He can use preachers, often even more; for they are dealing with more people out in the world than preachers are, and God is concerned with all people. If you're going to produce fruit for our Lord you must first commit your vocation to Him, no matter what it is. Whatever you do, do it for our Lord. That's the point. Do it to glorify Him. Do it to serve Him. Do it to produce fruit for Him.

There is more to producing good fruit than just planting a tree in the right soil, then leaving it and returning later to gather the fruit. There is another thing you must do before a fruit tree will produce good fruit; you must nurture that tree. Before a tree will produce good fruit, it must be cultivated, pruned, watered, fed and properly tended.

So it is with us, too. We don't just give ourselves to God and then expect to begin producing good fruit immediately. That is, we don't if we know what we're doing! Our lives need to be cultivated and pruned. For some of us the weeds of the world are using up all of our fruit-producing energy. These fruit-destroying weeds need to be pulled out of lives. Just as any good gardener must be eternally vigilant to stay ahead of the weeds in his garden, so it is in life. The weeds of the world are continually trying to use up our fruit-producing energy, and no matter how many weeds we pull up, there always are others to take their place. No matter how hard you try, weeds will continue to find their way back into your life. The only way you can deal with them is the way any good gardener deals with weeds: constant cultivation! Learn to recognize the weeds that are sapping your energy and keep them cultivated out of your lives.

To produce good fruit we need to keep our tree of life pruned too. Some of us have grafted onto our lives the wrong kind of branches. They are not fruit-producing branches but are more like the thorns and thistles that Jesus talks about in our parable. They are not compatible with the kind of fruit we are supposed to produce for God and they need to be pruned — they need to be cut off. Wise pruning is essential for a fruit tree to produce good fruit, and it is essential for us if we are to produce good fruit for our Lord.

Before a tree can produce good fruit its roots must go deep into the rich soil so it can feed on the right kind of nutrients and be refreshed with life-giving water. So it is with us too. Our roots must go deep into the Word of God. We must feed on His Word and be refreshed by His Spirit before we can produce good fruit for Him. Real Christian nurture is essential for a fruit-producing Christian, just as nurture is essential before a tree will produce good fruit.

Not only did the Master in our parable not expect the fig tree to produce apples, but he didn't even expect the fig tree to continually produce figs! He only expected it to produce figs in its season! The rest of the time he expected the tree to do what it was supposed to do: that is, to go down deep with its roots and find the nutrients it needs to grow into maturity. It takes time to become a sound tree!

Before you and I can bear good fruit for our Lord, we must first have the proper balance in the way we use our time. The local church is supposed to be our feeding ground where we get our nutrients. We need to come here and be fed each week, so we can go out into our world and bear good fruit for our Lord. Cut a tree off from the nutrients in the soil and it will produce no fruit. Cut a Christian off from the nutrients in the Church and likewise, he will produce no fruit for our Lord. Our time needs to be balanced between receiving food from God and bearing fruit for Him. This means that we must have a disciplined prayer life, where each day we open our lives to God so He can pour His love into our hearts. It also means that we must discipline ourselves in studying the Bible, so His Word can take firm root in our lives. Also, it means we must worship regularly so we can meet our Living Lord personally, so we can strengthen and feed each other, so we can hear His Word to us and re-dedicate ourselves to producing good fruit for Him.

This is what Jesus means when He says that before a tree can produce good fruit, it must first grow into a sound tree. Or, to say it another way, before we can begin to produce good fruit for our Lord, we must first permit our Lord to produce His good fruit in us. Paul calls this fruit which our Lord produces in us "the fruit of the Spirit," and says this fruit consist of nine character traits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. By this Paul simply means that, when we take time to permit Christ to live His life in us, then His basic character traits take root in us and we become like a sound tree capable of producing good fruit for our Lord.

There's one final thing that Jesus tells us about time here, and that's really the good news in this discipleship lesson. Jesus shows us how our time is inextricably bound up with the grace of God. Jesus says that even though we have been unproductive in the past, and like this fig tree we have failed to fulfill our purpose in life and produce fruit for our Lord, God is merciful and will continue to feed us and care for us and give us another chance.

NOTES

Jesus says an unproductive tree deserves to be cut down, for it is not serving its purpose and it is taking up valuable space; but God is good and does not give us what we deserve, but rather He gives us what we need — another chance. That's grace — more time in which to fulfill our purpose in life.

God wants none of us to perish without fulfilling our purpose in life. God wants none of us to perish without producing good fruit for Him. He continues to give us more time in which to do it! That's grace! That's why God sent Jesus Christ to us. He sent Jesus to show us how to use our time right, to nurture us, and to cultivate us and feed us for one more season; so we will begin to fulfill our purpose in life and produce good fruit for our Lord! That's grace! The point is, we are all living now only by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as the fig tree in our parable was allowed to live for another season only by the grace of the Master. So it is with all of us!

Even though our God is gracious and gives us another season, Jesus ends our lesson on a somber note. He warns us that just as He will expect fruit from his fig tree when the fruit-producing season comes next year, so with us also His grace must always be tempered by justice. He warns us that the time will come when we must make an accounting to our Master too! This parable is clear, God will not allow us to occupy this valuable space forever without producing good fruit for Him. In the parable the period of grace is limited to just one more year. In the Sermon on the Mount we are told there will come a time when —

Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt 7:19).

We are now living under God's grace, that's true; but it is also true that all of us must face God's judgment someday and at that time, according to our Lord, there will be only one test: Have we fulfilled our purpose in life? Have we produced good fruit for our Lord? That's the question with which our Lord ends our lesson: Are you fulfilling your purpose in life and producing good fruit for our Lord? If not, there is good news! By the grace of God you still have time to fulfill your purpose in life and begin to produce fruit for our Lord! Will you do it? Will you use your time of grace the way God wants you to use it?

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #23?
2. List the three things necessary for a tree to produce good fruit and explain how this is accomplished.

Search the Scriptures

3. Read 1 Cor 12:4-18 and list what these verses tell us concerning the different individuals in the Body of Christ.

Internalize God's Word

4. Use Jesus' parable in Luke 13:6-9 as the basis for Praying God's Word. The Lord wants to plant us deep in His soil, nurture us, give us Living Water, feed us with proper nutrients, refresh us through His Word, even pruning us, giving us proper balance, that we might bear fruit for Him. Expect Him to show you your particular areas of need.

On another day, as the basis for your visual prayer, use the word-picture that Jesus drew for His disciples the night before He died — John 15:1-11. See yourself as a fruit-bearing branch, Jesus as the Vine, the Father as the Vinedresser. Trust Him to show you what He wants you to see.

Memory scripture: Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Notes

Sermon 24: Remember the Sabbath and Keep It Holy

Our 24th discipleship lesson in *Our Journey into Discipleship* is so important that Jesus emphasizes it twice on His last journey from outside Galilee to Jerusalem. First, we find it in chapter 13 of Luke, verses 10-17, where He heals a woman who had been bent over with an infirmity for 18 years. We find it again in the first six verses of chapter 14 of Luke, where He heals a man with dropsy. The thing common to both of these healings is that they were performed on the sabbath day. Because Jewish law prohibited any kind of work on the sabbath, Jesus was condemned for this by the religious authorities. In his reply Jesus gives us one of our most important discipleship lessons and reveals to us one of the most meaningful truths in the Bible.

When you search the scriptures you discover that there are seven times that Jesus heals on the sabbath. No doubt, the reason for this is because on the sabbath Jesus always entered the synagogue and there encountered persons who were hurting and sick, so He healed them. We are told in the 4th chapter of Luke that it was always the custom of Jesus to go into the synagogue on the sabbath (Luke 4:16). This was the situation that prompted the first healing recorded in the Gospels (Mark 1:23-26) where He heals the man with the unclean spirit. Incidentally, our scripture lesson today, Luke 13:10-17, is the last time we are told about Jesus being in the synagogue. After this, He is no longer welcome in the Jewish synagogues; because He has broken their law about the sabbath.

What is the law about the sabbath? We are talking about basically the same thing whether we speak either of the Jewish sabbath — the last day of the week, or the Christian sabbath — the first day of the week. Christians now worship on Sunday instead of Saturday to celebrate the day our Lord rose from the dead. As we talk about the sabbath, the day of the week is not the important thing; the important thing is the principle and the divine truth upon which it is based. What is the law about the sabbath? In the opening pages of the Bible we are given the basis for this law of the sabbath. In chapter 1 of Genesis we are told about God creating the universe in six days, then in the opening verses of chapter 2 we're told that God rested on the 7th day and verse 3 reads:

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it ... (Gen 2:3).

When you consider that the word "blessed" means "to favor" and the word "hallowed" means "to make holy or sacred," then what we are being told in the opening pages of the Bible is that God favored this day for a holy and sacred reason. We are told the same thing in the 4th Commandment in

Scripture

Luke 13:10-17 and
Luke 14:1-6

Text

And he said to them,
"The sabbath was
made for man, not
man for the sabbath;
so the Son of man
is lord even of the
sabbath."

Mark 2:27-28

Exodus 20, when Moses writes:

Remember the sabbath, to keep it holy (Ex 20:8).

Then, after explaining how God created this special day as an integral part of His creation, Moses concludes the 4th commandment with the same words we find in the creation story:

... therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it (Ex 20:11).

That is, God favored this special day for a holy and sacred reason. We had to wait for the revelation of Jesus to understand why God favored this special day and what His holy and sacred reason was for doing it. Oh, Moses knew that it meant for us to desist from our regular labor and to turn all of our attention and energy to God. Also, we see Moses command adherence to this law when the children of Israel were gathering manna in the wilderness. On the 6th day of the week they must gather enough for both the 6th and the 7th days and rest on the 7th day. Why? Why must we remember the sabbath day to keep it holy?

Jesus specifically answers this question for all mankind in our text in Mark 2:27-28. Let's set the scene. In the 2nd chapter of Mark, beginning with the 23rd verse, we are told that, as Jesus walks along on the sabbath with His disciples, they pluck some ears of grain, thresh the kernel from the husk with their hands, then eat it. For this, the Pharisees confront Jesus and condemn Him for permitting His disciples to break the law of the sabbath. It was not against the law for them to take the grain from the field; Jewish law specifically provides in Deuteronomy 23:25 that anyone walking through a grain field is free to pluck the grain for eating as long as he does not put a sickle to it. The Pharisees were not upset because of the loss of grain; they were furious because the disciples did what was considered by them to be work and thus broke the law prohibiting work on the sabbath. It is in our Lord's reply to this that God reveals to us why He "blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." Jesus replies:

"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath" (Mk 2:27-28).

A more literal translation of what Jesus says here is:

"The sabbath for the sake of man came into being, and not man for the sake of the sabbath" (Wuest, Vol. I, p.61).

In other words, "The sabbath was not meant to be an end within itself; it was created to be a means for mankind to reach the end God wills for him!" The sabbath was not created to bind man to a static unproductive way of life; it was created to enable man to become the creative, productive co-worker with God that God wills him to be. The sabbath was not created to keep man from working on the 7th day of the week; it was created to enable man to work right on the other 6 days of the week! The sabbath was not created to motivate man to pass silly "blue laws" against work; it

was created to motivate man to move beyond law to “a life of grace!” Jesus is telling us here that God never intended for man to define this special “blessed and hallowed day” with “don’t rules.” He intends for us to use it as the basis for building a positive faith!

The best illustrations of this, of course, are the seven times that Jesus Himself heals the sick and infirm on the sabbath. “As His custom was” Jesus went into God’s House on the sabbath, but He didn’t go because the Lord prohibited work on the sabbath. Rather, He went to work and to show us how to be empowered and equipped for our work. This is exactly what Jesus means when He says in our text: *“The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.”* He means that the sabbath was created by God to be His means for equipping us and empowering us to continue the work of Christ on earth. This brings us face-to-face with two crucial questions:

- What is the work of Christ that we are called as disciples to continue on earth?
- How can we use the sabbath as God’s means for empowering and equipping us to continue the work of Christ?

I. What is the work of Christ that we are called to continue?

The Bible’s answer to this question is clear: Christ came to make men and women whole; and as His disciples we are called to continue His ministry of making people whole! This is what the word “salvation” really means. It means first, release from any crippling circumstances in life through the healing power of Christ; and, second, it means going on to wholeness through the perfecting power of His Spirit. Wherever Jesus went — be it the House of God or the market place — and found people less than whole, He touched them and gave them wholeness. Where He found the spirits of men and women burdened down with sin, immorality, and guilt, He touched them with the forgiving love of God and set them free so they could be made whole. Where He found the minds of men and women confused and troubled, He touched them with the transforming power of the Word of God, so they could “know the truth and the truth could set them free” and they could go on to wholeness. Where He found the bodies of men and women sick or infirm, He touched them with the healing love of God so they could be released from their crippling circumstances and could go on to wholeness.

This was the work of Jesus on earth, and He created His Church to continue this work. Jesus calls us into the Church so He can equip us and empower us to do it. How? By “blessing and hallowing the sabbath,” that’s how! Since the most “blessed and hallowed” day in all history is Easter Sunday, the Christian now makes Sunday His sabbath, believing that this sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). The Risen Christ is Lord of the sabbath, which means that He uses our sabbath — Sunday — for His purposes; He

uses the sabbath to accomplish God's will in our lives; He uses the sabbath to empower us and to equip us to continue His work on earth.

II. How can we use the sabbath as God's means for empowering and equipping us to continue the work of Christ?

You will recall the 6th discipleship lesson: *To be a disciple we must first attune our lives to the rhythm of God's creation: first receive from Christ — then give to others! Receive — give! Receive — give!* In the spiritual realm this rhythm of receiving and giving is as important as the rhythm of breathing is in the physical realm: Inhale — exhale, receive — give! Inhale — exhale, receive — give! Now, in this 24th discipleship lesson Jesus shows us how God has planned for us to do this. God wove the sabbath into the very structure of His universe so we can attune our lives to the rhythm of God's universe. God provided this way by creating time and putting the sabbath into this time scale every seven days. This is what Jesus means in our text, when He says that the sabbath was made (that is, created by God for man) not man for the sabbath."

Since "In the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God ... and all things were created through Him," Christ is the Lord of the sabbath. The Creator is the Lord of His creation, which simply means He uses it for His purposes. He uses the sabbath to accomplish God's will in our lives, that is, to equip us and to empower us to continue the work of Christ on earth. From the beginning the sabbath has been part of His plan of salvation for us — His plan of making us whole!

Just as all other parts of salvation are possible only when God's grace comes together with man's faith, so is this true when it comes to the sabbath! This is why Jesus was so adamantly opposed to the Pharisees' legalistic approach to the sabbath; it was simply another way of trying to earn our own salvation, and salvation is possible only as a gift from God in Christ. When we use the sabbath to formulate rules about what we must not do, we are misusing the sabbath and trying to substitute our legalism for God's grace. This always closes our lives to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus, because it puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

What Christ is saying to us is this: "God has already done everything that needs to be done for your salvation — for your wholeness, and it's a gift. That's the good news! Now, all you need to do is to receive this gift through faith. Learning how to use the sabbath right is essential to that!"

Faith is never what we don't do; faith is always the positive steps we take to open our lives to the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus! This is the purpose of the sabbath. God created time for this reason and He set the sabbath in this time scale so we can draw aside from everything else once every seven days and receive from Him the love, the power, the gifts and the assurance that we need in order to be whole and to be His instruments

for making others whole. Just as it was the custom of Jesus to go to God's House on the sabbath both to work and to be empowered and equipped; so must we make this our custom too if we are to find wholeness and follow Him. This is our discipleship lesson.

NOTES

Discipleship Lesson #24

To be disciples we must first learn how to use the sabbath as God's means for empowering us and equipping us to continue the work of Christ on earth.

We learn how to use the sabbath right by letting Christ teach us. When we look at Him we see that when we gather in our church on the sabbath — the Lord's Day — we should come first of all in the same spirit and with the same attitude as that of a doctor and a patient entering a hospital. The doctor enters to work, and the patient enters to have the damage repaired. All of us need to enter to have the damage repaired at times — to be ministered to; but when that damage is repaired we need to get about our Lord's work of ministering to the needs of others. First, our church needs to be like a hospital on the sabbath where the sick and wounded are cared for. If we are to learn from our Lord and begin to use the sabbath right, when we gather on the sabbath the giant stones in the walls must become like a common wailing wall for all of us, where we come to cry together and truly share in each other's hurts and burdens. We come to renew our common bond and covenant with each other through Christ.

Then, if we are truly sincere about traveling this *Journey into Discipleship* with our Lord, we must see our church on the sabbath as a weary traveler sees a way station on his journey — a way station where we can come each Sunday and be outfitted with the necessary supplies for the rest of the journey.

Next, the sabbath must become our weekly feast day — our festival of faith — where we gather to celebrate our victory in Christ Jesus, where we rejoice together because death has passed over us and we have been given eternal life, where we rejoice together because all of our needs have been met in Him. For the Christian, every Sunday should be like the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles — the three holy feasts for the Jews — all rolled into one. It should be a time when we sing, laugh, clap our hands, dance and rejoice because the victory has already been won for us!

Especially when we gather weekly in our church we must see it as gathering on holy ground and the sabbath as the time of our divine appointment with God. It is holy ground because God promises to meet us each week on this "blessed and hallowed day;" that is the reason He created the sabbath. Figuratively speaking, when we come to church each week we should take off our shoes and prostrate ourselves, because we come into the presence of the Most High — the Holy One. Only in this humble spirit can He empower us and equip us for the work to which He

NOTES

calls us. Then as we praise Him and worship Him — “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty” — He truly inhabits our praise and gives us the love, the power, the gifts and the assurance we need in order to be whole and to be His instruments for wholeness to others! This is the way that Jesus always used the sabbath when He went into the House of God on the Lord’s Day.

- He used it like a hospital to minister healing to the hurting and sick.
- He used it like a common wailing wall to share in the pains and burdens of others.
- He used it like a way station to outfit wayfarers for the journey.
- He used it like a feast day to celebrate the good news of the Gospel.
- He used it like holy ground to keep a divine appointment with our Heavenly Father, the God of hosts.

This is the way He wants to use our church on the sabbath too, so it can become the means of faith that God created it to be — so, the sabbath can become for all of us that special “blessed and hallowed day” every week — where our faith meets God’s grace and we are divinely empowered and equipped for another week of our *Journey into Discipleship!*

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #24?
2. This sermon discusses two questions. Summarize the answer for each.

Question #1: What is the work of Christ that we are called to continue?

Question #2: How can we use the sabbath as God's means for empowering and equipping us to continue the work of Christ?

Search the Scriptures

3. Read the first detailed explanation in the Bible of how to keep the sabbath in Exodus 16:22-30. Compare verse 29a, "See! The Lord has given you the sabbath," with Mark 2:27. What one fundamental truth is stated in both verses?
4. Compare the 4th Commandment as stated in Exodus 20:8-11 with the way it is stated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. In both versions the 4th is by far the longest commandment. Each gives reasons for keeping the sabbath day holy as well as detailed instructions about how to do it. What is the same in both versions? What is different?
5. Describe the five ways suggested in this sermon that we might keep the sabbath.
6. Why is the seventh day — the sabbath day — a holy day? See Genesis 2:1-3.

Internalize God's Word

7. Read again these Old Testament passages about the sabbath day: Gen 2:1-3, Ex 16:22-30, Ex 20:8-11, Deut 5:12-15. Read these New Testament passages: Mark 2:23-28, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 14:1-6, Mt 5:17-20. Then pray, asking God to show you clearly His Commandment to you in your current circumstances regarding your attitude toward and your behavior on the sabbath day. You may need to continue this prayer over a period of several days. When you believe you have a clear picture of God's will for you in this matter, write it out.

Continue to read this statement weekly, making changes in it as the Spirit leads.

You will find freedom, strength, and joy in keeping the sabbath day holy, as God fully equips you to fulfill His call upon your life.

Memory scripture: Mark 2:27-28 and Genesis 2:3

Notes

Sermon 25: Disciples, Take Heart!

Historians are prone to give names to different periods in history, and of course none of us know what they will call the present time. If I had to give it a name today, I think I would have to call it “The Age of Disheartenment.” Everywhere I look I see people becoming disheartened about something. Never since the great depression have Americans been so disheartened about the economy. Never in the history of our country have so many husbands and wives been so disheartened about marriage, nor have people been so disheartened about their families. Never since the Reformation have members been so disheartened about the Church. The sad fact is, Christians are just as disheartened as everyone else.

Yet Jesus assures us that the world can never defeat the disciplined Christian nor can the powers of hell prevail against the Church which is truly His Body on earth. Paul tells us that hope is one of the eternal verities, that is, one of the lasting qualities that cannot be taken away from a Christian. He says that, because we have this hope, nothing can ever separate us from the love and care of God.

Fortunately for us, Jesus deals specifically with this problem of disheartenment. As He walks from outside Galilee to Jerusalem on His last journey with His disciples He teaches them the basic discipleship lessons they will need in order to be His disciples and continue His ministry on earth — fifty separate and distinct discipleship lessons. Luke records these fifty lessons for us in the heart of his Gospel. He devotes ten full chapters to them out of a total of twenty-four chapters in his Gospel — from the end of chapter 9 to the middle of chapter 19. We are at mid-point in this journey, as far as the number of lessons is concerned; and as He and His disciples reach this mid-point, Jesus can sense a restlessness, a spirit of discouragement and a general sense of disheartenment among His disciples. He uses this discipleship lesson to deal with this problem and to give heart to the disheartened disciples. He wants to use it to give heart to His disheartened disciples today, twenty centuries later.

Let’s set the scene. A few weeks earlier at the beginning of this journey near Caesarea Philippi in what is now Syria Jesus gathered these twelve plain, uneducated men around Him and said, “I am beginning My Church with you and the powers of hell shall not prevail against it. I am giving you the keys to the kingdom of heaven — the power and authority to bind and to loose in heaven and on earth.” Shortly thereafter they leave on this journey, and already they are beginning to think that they are destined for nothing but hell! They no more than get started when Jesus warns them that this is their last trip together as He sets His face toward Jerusalem

Scripture

Luke 13:18-19 and
Romans 8:28-39

Text

It [The kingdom of God] is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.

Luke 13:19

For I am sure that [nothing] ... in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

and the Cross. What hope can there be without Him? As they travel, everywhere they look they see the mighty power of the Roman Empire lording it over them, while they have nothing more than simple wooden staffs in their hands and the promise of Jesus in their hearts. Continually, they are harassed and threatened by the powerful religious authorities, who say one thing and do another. No wonder they are disheartened! Where is the authority they have been given? Where is the strength of the Church that can prevail against this hell? Where is the power which has been promised them?

It is then that Jesus stops, gathers the disheartened disciples around Him, and teaches them this important discipleship lesson. In fact, He teaches them two discipleship lessons to deal with this problem: discipleship lessons #25 and #26. The amazing thing is that each lesson is only one short sentence, but each sentence is such a vivid illustration that the meaning and application of it can be as big and broad and high and deep as man's imagination itself. First, I want us to deal with only the first sentence — the first illustration — discipleship lesson #25. Let's see how our imaginations handle it as we listen to Jesus' teaching found in Luke 13:18-19.

It [The kingdom of God] is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches (Lk 13:19).

"Disciples, take heart," Jesus is saying. "Take heart for the kingdom I bring you is like a mustard seed — the tiniest of seeds, which grows into the greatest of trees where all the birds of the air come and nest."

Discipleship Lesson #25

Disciples, take heart, for life and growth are assured when you plant and nurture your God-given seed.

In this "age of disheartenment," we need to hear these words of Jesus resound across the centuries: "Disciples, take heart, for life and growth are assured when you plant and nurture the seed!" What does this mean for us today? It means nothing less than being able to cope with whatever is handed out to us on every level of life. It means that we can cope if we learn how to plant and nurture the seed. It means that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God when we give the seed fertile soil and let it grow. Jesus is telling us that, before we can cope with life without becoming disheartened, we must first see life as being lived out on two different levels, and know how God works with us and for us on both of these levels.

I. The Personal level of life.

NOTES

How does God works with us and for us on the personal level of life? That's where everything must begin. There cannot be life and growth in other levels of life, such as in our families, or in our churches, or in our world until first there is life and growth in us as individuals. It must begin the way that a great tree begins, with a small seed planted in the soil of our own souls. The trouble is, we are prone to forget this truth when we look at all of the pressing problems we're facing, or the agonizing trouble besetting our family. We feel like crying out, "Lord, that's too slow! I don't have time for a tree to mature! If I have to wait for that, it'll be too late! By then, my family will be in shreds, or I'll be broke! Then, it'll be too late and I can never put all of the pieces together again!" Somehow, without ever really planting and nurturing a seed, we want a fully grown tree to spring up where all of our problems can come and nest. We're all alike in that, aren't we?

Jesus says the first lesson that we must learn is how the kingdom of God works within our own lives. He says that it must start like a small seed then gradually but surely grow and spread to cover all of our life. Yet many of us spend our entire lives trying to conjure up a mature tree without first planting a live seed in our soul. In the first chapter of James' letter we are told:

... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Ja 1:21b).

James is telling us that God intends for His kingdom to work within us the same way a seed works. Just as it is not possible for the seed to grow until it is planted, so it is with us. The Bible says that God can do nothing for us personally until we "receive with meekness the implanted Word of God!" In accepting this truth we can prepare ourselves not only to face up to, but to go on and triumph over, disheartenment!

First, we must plant "the Word made flesh" by accepting Jesus Christ as our own personal Lord and Savior. That's where it must always begin, because the Bible says,

"... this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (1Jn 5:11b-12).

In reply to the question, "What is wrong with our country?" Will Rogers once said, "The trouble with our country is that too many women leave beauty parlors looking like they have never been waited on; and too many men leave church the same way." The trouble is we come to church but we fail "to receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save our souls." Instead, many of us come to church each Sunday expecting to find a full-grown tree, where all of our troubles and frustrations can flock and nest and just be left there. When we don't find that full-grown tree we refuse to plant the tiny seed we are given. Instead of growing gradually and surely as God intends for us to do, our lives remain barren and flat!

NOTES

Recently, in reading Charles Lindberg's biography I was impressed by his answer to the question: "What was the most crucial time in your entire 3600 mile flight across the Atlantic?" Without hesitation, he answered "The takeoff!" This, too, is our Lord's answer to our questions about dealing with disheartenment in our journey through life: The most crucial thing is the takeoff — the beginning! We must first receive with meekness the implanted Word, which will save our soul and give us life! After we do that, we are ready to move on and see how God works with us and for us on the other level of life.

II. The Communal Level

The other level of life is what the Bible calls the communal level, that is, living and associating with other people. This is where the seed, which is implanted into our individual souls, must always be nurtured and cared for and fed. This is why God created families and why Christ created His Church, for the implanted Word can grow only in community! We need each other for continued life and growth.

God didn't just call out Abraham when He wanted to make a covenant with His people. No, God called out Abraham's entire family! The family is where we must learn to care and share if we are ever going to learn at all. The family is where we are first supposed to learn that we don't have to bear all of the disheartening burdens alone. There are other people in that family — a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, a grandparent, or some other kin to help. That's what it means to be a family. This is why Jesus chose the name "Father" as the most descriptive name for Almighty God. As Head of this human family created in His image, God cares and He shares Himself with us and helps bear our disheartening burdens. He is truly a Heavenly Father.

This is what Jesus means when He says that the powers of hell shall not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18). Look again at that scene in Caesara Phillipi. Put yourself in that picture and you'll see a young man barely out of his 20's standing in the midst of the grandeur and splendor of the old world religions twenty centuries ago, saying, "I am starting My Church and the powers of hell shall not prevail against it!"

I tremble when I picture myself standing there, scoffing, "What do you mean that You're starting Your Church and the powers of hell shall not prevail against it? In a few weeks from now, young man, You'll be hanging on a cross. A few months after that Your failures will be broadcast across the whole Roman Empire, and a great Roman Emperor will erect a gigantic triumphal arch to symbolize that Your Church has been utterly destroyed and the last Christian has literally been swept from the face of the earth." Yet, after twenty centuries what is the score? The score is simply this: Plain men and women, like you and me, have met this living Christ along some road of life and planted His Living Word in our heart. As we join together

in community He has blessed our meager talents and efforts, until today that seed has grown into a giant tree that covers the whole earth where every race of man can come and find a home; while that gigantic triumphal arch has been trampled so deep into the dust that even history itself doesn't know where it stood!

Why? Simply for one reason: We have a Heavenly Father who cares and shares Himself with us! The powers of hell cannot prevail against the Church because our Heavenly Father cares and shares His Holy Spirit with us, and together — in community — we make up the Body of Christ which has already triumphed over hell and evil! This is no individual task, for none of us can be the Body of Christ alone. This takes community, this takes working together, sharing together in the power of God's Holy Spirit! Here's the point: The seed must be planted in the soil of each of our individual souls, yes; for that is the only way we can ever be brought to life, for life is in the Son. The growth must take place in community as we care and share with one another in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

This truth applies in the family, too, for the family is God's basic communal unit. First, each member of the family must receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save each soul. Then they can grow as a family in community, as they begin to care and to share with each other through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, theologians speak of this truth in high-sounding words like "justification" and "sanctification"; but Jesus spoke of it as the most common and best known truth in life. He spoke of it as planting a tiny seed that grows into a great tree. Jesus doesn't want us to get all bogged down with religious and technical words; instead He wants us to see the gospel on the level of life and growth where we live out our lives each day. Life begins when the seed of life — Jesus Christ Himself — is planted in our hearts; and growth takes place when we permit God to nurture this seed with His Holy Spirit as we open our lives to others in our homes and in our church and they open their lives to us in the same community.

Life is in the Son through faith. Growth is in the Spirit through community. In the same way that a seed matures into a great tree, we mature into Christians who can be victorious over the circumstances of life. This is the way we come to know with Paul that,

"in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

This is the way we come to the point where "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us," and are sure that,

"neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

We come to this point by letting our Lord write His 25th discipleship lesson indelibly upon our hearts and minds:

Discipleship Lesson #25

Disciples, take heart, for life and growth are assured when you plant and nurture your God-given seed!

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #25?
2. What does this discipleship lesson mean for us today in practical ways?
3. In this sermon we are told that life is lived out on two levels. What are they?
4. Life begins with a small seed. What is this seed and where is it planted?
(James 1:21b, 1 John 5:11-12)
5. Where is the seed nurtured and cared for and fed?

Search the Scriptures

6. Jesus assures us that the world can never defeat the disciplined Christian nor can the powers of hell prevail against the Church. We have this hope in us. Name some specific principles concerning this hope.

Rom 5:2 | Rom 5:5 | Rom 8:24-25 | Rom 12:12 | Rom 15:13

Internalize God's Word

7. Read the following poem from Habakkuk 3:17-19. A characteristic of Hebrew poetry is the couplet of two phrases expressing the same thought. There are five couplets in this poem and one phrase that stands alone. The first three couplets describe painful losses. The fourth couplet expresses trust in God in spite of circumstances. The next line is a strong statement of faith and trust in God. The last two lines explain what it is that God does.

Rewrite the poem found in Habakkuk 3:17-19 according to the needs of our culture, and according to your particular situation. Substitute your own problems for those of Habakkuk. Make your own statement of faith and hope.

*Though the fig tree do not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stall,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the LORD, is my strength;
He makes my feet like hinds' feet,
He makes me tread upon my high places.*

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Memory scripture: Romans 15:13

Notes

Sermon 26: Genuine Discipleship Is Contagious

As Jesus makes His last journey from outside Galilee to Jerusalem with The Twelve — a trip of approximately 100 miles, He teaches them the truths they must grasp and live by in order to be His disciples. Luke gives us the most complete account of this journey, ten full chapters right in the heart of his Gospel — from the end of chapter 9 to the middle of chapter 19. Here Jesus gives us fifty separate and distinct discipleship lessons. Discipleship lesson #26, is found in Luke 13:20-21, where Jesus says this:

“To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measure of flour, till it was all leavened.”

You see, in Bible times, a woman always saved a lump of dough from the last batch of bread to use as leaven for the next batch. Before she could serve fresh, light, delicious bread to her family, three things had to happen:

- First, the lump of leaven had to be good, that is, it had to have life in it.
- Next, the bowl of dough had to be completely leavened, or the bread would be flat.
- Finally, the dough had to be baked as nourishing bread — the staff of life — for the hungry family.

This, says Jesus in this picturesque illustration, is the 3-fold formula for finding abundant life and becoming a genuine disciple. Jesus is saying that every would-be disciple can tell if he has the real thing by the way it spreads through these three steps. Let’s examine each of these three steps using our Lord’s metaphor of leaven and bread.

I. A living faith to live by

First, the lump of leaven must be good; it must have life in it. If the leaven is dead the dough will be flat and there will be no nourishing bread for the hungry family. The Christian life likewise, says our Lord, must always begin with the right lump of leaven in our lives. If the lump of leaven we begin with is not alive, then nothing else is going to happen. We might wish it would; we might dream it would; we might hope it would; we might stir it up over and over; but absolutely nothing is going to happen! Without the right lump of leaven we’re going to remain flat — for without it there can be no life in us. You see, just like the woman in our story, we Christians must begin with the right lump of leaven to be sure we end up with delicious, nourishing bread! In every book of the New Testament we are told over and over the one thing we must do before we can have the real thing, and that one thing is wrapped up in the word faith — living faith, not just head knowledge.

Scripture

John 15:1-22

Text

And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

Luke 13:20-21

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

John 15:8

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10b

NOTES

A dynamic, living faith is where we must always begin if we're going to end up with the real thing. Jesus says that living faith is the live lump of leaven we must put into our lives if we're going on to the abundant life and genuine discipleship. No place does Jesus make more clear what this living faith is than in the 15th chapter of John, where He compares His life and ours to a vine and its branches:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (Jn 15:5-6).

The Bible is telling us that Jesus is the source of life for the Christian through faith. This faith is not just head knowledge, not just accepting a proposition. It is a living faith to live by; that is, a faith that looks to Jesus and Jesus alone as Savior and Lord, the Creator and Sustainer of life. It is a living faith because our living Lord lives in us. It is a faith that looks to Jesus as life-giver, just as the woman in our story looks to the lump of leaven as the life-giver for her bowl of dough. That must be the starting place for every would-be disciple: "A living faith to live by!" — The living Jesus living in us!

II. A cleansed self to live with

When you have that live lump of leaven in you, you're ready to move on to the second step that is essential for the abundant life and genuine discipleship. After the woman put the lump of leaven into the bowl, she had to wait until the whole bowl of dough was leavened. Here's the point: The leaven had to do its work in the dough before the dough could fulfill its function as delicious, nourishing bread for the hungry family.

Just so, as Christians we must permit our living Lord to do His work in us before we are ready to do our work for Him. We must let this live lump of leaven spread throughout our own lives, before we can be genuine disciples for Him. Jesus is simply saying that we must be leavened before we can be fit disciples. Yes, we start with a living faith to live by, but before we can experience abundant living and be of real use to our Lord, we must also experience a cleansed self to live with! That's the second step.

The longer I live and the more I listen to the hurts and pains of people and counsel with church members who are trying so hard, the more convinced I become that the key to finding life and finding it abundantly — the key to living a life of genuine discipleship — is all wrapped up in the one word: forgiveness. We must be forgiven ourselves and we must forgive others in order to have a cleansed self to live with, and go on to genuine discipleship.

Also, the longer I live and the more I hear people pour out their life's hurts, disappointments and misery the less judgmental I can be of other people. I know that they are living in that hell of the 7th chapter of Romans like Paul,

not because they want to, but because their searching has never turned up the key to that triumphant life described in the 8th chapter of Romans — the key of forgiveness. Forgiveness alone — both being forgiven and forgiving others — can give us a cleansed self we can live with, so we can move from *“O wretched man that I am”* to *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory!”*

God is showing me in real-life situations, day after day, that to be delivered from judging another person is the greatest deliverance and freedom we can experience in this life. Then for the first time we begin to see other people, and we begin to see life itself, as our Lord Jesus Christ sees people and life:

“For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

God is also showing me through real-life illustrations, day after day, that the worst bondage and the most terrible misery and pain come when we refuse to accept forgiveness for ourselves and refuse to give our forgiveness to others who have hurt us.

Christian, the Bible says that Christ came to this earth to forgive you and set you free, and Christ sends His Holy Spirit to you to give you the love you need to forgive others. The Bible says that He pours His forgiving love into your heart any time you accept His Holy Spirit through faith (Romans 5:5). Through honest-to-God faith in Christ as your Savior today, you can accept forgiveness for yourself — you can be freed from all guilt and fear. Christ died to set you free from guilt and fear. Let Him do it by accepting His death on the Cross as your own death to sin and by accepting His resurrection from the dead as your own resurrection into new life in Him. Then, through honest-to-God faith in Christ as the Lord of your life, you can accept from Him the love you need in order to forgive all of those who have hurt you. Through a living faith in Him you can be delivered from all guilt, fear, resentment, bitterness, self-condemnation and condemnation of others, so that in this very moment you can have a cleansed self to live with! That’s the good news! Christ came not to condemn you nor to let you be bound by condemnation. He came to set you free from the wretched life of the 7th chapter of Romans by forgiving you and cleansing you of all unrighteousness, so you can experience the victory He describes for you in the 8th chapter.

III. A specific purpose to live for

After the live lump of leaven was put into the dough, and after this leaven had done its work of leavening the whole bowl of dough, the woman baked and served the delicious, nourishing bread as the staff of life to her hungry family. From the beginning of the process to the end — from the time she pinched off that small lump of leaven until the last crumb of bread was

NOTES

eaten — there was a specific purpose in everything she did. Everything she did was for the specific purpose of feeding her hungry family. So it is for a real Christian — a genuine disciple. He must not only have a living faith to live by and a cleansed self to live with; he must also have a specific purpose to live for. That's the third and final step into abundant living and genuine discipleship.

That's why God gives us His grace through faith. He forgives us and cleanses us: so that we can fulfill our specific purpose in life and feed His bread of life to starving humanity. Jesus calls us to be His disciples today for the same reason He called the first Twelve: He calls us to feed His hungry family the bread of life which comes down from heaven. The Bible says that as Christians that's our specific purpose to live for. We were created to receive God's love and then to share God's love with others. That's why Jesus came to earth: to re-create us when sin has blinded us to our purpose in life. That's why our living Lord created His Church and calls us to be His disciples. He tells us so over and over. He tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches for a specific purpose, and that purpose is so we can bear much fruit — so we can feed His hungry family.

I said in the very first sermon I preached to you years ago, and I have reiterated it again and again, that my number one job as your pastor is not preaching, teaching, pastoring, visiting, marrying, burying, or counseling. My number one job as your pastor is to help you — each one of you — find and fulfill your specific purpose in life.

“For the kingdom of God is like leaven,” Jesus says, “which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Lk 13:20-21).

He is simply telling us that genuine discipleship is contagious and it will spread through our earth like leaven because every genuine disciple has a specific purpose to live for: to bear much fruit for his Lord! As a pastor, perhaps the most heartbreaking thing I see is a professing Christian with no specific purpose to live for. This is heartbreaking because, when I see it, I know that Christian has missed a step somewhere along the way to discipleship. I know that somehow he or she has failed to catch the real thing and consequently no one else can catch it from him or her either; the real thing is always contagious. When I see this, I always want to take that Christian back to the basics and go through these three important steps again — one by one:

- 1) ***A living faith to live by*** as you abide in Christ and He abides in you.
- 2) ***A cleansed self to live with*** as you accept, through faith, the forgiveness of God and with His love honestly forgive others who have hurt you.
- 3) ***A specific purpose to live for*** as you bear much fruit and begin to feed our Lord's starving family the bread of life that comes down from heaven.

One of my favorite story tellers is Ring Lardner. He just had a way of naming characters and driving home a truth in language no one can misunderstand. Often as we Christians assemble in our best clothes and faces, but seem to forget about our specific purpose in life, a penetrating line in Ring Lardner's *The Big-Time Story* rises up to drive me back to the basics. In this story, a character called Mr. Big gives his impression of those who follow the social hotel circuit in these words: "You know," he says, "everybody puts on their Sunday clothes, like something big is going to happen — but it don't!"

Well, Jesus gave us this 26th discipleship lesson so such a statement can never be made about us, His disciples. Jesus has shown us in this lesson exactly how to be genuine disciples. Listen to it again, carefully.

Discipleship Lesson #26

The three sure steps to genuine discipleship are:

A living faith to live by

A cleansed self to live with

A specific purpose to live for

"By this," says Jesus, "my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (Jn 15:8).

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #26?
2. Define and explain the 3-fold formula for finding abundant life and becoming a genuine disciple.

Search the Scriptures

3. As we picture Jesus as the leaven in our lives — our life-giving Source — what is our part in allowing His life to be at work in us?

Heb 12:2a | Jn 13:34, 35 | Jn 6:35 | Col 2:6 | Col 3:2

Internalize God's Word

4. Review Steps in Praying God's Word in the Appendix. Review the first sermon in this volume, 21 – Eyes That See God. Then use John 15:1-22 as the basis for your prayer. Allow the Holy Spirit to use your physical senses — sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste — and your God-given imagination to enter the experience of a fruit bearing branch drawing life and sustenance from the vine. Know the loving care of the Master Gardener as He prunes, sprays, weeds, waters, and fertilizes.
5. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead as you consider your own life in the light of the three steps of our Discipleship Lesson. Ask yourself such questions as these:

Do I have a life-giving faith? Try writing out a simple statement of your faith.

Is guilt or resentment soiling my life? (Read John 13:1-14)

What is my specific purpose in life? What fruit is the Master producing through me?

Memory scripture: John 15:5

Notes

Notes

Sermon 27: How to Be a Citizen of God's Kingdom

The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus opened His ministry with these words:

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14-15).

And from that time until He ascended into heaven the kingdom of God was at the center of everything Jesus said and did. Nearly all of His parables begin with the words: *"The kingdom of God is like ..."* Sometimes Jesus talks about God and the kingdom, sometimes about man and the kingdom, sometimes about himself and the kingdom; but the kingdom is always the central point of reference.

Jesus was certain that the kingdom of God was the most important thing in life. It is in the kingdom that man discovers the reason for his birth, the purpose for his life, the hope for his future. The kingdom of God is the treasure hidden in a field, so desirable that when a man finds it he sells all that he has to buy it (Matthew 13:44). It is the pearl of great price, so valuable that a merchant upon finding it will sell everything to buy it (Matthew 13:45). When Jesus was in the home of Martha and Mary, He told them that Mary, in taking time to find out about the kingdom, had found the one thing needful (Luke 10:38-42). He told all of His followers to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). In fact, the kingdom is so important that it is better to cut off a hand or foot than to miss it (Mark 9:42-48).

Is it any wonder that Jesus takes the opportunity on His last journey with His disciples to answer the question in their minds about the kingdom of God. When someone asks Jesus, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus uses this opportunity to give us discipleship lesson #27, and in it to tell us the four truths we must know about the kingdom of God before we can become citizens of it. These four truths are found in Luke 13:22-30, and deal with:

The doorway into the kingdom;
The urgency for entering the kingdom;
The exclusiveness and inclusiveness of citizenship there, and
The life-style in the kingdom.

I. The doorway into the kingdom of God

Jesus says:

"Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Lk 13:24).

Scripture

Luke 13:22-30

Text

And Jesus said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able ... and behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Luke 13:24, 30

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.

Mark 1:14-15

In a parallel passage of scripture in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Mt 7:13-14).

Jesus follows this passage in the Sermon on the Mount with a warning about false prophets who will try to lead us astray (Matthew 7:15-20). In John’s Gospel, Jesus says:

“I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved ... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:9 and 10).

Remember our Lord’s words as He opens His ministry in the Gospel of Mark:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15).

Can there be any doubt what is the only doorway into the kingdom of God? It is Jesus Christ Himself! He came to earth to open the doorway for us into the kingdom of God. He came to earth to be our doorway into the kingdom. The doorway into the kingdom of God is as narrow as the person of Jesus Christ Himself! No amount of head knowledge can get us in. No college degrees can get us in. No amount of good works will get us in. No ecclesiastical titles such as “Rev.” or “Dr.” or “Bishop” before or after our name can get us in. No church membership can get us in. No church office can get us in.

There is only one doorway into the kingdom of God, and that doorway is Jesus Christ Himself! Jesus says that door is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life in the kingdom. What does Jesus mean by this? He means there is only one way into the kingdom of God and it is extremely hard. He describes this one way for us with the words “repentance” and “faith.” The time is fulfilled, He says in Mark 1:15, the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent* and *believe* this good news.

Repent — Turn your back on playing king and exercising dominion over your own life.

Faith — Crown Jesus Christ as Lord of your life and put Him in complete control.

We enter into the kingdom and the kingdom enters into us when we take the crown off ourselves and crown our Lord Jesus Christ as our king. That’s a narrow door, that’s a hard way; but the Bible says it is the only doorway into the kingdom of God: Take yourself off the throne of your life, and enthrone the real king — Jesus Christ, our living Lord!

II. The urgency of entering the kingdom

NOTES

Exactly how do we do this? There is a note of urgency in our scripture lesson, as if Jesus said, "Strive to enter the kingdom"; that is, do something about it — get going, don't vacillate, don't hesitate. In verse 25 Jesus specifically says there will come a time for each of us when the door is shut and our knocking on the door will be too late, so it's urgent to do it now!

Today we hear a lot about "end times" and "the second coming of Christ," but Jesus is not talking about end times here; rather, He is talking about "beginning times" — the urgency for beginning now, the urgency for taking out our citizenship in God's kingdom now! Jesus is saying we had better stop putting so much emphasis on end times and start emphasizing present times, for that's all we have. The kingdom of God must begin right now or it can never begin at all! Jesus is not talking about the future when He comes again; He is emphasizing that His first coming has made it possible for us to live abundantly in God's kingdom right now!

What Jesus wants us to see is that vacillation and hesitancy disqualify us for the kingdom of God. Do you remember the three would-be disciples, who said they wanted to follow Jesus, but each had an excuse for not doing it yet? For one his excuse was his business; for another it was an elderly parent; and for another it was his family. Do you remember our Lord's reply? He says, no man who vacillates and hesitates like that is fit for the kingdom of God! To be fit for citizenship in God's kingdom, our first priority must be living our life under His kingship. We can't put business first, or family first, or recreation or anything else first, and still expect to receive the blessings of loyal citizens in God's kingdom. Jesus says:

"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well" (Mt 6:33).

That makes the door even more narrow, doesn't it? That makes the way even harder, doesn't it? Not only must we deny ourselves and enthrone our Lord Jesus Christ; we must urgently put this above everything else. No wonder Jesus says,

"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:14).

III. The exclusiveness and inclusiveness of citizenship

Jesus says that, before we can become citizens of God's kingdom, we must recognize both the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of such citizenship. Read again our scripture, Luke 13:22-30. Notice that many come to the door claiming they are entitled to enter because of their birthright or nationality, and others because they were present at His table or were always in attendance when He preached or taught. Jesus says, "Depart from me, I do not know you!" Then, in tears, those who are turned away

look through the door and see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all of the prophets sitting with strangers of every nationality and color. Jesus is showing us both the exclusiveness and the inclusiveness of citizenship in the kingdom.

Exclusiveness

Jesus is saying that no one can get into God's kingdom by hanging on to someone else's coattail. You can't get in because of birthright or nationality, nor because of your righteous mother or your godly father. You can't get in because of the particular church you belong to, nor because you regularly sat in church or attended Sunday school. No! Citizenship in God's kingdom is exclusively reserved for those who personally claim their citizenship. No one else can sign your citizenship papers. No one else can vouch for you. No one else can slip you in. Everyone must come through that same narrow door, and it's so narrow and so exclusive that you can go through it only one at a time. It's so narrow and so exclusive that no person can get through that door as long as he continues to wear the crown of righteousness on his own head. He must personally take that crown off his head and look to Christ and Christ alone as his righteousness before he can fit through that narrow door! That's the exclusiveness of the kingdom of God: Each person must accept and confess Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior and Lord!

Inclusiveness

Every person, regardless of birthright, nationality, race or color is welcome to enter through that narrow door! The Bible says,

And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God (Lk 13:29).

IV. The life-style in the kingdom

"And, behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Lk 13:30).

Life in the kingdom of God, says Jesus, is surprisingly different from what man often calls life in this world. What we often think is first in the kingdom of man turns out to be last in the kingdom of God. What turns out to be first in the kingdom of God, we often think is last in the kingdom of man. For example, in the kingdom of man we look at our birth and our nationality as the deciding factor for citizenship, but in the kingdom of God the deciding factor is our re-birth regardless of birth or nationality.

- The kingdom of man looks at what we possess; the kingdom of God looks at what (or Who) possesses us! *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God"* (Mt 5:3).
- The kingdom of man looks at our physical and economic strengths over others; the kingdom of God looks at our compassion and concern for

others. *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"* (Mt 5:4).

- The kingdom of man looks at who we are. The kingdom of God looks at whose we are. *"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth"* (Mt 5:5).
- The kingdom of man looks at our physical appearance; the kingdom of God looks at our spiritual maturity. *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"* (Mt 5:6).
- The kingdom of man looks at our worldly success; the kingdom of God looks at our success in loving others in the world. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* (Mt 5:7).
- The kingdom of man looks at the results; the kingdom of God looks at our motives. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"* (Mt 5:8).
- The kingdom of man looks at our outer power; the kingdom of God looks at God's power in us. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"* (Mt 5:9).
- The citizens of man's kingdom seek comfort and ease; the citizens of God's kingdom seek opportunities to serve Christ and His kingdom. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"* (Mt 5:10).

The life-style of the kingdom is different from the life-style of the world. That's why Jesus says:

"Behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last" (Lk 13:30).

It's not ignorance of the life-style of a Christian that causes us to fall so far short of living such a life-style. Paul says it's because we keep our citizenship in the kingdom of man. We remain a natural man or woman instead of taking out citizenship in the kingdom of God. In Romans Paul explains that, although we are created for citizenship in the kingdom of God, because of sin every person has fallen under the dominion and control of his own flesh, which makes him a citizen of the kingdom of man. Paul uses the word "flesh" as a technical word, by which he means all of our physical being — mind, body, will and emotions. By flesh Paul means our physical appetites, our selfish, willful egos, and our degraded emotions. Therefore, the way to change our citizenship from the kingdom of man to the kingdom of God is to renounce our citizenship in the kingdom of man and give the Spirit of our Living Lord Jesus Christ complete dominion and control over our minds, bodies, wills and emotions. This, says the Bible, is the way we can live out our lives in God's kingdom and experience the blessings that God has for us now and eternally.

NOTES

Jesus is showing us in these four truths that becoming citizens of God's kingdom and being disciples is one and the same thing. You cannot be a disciple without taking out citizenship in God's kingdom, and you cannot take out citizenship in God's kingdom without being a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. You can be neither a disciple nor a citizen of God's kingdom until you stop giving your own flesh dominion and control over the image of God within you, no matter what you say with your mouth or what vows you take. The narrow doorway leading to discipleship is simply the move from being "a natural man or woman" to being "a spiritual man or woman." Discipleship lesson #27 is simply this:

Discipleship Lesson #27

A disciple must enter by the narrow door, which means renouncing citizenship in the kingdom of man and taking out citizenship in the kingdom of God by personally giving the Spirit of our living Lord complete dominion and control over our mind, body, will, and emotions.

Yes, that's the Bible's formula for becoming citizens of the kingdom of God. In the third chapter of John, Jesus, as is so typical of Him, reduces this formula to just one word: rebirth! What Jesus is talking about in His confrontation with Nicodemus, is a far cry from the today's religious jargon. He is talking about a new life-style led by the Spirit of God. He's talking about freedom from legalism, freedom from religious rigidity, freedom from guilt, insecurity and fear; freedom that enables us to become truly spiritual men and women. He's talking about setting us free from the bondage we've gotten ourselves into in the kingdom of man, and giving us our citizenship papers in a completely new kingdom — a kingdom where love reigns, where judgment is left to God, where our past is forgiven and our future is secure, and every moment is lived to the fullest because we live it with our living Lord in charge of every moment. That's our Lord's offer to you — an offer of citizenship in the kingdom of God. No wonder it was the central point of reference in everything He said and did while He walked this earth. It's the kingdom all of our minds dream of and our hearts yearn for. The good news is: He stands at the door of that kingdom, not knocking, but waiting for you to knock. He can open that narrow door of rebirth the very moment you are ready to walk through it and become the spiritual person you were created to be. You have only to let Him know that you are ready to claim the citizenship that is rightfully yours as a child of God and an heir of Christ. He is waiting. What is your decision?

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #27?
2. What is the doorway into the Kingdom of God?
3. Citizenship and the Kingdom of God are synonymous. How do we change our citizenship from the kingdom of man to the Kingdom of God?

Search the Scriptures

4. Compare and contrast the life-styles of God's Kingdom and man's kingdom with the following statements and scriptures:

Who is in control?

The gate is...

The way is...

Those who enter...

Mt. 5:3 | Mt. 5:4 | Mt. 5:5 | Mt. 5:6 | Mt. 5:7 | Mt. 5:8 | Mt. 5:9 | Mt. 5:10

Internalize God's Word

5. As I look at this comparison chart of these two life-styles, where do I find myself?
6. Let the Holy Spirit guide you as you choose one of the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 as the basis for praying God's Word.

Matthew 13:24-30 Weeds among the wheat

Matthew 13:44 The Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:45-46 The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:47-48 The Full Net

Memory scripture: Revelation 3:20

Notes

Sermon 28: The Risk of Discipleship

In the 30's when Hitler came to power in Germany, a man by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a respected professor of theology in one of the leading German universities. Soon, however, he voluntarily left this secure post to become a pastor and speak out openly against Hitler and godless Nazism. During World War II he was arrested by the Gestapo and thrown into prison in Berlin. When the prison was destroyed by an air raid, Bonhoeffer was taken to the concentration camp at Buchenwald and from there to other places until he was executed by special order of Himmler at the Flossenburg Concentration Camp just a few days before it was liberated by the allies in 1945.

He died at the age of 39, but he left behind a book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*, which lives on to remind us that the greatest threat to genuine Christianity and true discipleship is not a Hitler and Nazism, not a Stalin and Communism, nor an Ayatollah Khoumenia and Islam, nor any other outside danger. The greatest danger to Christianity is what Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace!" In the opening sentence in this great book he writes, "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church." Then he spells out the difference between cheap grace which takes all of the power out of Christianity, and the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which gives life abundantly and eternally. "Cheap grace," Bonhoeffer says, "is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Cheap grace is expecting the blessings God has for us, without paying the price He requires us to pay as disciples of Jesus Christ. Cheap grace is a bargain-counter religion that offers flimsy rejects and low-grade seconds as the real thing.

Do you want to know what cheap grace is? Then turn on your radio any hour of the day and you will hear it being hawked at bargain-counter prices. Today our atmosphere is being polluted as the message of cheap grace is spewed out of radio and TV transmitters across our land. The peddlers of cheap grace say, "Think positively and everything will turn out all right," and sell that as Christianity. They say, "Just have faith and you will be healthy, wealthy and wise"; but somehow the object of that faith is always our own prosperity and happiness instead of the Crucified Christ. The risk of that faith is always a few measly dollars mailed in an envelope instead of our whole life. The purpose of that faith is always a worldly euphoria instead of sacrificial obedience to our Living Lord.

Oh, how we need to heed the message of the martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer today: Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the genuine saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, because it seduces people to accept a cheap

Scripture

Luke 13:31-35

Text

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:23

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Luke 13:35b

NOTES

substitute for the real thing! This truth is more apparent today than ever in the history of our faith. Over and over in counseling I face people who sincerely expect the blessings of Christian discipleship, but are unwilling to pay the price for it.

- They expect security without risking what they are holding onto.
- They expect the joy and excitement of new life, without risking the suffering of the Cross and death of their old life.
- They expect healthy human relationships without risking rejection by others and alienation from those they hold most dear.

In short, they expect the blessings of a disciple without taking *The Risk Of Discipleship* and that's nothing but cheap grace. That's falling prey to our most deadly enemy. Of course, Jesus came to give us security. Of course, Jesus came to give us an exciting, joyful new life. Of course, Jesus came to heal our brokenness and give us healthy human relationships. He didn't come to do it by the magic formula of just believing that it's going to happen or by lulling us into a state of euphoria. He came to show us in His own life, and in the lives of the Twelve, that it can happen only through the costly grace of genuine discipleship! Jesus makes this graphically clear in His 28th lesson in our *Journey Into Discipleship* in Luke 13:31-35.

We are told that as Jesus again sets His face toward Jerusalem and the Cross, some Jews rush up to Jesus and tell Him the journey must stop because the risk is too great. They say it must stop for He is risking alienation, He is risking suffering, He is risking even death by King Herod. Now, let me paraphrase our Lord's reply, filling in between the lines. Jesus says:

"Go and tell Herod, who keeps his throne the same way a sly fox keeps alive in this 'survival-of-the-fittest' wilderness — go and tell that sly fox about the 'signs' that demonstrate who I am. Go tell that sly fox that I will not disobey the will of My Father no matter what the risk. Go tell him that My security is not in a safe haven like an animal; it is in risking all for the gospel. Go tell him that My joy is not in escape; it is suffering on a Cross for his and every man's redemption. Go tell him that I must risk alienation and rejection by men so you both can be reconciled to God and to the human race. Go tell him that I must risk all so you can gain all!"

Jesus by His own words and actions is revealing to us *The Risk Of Discipleship*. He is showing us what we must risk to follow Him, to be His disciples and receive the blessings of discipleship. Jesus says that to be disciples and reap the blessings of discipleship, we must risk three things.

I. Earthly Security

We must risk our own earthly security. What a far cry this is from the cheap grace of earthly prosperity that is being hawked over the airways today as Christianity! This is the point of the Gospel writers detailing our

Lord's call to the Twelve. Remember His call to Peter and Andrew, to James and John? All four were fishermen and their earthly security was in their boats and their fishing nets. Then one day Jesus stood before them face-to-face and said, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"; that is, "Come, risk that earthly security and follow Me." They left their boats and nets and followed Him. Their first step was to risk all of their earthly security in order to be disciples.

It was the first step for others. When Jesus said, "Come, follow Me," Matthew left the earthly security of his tax table to follow Jesus. Paul left the earthly security of respected Pharisaism. Barnabas left the earthly security of upper class land owners. Luke left the earthly security of a medical practice. The point Jesus wants us to see is simply this: No person can become a disciple for our Lord until he is willing to risk his earthly security to follow Him.

Why is this so? It is so because the object of our security must inevitably be the object of our faith! To be a disciple of Jesus He must be the object of our faith. Before Jesus can become the true object of our faith He must become the true object of our security. Until we actually know Christ as our only hope for the good life now and eternal life hereafter, we will not be able to "bet our life" on Him. That is to say, only when Christ and Christ alone is the object of our security can He really be the object of our faith! This is why in *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that only those who obey, truly believe, and only those who truly believe obey!

Obedience and faith can never be separated, except by the peddlers of cheap grace. When our Living Lord stands face-to-face with us and says, "Come, follow Me," the only way we can do it is the same way Peter, James, John, Paul and Barnabas did it — by risking our earthly security to obey Him. That, my friend, is costly grace!

I know, because in 1955 when He stood face-to-face with me and spoke those words, "Come, follow Me," my security was in my education as a lawyer, in my position as general counsel of a large corporation. My security was in our new home and my salary and my expense account. My security was in my position in the community, in civic clubs, and in the church. For four long years "I kicked against the goads" refusing to obey, but kidding myself that I actually had faith anyway. The truth was, I wanted to live by cheap grace. Everyone does! The hardest thing I ever did in my life was to leave the security of my legal boat and my corporate fishing net and follow Him to Sallisaw, Oklahoma, as a Methodist preacher at a salary of \$4,800 a year.

You see that's the only way I could really put my faith in Christ and Christ alone as my security. The Lord knew His plan for my life all along; the problem was me! He wanted to give me real security — total security — both physically in this world and eternally, but He couldn't without

first having my obedience. He couldn't until I was willing to risk all of my earthly security to follow Him. Before He could use me as a pastor He had first to teach me that I could never separate faith and obedience, and that the object of my faith is always the same as the object of my security, no matter how much lip service I give to Christ. After teaching me that, He could bless me in a thousand ways with the total security He wants to give all of us when we obey and risk our earthly security to follow Him. The first risk of discipleship is always our earthly security. That's where it must always begin!

II. Suffering, Physically and Psychologically

The second risk is suffering, both physically and psychologically. What a far cry this is from the cheap grace of happiness and peace of mind that is being hawked over the airways today as Christianity! The Bible says that to be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ is to share in His suffering, rejection and crucifixion:

"If any man would come after me," says Jesus, "let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

That's the risk of discipleship: It's the risk of taking up the Cross of Christ with all of its suffering. There had to be a Cross for Christ before there could be a Resurrection, and before we can share in the glory of His Resurrection we must first share in the suffering of His Cross! The peddlers of cheap grace today offer us the benefits of a Resurrection without first enduring the suffering of a Cross. According to the Bible that is absolutely impossible. That is impossible because, like obedience and faith, the Cross and the Resurrection can never be separated. They go together. They are the two essential parts of the Gospel! The risk is the Cross. The blessing is the Resurrection.

This truth is illustrated in the marriage relationship. The Bible says that when two people marry they are supposed to become one, but of course, the problem often is —which one? Often each mate wants to change the other to fit his or her image; then follow hurts and pains and perhaps an affair. A marriage does not fail because one of the partners suddenly finds someone else more interesting. It fails because the marriage relationship has already broken down. Desperately they begin seeking ways to change their marriage — a better house, more money, moving away from in-laws, having children — only to discover that no change in circumstances is going to solve the basic problem in that marriage. That is just another form of cheap grace, seeking the benefits without paying the price. That's wishful hoping for a Resurrection without a Cross.

There is no way God can change a marriage and leave the people involved unchanged. C. S. Lewis once said, "no clever arrangement of bad eggs ever made a good omelet." The only way to a resurrected marriage is

through the Cross: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!” Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which we all must bear to experience resurrection! No husband and wife can carry resentments, bitterness, hostility, self-righteousness and a critical spirit and have a good marriage. A marriage can change only when the partners stop trying to use cheap grace by praying for God to change their mate, and begin praying, “Lord, change this marriage beginning with me. Forgive me, Lord, for my self-centeredness and my un-Christlike, selfish ways. Forgive me, cleanse me, and give me the redemptive love to forgive my mate.” That’s the only way any marriage can change! What is true in marriage is true in every area of life: There can never be a Resurrection without the suffering of the Cross.

The second risk of discipleship is suffering. The good news is when we honestly begin to share in the sufferings of our Crucified Christ, the Resurrection is assured; Easter is always only day after tomorrow away from Black Friday!

III. Broken Human Relationships

The third risk of discipleship is broken human relationships. To become a disciple of Jesus means to put Jesus first, which in turn means that the human relationships which have been first must now take their place after Him. This is not always conducive to peace and joy in the family as many of us know. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means that religion changes from a perfunctory Sunday affair to a whole way of life. This does not always make for peace and tranquility with those who want life to remain as is. To become a disciple means to treasure following Christ more than you treasure the approval of your friends and your peers. It means even risking being called a fanatic. Jesus teaches that no person can become His disciple who is not willing to risk broken relationships with mother, father, husband, wife, child, and friend. This is costly grace because these are the most precious of human relationships. That’s a far cry from the cheap grace of positive thinking and bargain-counter religion that’s being hawked today as Christianity.

This truth is best illustrated in the Bible in the life of Abraham, who in the New Testament is put forth as the best example of faith. You will recall that Abraham left his homeland and kin and became a stranger and sojourner in order to gain the Promised Land. This was his first call. Later, God called him to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice in order to teach him the one lesson we all must learn before we can have the intimate and blessed relationships that God wants us to have. Abraham had to learn that the promise of the good life did not depend upon Isaac, although Isaac was the only child of the promise. It depends upon God alone! Abraham had to learn that human relationships are not the key to the blessed life; God is! Like Abraham, many of us often get our children or our mate mixed up with God, so to teach us this essential lesson, God commanded Abraham

NOTES

to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham takes God at His Word and is ready to obey. At that very moment all that he had surrendered to God is given back to him. He receives back his son. God gives him back more than his son; God gives him a completely new relationship with his son. No one else knows what has happened. Abraham comes down from the mountain with Isaac just as he went up, but the entire situation has changed. Outwardly, the picture is the same, but in reality the old has passed away, and behold all things are new! Now father and son know each other as human beings who have been set free by God to fulfill God's promise in their lives! Now they are free to be themselves! No longer are they simply father and son by blood; now they are also father and son in spirit and in truth, for God has blessed this relationship with His Holy Presence. With this blessing God begins the community of His chosen people upon this earth — the blessing of a family bound to God first, so God can fulfill His promise in that family. This says the Bible, is what God wants to do for every family upon this earth. He wants to fulfill His promise for your family. He wants to bless your family with the gift of the Promised Land. There is no way he can do it until, like Abraham, you first are willing to risk broken human relationships by putting obedience to God first, even before your precious family.

Cheap grace always leaves out this obedience! Cheap grace would have us believe we can have earthly security without the risk of discipleship, new life without the risk of a cross, and family solidarity without the risk of broken relationships. The saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which promises total security, abundant life and right relationships always begins with obedience — obedience to our Lord's command: "Come, risk all, and follow Me!" This is our Lord's command to all of us in lesson #28 in our *Journey Into Discipleship*:

Discipleship Lesson #28

A disciple responds to Jesus' command, "come, risk all, to follow Me," and receives His promise, "and I will give you total security, abundant life, and right relationships."

You see, Christ wants to give all of us life as it's meant to be, but He can't do it until we move from cheap grace to obedience and risk all for Him! That move is what the Bible calls discipleship, and it's the key both to abundant life now and eternal life hereafter. There's only one way to find it: That is to set our own face toward the Cross and start our own *Journey Into Discipleship*. Are you ready to travel that road with our Lord today?

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #28?
2. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer “cheap-grace” is the greatest danger to Christianity. How would you define “cheap-grace”?
3. What 3 things must we risk to be disciples and reap the blessings of discipleship?

Search the Scriptures

4. Looking at the three things a disciple must risk to be a disciple and receive the blessing of discipleship, use the following Scripture references to compare the risk with the blessing to be received.

1 Timothy 6:17 | Romans 8:17 & 18 | Mark 10:29-30

Internalize God's Word

5. Who or what is the object of your security?
6. Is there any thing or relationship that God is asking you to surrender so He can bless it and possibly even give it back to you?
7. Psalm 103:1-5 is printed below. Read this Psalm of Gratitude for God's Grace, and make it your own psalm of gratitude as the Holy Spirit reminds you of times of forgiveness, healing, and redemption in your own life. Let Him bless you anew with His gift of assurance about today and hope for tomorrow.

Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

What does “all that is within me” include?

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

[The next 3 verses name areas of blessing and benefit. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your remembrance specific situations when God met your need in each area. Write a note of thanksgiving for each one.]

who forgives all your iniquity,

[Remember ways and times He has forgiven you.]

who heals all your diseases,

[Remember ways and times He has healed you.]

who redeems your life from the Pit,

[Remember when He restored you when circumstances and/or relationships in your life had thrown you into depression.]

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

[Remember ways and times when He gave you honor and blessings you in no way deserved.]

who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

[Think of all the ways in which He blesses you at this stage of your life and the hope He gives you for this life and the next.]

Memory scripture: Galatians 1:10

Notes

Sermon 29: The Secret to Being a Disciple

The Bible says, and life verifies, that one thing we all have in common in our human nature is this: Deep within all of us is a burning desire for importance! Deep within all of us is a constant reaching up for the greatness our whole being craves. Alfred Adler, one of the fathers of modern psychiatry, names this as the dominant drive in human nature. He thinks this drive for recognition — for significance — is stronger than any other human drive. The poet Ann Greenwood, describes all of us when she puts these words in the mouth of a housewife who wants to write a book:

*'Taint that I want the money or fame when I'm dead,
But because I get so tired of just composin' bread.
I'd like the folk in Plainville to read some magazine
An' see it writ in printin', 'A poem by Sarah Green.'
Yes, I can cook, but mercy, a body's got to cook.
That's just the very reason I want to write a book.*

We all have this desire to be important. Another thing we can depend on is that becoming a Christian does not stifle this desire for greatness. If anything, becoming a Christian makes it more pronounced, for now we begin to see the real reason for this deep inner drive that keeps pushing us. Jesus never tells His disciples to repress this deep hunger for greatness; rather He tells us exactly how to fulfill this desire and find greatness — true greatness!

It is in His 29th lesson in our *Journey Into Discipleship* that Jesus reveals this secret to us. It is not only the secret to true greatness; it is also *The Secret to Being a Disciple*. This discipleship lesson is found in the Luke 14:7-14. Jesus, while eating in the house of a very distinguished man, put it in the form of a parable. He says that a man who is invited to be a guest at a marriage feast pushed his way to the head of the table, only to face the humiliation of being asked by the host to go to the foot of the table, so a more important person can be given his place. Then, Jesus concludes with this truth:

"For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11).

This is no isolated text. It's the one truth most often repeated by Jesus. Three times it is repeated exactly like this in the Gospels. Another time Jesus says,

"Whosoever shall humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:4).

Scripture

Luke 14:7-11

Text

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 14:11

NOTES

Four times Jesus says it like this: *“The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”* In fact, in almost every way you can imagine, Jesus drives home this truth again and again. He says, for example:

“Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Lk 17:33).

“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39).

“... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:26-27).

Here Jesus gives us that small key which opens up the big door to life. The shocking thing is that it is exactly opposite of the natural instinct within us that drives us to seek greatness. This natural instinct is always self-seeking; it drives us to exalt self above everything else. Jesus says in our scripture that self-seeking in all of its subtle forms is self-defeating and foredoomed to failure! If that’s our dominant instinct, but it’s doomed to failure, then what hope is there — what can we do about it? “That,” says Jesus, “is the good news I’ve come to bring you! I’ve come to give you the secret to true greatness. If you would be truly great, stop putting yourself first. Start humbling yourself and true greatness will follow as surely as fruit follows blossoms on a tree.” What does Jesus mean by this? Why is this the secret to true greatness? It’s because, in the process of losing yourself, you receive from our Lord the three things that are essential for true greatness. You receive new life, wholeness, and power!

I. New Life

First, losing yourself is the secret to new life — to what is often called “rebirth.” The Bible is clear that the greatest obstacle to true greatness, that is, the greatest obstacle to reaching our true potential in life, is the same for all of us and that is ourselves. I am my greatest obstacle to true greatness. You are your greatest obstacle to true greatness.

In his story, *Ninety-Three*, Victor Hugo tells of a ship caught in a terrific storm. When the storm is at its height, the frightened crew hears a terrible crashing sound below. They know what it is. A cannon they are carrying has broken loose and is crashing into the ship’s sides, tearing gaping holes with every smashing blow of the sea. Two men at the risk of their lives manage to fasten it again, for they know that it is more dangerous than the storm. Jesus is telling us that human life is like that! It is not the outside storm which is our greatest danger. It is that terrible corruption of self loose within us which will send us to the bottom of the deep. Until we can be saved from that damnable self-seeking and self-centeredness, He says, there is no hope for us. Some power has to keep safe and sane the wild enemy within us we call “self!”

The Bible says that power is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ — the grace of God! We often speak of the grace of God being a totally free gift, and so it is; but God does not do for us what we must do for ourselves. Rather, God does for us what we learn at last that we cannot do for ourselves. Strangely enough, this experience does not lessen human effort but increases it and makes it more effective. For until we know and accept our limitations and dare to trust God's grace, we cannot use our own powers to their full extent.

Paul found this new life by first realizing his inability to live up to the law. When he acknowledged that he could not live a life of law himself and Christ would have to do it for him, he was born again into a life of grace. Paul describes the old, helpless life of law in chapter 7 of Romans and the new life of grace in the 8th chapter. The first he says is living hell, and the second is heaven itself. It is heaven in the sense that self has submitted to the power and love of God. Self is no longer loose within us tearing gaping holes in our life, but is harnessed to perfect love in Christ Jesus. How is this life of grace possible? Jesus answers this question in many different ways in the Gospels.

- Sometimes He speaks of becoming citizens of the kingdom of God where we put ourselves under the rule of God and follow God's will instead of our own willfulness.
- Or He explains it as the great commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Mk. 12:30) — that is put God first in your life.
- Most often He simply explains that you must lose yourself to find yourself. If you would be truly great, you must humble yourself and be servant of all!

His message for us is clear: All of us were made for greatness! God has given all of us the equipment we need to become genuinely important. Instead of disparaging this deep hunger within us, Jesus emphasizes it as a God-given drive. God gives it to us to keep pushing us on to the right goal: the goal of becoming children of God — His people!

Our problem, says Jesus, is not this deep drive within us; our problem is that we have settled for an unworthy goal. Jesus makes it clear that self can never be a worthy end for such a tremendous God-given drive as this! He says that exalting self is an unworthy goal, whether it is as a great preacher, a great business man, a great teacher, a great doctor or healer, or even a great disciple. Jesus says anytime we use this God-given drive to promote self, we are foredoomed to frustration and ultimate failure. Why? Because we are created to be children of God — that's why. We are created to be co-workers with God in bringing His kingdom into fruition upon this earth — His kingdom where love reigns and Christ rules supreme in the minds

NOTES

and hearts of men and women. There is only one goal that is worthy of this drive for greatness whether we are physician, homemaker, lawyer, or truck driver. That goal is for the world to see Christ in us and so be drawn to Him. It's the same goal which John the Baptist set for himself when he said, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30), which goal prompted Jesus to call him the greatest of the prophets.

It's not eloquent preachers who will save the world; it is truly great men and women (including preachers) in whom self has so decreased that the world sees the love of Christ in them and hears the words of Christ when they speak. These are the truly great, whether they be tinker, tailor, cowboy, or sailor. They are the truly great because they have teamed up with our Lord, working in harmony with Him for His eternal purpose. If you would be great, then lose yourself in Him and become servant of all so the world can see Him in you! That's the secret to true greatness and new life.

II. Wholeness

Not only is our text the secret to greatness and new life; but it is also the secret to wholeness. Wholeness is our Lord's promise to every person who answers His call to discipleship. It's strange; we hear a lot about happiness today, but hardly a word about wholeness. Yet wholeness is the real secret to happiness. You cannot find wholeness by seeking happiness, but you can find happiness by seeking wholeness. Happiness is a by-product of wholeness!

A character in Aldous Huxley's novel, *Point Counter Point*, describes our day as well as the last generation and every generation, when she complains about the stupidity of people all around her: "They never think of life," she says, "except in terms of happiness; 'How can I have a good time?' Everybody strains after happiness and the result is, nobody is happy," she concludes.

The words wholeness, health, and holiness, all stem from a root word which means the harmonious fulfillment of the complete or whole self. Jesus reminds us again and again that the whole self is four-fold: body, mind, emotions, and spirit together. When we forget this large dimension of our nature and concentrate on just a fragment of it, trying to satisfy one part of us at the expense of the rest of us, we end up with small temporary pleasures, but not happiness! Happiness is fulfillment of the total self! Happiness is always a by-product of wholeness!

Jesus meant exactly the same thing when He gave us The Great Commandment and *The Secret to Being a Disciple*. He worded The Great Commandment like this:

The first [commandment] is, "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is*

one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”.

He stated *The Secret to Being a Disciple* like this:

For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Mt 16:25).

They both mean the same thing. In both, Jesus is simply saying you can never horde life and have it too. Miser and misery stem from the same root. The way to save our lives is by spending them for the right reason: to serve God and His kingdom. This is true in all four dimensions of our being.

We all know it is true in the physical realm: We can develop our own physical strength only by expending it. It is also true in the mental realm: We can enlarge our mental powers only by spending them to the limit and thereby extending their boundaries. Whosoever would save his memory shall lose it! This is just as true in the emotional realm: We can have love only by giving it away. The same is true for all nine of “the fruit of the Spirit:” Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Try to horde them and you will lose them. Give them away and you will receive them back 30, 60 yea, 100 fold!

The Bible is emphatic that this is also true in the spiritual realm. Only by giving ourselves to God in praise and worship and service can He bless us with His Holy Presence and the gifts of His Spirit. As we give ourselves spiritually to God, our own spirit becomes strong. Be a miser with your praise, worship, and service and you will be miserable without the presence of God.

The point is: We must lose ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to find wholeness; and the secret to happiness is wholeness — for happiness is a by-product of wholeness!

III. Power

Not only is our text the secret to new life and the secret to wholeness and happiness, but finally it is the secret to power for living. What is power? Power is simply the ability to accomplish purpose. If you have a goal to generate electricity then you must find the power to reach this goal. This power is simply the ability to turn the turbines and generators so as to accomplish this purpose. If your purpose is to hit a home run, then the ability to swing the bat into the ball to accomplish this purpose is the power you need to do it. Likewise, if our goal is to be truly great disciples for our Lord so the world will see Christ in us and be won to Him, the one thing we need is the ability to accomplish this purpose: We need power. If our purpose is wholeness — fulfillment of our total self, by losing ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, — then the one thing we

need is the ability to accomplish this purpose: We need power! This is our common need!

The good news is: Jesus gives us the secret to this power for living life in our text: "You must lose yourself to find yourself." You must recognize your weakness before you can be strong with power. Paul says he found his strength for life in his weakness. Everybody does! "*For when I am weak, then I am strong!*" (II Cor. 12:10) must be the battle cry of every Christian, not just Paul.

The common need of all of us today is the need of power for living life! We need the power to do what our Lord calls us to do. We need the power to stop doing those destructive things that are sapping our strength, binding us with guilt and making us into the kind of people we inwardly detest and despise. We need the power to harness that explosive self that is loose deep within us, which tears another gaping hole in our personality with every pitch of the waves of life, bringing us closer and closer to the brink of the deep!

Well, dear friends this is exactly what the Gospel is about: Jesus came to give us the power we need. Before we can receive His power, we must first renounce our dependence upon our own power: "For when I am weak, then I am strong!" Renouncing our own power is what Jesus means by the word repentance. He means acknowledging that we cannot do it ourselves. He means admitting we have fallen far short. He means facing up to that corrupt self deep within us that is destroying us and sapping our strength. He means confessing that our real problem is nothing but ourselves and giving that self to Him for forgiveness and cleansing.

Then, after emptying ourselves of self through repentance, we must permit Him to fill us with His power through faith! That's what it means "to lose yourself to find yourself." By losing your dependence upon your own power, you find your power in Him! That's what the Bible means by a life of grace. That's the secret to new life! That's the secret to wholeness! That's the secret to power! That's *The Secret to Being a Disciple*. That's our Lord's 29th discipleship lesson to us today:

Discipleship Lesson #29

The secret to being a disciple is to lose ourselves through repentance and faith, so Christ can find us with His grace and give us new life, wholeness and power!

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #29?
2. According to this Discipleship Lesson what is the secret to true greatness, wholeness and power for living?
3. What is the greatest obstacle to true greatness?

Search the Scriptures

4. The one goal worthy of our drive for greatness is for the world to see Christ in us and to be drawn to Him. In what ways do the following scriptures illustrate this goal?

Mt 5:16 | 2 Cor 3:2-3 | 1 Pet 3:15-17

Internalize God's Word

5. Use the following scriptures as the basis for praying God's Word at different times during the coming week. Make a note of the leading you receive during your prayer.

Matthew 20:20-28

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of your Christian ministry where you are self-seeking rather than serving.

Matthew 6:1-8

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of your devotional life where you are self-centered rather than God-centered.

2 Corinthians 10:7-10

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of personal weakness where you can discover the Lord's strength.

John 13:1-14

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you particular ways in which He wants you to follow His example and obey His command to be "Christ" to others.

Memory scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9

Notes

Sermon 30: How to Set Priorities

I want to be perfectly honest with you at the outset today, so I must tell you that I am actually preaching this sermon to myself. I'm preaching to myself because I'm convinced I'm the one who needs it most. Of course, if some of the rest of you find out you need it too, then that's just a bonus. Knowing you as I do I wouldn't be a bit surprised if some of you don't need it almost as much as I do.

In this *Journey Into Discipleship* with our Lord we are taking the passages of scripture as they come in the 10 chapters in Luke which detail this journey. This morning we come to a passage of scripture which forces us to look at the difficult problem of how to set priorities. This is one of the most difficult problems we all face and after this past week I am confident that it is my number one problem in life. To be perfectly honest again, as I look back over recent years I must admit I have fallen far short of what my Lord would have me do here simply because I've failed to heed our Lord's revealed truth to us in this passage of scripture found in Luke 14:12-24. Again Jesus puts this truth in the form of a parable — *The Parable of the Great Banquet*.

Jesus says a man gave a great banquet and invited special guests. When everything was ready the man sent his servant to get the guests. "But," we're told, "they all alike began to make excuses" (14:18a). The first guest said he had invested in a field and had to go see it. The next said he had bought five yoke of oxen and had to go examine them. The third said that he had family responsibilities which kept him away. When none of the invited guests could come, the Master sent the servants out to the streets of the city and the highways and byways to get people to fill his table. Then the Master concludes the parable with these words: "For I tell you none of those who were invited shall taste my banquet."

Here, Jesus is dealing directly with this gigantic problem of priorities. How can we know what we should do at any given time? As with those in our parable, there are so many demands for our time: God, business, family, investments, relaxation, work — all demand our time and all are good. How can we know which we should give priority at a given time? Before Jesus answers this question for us, He points up two additional truths we need to recognize as a foundation before we can know how to set priorities.

I. The Demands of Success

The first one is this obvious truth: The price we all must pay for success is greater demands upon our time. Or, to say it another way: The more we

Scripture

Luke 14:12-24

Text

But they all alike began to make excuses ... and the Master said, "... for I tell you, none of those who were invited shall taste my banquet ..."

Luke 14:18, 23-24

NOTES

are blessed with material success the more difficult it is to set priorities. I say “obvious truth” because it stands to reason the more you acquire or the bigger your operation gets the more demands you have upon your time. This is the case with both of the first two invited guests in our parable. In biblical times to be able to invest in land was the highest mark of material success. The first man had reached the zenith of material success, and the demands were so great for his time that he had to say “no” to the Great Banquet. Likewise, the second guest who was invited, was climbing the ladder of success and because of it had to also say “no.” Again, in biblical times the most valuable kind of power in that agricultural society was the power of beasts of burden like oxen. Most families were fortunate to have one ox with which to plow their field, but our invited guest had just bought five yoke — ten oxen. He was tremendously successful and with his success it became increasingly hard for him to set priorities in life. It always is.

Often we look at a successful business man and secretly desire to be like him. We note the prestige, publicity and influence of a top executive and think, “Oh, what an exciting, beautiful life that would be.” Walk in the shoes of that successful business man or top executive for thirty days and deal with the ever-increasing demands for his time, the pressures and deadlines that never let up and you will see he is paying a terribly high price for that success!

The pastor of a small church may secretly dream of being pastor of the largest church in the conference. Unfortunately what he sees may be the prestige and not the price he must pay. I had hardly any problems with priorities when I was pastor of the Methodist Church in Sallisaw, my first church. As I look back on it, what a peaceful, happy three years for me. I had plenty of time to drink coffee with the guys in the morning at the drug store. I could go out to Lake Tenkiller with my wife, family and friends almost any afternoon I wanted, and still have time to prepare my sermons, pastor my people and administer the church.

Contrast that with my life today. Every new minister we add to our staff (and we now have 10), every new staff member (and we now have 150), every new member who joins our church (and we now have 5,200) makes new demands upon my time. So does every new program we begin, every new Sunday school class we start, every dollar we increase our budget. Now I find myself with at least a dozen things I need to do at any given time of any day and it’s not easy to decide which one of these should get priority.

Jesus tells us that before we start to build a tower we had better sit down and count the cost. Here’s a truth we can depend on: The price for success is an almost intolerable demand upon your time!

II. Joyful Relaxation and Heavenly Feasting

NOTES

The second truth Jesus reveals to us here is this: God's plan for all of us includes a time of joyful relaxation with each other and heavenly feasting with our Lord. This is exactly what these invited guests were asked to participate in. They were not being asked to take another job in the church or to teach a Sunday school class or get involved in visitation evangelism, or serve on another committee. No, the Lord simply invited them to a great banquet, where there would be joyful relaxation with each other and heavenly feasting with our Lord. This is also the very thing they turned down in order to tend to their investments, business and family affairs. Now, all of us know the importance of investments, business and family affairs. To say that these things are not important in our present society, or any society for that matter, is to be unrealistic, blind, and even stupid. Of course, they are important — very important! This is why Jesus uses them to illustrate the importance of joyful relaxation with each other and heavenly feasting with our Lord — the importance of relationships, both with God and people!

When I said I was preaching to myself today, it was this point that convicted me of my own failure to heed my Lord's command. You know when you are in full-time Christian service, it's so easy to get your own work mixed up with God. The harder you work the more pious and godly you feel. It's easy to see this in other people, but it's almost impossible to see it in ourselves. I continually warn the other ministers and staff members to set aside a time for joyful relaxation with others and heavenly feasting with our Lord. I warn them that they cannot continue to give without receiving or they will burn out. Somehow, I thought I was exempt until the Lord made me face up to this truth this week. At first I wanted to feel sorry for myself for working so hard for the Lord; but the Lord would have none of that! Immediately, He showed me that my problem is not working too hard, my problem is priorities! It always is, for all of us! Hard work never hurt anyone. We are created to work hard. Without hard work life loses its meaning, and we lose our vision of what life is all about. In fact, the Lord showed me this week that it's impossible for any person to work too hard if that person has the right priorities. If you have the right priorities then the harder you work the healthier and happier you are going to be! The opposite of that is true, too: If your priorities are wrong then the harder you work, the more you endanger your health, and the more you make life miserable for yourself and for others!

This is true because when your priorities are right you will always have time for joyful relaxation with the meaningful others in your life, and you will have time for heavenly feasting with our Lord. It is only through these relationships that we receive strength and power for hard work, and the self-esteem, love, and understanding that we need to make life meaningful. I say that when your priorities are right you will have time for these

NOTES

relationships, because then you will make these relationships one of your top priorities in your life right alongside your investments, business, and family responsibilities. Jesus is not telling us to downgrade the importance of tending to our business, investments and family affairs; but He is telling us to upgrade to the same level the importance of joyful relaxation with the meaningful others in our lives and heavenly feasting with our Lord.

This is exactly what I have failed to do! I've been too busy working for the Lord, speaking here, teaching there, attending this meeting and that! About two weeks ago, I rushed off to Chicago after the Sunday services to attend a meeting, got back just in time to teach my Bible study on Wednesday night and attend a committee meeting afterwards, meet with the staff all day Thursday and conduct a Retreat on Friday and Saturday and squeeze in sermon preparation along the way. On the way back from the Retreat my wife got out the calendar and said, "Let's find a day we can take off together." I said, "Good, let's do it." After diligently searching and finding nothing within the next month, she said, "How about an evening — one whole evening." I said, "Good, let's do it." Finally, we settled on one evening, but when that evening came last week another meeting had already squeezed it out.

Last week I used the time between teaching sessions at a Holy Spirit conference for sermon preparation. It was then, as I studied The Parable of the Great Banquet, that the Lord convicted me. He showed me my own stupidity, my mixed-up priorities, and said, "Preach to yourself, preacher!" I want you to know that I did listen. I announced to our ministers at our weekly meeting on Thursday that I am canceling all engagements and meetings outside our church for this calendar year. I am refusing to make any more commitments until my own priorities are right, until my relationships — relationship with God and relationship with family — have the place God commands me to give them, until heavenly feasting and joyful relaxation have priority.

Unless we make these relationships a top priority, the other important priorities — investments, business, and family responsibilities — will soon squeeze them out, if not altogether, then to such an insignificant and hurried time that they can never be truly meaningful. This is why Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God and to love our neighbor.

III. Setting Priorities

This brings us to the crucial question: How can we know what must go in order to give top priority to these important relationships? How do we set priorities? What guidelines can we use?

Some popular and respected preachers and teachers today are causing much confusion and guilt in many sincere Christians by laying down

legalistic and dogmatic rules for setting priorities in our lives, such as the foolish and unscriptural rule that you must always put God first, family second, and work last. Such a rule can do nothing but send people on a perpetual guilt trip, making them more mixed up than ever about both the gospel and setting priorities. Such a legalistic rule is not only impossible to live by, it is also a total misunderstanding of both the gospel and the Great Commandment of Jesus. Jesus did not come to put God in a box over here and say now you must give Him a certain amount of your time, and in another box over here goes your family which deserves another segment of your time; and finally put work in a box out there which gets only what's left. That's not only impossible, but it is exactly contrary to what Jesus came to do!

Jesus came to show us how God wants to be involved in everything we do. He came to show us how we can make God's power and love a part of everything we do — work, play, family, business, investments, church, or what not. This is what Jesus means when He says that the first and great commandment is to put God first in everything. He does not mean that we must stop working to run to a church committee meeting, or that we must feel guilty because a pressing business matter makes us miss dinner with the family.

I know many dynamic, Christian business men whose best witness for Christ is not on Sunday morning in church. It is the other six days of the week when the world sees Christ in them as they go about their work. Of course, they are in church regularly, because they know that without the regular heavenly feast with our Lord they cannot keep God first in their other relationships.

Here is the point: No one can lay down a legalistic, dogmatic rule and say you must always put this first, and this second, and this third, etc. We are not created to be robots whom God programs; we are created to be living human beings whom God loves and through whom He loves others. There are times for all of us when pressing business matters must come first and cause us to miss the most important religious meetings or the most precious family gatherings. Jesus came to deliver us from foolish, legalistic living, and introduce us to that glorious way of life called a life of grace, where God is involved in everything we do, all of the time! Jesus came to give us a life where we live and move and have our being in Him and He in us.

In our scripture lesson today and throughout the Gospels Jesus tells us that in living a life of grace there is only one guideline for setting priorities and each one of us must apply this guideline to our own life — no one else can do it for us. That guideline is relationships — relationship with God and relationships with the meaningful others in our lives. Jesus is telling us that no person can have the right priorities in his life until he upgrades

NOTES

the priority of these relationships to the same level as the other important things in his life, such as investments, business and family responsibilities.

I don't know about you, because I don't know the demands upon your time; but when I honestly examined my own life this week the Lord showed me in vivid illustration after illustration how I had gradually slipped into the pattern of continually upgrading the priorities of church work, church program, church building, church business, outside preaching, teaching, and meetings, and always at the expense of meaningful relationships with those with whom I work and live. Suddenly, I realized I have gotten so busy "doing" that I no longer have time "to be" — to be a friend who has time to listen; to be a husband who has time for a leisurely day with his wife; to be a father and grandfather who has time to give himself as well as his money to his children and grandchildren; to be a brother who has time to share the hurts and visions of brother ministers; to be a boss who takes time to care about the person under me as well as his work; to be a pastor who has time to laugh and cry with his people; to be a Christian who has time to let Christ love others through me.

No other person on earth can tell me what I must stop "doing" in order "to be" such a person, nor can I or anyone else tell you! Our Lord tells all of us the same thing, and it is this: As disciples, we must first upgrade "being" to the same level as "doing"! What you must stop doing in order to be the person God wants you to be I don't know, but perhaps God has shown you as I have preached to myself today. Our 30th discipleship lesson is our Lord's formula for setting priorities in our life:

Discipleship Lesson #30

In setting priorities, a disciple will use the guideline of relationships, which means he will always give as much weight "to being" as he does "to doing."

That's it! How do these two — Doing and Being — balance on the scales of your life?

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #30?
2. What two important truths do we need to recognize before we know how to set priorities?
3. What is the one guideline for setting priorities?

Search the Scriptures

4. Read the following Scriptures and note what you learn about Jesus' personal priorities.

Mk 6:31-32 | Mt 9:10 | Mk 1:35 | Lk 6:12 | Lk 7:36 | Jn 2:1-2

Internalize God's Word

5. Use *The Parable of the Talents* in Matthew 25:14-30 as the basis for praying God's Word. In this meditation, equate the talents with opportunities to be a channel of God's love to others — family, friend, co-worker, stranger, enemy. Who are you in this story — the one with 5 talents? Two? One? Is the Master pleased with your use of what He has entrusted to you?

Are you so busy “doing” that you no longer have time “to be?” Do “heavenly feasting” and “joyful relaxation” have a place in your schedule? Have you, like Dr. Thomas, allowed your priorities to get out of balance? Be still. Listen. Let the Holy Spirit guide as you make note of priorities your Father would have you change.

Memory scripture: Matthew 6:19-21

Notes

Journey Into Discipleship

Appendix

Steps in Praying God's Word

Choose a time and place where you can be alone and uninterrupted for at least 15 minutes. Take the phone off the hook. You have an appointment with God. Read through the following steps thoughtfully. The seven underlined verbs may help you remember how to proceed, but treat them as guideposts to help you find your way, not as rigid rules!

1. **Read** a passage of scripture. Read slowly; your objective is not to finish a chapter, nor even a sentence, but to enter an experience.
2. **Pray**, focusing your attention on Jesus. You want no spirit but His Holy Spirit in control!

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10).

3. **Relax** your body. Turn loose one muscle group at a time, starting with your toes. Physical relaxation helps your spirit become quiet and at rest. Breathe slowly and deeply, breathing in the Holy Spirit, breathing out tension. Let go and trust God.

*"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Is 30:15).*

4. **Recall** the scripture passage. Picture the scene vividly. Use as many of your five senses as possible. For example, if you are meditating on John 8:1-11 about the woman caught in adultery, the scripture has told you that it is early in the morning. Jesus is seated in the temple teaching the people. Probably His disciples are with Him as usual. They are interrupted by the scribes and Pharisees bringing the woman into their midst. What do you see, hear, smell, feel, taste? Experience the color and movement, hear the noise of the crowds and perhaps the sounds and odors from the sacrificial animals being sold nearby. Sense the mood of the crowd, the condemnation of the accusers.
5. **Enter** the scene as one of the participants. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which one you are: the accused woman, one of the scribes or a Pharisee, one of the people who had been listening to Jesus teach, or one of the disciples. Perhaps Jesus had been teaching on forgiveness. Live the entire event within yourself.
6. **Experience** whatever the Lord brings. Let Him apply this to your present life situation. Are you experiencing shame or fear over some sin in your life? Are you feeling self-righteous as you judge someone else? Are you having difficulty accepting Jesus' teaching that you are to not judge others? Are you questioning His compassion for someone you know? Is He expecting you to be compassionate? Are you slipping quietly away like the others? Allow the Risen Christ to lead you. Don't try to figure it out; don't write your own script. Just wait on the Lord. Allow Him to supply your need: comfort, forgiveness, conviction, guidance, compassionate understanding.

"...my word ...shall accomplish that which I purpose..." (Is 55:11)

7. **Express** to God your gratitude or your disappointment. If you use a Prayer Journal, you may want to record this experience and write down your insights. Continue to practice the presence of God. Be persistent in learning to pray God's Word.

Seven verbs: Read Pray Relax Recall Enter Experience Express